

RETTENDON PARISH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY



1. Introduction

1.1 This document forms the Council's Community Engagement Policy.

It sets out:

- * The Role of community engagement and its importance;
- * How the Council engages the wider community and identifies the needs and aspirations of the community.
- * How the 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.

2. Community Engagement – an Overview

2.1 Community engagement is concerned with 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 or needs in their community and neighbourhood. 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.

2.2 The term stakeholder makes reference 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, people with physical disabilities, language barriers, financial constraints, cultural differences or social expectations. The 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 a number of 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. Rettendon Parish Council and Community Engagement

- * Ensuring 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 Council website, notice board, posters, consultations, reports, monthly newsletter and word of mouth.

- * All meetings of the Council are open to the public and press and there is a period set aside for residents to speak.
Residents can access the agenda for meetings via the Council web site and notice boards.

The Council website, notice boards, and agendas explain the procedure for residents wishing to speak at meetings. Residents can also write/telephone the Clerk or any Councillor should they wish to put an item on the agenda or have a case presented on their behalf to the full Council.

Planning applications are considered at Council meetings held monthly. This is an opportunity for residents to speak, this applies equally to agenda items. Equal opportunity is given to applicants/supporters, objectors and local community groups.

- * The Parish Clerk is required to play a neutral role so that residents can be fully involved and be confident that they are receiving unbiased information and support. This neutral involvement will allow more flexibility in the service and the personal element of the contact, will hopefully encourage more involvement from the hard to reach members of the community.
- * Details of how to contact the Parish Clerk is displayed on notice boards, council website and monthly newsletter.
- * A list of Parish Council Meeting dates for the year May to May is on the website and published in the newsletter.

- * The 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 Parish 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 Council but also to other organisations.

This may be by including items for discussion on the agenda or allowing a local group to put their opinions/projects to the Council. The Council will then if appropriate take the project forward.

- * Councillors will continue to represent the Council on various outside bodies, to ensure that they are kept informed of the communities' need

4. Communication

4.1 The Council is committed to improving community engagement by:

Continuing all the above activities and services into the future and improving relationships with community groups, including developing measures to harness the views and opinions of people and groups who are often missed out of community engagement activities.

- * The Council will be proactive and will be willing to consider any reasonable opportunities that support its purpose of getting information available and increasing contributions from the community, especially those difficult to reach.
- * When dealing with controversial issues that affect a particular community then consideration will be given to holding a public meeting.
- * Consultations and surveys are to be considered when necessary and appropriate and results will be made available.
- * Identifying and embracing opportunities to work with other local community groups when the need arises.
- * Publicising the positive results that have been achieved from working relationships between Council and other community groups; in order to encourage new relationships/partnerships to be formed and to raise community spirit.
- * Promoting elections and the importance of the democratic process and the value of being a councillor.
- * Promoting the value to the parish of volunteering.
- * The Parish Council will review its community Engagement Strategy on an annual basis to ensure it remains relevant.

5. Freedom of Information

5.1 In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, this document will be posted on the Council website and paper copies will be available from the Parish Clerk.

6. Outcomes

The outcomes which we are striving for and against which the success of this policy will be measured are:

- * Improved communication through the establishment of new channels of engagement.
- * More residents understanding the role of Councillors and getting the best effect.
- * Improved engagement with local communities, with more people feeling that they are involved in decision-making and a higher percentage of people involved in volunteering.
- * Improved satisfaction with services provided by the Council

RPC Community Engagement Policy Approved by Full Council on 29th May 2018

Signed: Chairman

Minute No.