LOGGERHEADS COUNCIL
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

Approved by Council: November 2023
Date of Review: May 2026

Introduction

Loggerheads Parish Council recognise the importance of local people, community groups and businesses having a voice in contributing to the debate and decisions on issues being determined by the Council and on wider issues within the .

The Policy is also intended to be an ongoing pledge by the Council to our communities. It also compliments the authority's Social and Ethics Policy; and our Equal Opportunity and Diversity Policy; and should be considered alongside our broader Communications Policy.

This document forms the Council's first Community Engagement Policy. It sets out: -

- The Role of community engagement and its importance.
- How Loggerheads Parish Council engages the wider community and identifies the needs and aspirations of the community.
- How the Parish Council can improve community engagement.

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 communities about decisions that affect them.
- Enable aspirations/ comments/suggestions obtained from community engagement to have an impact on decision making and the way decisions are being made and services are being delivered.
- Identify how the Council can enhance its profile by improving engagement with the wider community (with specific reference to the harder to reach groups in our society).

Community Engagement – An Overview

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 its performing.

The term stakeholder refers to a wide range of people and groups (these might include, residents, visitors, businesses, voluntary organisations, public service organisations and lobby groups), all of which have an interest in the Council's services and projects and other issues in

the parish.

Hard to Reach groups refers to those likely to experience social exclusion and are sometimes perceived as being disempowered. Some examples include young people, elderly people, physical disability, language barriers, financial constraints, cultural differences or social expectations. The Council will put effort into seeking their views, but it also recognises that sometimes they may have excluded themselves through personal choice.

The key aspects of community engagement include: -

- Development of a network of relationships between the Council, individuals, voluntary and community groups.
- Clear and open communication to ensure that information is made accessible to all groups.
- Listening and understanding to a range of people to identify aspirations, needs and problems of local people and groups.

Effective and meaningful community engagement can provide a number of benefits: -

- The problems and needs of local people are clearly identified in order that appropriate new or improved facilities / services can be provided.
- Those participating feel empowered by being involved in decision making in their local community.
- This may result in enhanced leadership and greater interest in elections or standing for Council and in volunteering within the community.

Loggerheads Parish Council and Community Engagement

The Council will facilitate community engagement in the following ways: -

- Ensuring information on what decisions are being considered and how residents can influence or contribute to the discussions are available in good time. Methods used to ensure engagement will be - through the Council website, noticeboard, the Council's Facebook, posters, consultations, reports and word of mouth.
- All meetings of the Council and its committees are open to the public and press and there is a period set aside for public participation. Residents can access agendas for meetings via the Council website, noticeboard or they can be collected from the Council office, public agendas are also made available at the meetings of the Council and its committees. The Council website, noticeboard, agendas explain the procedure for residents wishing to speak at meetings. Facilities also exist where residents can, where appropriate or necessary, make written reports, present petitions or have a case presented on their behalf to Councillors.
- Planning applications are considered at Planning and Environment Committee meetings which are held monthly. The opportunities for people to speak applies equally to these agenda items. Equal opportunity is given to applicants/supporters, objectors and local community groups.
- The Clerk is the principal advisor to the Council and other staff also advise on their areas of expertise. They must however be politically neutral and ensure that residents can be fully involved, have their views considered and be confident that they are receiving unbiased information and support from Council Officers.
- Details of how to contact the Clerk will be displayed the Council noticeboard, Council website and Facebook. Details of how to contact Councillors will be displayed on the

noticeboard and the Council website.

- The Council will produce a list of annual Council and committee dates to include the start times of the meetings.
- The Council will be open and accountable in its dealing 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 to ensure their opinions are also known to other organisations. This may be by including an item for discussion on an agenda or allowing a local group to put their opinions into an official report undertaken by the Council.
- The Council will, operate a "gateway" service from both its offices to ensure local people and communities are referred to the correct organisation, Officer, Borough, or Councillor where the Council cannot resolve their issue directly.
- Councillors will continue to represent the Council on various outside bodies, to ensure that they are kept informed of the communities' needs.

Communication

Loggerheads Parish 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.
- Ensuring that the principles and standards of its main Communications Policy (which is also available on the website, are applied to its community engagement.
- Being proactive and willing to consider any reasonable opportunities that support its purpose of making information available and increasing contributions from the community, especially those that are difficult to reach.
- When dealing with controversial issues that affect a particular community then consideration will be given to holding a public meeting.
- Consultations and surveys are to be considered when necessary and appropriate and results will be made available.
- Continuing to work in partnership to produce and review community led policies. It will also ensure that priorities from such policies are built into its own Business Plan.
- 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.
- Reviewing its Community Engagement Strategy on regular basis to ensure that it remains relevant.

Freedom of Information

In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, this document will be posted on the Council website and copies will be available from the Council office.

Outcomes

The outcomes which we are striving for and against which the success of this policy will be measured are: -

- Improved communication through the establishment of new channels of engagement.
- More residents understanding the role of Councillors, feeling they can become involved and thereby getting the best effect.
- Improved engagement with local communities, with more people feeling that they are involved in decision-making and a higher percentage of people involved in volunteering.
- Improved satisfaction with services provided by the Council.