

**ESSINGTON PARISH COUNCIL
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY**

1. SCOPE

This policy sets out the role of community engagement and its importance, how Essington Parish Council (the Council) engages the wider community and identifies the needs / aspirations of the community and how the Council can improve community engagement.

Community engagement is concerned with giving local people a voice and involving them in decisions which affect them and their community. This may include individuals, voluntary and community organisations as well as other public-sector bodies.

It provides opportunity for local people to talk to the Council about their aspirations and / or needs in their community and neighbourhood.

It allows the Council to consult with and inform people about what services it provides, how it prioritises, how policies are determined and how well it is performing.

2. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the policy are to:

- encourage effective local community engagement
- ensure that embedded throughout the Council there is clear understanding of the need to engage with the community about decisions that affect them
- enable aspirations / comments / suggestions obtained from community engagement to have an impact on decision making and the way services are being delivered.
- identify how the Council can enhance its profile by improving engagement with the wider community (with specific reference to hard-to-reach groups).
- encourage feedback whether positive or negative

In order that:

- the problems and needs of local people are clearly identified so that appropriate new or improved facilities / services can be provided
- those participating feel empowered by being involved in decision making in their local community
- there may be enhanced leadership and greater interest in elections and standing for the Council

3. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The key aspects of community engagement include:

- development of a network of relationships between the Council, individuals, voluntary and community groups
- clear, honest and open communication to ensure that information is made accessible to all groups
- listening and understanding from a range of people to identify aspirations, needs and problems of local people and groups
- providing accurate and unbiased information that sets out the significance of the issues and makes it clear what can be influenced by parishioners and when parishioners input is particularly required.

4. THE COUNCIL AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Council will facilitate community engagement in the following ways:

- by holding an Annual Parish Meeting to allow residents to question and review how the elected members help shape the community. The main objective of the annual meeting must be to provide and encourage two-way communication between the community and Councillors.
- providing opportunities for parishioners to have their say about decisions, services and plans. All meetings of the Parish Council are open to the public and press. Residents can access agendas for meetings via the Council's website and noticeboards.
- making relevant information available on what decisions are being considered and how residents can influence or contribute to the discussions in good time. Methods used to ensure engagement will be through the Council's website, noticeboards, Facebook, notices, agendas, parish newsletter, word of mouth and having stalls at village events and such other methods as the Council considers appropriate.
- planning applications are considered at meetings. The opportunities for people to speak applies equally to these agenda items. Equal opportunity is given to applications / supporters, objectors and local community groups.
- the Clerk is required to play a neutral role so that residents can be fully involved and be confident that they are receiving unbiased information and support.
- details of how to contact the Clerk are shown on the Council's website.
- The Council will produce and publish on its website a list of annual Council dates to include the start times of the meetings and the agenda for each meeting.
- The Council will be open and accountable in its dealings with residents and the community. It will make information on its policies and procedures freely available.
- The Council will be receptive to requests from residents or communities and will attempt to be flexible in order to ensure their opinions are known not only to the Council but also

to other organisations.

- Councillors will continue to represent the Council on various outside bodies to ensure that they are kept informed of the community's needs.

5. COMMUNICATION

The Council is committed to improving community engagement by:

- continuing all the above activities and services into the future and improving relationships with community groups, including developing measures to harness the views and opinions of people and groups who are often missed out of community engagement activities.
- The Council will be proactive and will be willing to consider any reasonable opportunities that support its purpose of getting information available and increasing contributions from the community, especially those difficult to reach.
- when dealing with controversial issues that affect a particular community then consideration will be given to holding a public meeting or some other suitable form of public consultation.
- consultations and surveys are to be considered when necessary and appropriate and results will be made available.
- continuing to work with others to produce and review community led policies.
- identifying and embracing opportunities to work with other local community groups when the need arises.
- publicising the positive results that have been achieved from working relationships between the Council and other community groups in order to encourage new relationships / partnerships to be formed and to raise community spirit.
- promoting elections and the importance of the democratic process and the value of being a Councillor.
- promoting the value to the parish of volunteering.

6. REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed three years after it has been adopted by the Council.

Approved: 01 March 2021
Review date: March 2024