

ALCESTER TOWN COUNCIL

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** Alcester Town Council has developed a Community Engagement Strategy which aims to set a standard for engagement with residents, communities, businesses and voluntary organisations.
- 1.2** The Council recognises that it must provide services which reflect the needs of its residents and which endeavour to improve the quality of life. It aims to give local people a voice in the process of taking decisions which affect the community.
- 1.3** The Council aims to engage with its residents and encourage their participation in decision making, securing better services, being engaged with the local democratic process and creating a more active and informed community.

2 AIMS

- 2.1** To work more closely with residents, community groups and businesses.
- 2.2** To be inclusive in engaging with as many people as possible.
- 2.3** To actively encourage residents' involvement.
- 2.4** To listen to views and have regard to them in enhancing services.
- 2.5** To raise the profile of the Town Council.

3 OBJECTIVES

- 3.1** To encourage effective local community engagement.
- 3.2** Ensure that embedded throughout the Council there is a clear understanding of the need to engage with communities about decisions which affect them.
- 3.3** Adopt modes of communication which enables as many people as possible to be reached.
- 3.4** Enable the aspirations/comments/suggestions etc. obtained from community engagement to have an impact on decision making and the way in which services are being delivered.
- 3.5** To inform residents of the role of town councillors.
- 3.6** To enhance the well-being of the town.

4 ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

- The Town Council cannot force any individual or group to become involved but it can, and will, make it easier and more attractive to do so.
- The Council will always be clear, before the start of any participation or consultation event, to what extent the result will inform a decision.
- If the outcome of a participation or consultation event is intended to inform

a decision and a different decision is taken, the reasoning behind that decision will be clear and published.

- All involvement will be time-bound and aggregated results will be published openly.
- Not every decision requires community involvement.
- Consultations will be targeted at the relevant group or groups.
- If an event calls for wider public involvement the event will be advertised locally allowing people time to organise their engagement with the event.
- Specific, non-leading questions will be asked. Questions can be open (e.g. where do you think swings should be sited?) but not open-ended (e.g. what do you think should be done?).
- Care will be taken to ensure that no one voice is given greater weight than any other.

5 CURRENT METHODS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

5.1 Communication

- The Town Council Website will be updated regularly and will contain Agendas, Minutes, Council information documents, latest news and other information as required.
- Meeting minutes are available in both hard copy and electronically for residents and community groups.
- A quarterly newsletter is produced and delivered to all residents
- Meetings are publicized, both online and through public noticeboards and public participation is a permanent item on Full Council and Committee agendas.
- Social media – the Town Council has a presence on Facebook and Twitter and regularly posts updates about news and forthcoming events.
- The Annual Parish Meeting is an opportunity for residents to discuss issues and raise matters of concern.
- The annual audit process provides the opportunity for public inspection of the Annual Governance Statement and Accounting Statements (available on the website and on noticeboards).
- Regular press releases about the work of the Town Council or information that might be useful for residents.
- Councillor representation on community groups and organisations.

5.2 Consultation

- Consultation on important issues will be key in obtaining precise information and views and will be undertaken by questionnaires, use of the website and by approaching local organisations.
- Consultation will be as inclusive as possible and will seek to consult everyone including minority and hard to reach groups.
- The Health and Wellbeing Coordinator will work with residents and the wider community in support of the Town Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy

5.3 Support

- To support local organisations and engage with them in meeting their own targets and aims.
- To support local projects and participate in local events to raise awareness of the Town Council and its aims.

5.4 Relationships

- Positive working relationships with local organisations will ensure appropriate and acceptable outcomes.
- Such relationships will further the aims of the council to improve the environment and the quality of life for all residents.
- Positive working relationships will raise the profile of the Town Council and its work.
- Good relationships with Stratford on Avon District Council, Warwickshire County Council and surrounding local councils will enhance the service the Town Council is able to provide.
- Some members act as representatives for outside bodies comprising community groups, local organisations, and other government agencies, and regularly attend their meetings.
- Unlike other tiers of local government, town councillors always 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 uniquely placed in terms of informed representation.

6 FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS

6.1 Alcester Town Council is committed to improving community engagement by:

- Improving relationships with community groups and developing measures to harness the views and opinions of people and groups who are often missed out of community engagement activities.
- Providing a presence at town events and arranging councillor surgeries at regular intervals.
- Identifying and embracing opportunities to work with other local community groups, as and when the need arises.

- Working more proactively with schools to further the Town Council's aims to support young people.
- Participating in local groups and networks to share knowledge and experience of community engagement activities in other areas.
- Publicising the positive results that have been achieved from working relationships between the Council and other community groups; in order to encourage new working relationships to be formed and raise community spirit.
- Ensuring that appropriate evaluation is carried out following consultation exercises to ensure that lessons learnt are carried forward and an assessment of how effective and useful the consultation was.