



SANDY
Town Council



Have your Say – Our commitment to engaging with you

1.1 What is this strategy about?

Community engagement is concerned with giving local people a voice and involving them in decisions which affect them and their community. It provides an opportunity for local people to talk to the Council about their aspirations and/or needs in their community and neighbourhood. Community engagement is vital to ensuring Sandy is a vibrant community which provides the services and opportunities that its communities need.

Community engagement means the Council interacting with individuals, voluntary and community organisations and other public-sector bodies to make Sandy a better place. To get involved in making Sandy a better place to live, work and enjoy, you need to let us know what you think.

To do this, you need consistent, coordinated engagement by all the organisations who influence and provide services in Sandy. This includes Sandy Town Council who provide a variety of services within the town and are involved in making decisions that affect the future of the town and the well-being of its residents.

This strategy supports the Council's Community Engagement Policy and outlines how we will work together to inform, consult and involve local people in decision making and improving public services in Sandy.

This strategy sets out our community engagement values and standards and is divided into three main sections:

- The Community Engagement Strategy - an overview
- Visions and values – our commitment to involving you
- Involving you – standards, types of community engagement, how to include everybody and how decisions are made

We want you to have a stronger local voice and to have an impact on your local area and services. Examples of how we've started to go about this are included throughout this document – look out for the boxes.

Did you know...

Central Bedfordshire Council provides Sandy with most of its services, including matters related to highways, waste, planning, street lighting, dog control and more. Central Bedfordshire Council has its own Community Engagement Strategy which can be found on their website at the link detailed below;

<http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/council/stronger-communities/engagement.aspx>

2. Aims and Objectives

2.1 Our Aim

The Town Council exists to serve the community of Sandy and the Town Council can operate more effectively by engaging the community in its decision making and the provision of its services. The Council also considers it necessary to develop and maintain dialogue with residents and their representative groups.

This strategy is part of the Council's commitment to creating and maintaining effective working relationships with all sectors of the community, based on trust, openness and constructive challenge. The specific aim of the strategy is to improve the way in which the Council engages and consults its residents and partners on important issues by:

- Informing, consulting and involving
- Being inclusive and engaging with all of its residents and partners
- Ensuring views are listened to and used to develop, enhance and improve services, the environment and the quality of life for residents.

2.2 Our Objectives

Sandy Town Council is committed in its objectives to provide a democratic representational voice for the people of the Parish of Sandy. Central to this is engagement with the community in a proactive and meaningful way.

The objectives of this strategy are to:

- Encourage local community engagement
- Ensure that within the Council there is a clear understanding of the need to engage with communities about decisions which affect them
- Enable the views and aspirations of the community to have an impact on decision making and the way in which 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)
- To improve, plan and shape the future of the town according to local needs and priorities
- To improve the quality and delivery of services
- To be a stronger, more active and cohesive town

4.2 Current Communication and Engagement Methods

The Council already shows good practice in how we go about communicating and engaging with people. The Council has identified certain activities it undertakes within community engagement, how the service is delivered and how it can be improved;

Activity	What we do now	What we could do
Enable an involved, empowered and active citizenship through:		
The Council's presence in Sandy and ensuring ease of accessibility	Accessible Council Offices in the centre of town. Information point open to public three days a week. Phone lines open 9-5, five days a week. Opening hours are publicised online	Improved directional signage pointing to Council offices
	Attendance of Mayor at local community or business events when invited	
	Organisation and hosting of Mayors Civic events, including civic service and carol service	Ensure better publicity of upcoming civic events on social media
	Organisation of Mayors charity functions in and around Sandy. Often supported by local restaurants	Ensure better press and social media cover following Mayors events (publicise mayor's charities)
	Contact details for the Council, Councillors and the Council office are made available on the Notice Boards and the Council's website	Raise profile of all Councillors' biographies using media and social media Run regular Councillor surgeries
	Website and Facebook page provide residents with online ways to communicate with the Council	Continue to develop Facebook site and use to promote both information and positive aspects of Council activity
Council Meetings – Ensuring transparency and engagement	Notices of meetings, agendas and minutes are posted on the Council website and Facebook page. A schedule of meetings is published in The Bulletin and on the Council website	Highlight key agenda points on upcoming meetings via social media

Communicate information to our community clearly, factually and appropriately through:		
Council Website	The Council runs a website covering all its services and activity	Ensure website is regularly audited and updated
Council Facebook	The Council has set up a Facebook page with the aim of sharing information to a wider audience and improving the way we communicate	Continue to develop regular and interactive use of Facebook
Council Documents	Agendas and Minutes are published on the Council's website as soon as possible	Share agendas and minutes through social media
	Policy Documents are available via the Council's website	Share links to key policy documents through social media
	Core Council regulation documents are published on the Council's website	Share links to Core documents through social media
Press Releases	Regular press releases are made on key activity or action via the local papers and the Bulletin	Consider friendlier ways of communicating a message, such as infographics via social media and the Bulletin
Annual Report	Produce and publish on our website an annual report which includes a financial summary of the year and reports on works carried out by the Council	Make hard copies available more easily via the Library
		Publish a link to the report on Facebook and a series of individual posts with excerpts of information contained
Consultations	Use of leaflets and online survey providers as need arises	Actively consider whether consultation is needed on decisions by Council or changes in service. Ensure consultations are widely published and easy to engage with

Receptive to requests from residents and will attempt to be flexible in order to ensure their opinions are known not only to the Town Council but other organisations	<p>Communication relating to STC matters are dealt with by the Clerk and office or referred to a Council meeting</p> <p>Any request/complaint relating to or effecting another organisation will be communicated to that organisation and response provided back</p> <p>STC activities and queries are shared with CBC ward members at quarterly briefings</p>	
To raise the image and reputation of the Council through:		
Issuing press releases covering activities of the Council	Issue press releases as directed by Council in local papers	Issue more regular releases on social media about Council activity and increase positive images/photographs included
Civic and Charity events	Advertise upcoming events in The Bulletin	Advertise positive results of civic and charity events and who benefits on social media
Councillors	Advertise Councillors' contact details and promote activities carried out by Councillors as part of their role	Raise profile of all Councillors' biographies by promoting on social media
		Hold regular councillor surgeries
Decision making on controversial or widely impacting issues	When dealing with 'controversial' issues that affect a particular community, consideration will be given to holding a public meeting	
Evidencing dedication to professional and community service provision	Achieved foundation level of the Local Council Award Scheme	Gaining the next level of the Local Council Award Scheme

Agree a 'theme' focused on topical issues, such as East West Rail Link or crime rates. Ensure speakers appropriate to the theme are able to attend	Cllrs Clerk Admin	Annually April	Increased attendance
Community and Management Plans			
Consult via a variety of methods on the proposed Community Plan and agree a target for the number of responses received	Community Plan Group Clerk	Date to be agreed by Community Plan Group	Community Plan Group to monitor number of responses received and feed into Plan. Report back to Council
Consult on the Beeston Green Management Plan via a variety of methods and agree a target for the number of responses received	Beeston Working Group	Date to be Agreed by Working Group	Beeston Working Group to monitor number of responses received and feed into Plan. Report back to Council
Communicate information to our community clearly, factually and appropriately through:			
Website and Social Media			
Ensure website is regularly audited and updated	Admin Clerk Cllrs	Monthly with complete audit annually	<i>Assign a Councillor/s to help audit once a year and confirm process carried out to council (?)</i>
Continue to develop regular and interactive use of Facebook and greater publication of Council activity	Admin Clerk	Ongoing	Increased Facebook 'Followers' and 'Likes'
Council Documents			
Share agendas and minutes through social media	Admin	Ongoing	Council's appointed Facebook editors to monitor number and frequency of posts and review posts reach
Share links to key policy documents through social media	Admin	Ongoing	
Share links to Core documents through social media	Admin	Ongoing	

Look at areas of our Community Plan that require action and invite other relevant groups to work with us on achieving desired results	Cllrs	April/May 2018	
To raise the image and reputation of the Council through:			
Issue more regular releases on social media about Council activity and increase positive images/photographs included	Admin Clerk	Ongoing	Increased 'Press Clippings' and Facebook 'Followers'
Advertise positive results of civic and charity events and who benefits on Facebook, website and press releases	Mayor Admin	Ongoing	
Raise profile of all Councillors' biographies by promoting on Facebook	Cllrs Admin	Ongoing	Increased reach numbers of Facebook posts
Hold regular councillor surgeries	Cllrs	<u>2018</u> March May July September November	Reports on each surgery to go to Council
Gaining the next level of the Local Council Award Scheme	Clerk Admin Cllrs	August 2018	PFR Committee to monitor progress against checklist throughout 2018/19

6. Role of Council Members and Officers

Council Members (Councillors) are the elected decision makers of the Town Council. Their contact details are available from the Town Council offices and on the Town Council website. Members of the public are welcome to contact officers to raise any issues.

The Council's officers are staff who are employed to carry out the day to day functions of the Council and make sure that its services are provided for the local community. The Town Clerk is the Proper Officer for the Council.

SANDY TOWN COUNCIL

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Sandy Town Council wants to work closely with the public – residents, communities, businesses and voluntary organisations. Our aim is to engage with residents and encourage their participation in the local democratic process; creating a more active and informed community that is involved in decision making and securing better services.

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

It sets out:

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

1.3 The objectives of the policy are to:

- Encourage effective local community engagement;
- Ensure that embedded throughout the Council there is a clear understanding of the need to engage with communities about decisions which affect them;
- 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;
- 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 means the involvement of local people in decisions which affect them and their community. This can include individuals and community groups as well as businesses and other public bodies. It provides an opportunity for local people to communicate with the Council about their community and neighbourhoods needs and/or aspirations.

- (v) considering consultations and surveys where necessary and appropriate and making results available

3.2 To communicate information to our community clearly, factually and appropriately through:

- (i) a website detailing all council services and activities
- (ii) regular press releases and advertisements in local publications
- (iii) use of social media via the Town Council Facebook page (in line with the Council Social Media Policy)
- (iv) an annual report
- (v) display of information on public noticeboards
- (vi) use of plain English

3.3 To improve our communication with our partners and stakeholders and co-ordinate our community engagement efforts through:

- (i) supporting the work of statutory agencies in Sandy
- (ii) supporting the work of non-statutory organisations in Sandy
- (iii) maintaining positive working relationships with local organisations
- (iv) identifying and embracing opportunities to work with other local community groups, as and when the need arises
- (v) receptive to requests from residents and will attempt to be flexible in order to ensure their opinions are known not only to the Town Council but other organisations
- (vi) ensure local people and communities are referred to the correct department/officer/council and that they are aware of the ways that they can use relevant systems to make their views known

3.4 To raise the image and reputation of the Council through:

- (i) inviting residents to be actively involved in meetings via the public forum
- (ii) publicising the Annual Town Meeting
- (iii) inviting residents/community groups to provide information for Council publications, website or Facebook
- (iv) issuing press releases covering activities of the Council
- (v) encouraging the Mayor to represent the Council and the community
- (vi) when dealing with 'controversial' issues that affect a particular community consideration will be given to holding a public meeting

SANDY TOWN COUNCIL

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

1. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

- 1.1 The widespread availability and use of social networking applications bring opportunities to understand, engage and communicate with our audiences in new ways. It is important that the Council is able to use these technologies and services effectively and flexibly. However, it is also important to ensure that the Council balance this with its duties to its service users and partners, its legal responsibilities and its reputation.

For example, the Council's use of social networking applications has implications for its duty to safeguard children, young people and vulnerable adults. There are also implications for employees, Councillors and the Council as a corporate body.

- 1.2 This policy is intended to help Councillors and Council staff make appropriate decisions about the use of social media and provide a framework of good practice.

- 1.3 The purpose of this policy is to ensure:

- that the Council is not exposed to legal and governance risks;
- that the reputation of the Council is not adversely affected;
- that our users are able to clearly distinguish where information provided via social networking applications is legitimately representative of the Council.
- Management of the Council's Facebook site

2. Scope of Policy

- 2.1 This policy covers all individuals working at all levels with the Council, including all elected and co-opted Councillors, the Clerk to the Council and all other employees and volunteers. These groups are referred to collectively as 'Council representatives' for brevity.
- 2.2 The requirements of this policy apply to all uses of social networking applications which are used for any Council-related purpose and regardless of whether the applications are hosted corporately or not. They must also be considered where Council representatives are contributing in an official capacity to social networking applications provided by external organisations.
- 2.3 The Council has a corporate presence on the web and by use of email, which it uses to communicate with people who live in, work in and visit the parish. Over time the Town Council may add channels of communication that it uses as it seeks to improve and expand the services it delivers. When these

changes occur, this Social Media Policy will be updated to reflect the new arrangements.

- 2.4 All members and staff are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the reputation, privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the Council, its services, employees, partners and community.

3. Enforcement

- 3.1 Serious breaches of this policy by employees may be dealt with under the Employee Disciplinary Procedure. The Council may take disciplinary action in respect of unlawful, libellous, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented or racially offensive comments by an employee.
- 3.2 Behaviour required by the members' Code of Conduct shall apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Members will bear in mind that inappropriate conduct can still attract adverse publicity, even when the code does not apply. Online content should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate. Members must be aware that their profile as a councillor means the more likely it is that they will be seen as acting in an official capacity when networking or blogging.
- 3.3 Breach of the policy by volunteers will result in the Council no longer using their services and, if necessary, appropriate action will be taken.
- 3.4 Communications on the internet are permanent and public. When communicating in a 'private' group it should be ensured that the Council would be content with the statement, should it be made public.

4. SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

- 4.1 Social networking applications include, but are not limited to:
- Blogs
 - Online discussion forums
 - Collaborative spaces
 - Media sharing services, for example YouTube
 - 'Micro-blogging' applications, for example Twitter.
- 4.2 All Council representatives should bear in mind that information they share through social networking applications, even if they are on private spaces, are still subject to copyright, data protection and Freedom of Information legislation, the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 and other legislation. They must also operate in line with the Council's Equal Opportunities Policy.

4.3 This policy is based on the Civil Service Code: Principles for Participation Online and advice produced by the Chartered Institute of Public Relations and other sources of good practice.

5. Rules for using Social Media

5.1 Staff and Councillors must not allow their interaction on any website or blogs to damage their working relationships with others. They must not make any derogatory, discriminatory, defamatory or offensive comments about other staff, councillors, the council or about the people, businesses and agencies the council works with and serves.

5.2 Posts must not contain anyone's personal information, other than necessary basic contact details.

5.3 If staff or councillors blog, tweet or post personally they must not act, claim to act, or give the impression that they are acting as a representative of the council. If in doubt, they should make it clear they are posting personally, especially when posting on subjects which are the concern of the council.

5.4 All staff and councillors must ensure they use the council facilities appropriately. If using a council-provided website or social networking area, any posts made will be viewed as made in an official capacity. Council facilities cannot be used for personal or political blogs.

5.5 When participating in online communication on behalf of the council, staff and councillors must;

- Never make false or misleading statements
- Never name an individual third party unless you have written permission to do so.
- Never use language that may be deemed as offensive, relating in particular to sexuality, race, disability, gender, age or religion.

5.6 Discussions and documents which are part of council meetings and are open to the public, may be freely referred to in online communications. However, e-mail communications, discussions of meetings or parts of a meeting which are not open to the public, and any other correspondence or communication should be regarded as confidential unless specifically agreed otherwise.

6. Managing the Council Facebook Page

6.1 The Council will appoint at least three nominated persons as editors and moderators. They will be responsible for posting and monitoring of the content on council pages, ensuring it complies with the Social Media Policy. The moderators will have authority to immediately, without notice or comment, remove any posts from the council's Facebook page if they are deemed to be inflammatory or of a defamatory or libellous nature. Such posts will be reported to the Clerk for council records.

- 6.2 The Clerk reserves the right to require the removal of content published by Council representatives which may adversely affect the reputation of the Council or put it at risk of legal action.
- 6.3 The Facebook page will be used to;
- Post notices and minutes of meetings
 - Advertise events and activities
 - Post news stories about council activities and decisions
 - Link to appropriate websites
 - Advertise vacancies
 - Share information from partners, i.e CBC, Police, Library
 - Announce new information appropriate to the council
 - Post or share information promoting bodies for community benefit, such as sports clubs and community groups
 - Post information about council services
 - Post contact information for the council
 - Post other items as the council sees fit
 - Facebook may be used to support the Town Council website and its information as above.
- 6.4 The site will be checked on a regular basis to ensure security settings are in place. Access passwords for the site will be given to the Clerk and appointed Council editors/moderators only.
- 6.5 The Council will only monitor the page during office work hours and an automatic message will alert any 'posters' to this.
- 6.6 If a matter is raised on the Facebook page which needs further consideration by the Council, it may be raised at either the public participation session or as an agenda item for consideration by a quorum of councillors. The 'poster' shall be informed via the page or a direct message that this is the case and invited to contact the clerk directly. Any response agreed by council will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.
- 6.7 Reports of any concerns regarding content on the Facebook page should be reported to the Clerk for referral to the moderators and/or council as required.
- 6.8 The use of the Council's logo and other branding elements should be used where appropriate to indicate the Council's support. The logo should not be used on social networking applications which are unrelated to or are not representative of the Council's official position.

7. Friends of Sandy Green Wheel Facebook Page

- 7.1 The Council will host a Friends of Sandy Green Wheel (FOSGW) Facebook page via its account. The Clerk will be the administrator of the page. A Council administrator and a Councillor representative from the Green Wheel group will be assigned as editors of the page. They will be responsible for posting and monitoring of the content on the FOSGW page, ensuring it complies with this Social Media Policy. The moderators will have authority to immediately, without notice or comment, remove any posts from the FOSGW Facebook page if they are deemed to be inflammatory or of a defamatory or libellous nature. Such posts will be reported to the Clerk for Council records.
- 7.2 The Clerk reserves the right to require the removal of content published by Council representatives which may adversely affect the reputation of the Council or put it at risk of legal action.
- 7.3 The FOSGW Facebook page will be used to;
- Promote and advertise the Sandy Green Wheel
 - Advertise the route of the Green Wheel
 - Advertise events and activities related to the Green Wheel
 - Post news stories about activities and decisions made by the Council and/or the Green Wheel Working Group
 - Link to appropriate websites supporting the Green Wheel
 - Share information from partners, i.e CBC, BRCC, Greensands Country
 - Announce new information appropriate to the development and enhancement of the Green Wheel
 - Post or share information promoting bodies which benefit the Green Wheel or the wider remit of promoting and enhancing Sandy's green spaces
 - Post information on recruiting volunteers to become Friends of the Green Wheel
 - Posting updates pertinent to the route of the Green Wheel (street works, damaged gates etc)
 - Posting questions or gathering comments and feedback on the Green Wheel or any proposed projects related to it.
 - Promote Sandy to walking groups, such as Ivel Valley Walkers etc
- 7.4 The page will be checked on a regular basis to ensure security settings are in place. Access passwords for the site will be given to the Clerk and appointed Council editors/moderators only.
- 7.5 Reports of any concerns regarding content on the Facebook page should be reported to the Clerk for referral to the moderators and/or council as required.
- 7.6 The Green Wheel logo will be used on the Page and the branding will be taken from the already developed and published marketing material.

7.7 The use of the Town Council's logo and BRCC logo may be used where appropriate to indicate the Council's support of the Green Wheel, Greensands Country or related activities.