



Westbury Town Council

Community Engagement Policy

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INTRODUCTION

Westbury Town Council is committed to the pursuit of effective community engagement in all aspects of its day to day operations.

Community engagement is about giving local people a voice and involving them in decisions which affect them and their community. This may include residents, visitors, businesses, government, voluntary organisations and public service organisations, all of which have an interest in the Council's services and projects.

It provides opportunity for local people to talk to the Council about aspirations or needs in 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 it's performing.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

1. Objectives

The objectives of this strategy are to:

- Encourage effective local community engagement.
- Ensure that throughout the Council there is an understanding of the need to engage with communities about decisions which affect them.
- Allow aspirations/comments/suggestions etc. from the community engagement to have an impact on decision making and the way in which services are delivered.¹
- Enhance the Council's profile by improving engagement with the community and in particular with hard to reach groups.²

2. Westbury Town Council and Community Engagement³

The Council currently shows its commitment to community engagement by:

- Publishing agendas, minutes and non-sensitive documents for all Council meetings on its website.
- Displaying agendas on notice boards around the town.
- Making all meetings of the Council and its committees open to the public and press.
- Allowing members of the public to speak at the beginning of each Council and committee meeting. This provides an opportunity for residents to raise issues or make comments or ask questions relating to items on the agenda.
- Providing opportunity for participation at the Council's Highways, Planning and Development committee where planning applications are considered at meetings. Equal opportunity is given to supporters and objectors.
- Inviting members of the public with relevant skills and knowledge to join as non-voting participants on Working Groups and Task-Finish groups.
- Encouraging involvement in the Annual Town Meeting with its public question time.
- Making all public documents available for inspection at the Council offices during business hours. The offices at the Laverton Institute on Bratton Road are normally open to the public from 9am to 4.30pm, Monday to Friday.
- Publishing the Annual Report and Statement of Accounts on the Council website with printed copies available at the office.
- Offering an opportunity for questions to be asked about the latest Statement of Accounts and Balance Sheet as part of the annual External Audit.. The *Account and Audit Regulations 2015* give the right for any interested party to inspect and copy the Annual Return and all books, deeds, contracts, bills, vouchers and receipts for the

¹ The Appendix to this policy paper records those community groups with which the Town Council already has contact.

² *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 try to seek their views, but it also recognises that sometimes people exclude themselves through personal choice.

³ In the outworking of community engagement, any personal data held by the Council will always be dealt with respectfully and confidentially.

financial year being audited. Any questions or objections can be then be made to the External Auditor.

- Sharing in public engagement through Council arranged and partnered events such as the Christmas Fayre, the Westbury Festival and Council Grants' Presentation event.
- Providing Councillors' contact details on the Council website and on various notice boards around the town.
- Publishing and delivering to Westbury households a quarterly newsletter with information about Council related activities.
- Making regular press releases in local media about community events, projects and other Council items of interest.
- By making news and events available on the Council website and through social media such as *Facebook* and *Twitter*.
- Holding consultations and conducting surveys with residents with appropriate evaluation of results.
- By considering the use of external services when consultations may be too large and time consuming for the Council's own resources.
- Where Council staff cannot resolve their issue directly, acting as a "gateway" service and referring people to the appropriate organisation, Council officer, Unitary or Town Councillor.
- Town Councillors in order to stand for appointment must by law live within 3 miles of the town they serve and therefore have close ties to their constituents and local voluntary and community organisations on a day-to-day basis, making them well placed in terms of informed representation.
- Working in partnership with community and voluntary groups and volunteers who also work directly with the Council. This includes providing grants to many organisations that further all kinds of community activities.

3. Principles for Participation / Consultation Activities / Events

- From time to time, issues will be identified about which the Council considers it would be appropriate to seek wider public engagement and feedback.
- Consultation events provide an opportunity for residents to share and hear a variety of views.
- Consultation may be means of a meeting or series of meetings, some form of survey or another method which is considered appropriate.
- When such a consultation event is planned it will be advertised locally, allowing people time to take part.
- All involvement will have clear start and finish dates.
- At the beginning of any consultation it will be indicated what outcome is expected, e.g. a recommendation, strategy suggestion etc., and how the results will influence any decisions.
- Care will be taken to ensure that all views are considered equally.
- If the outcome of a consultation supports a particular option but a different decision is taken by the Council, the reasons for that will be published.
- Where summary results are published personal or identifying data will be excluded.

4. Future Community Engagement

Westbury Town Council is committed to improving community engagement by:

- Continuing all the above activities and services.
- Growing relationships which already exist with community groups, local businesses and commercial interests.
- Identifying and embracing opportunities to work with other such groups and interests when new possibilities, opportunities or needs become evident.
- Reviewing how to obtain the views and opinions of people and groups who are commonly missed.
- Developing and extending the range of electronic communication.
- Publicising the positive results that have been achieved from working relationships between the Council and other community groups, to encourage new relationships and raise community spirit.
- Participating in local networks to share knowledge and experience of community engagement activities.
- Engaging with the community as fully as possible to produce a Neighbourhood Plan for Westbury.

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Signed: Town Clerk

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