

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

GIVING PEOPLE A VOICE

Introduction

In line with the Godalming Town Council *Supporting Our Community* document, which was adopted on 19 July 2018, <https://godalming-tc.gov.uk/supporting-our-community/> Godalming Town Council aims to:

“provide the best services possible within the available resource. The Council will fulfil its statutory duties and obligations and strive to maintain, improve and enhance its service provision for the community.”

Godalming Town Council is committed to engaging residents by encouraging them to become actively involved in decisions that affect them and the community, and to delivering better services by creating a more active and informed community. To this end this Community Engagement Strategy has been developed.

Aims

The aim of the Community Engagement Strategy is to improve the way in which Godalming Town Council engages and consults its residents and partners on important issues to ensure that:

- they are fully informed, consulted and involved;
- they are all included in the engagement process irrespective of their age;
- their views are heard and used to develop and improve the Council’s own services; and
- that the Council is better able to act as advocate for its community in dealing with other authorities and agencies.

Objectives

The objectives of the Community Engagement Strategy are to:

- engage people with local councillors;
- inform local residents clearly about who does what in local government and the range of services available;
- consult with residents about their needs and aspirations for the town, and the services they wish to receive;
- use engagement to inform decision making, ensuring decisions are fit for purpose and meet the needs of the community;
- use the information obtained through consultation to improve the quality and delivery of the Town Council’s services; and
- strengthen the capacity of local councillors to act as leaders of the community and as advocates for that community.

HOW THIS WILL BE ACHIEVED

Informing the Community (What we will tell the Community & how we will do it)

Godalming Town Council will use a number of mechanisms to inform the Community about the Town Council and its activity and will remain open-minded and flexible about new means of communication as they become available.

The Town Council's website contains the most comprehensive information about the Council and about the town more generally. This website is updated regularly (at least weekly) and its contents include all the items referred to below. Website content and functionality continually evolves.

The Council's Annual Report, informs residents about the Council's activity. Copies are distributed at the Annual Town Meeting in April each year and made available at the Town Council's offices, at the Museum and at the Library. The Annual Report is also publicised in the quarterly newsletter and by press release.

Notices of all meetings of the Council and its Committees are displayed on the main Council noticeboard and on its website. All such meetings are open to the public.

As well as being posted on the Town Council's website, agendas and minutes of all formal meetings are distributed to the local press and partner organisations including the Chamber of Commerce and the Godalming Trust.

A quarterly newsletter with information about the Council and its services is distributed to every household in the town.

Regular press releases are issued and there is regular dialogue between Officers and Members of the Town Council and local journalists.

The Council maintains a database of contacts and uses it, within GDPR guidelines, to inform key individuals/organisations of specific events, meetings or service developments that it thinks may be of interest to them.

From time to time specific information is distributed to all households in the town, for example information regarding the Godalming & Farncombe Neighbourhood Plan.

The Town Council will take a stall at a town event (Town Day, the Town Show, Food Festival) to share information with the public.

The use of social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook is being explored.

Consulting & Engaging with the Community (How we will listen to the community)

Unlike other tiers of local government, Town Councillors always live and/or work within the town they serve and have close ties to their constituents and local voluntary and community organisations on a day-to-day basis, making them uniquely placed to act as the Council's eyes and ears.

The Council maintains an office, open to the public on weekdays from 9.00am to 5.00pm, in Godalming Town Centre. All visitors to the office are welcomed as are all those making contact by telephone.

All correspondence (e-mail or letter) is dealt with promptly.

All Godalming electors and their children, local businesses and users of the Town Council's premises have the right to speak at meetings of the Council and its Committees and all Councillors and Officers will promote this opportunity within the community.

We monitor the local press and keep press cuttings and published letters relating to the Town Council.

We monitor all comments and feedback made on our website.

From time to time we will specifically consult the community on important issues and a range of tools are available for us to do this: exceptionally (as with the survey carried out as part of the Neighbourhood Plan) we will commission a professional market research company to carry out research for us (by questionnaire, street survey or focus group). More usually we will use the press, or our newsletter, to ask for comments on a specific subject. Where appropriate, we will use a stall at a town event to ask the community their views on a specific issue.

Reception of Feedback:

Feedback from the public is always welcome and can be accepted via methods listed below:

- Town Council website 'Contact Us' online mechanism;
- Email;
- personal visit to the Town Council offices;
- telephone;
- letter; and
- verbal feedback through Councillors.

The contact details of all Councillors are available from Town Council office or Godalming Town Council's website.

Handling of Feedback:

The staff at the Town Council office will keep a record of all feedback received, by any method and file it in a manner which allows for ease of review.

The Clerk to assess all feedback and either take issues to the relevant committees for further investigation/action or deal with direct.

Reviewing and Assessing Effectiveness of the Strategy:

This strategy will be reviewed bi-annually; its effectiveness will be assessed by Councillors and Council staff and amendments/improvements will be recommended if opportunities are identified.

From time to time this consultation strategy can itself be subject to publicity, feedback and/or review, in order that public opinion on its effectiveness and how it may be improved can be sought.