

Frome Town Council Constitution

Chapter 19 Community Engagement Strategy

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1. Background and principles

- 1.1. Frome Town Council (FTC) recognises the need to consider the impact of its actions on others and the surrounding environment.
- 1.2. A key component in FTC's corporate "Strategy for Success" is the statement "We will encourage you to get involved. Participation and engagement are central to the thinking of the Council."
- 1.3. The Localism Act (2011) places considerable onus on increased involvement and therefore, initial guiding principles are required:
- 1.4. Involvement principles
 - 1.4.1. FTC cannot force any individual or group to become involved, but it can, and will, make it as easy as possible.
 - 1.4.2. It will always be clear, before the start of any participation or consultation activity, to what extent the result will inform a decision.
 - 1.4.3. If the outcome of a participation or consultation activity is intended to inform a decision and a different decision is taken, the reasoning behind that decision will be explained where necessary.
 - 1.4.4. Not every decision requires community involvement.
- 1.5. Engagement principles
 - 1.5.1. FTC will be clear at the start of the event what output is expected, e.g. a recommendation, strategy suggestion etc.
 - 1.5.2. Engagement events are not intended as an opportunity for individuals with an interest to lobby decision makers.
 - 1.5.3. While individuals may well have links with groups that have a vested interest, they should not represent those groups in informing the process.
 - 1.5.4. 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.
- 1.6. Consultation principles
 - 1.6.1. If an event calls for wider public involvement, such as **Participatory Budgeting**, the event will be advertised locally allowing people time to organise their engagement with the event.
 - 1.6.2. Consultation events will sometimes be targeted at the relevant group or groups.
 - 1.6.3. Events will be time-bound.
 - 1.6.4. Specific, non-leading questions will be asked.
 - 1.6.5. 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?).

2. Corporate aims and objectives

- 2.1. Community engagement is embodied in the delivery of the Council's Strategy.
- 2.2. Areas of focus in the Strategic Plan are:
 - 2.2.1. **Wellbeing:** to build and foster a flourishing and active community of people and organisations working together.
 - 2.2.2. **Prosperity:** to build and foster thriving business community, connected with

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each other and with the town, providing employment and prosperity.

- 2.2.3. **Environmental sustainability:** covering the attractiveness, variety and accessibility of the town's green spaces and an increased focus on renewable energy, energy efficiency, waste reduction, and community transport.
- 2.3. FTC recognises that wellbeing, prosperity and environmental sustainability are intrinsically interlinked and none of the aims can be achieved without a high level of community engagement.
- 2.4. The objectives of this strategy are to:
 - 2.4.1. Encourage effective local community engagement.
 - 2.4.2. Ensure that there is a clear understanding of the need to engage with communities about decisions which affect them and that this is embedded throughout FTC.
 - 2.4.3. 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.
 - 2.4.4. Identify the principles behind how FTC can enhance its profile by improving engagement with the wider community (with specific reference to hard-to-reach groups).

3. Frome Town Council and community engagement

- 3.1. The Council currently facilitates community engagement in the following ways:
 - 3.1.1. Allocation of public participation at the beginning of each Council meeting. This provides an opportunity for residents to talk to the Council or ask questions relating to items on the agenda.
 - 3.1.2. Engagement is also encouraged throughout Council meetings.
 - 3.1.3. 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.
 - 3.1.4. Active involvement in the Annual Town Meeting with its public question time.
 - 3.1.5. 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.
 - 3.1.6. The ability to provide FTC information, when requested, to those with a need for alternative formats or languages.
 - 3.1.7. Making the Cllrs' contact details available on the website and on various noticeboards around town.
 - 3.1.8. News and events are publicised through the FTC website, Facebook, Twitter and the Mayor's Facebook and Twitter pages.
 - 3.1.9. The Annual Return and Statement of Accounts made available as printed copies and on the website.
 - 3.1.10. Consultation exercises (e.g. on Market Place), surveys and questionnaires (e.g. as part of People's Budget) are undertaken with residents, young people and local user groups and organisations for specific projects and tasks.
 - 3.1.11. Inviting members of the public to Open Forums, Working Groups and Panels.

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- 3.1.12. Regular press releases featured in local media keep the general public informed of community events, projects and other Town Council items of interest.
- 3.1.13. The Council has an Information Service that is open 5 days a week. The Council offices near the town centre are also open from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.
- 3.1.14. Where and when appropriate, external resource maybe utilised for a large and time-consuming consultation or engagement exercise.
- 3.2. Unlike other tiers of local government, Town Cllrs always live within 3 miles of the town they serve and therefore have close ties to their constituents and local voluntary and community organisations on a day-to-day basis, making them uniquely placed in terms of informed representation.

4. Future improvements

- 4.1. FTC is committed to improving community engagement by enforcing the principles in section 1 and:
 - 4.1.1. Continuing all the above activities and services into the future, 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.
 - 4.1.2. Identifying and embracing opportunities to work with other local community groups, as and when the need arises.
 - 4.1.3. Extending and developing the range of electronic communication including a presence on social networking media such as Facebook, Twitter etc.
 - 4.1.4. Participating in local networks to share knowledge and experience of community engagement activities in other areas.
 - 4.1.5. Publicising the positive results that have been achieved from working relationships between the Council and other community groups (e.g. Fireworks 2018) in order to encourage new relationships to be formed and raise community spirit.
 - 4.1.6. 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