

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.

- 2.2 Community engagement provides the Council with an opportunity to consult and inform the public about its services and projects.
- 2.3 'Hard to reach' groups within the community can be those who experience social exclusion and can be perceived as being disempowered. An example may be young people, elderly people or those with a disability.
- 2.4 The key aspects of community engagement includes;
- Development of a network of relationships between the Council, individuals and groups;
 - Clear and open communication to ensure that information is made accessible to all groups;
 - Listening to and understanding a range of people to identify aspirations, needs and problems
- 2.5 The benefits of community engagement include;
- Problems and needs within communities are identified so they can be addressed;
 - Those participating feel more empowered by being involved in decision making and a sense of ownership over new facilities/initiatives can be developed;
 - May result in a renewed respect for the Council; enhanced leadership and greater interest in elections or standing for Council.

3. AIMS

Sandy Town Council strives to undertake the following:

3.1 To enable an involved, empowered and active citizenship through:

- (i) All meetings of the Town Council and its committees will be open to the public and press and there is a period set aside for residents to speak.
Residents can access agendas for Council meetings via the Council's website, Council office, Library and Council notice boards.
- (ii) involving residents in community issues and informing local people of the Council's services and actions taken via social media and press releases
- (iii) details of how to contact the Council are displayed on notice boards, website, Facebook and in the monthly Bulletin page
- (iv) engaging proactively with all sections of the community

- (v) considering use of 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
- (vii) use of lamppost banners to promote the Council and the town, or to celebrate and advertise community or national events of significance

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 by issuing statements, articles or attending events

- (vi) when dealing with 'controversial' issues that affect a particular community consideration will be given to holding a public meeting
- (vii) publishing positive results achieved from working relationships between the council and other community groups/bodies

3.5 To enable every councillor to maximise their role as elected representatives and community leaders through:

- (i) the supply of a New Members Pack
- (ii) encouraging Councillors to attend appropriate training as set out in the Council Training Statement of Intent
- (iii) encouraging Councillors to attend meetings of community organisations and resident's associations when these arise
- (iv) encouraging Councillors to take up places on community groups and organisations
- (v) holding Councillor surgeries

3.6 To ensure every member of staff understands the council's role and priorities through:

- (i) development of a customer care programme
- (ii) the staff appraisal scheme
- (iii) encouraging staff to provide input into the decision making process
- (iv) encouraging staff to represent the Council at community events
- (v) provision of regular staff training, continuous professional development and briefings