

WEST PARLEY PARISH COUNCIL

Community Engagement Policy

1. Introduction

1.1 This document forms the Parish Council's Community Engagement Policy.

It sets out:

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

1.2 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 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).

2. Community Engagement – an Overview

2.1 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 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's performing.

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

Hard to Reach groups refers to those who 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 Parish Council will put effort into seeking their views, but it also recognises that sometimes they have excluded themselves through personal choice.

2.3 The key aspects of community engagement include:

- Development of a network of relationships between the Parish Council, individuals, voluntary and community groups.
- Clear 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.

2.4 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 and standing for Council.

3. West Parley Parish Council and Community Engagement

3.1 The Parish Council will facilitate community engagement in the following ways:

- Making information 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 Parish Council website, Parish Council notice boards, various local publications, social media, posters, consultations, reports and word-of-mouth.

The Parish Clerk to check all communications prior to publication.

- All meetings of the Parish Council and its committees are open to the public and press and there are periods set aside for residents to speak.

Residents can access agendas for meetings on the Council's website or noticeboards.

The Parish Clerk explains the procedure for residents wishing to speak at meetings.

- Planning applications are considered at Council meetings held every 2-4 weeks. The opportunity for people to speak applies equally to these agenda items. Equal opportunity is given to applicants/supporters, objectors and local community groups.
- The Parish 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.

This neutral involvement will allow more flexibility in the service and the personal element of the contact will hopefully encourage more involvement from the hard to reach members of the community.

- Details of how to contact the Parish Clerk is displayed on notice boards, is on the bottom of all notices on headed paper and the website. Details of how to contact Councillors is displayed on notice boards and the Parish Council website.
- The Parish Council will produce a list of annual council and committee dates to include the start times of the meetings.
- The Parish Council will operate a "signposting" service to ensure local people and communities are referred to the correct organisation, officer, unitary or parish Councillor and that they are aware of the ways that they can use the relevant systems to make their views known.
- Parish Councillors will continue to represent the Council on various outside bodies, to ensure that they are kept informed of the communities' needs.

4. Communication

4.1 West Parley 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.
- The Parish 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.
- Consultations and surveys are to be considered when necessary and appropriate, and results will be made available.
- Publicising the positive results that have been achieved from working relationships between the parish 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 village of volunteering.
- The Parish Council will review its Community Engagement Strategy on a 4 yearly basis, or if required prior.

5. Status of Policy

This policy will be considered for adoption by full Council on the 24th September 2025.

Adopted: 24th September 2025

Review period: 4 yearly