



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

Adopted 13 June 2024 – Full Council – Minute 2100

To be reviewed – Every four years

Review Date – May 2028

Folkestone Town Council's policy on community engagement is an overarching framework to better coordinate how we consult and engage with our community, to give Folkestone residents more opportunities to have their say on the services the council provides.

This policy builds on good practice which already exists in the town and acknowledges the council's genuine desire to place engagement at the heart of our role in championing the needs of our communities and involving them in decisions that affect them. We are committed to delivering services, policies and strategies that reflect local priorities, requirements and aspirations.

Crucially, it seeks to establish the minimum standards we will follow when developing a consultation and engagement exercise to ensure that the many different "communities" in the town have a voice in the debate around how services are delivered. It acknowledges the need to provide appropriate opportunities for communities to participate at whatever level they wish to influence how services are provided, decision making and policy development.

1. Background

Folkestone Town Council recognises its essential role to work more closely together and with local people to:

- Shape public services according to what local taxpayers really want.
- Work with a greater range of organisations that provide public services in the town
- Provide good value for money

This sets out a framework of how we will work with residents and partners from the public, private and voluntary sectors to give local people more of a say on what services they want and need and how they would like them delivered.

It sets out:

- Our objectives for community engagement and how these will be achieved
- Our guiding principles for consultation and community engagement
- The key tasks, we as an organisation will undertake to implement our approach to community engagement and consultation

2. Our Objectives

We have set out objectives for what we wish to achieve from engaging and consulting with our communities:

- Strengthen, develop and sustain opportunities for local people and groups to influence what happens in their communities
- Provide opportunities for communities to shape and influence the development and delivery of quality services and policies that reflect local needs and priorities
- Manage and co-ordinate community engagement activities to ensure consistency, quality, participation, compliance and avoid duplication
- Ensure that community engagement activities provide opportunities for participation for all sections of the community, particularly people and groups that are often missed out of community engagement activities
- Listen to communities and feedback to participants about the outcomes of the community consultation and engagement
- Listen and learn from our own and others' experience and share community engagement skills and knowledge of putting the citizen at the heart of decision making

3. Our Guiding Principles:

- **We will follow a consistent approach to planning for community engagement and consultations:** Our consultations will be pre-planned, have a clear purpose and outcome. We will carefully consider the target audience and the methods used to engage them.
- **We will actively seek to bring the voluntary and community sector on board:** With many organisations providing services in Folkestone, this sector has huge potential for making a consultation work. They can reach parts of the community that we may find hard to reach.

- **Elected councillors will encourage involvement:** Encouragement from elected councillors is crucial to the success of a good consultation. They are strategically placed in the community to build relations with residents and are often well-respected.
- **We will listen and feed back:** Consultation results will be properly analysed and used to inform decisions about how we deliver services. We will feedback overall responses from consultations, the council's subsequent decision (where specific to service) and how the consultation influenced it.
- **Recording and sharing information with relevant stakeholders:** Information from engagement and consultation will be captured in a structured way that is compliant with the General Data Protection Regulations and this together with summary key messages and outcomes, will be shared with councillors, officers, partners and other audiences as appropriate.

4. **Who is the Policy for?**

We recognise that the council alone cannot achieve the ambitions set out in this policy. Everyone has a part to play in community engagement and consultation particularly:

- **All residents in Folkestone**
- **Elected councillors, who play a key role in actively encouraging involvement at a very local level**
- **Council staff, everyone is involved in community engagement activity in various forms**
- **Community and voluntary sector organisations, who provide local services, work directly with local groups and organisations and with members of usually excluded groups and represent the view of their sectors.**
- **Partners, by working with other organisations and partnerships to make sure services across the town complement each other.**

We will work with other organisations, such as the police, schools and colleges, health service providers and groups and individuals from the community, voluntary and private sectors to make sure that community engagement activities influence the future direction of the town.

5. **How will we measure our achievements?**

It is important to understand how we are doing when it comes to evaluating the success of this policy. We will use a variety of methods to measure this, including:

- Perceptions of residents, who feel Folkestone Town Council engages with them in relation to its decision making.
- Evidence of information from consultation and engagement that influences council services.

6. What has been achieved so far?

Folkestone Town Council already engages on a range of issues utilising many different forms of engagement. The purpose of this policy is to introduce a consistent and compliant way in which we plan, develop and share learning from engagement and consultations to influence the way in which we continue to provide services in the future.

_____ **POLICY ENDS** _____