



CHESHAM TOWN COUNCIL

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of community engagement is to effectively involve people in the decision-making processes and work of the Town Council. It will give a voice to local people as individuals, as well as community groups, public bodies, businesses, and anyone with an interest in the Council's services and projects. Engagement is a two-way process, which allows the public to talk to the Council about their views and needs and in return enables the Council to tell the community about its work, its priorities and how well it is performing.

The aim of the strategy is to provide opportunities for people to participate at whatever level they wish in order to influence the Council's service delivery, priorities and policies.

Effective community engagement will help to clearly identify the needs of local people, empower the community in local decision-making, and create a greater level of interest in, and understanding of, local government.

2. LEGISLATION

The *Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act (2007)* places emphasis on the importance of effective engagement with the community and facilitating inclusive and effective participation by individuals and organisations in local governance.

3. OUR COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Town Council's commitment to community engagement is enshrined within its Strategic Objectives:

"To consult with, understand and represent the views and wishes of the citizens of Chesham

- a. Through regular consultation with residents, including town-wide surveys, and representation on local voluntary organisations, assess how well current services meet residents' needs, understand how those needs are



- changing and respond effectively to those changes
- b. Consult with and respond to District Council, County Council and other Authorities on current services and planned changes, to ensure continuing improvement in services consistent with local needs
2. To help create a socially inclusive and caring community, which embraces all its residents equally, seeking to develop their well-being, knowledge, understanding, and mutual co-operation
- a. Encourage community associations and other voluntary organisations which actively engage in projects that contribute to social inclusiveness and community cohesion.
 - b. Engage and work with COPAG, the CAB, youth groups and other voluntary organisations to provide for the needs of more vulnerable or isolated groups in Chesham.”

4. ENGAGEMENT MECHANISMS

The Town Council will engage with its community using the following methods:

(i) Provision of information to the community

We have adopted the Information Commissioner’s Office “Model Publication Scheme”, which commits the Council to producing and publishing the method by which specific information will be made available, so that it can be easily identified and accessed by the public. As a result, we publish the “Guide to Information Available from Chesham Town Council” each year, which explains what information is routinely available and how it can be accessed.

Council and committee agenda, reports and minutes are made available on www.chesham.gov.uk and from Chesham Library. Agenda are posted on the Town Hall noticeboards.

We produce four newsletters per year, which are freely available from the Town Hall and www.chesham.gov.uk as well as other town centre locations. The newsletters can be made available in large print and Urdu upon request. We provide a Town Council report to the monthly yourChesham magazine, distributed door-to-door throughout Chesham and the surrounding area.

We publish a Performance Plan annually that provides information on Town Council projects, performance against targets, a breakdown of our precept and expenditure and costs per service area.

Press releases are sent to all local media outlets and news stories are published on



www.chesham.gov.uk and flagged up through our social media accounts.

(ii) Enabling the community to comment

We run open surgeries in the town centre on Saturdays to enable members of the public to talk to councillors face-to-face.

Councillor contact details are available on www.chesham.gov.uk and are published in the annual Town Guide which is delivered door-to-door and in the quarterly newsletters.

We have a “Contact Us” facility on www.chesham.gov.uk.

We can be contacted via our Twitter feed and Facebook page. Officers and councillors also monitor other social media streams and interact with the public using these formats.

There is a period set aside for public questions at the beginning of every meeting of the full Council and within the Annual Town Meeting.

Officers are available to speak to the public at the Town Hall from 10am Monday to Friday.

We support a number of “friends” groups that enable community members to become directly involved in running and supporting Town Council facilities.

We have formal councillor representation on a wide range of charitable and outside bodies, as well as working in partnership with agencies such as Chiltern District Council, Buckinghamshire County Council, Thames Valley Police and the Environment Agency.

Our annual external audit provides an opportunity for the public to ask questions about our Statement of Accounts and Balance Sheet.

We carry out targeted consultation to ascertain people’s views on specific topics as and when the need arises, in order to avoid consultation fatigue. Consultation is carried out in line with our Consultation Policy, Strategy and Procedure.

5. STANDARDS FOR ENGAGEMENT

The Town Council will adhere to the following standards:

Inclusion

- Use plain language
- Take into account the particular needs of people, especially in hard-to-reach groups, to enable them to participate



- Listen to, and respect, all opinions received

Clarity and Transparency

- Be clear about what we are asking the public to comment on when seeking people's views
- Only use engagement and consultation processes when there is a real opportunity for people to influence decision-making and services
- Provide feedback whenever possible

Visibility

- Ensure that those directly affected by decisions, policies and plans are aware of the opportunity to engage

6. RESPONSIBILITY

The success of this strategy lies with all councillors, who actively work to enhance community engagement in Town Council decision making) and the Town Clerk who is responsible for overseeing its implementation.

7. POLICY REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed on a four-year cycle. However, the policy may be developed and enhanced more frequently in light of on-going experiences in engaging with the community.

Version One Adopted: 15 July 2013

Strategy Due for Review: July 2017

