

Community Engagement Policy

1. Introduction

1.1 This document forms the Town Council's Community Engagement Policy.

It sets out:

- The role of community engagement and its importance
- How Wareham Town Council engages the wider community and identifies the needs and aspirations of the community
- How the Town Council can improve community engagement.

1.2 The objectives of the policy are to:

- Encourage effective local community engagement
- Ensure that embedded throughout the Council there is clear understanding of the need to engage with communities about decisions that affect them
- Enable aspirations/comments/suggestions obtained from community engagement to have an impact on decision making and the way services are being delivered
- Identify how the Council can enhance its profile by improving engagement with the wider community (with specific reference to hard-to-reach groups).

2. Community Engagement – An Overview

2.1 Community engagement is concerned with giving local people a voice and involving them in decisions which affect them and their community. This may include individuals, voluntary and community organisations as well as other public sector bodies.

It provides opportunity for local people to talk to the Council about their aspirations and needs in their community and neighbourhood. It allows the Council to consult with and inform people about what services it provides, how it prioritises, how policies are determined and how well it's performing.

2.2 The term stakeholder makes reference to a wide range of people and groups (these might include residents, visitors, businesses, government, voluntary organisations and public service organisations), all of which have an interest in the Council's services and projects.

Hard to Reach groups refers to those who experience social exclusion and are

sometimes perceived as being disempowered. Some examples include young people, elderly people, physical disability, language barriers, financial constraints, cultural differences, or social expectations. The Town Council will put effort into seeking their views, but it also recognises that sometimes they have excluded themselves through personal choice.

2.3 The key aspects of community engagement include:

- Development of a network of relationships between the Town Council, individuals, voluntary and community groups
- Clear and open communication to ensure that information is made accessible to all groups
- Listening and understanding from a range of people to identify aspirations, needs and problems of local people and groups.

2.4 Effective and meaningful community engagement can provide a number of benefits:

- The problems and needs of local people are clearly identified in order that appropriate new or improved facilities/services can be provided
- Those participating feel empowered by being involved in decision making in their local community
- The potential to enhanced leadership and greater interest in elections and standing for Council.

3. Wareham Town Council and Community Engagement

3.1 The Town Council will facilitate community engagement in the following ways:

- Making information available on what decisions are being considered and how residents can influence or contribute to the discussions in good time
- Information is provided by the Town Council to the community in a number of ways including via:
 - ❖ The Town Council Office; Town Hall, East Street, Wareham, BH20 4NS, open to the public Monday to Friday 10am – 1 pm.
 - ❖ The Town Council's website – www.wareham-tc.gov.uk, which provides comprehensive information both on the work of the Town Council and on other organisations. Details of how to contact the Town Clerk and Councillors are also available on the website
 - ❖ Various notice boards around the town which are used to display agendas for Council and committee meetings, as well as other information of interest to the local community
 - ❖ The Town Council's magazine 'Tower Chimes' published on a quarterly basis
 - ❖ The Annual Reports, produced in April each year and given at the Annual

Town Meeting and included in the Minutes

- ❖ Posts on social media sites, such as Wareham Community Facebook Group
- ❖ Public consultations which could include drop-in events.
- All meetings of the Town Council and its committees are open to the public and press and there are periods set aside for residents to speak
- Planning applications are considered at Planning and Transport Committee meetings held every 3 weeks. The opportunity for people to speak applies equally to these agenda items. Equal opportunity is given to applicants/supporters, objectors and local community groups
- The Town Clerk's office is required to play a neutral role so that residents can be fully involved and be confident that they are receiving unbiased information and support

This neutral involvement will allow more flexibility in the service and the personal element of the contact will hopefully encourage more involvement from the hard-to-reach members of the community

- The Town Council will produce a list of annual Council and committee meeting dates
- The Town Council will be open and accountable in its dealings with residents and the community. It will make information on its policies and procedures freely available
- The Town Council will be receptive to requests from residents or communities and will attempt to be flexible in order to ensure their opinions are known, not only to the Town Council, but also to other organisations. This may be by including an item for discussion on an agenda or allowing a local group to put their opinions into an official report produced by the Town Council
- The Town Council will operate a "signposting" service from its office to ensure local people and communities are referred to the correct organisation, officer, Dorset or Wareham Councillor where the Town Council cannot resolve their issue directly
- Town Councillors will continue to represent the Council on various outside bodies, to ensure that they are kept informed of the communities' needs
- The Town Council often works in partnership with other organisations such as Dorset Council, the Police, the NHS, local schools and many voluntary and charitable sectors.

4. Communication

4.1 Wareham Town Council is committed to improving community engagement by:

- Continuing all the above activities and services into the future and improving relationships with community groups, including developing measures to harness

the views and opinions of people and groups who are often missed out of community engagement activities

- Being proactive and willing to consider any reasonable opportunities that support its purpose of getting information available and increasing contributions from the community, especially those difficult to reach
- Considering the holding of a public meeting when dealing with controversial issues that affect a particular community
- Consultations and surveys are to be considered when necessary and appropriate and results will be made available
- Identifying and embracing opportunities to work with other local community groups when the need arises
- Publicising the positive results that have been achieved from working relationships between Council and other community groups; in order to encourage new relationships/partnerships to be formed and to raise community spirit
- Promoting elections and the importance of the democratic process and the value of being a Councillor
- Promoting the value to the town of volunteering
- Reviewing its Community Engagement Strategy once during the electoral term to ensure that it remains relevant

5. Outcomes

The outcomes which we are striving for and against which the success of this policy will be measured are:

- Improved communication through the establishment of new channels of engagement
- More residents understanding the role of Councillors and getting the best effect
- Improved engagement with local communities, with more people feeling that they are involved in decision-making and a higher percentage of people involved in volunteering
- Improved satisfaction with services provided by the Council