



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

1. What is the overall aim of the Community Engagement & Development Strategy?

This Community Engagement & Development Strategy aims to support strong, active and inclusive communities, who are informed and involved in decision-making and have the capacity to develop and deliver their own projects. This will enable us to improve public services and civic spaces and to enhance quality of life across the town.

2. The Council's Commitment to Community Engagement

Royal Sutton Coldfield Town Council recognises the need to consider the impact of its actions on others and the surrounding environment. As a result, the Strategic Plan 2017 – 2019 is founded in the belief that the actions it contains will help to protect and wherever possible enhance environmental quality. Of equal importance, the decisions will be made ethically with regards to social and economic impact, which together the Council believes will help to make Royal Sutton Coldfield a better place. The Council is committed in its vision, aspirations and objectives to provide a democratic representational voice for the people of Sutton Coldfield. Central to this ethos is the proactive engagement and meaningful participation of the local community.

3. Corporate Aims

Our Strategic Plan sets out three main aims that will require us to engage with our community. We will:

1. represent Sutton Coldfield's interests on key strategic issues facing the town,
2. work with the local community and partners to ensure that the town becomes a more vibrant, better served, more prosperous, cleaner, greener, safer and inclusive place in which to live, work and enjoy life,
3. enhance the organisational management, capacity and efficiency of the Town Council in addressing the needs of the community.

4. An Engaged and Participative Community

To achieve an *engaged* and *participative* community, the Council needs greater involvement with people from all sectors in the community and who reflect the wide interests and backgrounds of its residents. As decision makers, the Council needs to be able to tap in and respond to the feelings, thoughts, knowledge and expertise in the town.

It is clear that involvement doesn't mean simply asking the town's people what they want and acting on the majority decision.

Our understanding of *involvement* is that it begins with two-way communication allowing the best (and not always the most popular) decisions to be made and the reasons behind those decisions to be understood. The Council sees *participation* as the direct involvement of individuals or groups through a planned method or technique in informing the decision-making process. Participation may be open, or directed at a particular section of the community depending on the topic, relevant audience and what is required. Participation events may directly inform decision making or the outcome may be to understand and/or inform the views held in the wider community.

The Council sees *consultation* as the seeking of views on a specific subject. Our understanding of consultation is that it should be focussed, where we ask specific questions on a particular subject matter and are clear about the aims and limitations of the process. Crucially, asking the right questions in the right manner will be more important than receiving the 'right' answers; consultation responses will help us to shape our thinking, but not all consultation responses may be acted upon. Consultation, like participation, may be open or limited to relevant groups depending upon the issue or question(s).

We will clearly explain the approach we have adopted and why for each of our community engagement activities.

4. Principles

The Localism Act places considerable onus on increased involvement and therefore initial guiding principles are required, as noted below:

Involvement Principles

1. The Town Council cannot force any individual or group to become involved, but it can, and will, make it easier and more attractive to do so.
2. It will manage expectations and always be clear, before the start of any participation or consultation event, to what extent the result will inform a decision.
3. If the outcome of a participation or consultation event is intended to inform a decision and a different decision is taken, the reasoning behind that decision will be clear and published.
4. All involvement will be time-bound, and the aggregated results will be published openly.
5. Not every decision the council takes requires community involvement.

Engagement Principles

6. Engagement may be ongoing through the staff we deploy in the community, or the relationships councillors and the Town Clerk's team develop with partners, or it might be specific activity, for example, an event.

7. The Council will be clear at the start of the event what output is expected e.g. a recommendation, strategy suggestion etc. and the possible method of engagement.

Consultation Principles

8. Consultations will be targeted at the relevant group or groups and occasionally, the whole Town.

9. Consultation events are intended to be productive opportunities for a wide range of views to be heard, rather than a platform for individuals with a particular interest to lobby decision makers. Where individuals have links with groups that have a vested interest, they should not represent those groups in informing the process. The process should encourage people to take the wider view and to ensure that those unable to attend an event have their views expressed by others.

10. Events will be time-bound, accessible and take into consideration the availability of the audience they will involve.

11. If an event calls for wider public involvement the event will be advertised locally allowing people time to organise their engagement with the event.

12. Specific, non-leading questions will be asked. 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?)

13. Care will be taken to ensure that no one voice is given greater weight than any other.

6. Sutton Coldfield Town Council and Community Engagement

The Council currently facilitates community engagement in the following ways:

- Allocation of Public Participation at the beginning of each Council and Committee meeting. This provides an opportunity for local residents to make representations to the Council or ask questions relating to items on the agenda.
- The publishing of agendas, minutes and supporting documents for all Council meetings on the website.
- Active involvement in the Annual Town Meeting with its public question time.
- 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.

- The Annual Report and Statement of Accounts made available as printed copies and on the website.
- Regular press releases featured in local media keep the general public informed of community events, projects and other Town Council items of interest.
- Some Members and officers act as representatives for Outside Bodies comprising community groups, local organisations and other government agencies and regularly attend their meetings.
- Making available the Councillor's contact details on the website:-

In addition, the Council will:

- Continue to support the production of Community Plans
- Produce regular Town Council newsletters highlighting local events and latest developments.
- Continue to develop its website and use of social media to further promote the activities of the Council
- Undertake consultation exercises, surveys and questionnaires with residents, young people and organisations for specific projects and tasks.
- Invite members of the public to Councillor Surgeries, Open Forums, Working Groups and Question Time.
- Provide Town Council information, when requested, to those with a need for alternative formats.
- Where and when appropriate, utilise external resources for any large and time-consuming consultation exercise.

7. Future Improvements

Royal Sutton Coldfield Town Council is committed to improving community engagement by applying the aforementioned principles. We will:

- Continue all the above activities and services into the future; improve relationships with voluntary and community groups; develop measures to harness the views and opinions of people and groups who are often missed out of community engagement activities.
- Identify and embrace opportunities to work with other local voluntary and community groups, as and when the need arises.
- Participate in local networks to share knowledge and experience of community engagement activities in other areas.
- Establish a feedback loop – 'you said, we did', including publicising the results that have been achieved from working relationships between the Council and other

community groups, in order to encourage new relationships to be formed and raise community spirit.

- Ensure 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.

This Policy was adopted July 2018.