

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY & STRATEGY

Introduction

The Parish Council is committed to community engagement at all levels and supports and encourages all community members to engage with the Council.

Policy Aims

The overall aim is to make Council communication a two-way process. The intention is to provide timely information to allow the community to understand what we do, whilst enabling the Council to make informed decisions using accurate information received from residents and partners.

Objectives of the community engagement policy:

- To improve, plan and shape the future of the parish according to local needs and priorities through active engagement with the community to understand needs and priorities.
- To use the process of engagement to inform decision making.
- To raise the profile of the parish.
- To raise the profile of the work of the Parish Council.
- To use a variety of methods to provide information to the community.
- To engage with local and strategic partners on a range of matters of interest or concern to the community.

Who are the community and local partners and stakeholders?

Within the parish:

- Parishioners.
- Societies and organisations with interests in the Parish.
- Local businesses.
- Sports clubs.

Wider groups and organisations:

- Borough and County Councillors, MPs.
- Neighbouring Parish/Town Councils.

- Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council.
- Other public sector organisations such as those concerned with health, education, the police and emergency services.
- The media.

A strategy for engagement

The Council will achieve its communications objectives in the following ways using the methods of communication and engagement below:

The Parish Clerk The Clerk is a pivotal point of contact for residents in fielding and answering queries which arise. The Clerk's contact details are widely publicised and contact may be made by email and via Facebook.

Parish Council Meetings Parish Council meetings are held every month on a Monday. A key aspect of the meetings is publicising the agenda in advance on the noticeboards, website and Facebook page. In all respects the Parish Council meetings must comply with the Council's Standing Orders ensuring good practice is maintained.

Residents Open Forum The public are continually invited to attend all Parish Council Meetings. Each and every meeting includes an 'Open Forum' session. Open questions are normally restricted to 15 minutes in total, however at the Chair's discretion a period can be extended if deemed appropriate. (Please see the Rules of Public Participation.)

Parish Council Committees

All committee meetings are open to the public and publishes their agendas in advance of meetings, dates available on the noticeboard, website and Facebook.

Parish Council Contact Details

The Parish Council display contact details on the website, noticeboards and Facebook.

Calendar of Meetings

The Parish Council display the annual timetable for meetings on the website and noticeboards.

Annual Parish Meeting

The Annual Parish Meeting is the ideal opportunity to bring the community together and allow residents to question and review how the elected members help shape the community. To be successful, good planning is needed and it is the responsibility of the Parish Clerk to both timetable an annual meeting date, organise the venue and ensure that Parish, Borough and County Councillors all attend and have a part to play. The Parish Council determines the 'interest theme' for each annual meeting to encourage maximum turnout by the community. The main objective of the annual meeting is to provide and encourage two-way communication between the community and Councillors. The meeting is heavily advertised in advance on the website, noticeboards and Facebook.

Public Meetings

From time to time the Council may decide that an item warrants being dealt with through a specially convened Public Meeting. Public Meetings will be organised by the Clerk to set the meeting agenda and meeting content. The Clerk will arrange the meeting venue with any costs met by the Council.

Public Consultation

A public consultation will be conducted if the Council concludes a particular event or programme that has an impact on the parish warrants a consultation programme. The intention of this exercise would be to better understand the needs of the parish. Examples may include: Update of an existing Parish Plan or Village Design Statement; Road Safety Planning; Boundary Change Proposals. In some cases, when a consultation programme needs to engage with the wider community a working party will be appointed to analyse any results and report to the Council with the outcomes. The Parish Council will have the option to accept all or part of any recommendation made by the working party by way of a majority decision by Councillors.

Parish Website

A wide ranging website with extensive information regarding the Parish Council and parish is in operation which includes news of both of the parish and further afield to encourage regular visits by interested parties.

Social Media

Social media is used to encourage rapid communication within the community. Facebook allowing short news items to be quickly distributed to those preferring to receive news through social media channels. Social media provides a two-way capability therefore it is important that each is regularly checked and responses given from the Council in a timely manner.

Community Forum

The Parish Council may act in a proactive way when there is a need to assist the community to become organised in order to lobby or influence other partners or where it will be useful to determine a way forward for residents as a whole. By doing this the Parish Council is an enabler rather than the main driving force.

Evaluation

It is important that the Council measures its progress towards its stated objectives so that it may inform any future plan. Initially a benchmark of the current state will be required.

The following initiatives can potentially be monitored:

- Raised awareness of the Parish Council and the services it provides
- Participation and engagement of community partners with Council projects, initiatives and consultation processes.
- Attendance at public meetings and organised events.
- Media coverage of the Parish Council's communication coverage.

- Parish Council Delivery Plan.

This can be done by:

- Parish questionnaires or Facebook polls.
- Assessment of website usage.
- Measurement of press coverage following press releases.
- Number of likes and followers on social networking sites.
- Attendance at meetings.
- Compliance score on the Parish Council Delivery Plan.

Conclusion

The Council should aim to consult regularly with residents ranging from light touch opportunities such as the 'Open Forum' session at each Parish Council meeting through to formal consultation programmes where information must be widely disseminated and feedback obtained to shape the programme and demonstrate democracy in action.

For large or complex consultation programmes it may be necessary to form working parties - ideally consisting of Councillors and members of the public to organise the consultation programme. Outcomes from surveys and consultation draft material should be made available to the public through parish bulletins and the website for transparency purposes.

This Community Engagement Policy and Strategy provides the framework for how the Parish Council will communicate and engage with parishioners and other organisations. It must be reviewed and updated if necessary, annually.