

Community Engagement

Themes from Blackpool Council Consultation & Best Practice recommendations informed by local feedback.

Introduction

The need for organisations to engage is enshrined in law (Health and Social Care Act 2012 and the Care Act 2014). During any change process, it is vital that the public are involved in the journey.

Blackpool Council have completed an engagement activity on their community engagement framework. The Council asked Healthwatch Blackpool to independently provide themes and recommendations as a result of the consultation process carried out.

Themes

Blackpool Council engaged with over 150 residents in Blackpool through an online survey and focus groups across Blackpool's community venues.

Feedback gained was mixed, however there appears to be an overall emphasis on communication and trust being key to effective engagement across the town.

Interest

63% of respondents are interested in engaging with Blackpool Council. Feedback suggests that residents consider health, improvement, climate change and coproduction to be important. Young peoples experience and a holistic view from those who access local services are deemed to be significant.

Where respondents are not interested to engage with the Council, feedback was given. There is suggestions that the Council 'doesn't care' and there being an understanding that 'feedback is sought following decisions rather than in the planning stage'. One respondent noted that the voices being heard aren't those within Blackpool who are struggling with the financial cuts.

Barriers

Participants were asked if there would be any barriers to engaging with the Council, 36% noted time to be a barrier. This was closely followed by confidence, cost, location of event and transport. Childcare was also acknowledged within the feedback.

Where those provided further information, some comments were made such as:

"Wheelchair access"

"Conflict of interest, I work within the Council"

"There is no point in consulting ... as they do what the biggest brown envelope wants"

"Lack of confidence in being heard"

"Too many written documents, not easy to read"

Things to consider

Participants were asked if they think that there is anything else to consider when the Council is looking to undertake engagement. Feedback themes include:

- Accessibility
- Equal engagement across Blackpool boundaries
- Being able to evidence benefits of engaging
- Transparency and sharing of information
- Having a common contact that residents can provide feedback to
- Community venues
- Reasonable adjustments so that everyone can engage
- Inclusion and engagement with hard to reach groups

Trust

There is an overarching theme within the feedback that evidences a lack of trust with the Council. Some examples of feedback include:

“Resilience, they mean if we don’t like it we will have to learn to suck it up”

“Feedback is listened to out of courtesy and ignored”

“I have filled in this form in the hope that one person takes note. Do we think the Council are going to act upon our views.. Not at all”

Aims of the framework

Participants were asked if they agreed with the aim of the overarching framework. Of those who responded, 75% agreed with all aims and 22% agreed with some. There was an opportunity for participants to provide comments if they felt that the framework had something missing.

Where participants provided comments, resident feedback was noted and put into questions:

- How do you ensure an equal partnership?
- How do you ensure consultation isn’t purely a tick box exercise?
- What resource will be in place to make sure engagement happens?
- How will the Council simplify engagement and only promise what you can deliver?
- Will the Council use easier language and meet with the residents face to face?
- Can the Council skill up the community to lead on co design and coproduction?
- How will the Council do what they say they will?
- How will the Council make language easier to understand?
- How do you ensure that engagement is resident focused rather than suiting a Council narrative?

On the whole

Engaging with Blackpool Council is something that participants would like. Some respondents have particular interests, so this must be considered. Where respondents have acknowledged barriers, it must be noted that time and accessibility are rated the biggest barriers to overcome. Throughout the feedback there is a common theme that suggests the need for transparency and inclusion when carrying out engagement. There is an acknowledgement of the need to promote wider engagement and make reasonable adjustments so that all can participate.

Implementation and actions as a result of engagement has been noted within the feedback. Respondents have stated that the document needs to acknowledge the methods to engagement and the many ways in which the public will be kept informed.

Trust will be an ongoing issue to overcome when carrying out engagement.

Reflections and recommendations on good engagement?

- The framework and ongoing action plan should continue to be developed with public/users.
- Acknowledge a public commitment to working in a partnership between users, carers the public and professionals.
- Decision making routinely informed by patient/user, carer and public feedback.
- Be open and honest from the top down, involve people in identifying the issues and the solutions.
- Be clear on the parameters that may have an impact on the overall outcome of engagement.
- Understand the makeup of the community it serves: diversity of the user, carer and public is recognised and valued with evidence of targeted effort to engage people in the development and improvement of services.
- Proposals for new services or improvement need to include a demonstration of how they have been developed in partnership with patients/users, carers, public and professionals.
- Engagement is developed as an ongoing conversation and relationship with users and public, not started or revisited only when a consultation might be needed.
- Frontline staff encouraged, supported and trained to engage with public and users on specific service changes.
- Regularly review engagement action plan, adapting it with learning from successes and challenges.
- Demonstrate the importance and the difference that engagement can make.
- Be prepared to act on what you hear.
- Promote inclusion and accessibility.
- Build on community assets.
- Work to develop trust with the public and help people to communicate the truth.
- Use the right language and avoid jargon where possible.
- Know and use a range of methods to engage.
- Use existing networks to share intelligence and work with front line staff to support ongoing engagement.

Feedback from Blackpool Council

The survey and engagement work undertaken on the proposed Community Engagement Framework has taken place over a 6 week period, across many areas of Blackpool. Activity has been by a mixture of methods; including a digital survey, focus groups and drop-in sessions that have taken place across the town covering a choice of days in the week and times of the day. This activity has been led by the Community Engagement and Partnership Manager within Blackpool Council and supported by a number of voluntary and community sector partners. Healthwatch were asked to review the feedback received to ensure it was independently scrutinised and reviewed.

The subsequent report will be used to shape the revised Community Engagement Framework and ensure the document meets the needs of local people.

Thank you to Healthwatch for undertaking this activity on our behalf and providing us with a clear understanding of key themes, barriers and areas for consideration.

This reference document will be made available as an appendix within the Community Engagement Framework, published online and shared directly with the focus groups that helped provide some of the feedback referenced within the report.

The role of Healthwatch

Healthwatch was established under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to understand the needs, experiences and concerns of people who use health and social care services and to speak out on their behalf.

We exist on a national and local level, working towards the same goal of enabling people to have a voice about their health and social care systems.