

Community Engagement Policy

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1. Introduction

1.1 This document forms the Woodley Town Council Community Engagement Policy.

It sets out:

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

2.1 Community engagement is 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 within their community. 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 its performing.

2.2 The term stakeholder refers 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 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 several 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.
- This may result in enhanced leadership and greater interest in elections and standing for council.

3. What will we do?

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

- Make available information on what decisions are being considered and how residents can influence or contribute to the discussions in good time. Methods used to ensure engagement will be - through the Town Council website, noticeboards, the Woodley Herald newsletter, social media channels and word of mouth.
- All meetings of the Town Council and its standing committees are open to the public and press. There is a period set aside at the beginning of every Full Council meeting for residents to speak, in line with the Council's standing orders.
- Residents can access agendas for meetings via the Town Council website and notice boards. Public agendas are also made available at the meetings of the council and its committees.
- The Town Council website, noticeboards and agendas explain the procedure for residents wishing to speak at meetings. Facilities also exist where residents can, where appropriate or necessary, make written or verbal reports or present petitions to councillors.
- Planning applications are considered at Council meetings held monthly. The opportunities for people to speak applies equally to these agenda items. Equal opportunity is given to applicants/supporters, objectors and local community groups.
- Officers at all levels are required to play a neutral role so that residents can be fully involved and be confident that they are receiving unbiased information and support.
- Details of how to contact the Town Clerk/Council Office will be displayed on noticeboards, council website, social media channels. Details of how to contact Councillors will be displayed on notice boards and the Town Council web site.
- A list of annual council and committee dates including the start times of the meetings and agenda distribution dates can be found on the council website.
- The Town Council will be open and accountable in its dealing 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 to be considered by the Town Council.

- The Town Council will, operate a “gateway” service to ensure local people and communities are referred to the correct organisation, officer or Town Councillor.
- Town councillors will continue to represent the Council on various outside bodies, to ensure that they are kept informed of the communities’ needs.
- The Council will engage fully and as appropriate in consultations carried out by the Borough Council and other organisations, on matters that affect residents in Woodley. In addition to providing a response on behalf of the Council this may also include requesting extensions in order to provide a response, distributing and publicising consultations more widely via notice boards, website and social media – including consultation outcomes, requesting clarifications and additional information, inviting organisations to attend council or committee meetings. Consultations are normally considered through the Planning and Community Committee but can be considered by whichever committee is deemed most appropriate.

4. Engagement Standards

The Town Council will adhere to the following standards:

Inclusion

- Use plain language
- Take into account the particular needs of people, especially in hard-to-reach groups, to enable them to participate
- Listen to, and respect, all opinions received

Clarity and Transparency

- Be clear about what we are asking the public to comment on when seeking people’s views
- Only use engagement and consultation processes when there is a real opportunity for people to influence decision-making and services
- Provide feedback whenever possible

Visibility

- Ensure that those directly affected by decisions, policies and plans are aware of the opportunity to engage

5. Hard to reach groups

It is recognised that some individuals and groups may not wish to engage with the Council. It is also recognised that there are groups who may be under-represented in the established organisations in the community – including the Council. In addition to the measures set out above, the Council will endeavour to engage with these groups through the following;

- Assessing and identifying potential hard to reach groups as part of the early stages of project planning or policy development.
- Engaging partners who may have more access/influence with hard to reach groups e.g. youth charities/workers, churches, faith groups.

- Continue to seek out opportunities to build and develop trust between the Council and the community it serves.

This can be broken down into the following principles;

1. Build trust – show that we’re listening by inviting people to be involved in surveys and focus groups.
2. Strive for representation – look to build diversity of background and mind on key committees, not just with engagement but also at the point of decision.
3. Engage with respected community leaders – work with those who are most able to engage and use their influence.
4. Learn about the groups – take time to understand the dynamics of the groups and shift approach accordingly where appropriate.
5. Find a form of engagement that works for different groups and individuals – consider a wide range of potential channels including visual, audio, online and face to face engagement.
6. Go beyond digital engagement – consider the digital divide and what this means for our community. Specifically, to consider older people and those with limited or no access/ability to use electronic forms of communication.
7. Ensure the engagement is beneficial and consider these benefits at the outset.

6. Review

This policy will be reviewed annually.