



Swanley Town Council Community Engagement Policy

Approved annually at the Annual General Meeting

1. Introduction

Swanley Town Council (STC) recognises that effective community engagement is vital for fostering trust, transparency, and cooperation between the Council and the residents. The Council is committed to ensuring that local people and stakeholders are informed, consulted, and actively involved in the decision-making process that affects their lives, their environment, and their community.

This policy sets out the Council's approach to engaging with residents, local businesses, community groups, and other stakeholders to ensure they have the opportunity to participate in and influence the Council's work.

2. Objectives

The main objectives of this Community Engagement Policy are:

1. **Transparency:** Provide clear, accessible, and timely information about the Council's services, decisions, and policies.
 2. **Inclusivity:** Ensure all sectors of the community are represented, especially underrepresented or vulnerable groups.
 3. **Two-Way Communication:** Create opportunities for dialogue, where the Council listens to the community's concerns and feedback.
 4. **Participation:** Actively involve the community in decision-making processes and in shaping the development and future of Swanley.
 5. **Accountability:** Ensure that the Council is held accountable for its actions and decisions by providing regular updates and transparent processes.
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3. Principles of Engagement

STC will adhere to the following principles in its community engagement efforts:

1. **Openness and Honesty:** Communication with the community will be clear, concise, and truthful. Information will be shared in a timely and accessible manner.
 2. **Accessibility and Inclusiveness:** Engagement methods will be designed to reach all sectors of the community, including those who may face barriers due to language, disability, age, or lack of access to digital platforms.
 3. **Collaboration:** The Council will work with residents, businesses, community groups, and other stakeholders to ensure that their input is meaningful and integrated into Council policies and decisions.
 4. **Proactivity:** The Council will actively seek the views of the community, not just when required by law but whenever significant changes or projects are being proposed.
 5. **Feedback and Follow-Up:** The Council will provide feedback to the community on how their views have been considered in decisions and will follow up on the outcomes of consultations.
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4. Methods of Engagement

Swanley Town Council will use a variety of methods to engage with the community to ensure inclusivity and effectiveness:

1. **Public Meetings and Consultations:**
 - Hold regular Council meetings, open to the public, where important decisions are discussed and made.
 - Host public consultations on significant projects or policy changes to allow for feedback and ideas.
2. **Digital Platforms:**
 - **Website:** Regularly update the Council's website with information on council activities, upcoming meetings, and opportunities for engagement.
 - **Social Media:** Use platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to engage with residents in real time, answer questions, and share updates.

- **Online Surveys:** Conduct online surveys to gather feedback on specific issues, ensuring broad participation.

3. **Face-to-Face Interaction:**

- Hold **drop-in sessions** such as PACT where residents can speak directly with Council members and officers.
- Engage with **local events** (e.g., fairs, town celebrations) to hear from residents in an informal setting.

4. **Printed Media:**

- Produce **newsletters** and **leaflets** to share important information with those who may not use digital platforms, ensuring paper copies are available at public locations such as the town hall, libraries, and community centers.

5. **Community Panels and Focus Groups:**

- Establish **focus groups** or **advisory panels** for specific issues to allow for deeper discussion and more detailed community input.

6. **Working with Local Media:**

- Use the local press and radio to promote consultations and provide updates on Council activities.

5. **Engaging Underrepresented Groups**

Swanley Town Council acknowledges that certain groups may be harder to reach or less likely to participate in traditional engagement activities. To address this, STC will:

1. **Work with Community Leaders:** Build relationships with community leaders or representatives from minority groups to facilitate communication.
2. **Accessible Information:** Provide materials in multiple languages where necessary and offer information in different formats (e.g., large print, braille).
3. **Youth Engagement:** Develop strategies to engage young people through schools, youth clubs, and social media platforms that resonate with younger demographics.
4. **Elderly and Disabled Residents:** Ensure that engagement activities are accessible to elderly and disabled residents by offering physical accessibility at meetings, clear communication, and home visits if needed.

5. **Hard-to-Reach Communities:** Use targeted outreach strategies, such as door-to-door engagement or hosting meetings in informal settings like community centers.
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6. Monitoring and Evaluation

The Council will regularly review the effectiveness of its community engagement efforts to ensure they are inclusive, meaningful, and productive. This will involve:

1. **Regular Feedback:** Collecting feedback from residents and stakeholders on the engagement process, including how they feel their input has been handled.
2. **Tracking Participation:** Monitoring the number of participants in consultations, meetings, and other engagement activities to ensure broad representation.
3. **Review of Tools and Methods:** Periodically reviewing the methods and tools used for engagement to adapt to new technologies