



Adopted: November 2020 Full Council

Due for review: Annually, Publicity Panel any changes for recommendation to November Full Council

# Community Engagement Policy & Strategy

## 1. Introduction

The Town Council is committed to community engagement at all levels and supports and encourages all community members to engage with the Council. The Town Council acknowledges that 'Community engagement works best where it is an ongoing cumulative process enabling relationships and trust to build and strengthen over time' (HM Government, 2005, p. 3).

## 2. Policy Aims

The overall aim is to facilitate appropriate, good quality, effective Community Engagement. The intention is to provide timely information to allow the community to understand what we do, whilst enabling the Council to make informed decisions using accurate information received from residents and partners. This is in accordance with the Council's overarching principles, within the Council Priorities 2017-2020 document:

- Democratic Representation: : Representing residents in a fair and equal manner and ensuring SSTC comments where possible, on consultations from Milton Keynes Council, and other organisations, covering changes which will affect the parish and its residents
- Community engagement: In its activities to the key principles of inclusivity, engagement and communication. It will seek to take account of the interests of all the community and be accountable to them;

## 3. Objectives of the community engagement policy

- To improve, plan and shape the future of the parish (Stony Stratford, Fullers Slade and Galley Hill) according to local needs and priorities through active engagement with the community to understand needs and priorities.
- To use the process of engagement to inform decision making.
- To raise the profile of the Town.
- To raise the profile of the work of the Town Council.
- To use a variety of methods to provide information to the community.
- To engage with local and strategic partners on a range of matters of interest or concern to the community.

## 4. Who are the community and local partners and stakeholders?

Within the parish:

- Residents
- Resident Associations
- Parish voluntary groups
- Parish clubs, societies and organisations
- Local churches
- Local businesses and their representative organisations
- Russell Street School
- St Mary and St Giles School Primary School

Wider groups and organisations:

- Borough and SSTC Ward Councillors
- MPs
- Neighbouring Parish and Town Councils
- Milton Keynes Council (MKC) Departments
- Thames Valley Police
- Other public sector organisations such as those concerned with health, education, the police and emergency services
- The media

## 5. A strategy for engagement

The Council will achieve its communications objectives in the following ways using the methods of communication and engagement below:

- **Information Officer** – This role was first implemented in 2006 when the Council determined the role was required to help liaise between the Council and its community partners. This liaison role helps encourage the public to have a say on parish matters and to assist them to publish their aspirations through a named contact. The Information Officer's contact details are widely publicised and communications can be made in a variety of ways; phone, email, website and Facebook.
- **Town Clerk** – The Clerk is a pivotal point of contact for residents in fielding and answering queries which arise. The Clerk's contact details are widely publicised and contact may be made by phone, email, website and Facebook.
- **Deputy Town Clerk (DTC)** – The Deputy Town Clerk is a main point of contact for Allotment and Landscape enquiries but also deputises for the Town Clerk. The DTC's contact details are widely publicised and contact may be made by phone, email, website and Facebook.
- **Environment and Planning Officer (EPO)** – This is a new role, first implemented in August 2020, (for one year in the first instance) to monitor the landscape contract and assist with Planning administration. The EPO also monitors the Landscape email enquiry address. The EPO's contact details are widely publicised and contact may be made by email or website
- **Full Town Council and Committee Meetings** – Full Town Council meetings are held bi-monthly on the third Tuesday of every other month. The schedule of all meetings can be found at: <https://www.stonystratford.gov.uk/town-council-meetings/meetings-20182019>

A key aspect of the strategy is publicising the dates of meetings for the forthcoming year at the Annual Meeting of Town Council in May of each year. In addition, agendas are published in advance on the Council noticeboards, website and Facebook page. In all respects the Town Council meetings must comply with the Councils Standing Orders ensuring good practice is maintained.

- **Resident participation in meetings** – The public and press are invited to attend all Town Council Meetings. Each meeting begins with a Public Forum, stating that “Members of the press and public are welcome to attend and make representation on agenda items to the Committee. In accordance with Standing Order 3f-g, a maximum of 15 minutes is allocated for public participation and no member of the public may speak for more than three minutes.’ Open questions are normally restricted to 15 minutes in total however at the Chairman’s discretion a period can be extended if deemed appropriate.
- **Town Council Contact Details** – The Town Council display contact details on the website, noticeboards and in the quarterly ‘Town Crier’ magazine.
- **Calendar of Meetings** – The Town Council display the annual timetable for meetings on the website, noticeboards and in the Town Crier.
- **Annual Town Meeting** – The Annual Town Meeting is the ideal opportunity to bring the community together and allow residents to question and review how the elected members help shape the community. To be successful good planning is needed and it is the responsibility of the Information Officer to both timetable an annual meeting date, organise the venue and invite the Town and Borough Councillors. The Chairman, Town Clerk and Information Officer determines the ‘interest theme’ for each annual meeting to encourage maximum turn out by the community. The main objective of the annual meeting is to provide and encourage two-way communication between the community and the Council. The meeting is heavily advertised in advance on the website, noticeboards, Facebook and in the quarterly Town Crier.
- **Public Meetings** – From time to time the Council may decide that an item warrants being dealt with through a specially convened Public Meeting. Public Meetings will be organised by the Town Clerk in liaison with the Publicity Panel to set the meeting agenda and meeting content. The Clerk will arrange the meeting venue with any costs met by the Council.
- **Public Consultation** – A public consultation will be undertaken if Council concludes that a particular event or future change will have an impact on residents or businesses. The intention of this exercise would be to better understand the needs of the village.

Examples may include;

- Update of the existing Neighbourhood Plan or Design Statement;
- Town Council borrowing e.g. to refurbish an existing asset
- Major increase (in excess of 3%) to the precept to provide an additional service
- Identifying gaps in service e.g. Youth provision
- Boundary change proposals

In some cases, when a consultation programme needs to engage with the wider community a working group/independent company will be appointed to analyse any results and report to the Council with the outcomes. The Town Council will have the option to accept all or part of any recommendations made by the working group/independent company by way of a majority decision by Council.

- **Town Council News Distribution** – It is important that what happens in the community and how the Town Council administers the Parish is widely publicised. The Council has a duty of care to ensure that accurate and relevant parish news has a medium available to it that does

not solely rely on advertising income. The Town Council therefore provides funding for the publication and distribution of the Town Crier newsletter. Sponsorship is sought by the Information Officer to help offset the costs of printing and distribution. Local groups are invited to put items of interest in the magazine. The Town Crier is produced quarterly by the Information Officer, proof-read by the Town Clerk, printed and distributed by local independent companies.

- **Website** ([www.stonystratford.gov.uk](http://www.stonystratford.gov.uk)) – A wide ranging website with extensive information regarding the Town Council and parish is in operation which includes news of the parish and further afield to encourage regular visits by interested parties. A regular report is produced by the Information Officer for the Publicity Panel to monitor the popular web pages visited. This information is used to allow the Council to determine where visitor interest lies from an information exchange perspective.
- **Social Media** – The website has been enhanced to allow social media to encourage rapid communication within the community. Facebook capability has been added; allowing short news items to be quickly distributed to those preferring to receive news through social media channels. Social media provides a two-way capability therefore it is important that each is regularly checked and responses given from the Council in a timely manner. Aside from the link via the website there is a Town Council Facebook page which the Information Officer regularly posts to.
- **Community Forums** – The Town Council may act in a proactive way when there is a need to assist the community to become organised in order to lobby or influence other partners or where it will be useful to determine a way forward for residents as a whole. By doing this the Town Council is an enabler rather than the main driving force. Current examples include:
  - Fullers Slade Residents Association
  - Fullers Slade Regeneration Group
  - Galley Hill Residents Association
  - London Road Allotment Association
  - Stony Stratford Business Association

## 6. Evaluation

It is important that the Council measures its progress towards its stated objectives so that it may inform any future plan. Initially a benchmark of the current state will be required.

The following initiatives can potentially be monitored:

- Raised awareness of the Town Council and the services it provides.
- Participation and engagement of community partners with Council projects, initiatives and consultation processes.
- Attendance at public meetings and organised events.
- Media coverage of the Town Council's communication coverage.

This can be done by:

- Parish questionnaires.
- Assessment of the report provided by the web host.
- Measurement of press coverage following press releases.
- Number of likes and followers on social networking sites.
- Attendance at meetings.

## Conclusion

The Council should aim to consult regularly with residents ranging from light touch opportunities such as the 'Public Forum' session at the start of each Council & committee meeting through to formal consultation programmes where information must be widely disseminated and feedback obtained to shape the programme and demonstrate democracy in action.

For large or complex consultation programmes it may be necessary to form working parties – ideally consisting of Councillors and members of the public to organise the consultation programme. Outcomes from surveys and consultation draft material should be made available to the public through Town Council bulletins and the web site for transparency purposes.

This Community Engagement Policy and Strategy provides the framework for how the Town Council will communicate and engage with parishioners and other organisations. It must be reviewed and updated if necessary, annually.

Communication and Engagement Strategy Draft v2 10<sup>th</sup> November 2020