

Newbury Town Council

Engagement and Consultation Policy

(As approved by Policy and Resources Committee, 18 January 2021)

1. Introduction

1.1 Newbury Town Council's community engagement and consultation activities have been brought together into one overarching framework for the Council so as to better coordinate how we consult and engage with our community and to give Newbury residents more opportunities to have their say on the services the Council provides.

1.2 This policy acknowledges the Council's genuine desire to place consultation and engagement at the heart of our role in championing the needs of our community and involving them in decisions that affect them. We are committed to delivering services, policies and strategies that reflect local priorities, requirements and aspirations. The Policy sets out the matters we will consider when developing a consultation and engagement exercise to ensure that all relevant members of the community have a voice in the debate around how services are delivered. It acknowledges the need to provide appropriate opportunities for the community to participate at whatever level they wish to influence the provision of services, decision making and policy development.

2. Engagement

2.1 The aims of our Engagement Strategy are:

- To improve the way in which we engage with our residents
- To improve the quality and value of our policy and decision-making processes by taking into account the views of the residents and other stakeholders concerned
- To ensure that residents and other stakeholders have been offered the opportunity to be involved in key decisions affecting them
- To inform residents of Council plans, policies, decisions and outcomes
- To ensure that residents are consulted on key issues,

2.2 Community engagement is about giving local people a voice and involving them in decisions that affect them and their community. We will provide the opportunity for residents of the Town to express their views on matters that are important to them. This will inform and advise the Town Council and improve the quality and value of our policies and decisions on behalf of our residents.

2.3 Community Engagement also enables the Town Council to consult with and inform the residents about what services it provides, and explain how, when faced with limited financial resources, it prioritises those services, and it enables the Town Council to tell them how we are performing against our Plan and targets.

3. Objectives

The key objectives of the Engagement and Consultation Policy are to:

- Provide and receive information
- Seek opinions
- Improve the quality and value of the Town Council's decision making
- Encourage effective local community engagement
- Publish accurate information about the work of the Town Council
- Identify what is important to the residents, and consider and prioritise those needs
- Encourage participation in the development of services and understand how the Precept is spent

4. General Principles

4.1 The key aspects of engagement include:

- Clear, honest and regular communication of important information, which is accessible to everyone in the Town
- Providing accurate information that explains the significance of issues faced by the Town, what the options are and how we intend to deal with the issues
- Listening, understanding, and acting on information provided to us, and
- Responding to all concerns raised by residents

4.2 How we engage

- We provide opportunities for residents to have their say in key decisions affecting the Town. All meetings of the Town Council are open to the public and Press, and information is published on the website and the Town Hall notice board
- Members of the public can ask questions at any meeting of the Council or any of its Committees
- We provide regular opportunities for face-to-face discussion with a Councillor by means of weekly surgeries, held on Saturday mornings on the Town Hall steps
- We provide a broad range of information on the Town Council website
- We encourage residents to write to us with their concerns through our "Ask The Leader" page on the Town Council website
- We actively promote our plans on the website and through our monthly newsletters
- We use our Facebook account to reach those who regularly use those communication tools
- We ensure that all meeting dates are advertised well in advance and that the relevant statutory notices are published in good time before each meeting
- We make our policies and procedures available through the website
- We continue to represent Newbury Town Council and the community of Newbury through consultations and attendance at meetings of outside bodies, to ensure the needs of our Town are made known and promoted

- We hold an annual Town Meeting to encourage Community Engagement

4.3 Communication with the Local Community & Stakeholders

We are committed to improving our community engagement by:

- Undertaking all of the above activities and striving to improve our relationships with community groups and other agencies and stakeholders that can assist us in our endeavours, including developing measures to harness the views and opinions of people who are sometimes missed out of community engagement activities.
- We will be proactive and willing to consider all means of getting information to the local community and in trying new ways of increasing feedback from them.
- We will continue joint venture working and shared services with local or District groups and organisations that may be able to assist us in achieving our aims
- We will promote our achievements and actively encourage residents to join us as Members of the Town Council.
- We will promote Town Council elections, the importance of the democratic process, and the value of being a Town Councillor.
- We will seek volunteers for community projects and promote the value of volunteers to the Town

5. Consultations

5.1 Much of the work of the Council is guided by the Strategy 2019-2024. However, there may be circumstances when the Council wishes to seek the views of local people on a proposed project, action or policy. In such circumstances, a consultation may be conducted and this policy aims to set out how such consultations may take place.

5.2 Newbury Town Council already engages and consults on a wide range of issues utilising many different forms of engagement. The purpose of this policy is to ensure there is a consistency to the way in which we plan, develop and share learning from consultations to influence the way in which we provide services in the future.

5.3 A consultation will not be carried out in connection with any action required to be carried out by the Council by law or where a project, action or activity is proposed on the grounds of health and/or safety or in connection with required repairs and maintenance, or in any circumstances where the proposed project, action or activity is outside the power of the Parish Council to undertake.

5.4 We will carry out appropriate consultation before making any new policy or decision which will impact on residents, communities or other stakeholders. In designing a consultation we will have regard to

- The scale of the proposal,
- The cost of the proposal
- the geographical range of any impacts and/ or benefits and the residents/ communities who may be effected by the proposal
- The timing of the consultation and the length of the consultation period and
- The cost of the consultation

5.5 Having regard to the above, the Council may employ any one or all of the following consultation methods:

- a) Handing or posting the consultation to those most likely to be impacted
- b) Notices in local media outlets
- c) Notices on notice boards
- d) The use of the Council's website and online survey/ consultation methods
- e) Directly consulting relevant partners, stakeholders or other community/ voluntary organisations
- f) Directly consulting local residents known to have particular knowledge or interest in the matter
- g) Holding meetings virtually or in physical venues
- h) Face to face informal surveys
- i) Formal written questionnaires
- j) Telephone surveys
- k) Interviews

5.6 Wherever possible, the consultation will include the following:

- A brief explanation of the nature of the project/activity
- A clear indication that the consultation is being undertaken by Newbury Town Council
- A statement indicating that the results of the survey/questionnaire will be used to inform Town Councillors who will remain responsible for making a decision on the matter
- An opportunity for members of the public to add comments about the project/activity
- A clear indication of when the questionnaire is to be returned and to which address

5.7 When proposals come before the relevant committee, the recommendation to Members will include details of the proposed consultation approach. This will ensure Members actively approve both the plans and the consultation approach.

5.8 The elected councillors will be encouraged to promote the consultation, engage with residents and improve the response rate. Their involvement is crucial to the success of a good consultation. They are strategically placed in the community to build relations with residents and often well known to residents in their locality.

5.8 We will make available via our website, the results of any public consultation or survey that affects the Town.

5.9 Parish Council decisions can only be made by Parish Councillors in a duly convened meeting. The results of a consultation will be used solely for the purpose of informing parish councillors of the general wishes of those consulted.

The Council is required to take the needs of the Town as a whole into account when making decisions and not just reflect the wishes of a minority which may conflict with the needs of the parish as a whole. Thus, the results of a neighbourhood consultation will not be binding on any final decision of the Parish Council.

5.10 Feedback on the results of a survey will be made available to members of the public where appropriate through the Minutes of meetings at which the results are discussed. A separate notification of the results may be given to those surveyed if the Town Council so chooses, either through a separate written notification or a notice on a nearby noticeboard for example.