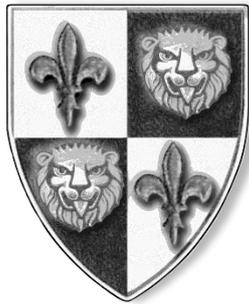


# SHAFTESBURY TOWN COUNCIL

*Delivering Excellence across the  
Shaftesbury Community*



# Community Engagement Strategy

Date of Adoption: 12<sup>th</sup> January 2021  
Review Date: 12<sup>th</sup> January 2024



Managing People Policies



## Community Engagement Strategy

### 1 Objectives

The objectives of this strategy 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 the principles behind how the Council can enhance its profile by improving engagement with the wider community (with specific reference to hard to reach groups).

### 2 The Council's Commitment to Community Engagement

- 2.1 The Strategic Plan is founded on our belief that decisions should be made ethically, with equal regard to social, economic and environmental impact. This, we believe, will make Shaftesbury a better place.
- 2.2 The Council is committed in its vision, aspirations and objectives to provide a democratic representational voice for the people of Shaftesbury. Central to this ethos is engagement with the local community in a proactive and meaningful way.

### 3 Corporate Aims

- 3.1 Community engagement is embodied in the delivery of the Council's mission statement:

*"Shaftesbury Town Council will work conscientiously with the community to define and provide best value, high quality services and facilities, ensuring that Shaftesbury is a 21st Century Town that respects its heritage and upholds its values making it a great place to live, work, play and visit"*

- 3.2 The key corporate aims

- A Sustainable Economy
- A Vibrant Participatory Community
- A Thriving Town Centre
- Efficient and Effective Public Services
- An Innovative and Supportive Town Council

Are supported by a range of objectives which are informing the development of the workplan.

- 3.3 The framework of objectives for the future work plan of the council is split into two areas of focus:



INTERNAL FACING – the work Shaftesbury Town Council needs to progress to make it a strong well-resourced organisation capable of delivering the visions of the council and raising its profile and engagement with its community.

EXTERNAL FACING – the work Shaftesbury Town Council wants to undertake on behalf of Shaftesbury

### 3.4 Internal Facing Objectives:

- Town council reputation
- Staffing
- Town hall offices and reception
- Staff and councillor development and support
- Town Council financial strategy

### 3.5 External facing objectives:

- Community engagement
- Improving and increasing services and facilities provided by STC
- Town development control (i.e. Neighbourhood Plan)
- Recreational facilities
- Encouraging civic pride
- Tourism
- Business development
- Engagement with other authorities
- Shaftesbury infrastructure and facilities

## 4 A Vibrant Participatory Community

4.1 To achieve a vibrant and participatory community, the Council needs greater involvement with people from all sectors. As decision makers, the Council needs to be able to tap in and respond to the feelings, thoughts, knowledge, interest and expertise in the town. It is clear that involvement doesn't mean simply asking the town's people what they want and acting on the majority decision. Our understanding of involvement is that it is a two-way communication allowing the best (and not always the most popular) decisions to be made and the reasons behind those decisions to be understood. The Council sees participation as the direct involvement of individuals or groups through a planned method or technique in informing the decision-making process. Participation may be open or it may not be depending on what is required. Participation events may directly inform decision making or the outcome may be to understand and/or inform the views held in the wider community.



4.2 The Council sees consultation as the seeking of views on a specific subject. Our understanding of consultation is that it should be focussed (asking specific questions) and the limitations of its impact clearly understood. Crucially, asking the right questions in the right manner will be more important than receiving the “right” answers. Consultation, like participation, may be open or limited to relevant groups depending upon the issue or question(s).

## 5 Principles

The Localism Act places considerable onus on increased involvement and therefore guiding principles are required, as noted below:

### *Involvement Principles*

- The Town Council cannot force any individual or group to become involved but it can, and will, make it easier and more attractive to do so.
- It will manage expectations and always be clear, before the start of any participation or consultation event, to what extent the result will inform a decision.
- If the outcome of a participation or consultation event is intended to inform a decision and a different decision is taken, the reasoning behind that decision will be clear and published.
- All involvement will be time-bound and the aggregated results will be published openly.
- Not every decision requires community involvement.

### *Engagement Principles*

- The Council will be clear at the start of the event what output is expected e.g. a recommendation, strategy suggestion etc.
- Consultation events are not intended as an opportunity for individuals with a particular interest to lobby decision makers. While individuals may well have links with groups that have a vested interest, they should not represent those groups in informing the process. The process should encourage people to take the wider view, and to ensure that those not able to be at an event have their views expressed by others.

### *Consultation Principles*

- Consultations will be targeted at the relevant group or groups.
- Events will be time-bound.
- If an event calls for wider public involvement the event will be advertised locally allowing people time to organise their engagement with the event.
- Specific, non-leading questions will be asked. Questions can be open (e.g. where do you think swings should be sited?) but not open-ended (e.g. what do you think should be done?).



- Care will be taken to ensure that no one voice is given greater weight than any other.

## **6 Shaftesbury Town Council and Community Engagement**

The Council currently facilitates community engagement in the following ways:

- Allocation of Public Participation at the beginning of each Council and Committee meeting. This provides an opportunity for local residents to make representations to the Council or ask questions relating to items on the agenda.
- The publishing of agendas, minutes and supporting documents for all Council meetings on the website, in the office window and on various notice boards around the town.
- Active involvement in the Annual Town Meeting with its public question time.
- The annual External Audit provides the opportunity for questions to be asked about the latest Statement of Accounts and Balance Sheet. A synopsis of the financial accounts is published within the Annual Report.
- Provision of Town Council information when requested, to those with a need for alternative formats or languages.
- Making available the Councillors contact details on the website and on various notice boards around town.
- Production of regular news and events updates through the website, twitter and Facebook,
- The Annual Report and Statement of Accounts made available as printed copies and on the website.
- Consultation exercises, surveys and questionnaires are undertaken with residents, young people and local user groups and organisations for specific projects and tasks.
- Inviting members of the public to Councillor Surgeries, Open Forums, Working Groups and Question Time.
- Regular press releases featured in local media keep the general public informed of community events, projects and other Town Council items of interest.
- Some Members and officers act as representatives for Outside Bodies comprising community groups, local organisations, and other government agencies, and regularly attend their meetings.
- Advisory Committees made up of knowledge specialists in the community to advise the Council on decisions.



- The Council offices located in the Town Hall in the town centre are also open from 9am to 4.30pm, Monday to Thurs; Friday 9am – 1pm.
- External resource may be utilised for a large and time consuming consultation exercise.

6.1 Town Councillors have close ties to their constituents and local voluntary and community organisations, and are committed to connecting with their constituents to enable informed representation. They therefore welcome contact from their constituents.

## **7 Future Improvements**

Shaftesbury Town Council is committed to improving community engagement by adopting the above principles and:

- Improving relationships with community groups; developing measures to harness the views and opinions of people and groups who are often missed out of community engagement activities.
- Identifying and embracing opportunities to work with other local community groups, as and when the need arises.
- Extending and developing the range of electronic communication including a presence on social networking media such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn etc.
- Participating in local networks to share knowledge and experience of community engagement activities in other areas.
- Publicising the positive results that have been achieved from working relationships between the Council and other community groups; in order to encourage new relationships to be formed and raise community spirit.
- Ensuring that appropriate evaluation is carried out following consultation exercises to ensure that lessons learned are carried forward and an assessment of how effective and useful the consultation was.

## **8 Linking with other Council Policies**

This Strategy overlaps many, if not all, of the Council's other policies, not least because it is a requirement for the accreditation of Quality Council status.

## **9 Let Us Know What You Think**



If you wish to discuss this policy or make any comments or suggestions on the work, we are aiming to do to carry out this policy please contact the Town Clerk at Shaftesbury Town Council.

Our contact details are:

Town Hall, High St, Shaftesbury SP7 8LY

Tel: 01747 852420

Email: [enquiries@shaftesbury-tc.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@shaftesbury-tc.gov.uk)

Website: [www.shaftesbury-tc.gov.uk](http://www.shaftesbury-tc.gov.uk)

## **10 Alternative Formats**

If you need this information in an alternative language or format: - large print or electronically, please do not hesitate to contact us at the address above.