



CHIPPENHAM
TOWN COUNCIL
Improving the quality of town life

Communications and Engagement Policy

Author: Chief Executive
Responsibility: Human Resources Committee
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Policy Statement

Chippenham Town Council recognises the importance of communication and engagement with the wider community, to achieve our mission of *‘improving the quality of town life for present and future generations.’*

The role of the Council is to ensure Chippenham is a thriving community and a healthy, vibrant, and attractive place in which to work, live and visit. The Council does this by working collaboratively, not only as an ambitious and committed team of Councillors and Officers, but also with a range of external strategic partners.

Introduction

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Provide an overview of how the Council engages with the local community and identifies the needs and priorities of our residents.
- Encourage effective community engagement.
- Ensure that embedded in the culture of the Council is a clear understanding of the need to engage with the community about decisions that affect them.
- Enable aspirations, comments and suggestions obtained through community engagement to impact decision making and the way our services are delivered.
- Identify how the council can enhance its profile by improving engagement with the wider community including hard-to-reach groups.

The Council will be proactive and willing to consider any reasonable opportunities that support our aim of making information available to as many residents as possible and receiving input from the community on decision making.

This policy may be read in conjunction with Chippenham Town Council’s Equal Opportunities Policy and Statement.

Scope of Policy

The policy applies to all employees and Councillors of Chippenham Town Council (herein referred to as “the Council”).

Review Statement

This policy has been prepared considering prevailing legislation and recognised good practice. New legislation requirements or changes in current legislation may necessitate the review of this policy document. The Council will continue to review and amend all or part of this policy on a regular basis.

Equality

In putting the policy into practice, no aspect will discriminate on the grounds of race, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, age, religion, politics, marital status, disability, union membership or any other grounds likely to place any person at a disadvantage.

Relevant Legislation

The Council complies with the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity 2011, which is based around seven principles, ensuring that all communications activity should:

- be lawful
- be cost effective
- be objective
- be even-handed
- be appropriate
- have regard to equality and diversity
- be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity.

Communications

It is vital that the residents of Chippenham are fully aware of the services and facilities we provide and the various ways they can engage with us. We also strive to communicate effectively with a wide audience including local businesses, charities, community groups and visitors to the town.

The Council communicates with the Chippenham community in the following ways:

Website

The Council is committed to openness and transparency and publishes a wealth of information on our website www.chippenham.gov.uk including:

- Regular news updates

- Councillor biographies and contact details
- Our Corporate Strategic Plan and other key policies
- Our Committees, agendas and minutes and calendar of meetings
- Financial information including annual governance and accounting statements
- An overview of our services
- Details about Chippenham including its history, a map of key locations and links to local amenities and community groups.

We often receive enquiries regarding Wiltshire Council services, so links and relevant telephone numbers for Wiltshire Council are also available.

The website is fully accessible on mobile devices.

Social Media

Social media is a key communication channel. Social media sites are used for sharing and exchanging content and ideas including pictures and video. It is the quickest way to disseminate information to the public.

Social media is also a great place to share the positive results that have been achieved from working relationships between the Council and other community groups and include them in our posts.

The Head of Communications and Customer Services oversees which social media sites are used to ensure we are reaching a wide range of people.

Customer Services

Our Customer Services team are based in the Town Hall on Chippenham High Street, and unless otherwise advertised opening times are as follows:

Monday - Thursday 9am - 4.30pm

Friday 9am - 4pm

Saturday 9.30am - 3pm

The Customer Services team can help with information and queries about our services, amenities and the facilities we run and provide. This includes the Neeld, Town Hall, John Coles Park, Stanley Park Sports Ground, Chippenham Museum, Yelde Hall, London Road Cemetery, Monkton Park, Friday & Saturday Market, play areas, allotments and the sites we maintain across the town.

Customer Services can be contacted by telephone on 01249 446699, by email to enquires@chippenham.gov.uk or in person.

There is also a range of community information available at the Town Hall such as our Neeld listings and local information.

The team also hold information for partner organisations such as consultations by Wiltshire Council.

Promoting Community Events

The Council has posters on display showing information at the Town Hall and community noticeboards in eighteen locations across Chippenham.

We also have a 'What's On' page on the Chippenham Town Council website which promotes upcoming community events in and around Chippenham.

Residents can bring in printed posters to promote Chippenham based community and charity events for our displays and let us know about local events and activities that we can help publicise.

Report - It

The Report-it system is the best way for residents to report issues to us. Available online and on Android and iPhone, it enables users to give a precise location, upload a photo and answer questions so we can manage the report more effectively. By creating an account on the system, updates will be received on the progress of a report.

Annual Report

The Annual Report provides an overview of the Council and the key events and achievements of the past year. It is published on our website and is available in paper copy format at the Town Hall.

Talk Chippenham

Our Talk Chippenham newsletter is delivered to residents in Chippenham twice a year, in Spring and Autumn. It contains news articles and information about our facilities and services, including our Neeld and Museum events programmes. The newsletter is also published on the Town Council website alongside previous editions.

Press Releases

Press releases are issued to local press and published on the Council's website as

needed to communicate important news and statements on behalf of the Council.

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 needs or aspirations for the Town.

Community engagement 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.

The Council will make every effort to engage with a wide representation of people and seek their views.

The Council engages with the Chippenham community in the following ways:

Consultations and Surveys

Consultations and surveys will be conducted whenever it is considered necessary and appropriate. Consultations usually focus on one specific topic, and surveys are for gathering more general information and viewpoints.

Surveys will be conducted for development of significant strategic documents such as the Chippenham Neighbourhood Plan and Corporate Strategic Plan.

The Corporate Strategic Plan sets out the Council's key priorities for the next four years, and it is therefore essential to receive input from the community. Results are used to help provide the Council with a clear understanding of our resident's views and hopes for the town's future, which in turn helps shape our priorities and budgets.

Consultations and surveys are promoted as widely as possible by encouraging our partners and community groups to participate and share.

The Council will ensure that both electronic and paper copies of all consultations and surveys are available.

Council Meetings

Council meeting agendas and minutes are published to keep the public informed

of the business being conducted by the Council.

The Council publishes a list of upcoming meetings including dates and start times.

Members of the public are welcome to come along and ask questions relevant to the Full Council or Committee during public question time at the start of the meeting. Public questions may also be submitted in advance and read by a Council officer during the meeting.

At the Annual Council Meeting, presentations are delivered by the Council and partners, usually including the Mayor's charity of the year.

We welcome residents to come along and learn about the Council's activities over the past year, plus other useful town updates, and questions are welcome throughout.

To make our Council meetings as accessible as possible, all public meetings are simultaneously streamed to YouTube so they can be watched live anywhere with access to the platform.

Chippenham Youth Council

The Youth Council was established in 2019 to engage with young people in the town and involve them in the democratic process to inform and influence decisions that affect their lives.

Anyone aged eighteen and under can apply to be a member of the Youth Council and give a voice to the young people of the town on decisions that might affect them.

Outside Bodies

Councillors are elected annually to outside bodies which have requested representation at their meetings and will report back to Council.

The Council is registered to receive news and guidance from professional outside bodies including the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) and Wiltshire Association of Local Councils (WALC).

Officers communicate and engage with other local authorities and share best practice.

The Council has participated in the Corporate Peer Challenge, jointly ran by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and the Local Government Association (LGA). This invites peers from the sector to spend time with the Council to review how we work. We welcome feedback and will continue to engage in this process on a regular basis as part of our commitment to continual improvement.

Elections

Elections take place every four years and the Council engages the community by promoting the importance of the democratic process and the value of being involved with the Town Council. In the run up to the election information is made available online and an in person meeting is held for any potential candidates looking to learn more about the role.

The aim is to attract enough interest that all positions are filled and Councillors are elected rather than co-opted onto the Council.

Part of the Councillors role is to continually engage with residents so they can be sure they are representing the views of the people in their ward.

Community Events

The Council hosts various events throughout the year which are free to attend, with the purpose of bringing people together and celebrating town life. Two major events are held each year, the Christmas Lights Switch On event in the winter, and a summer event in one of our parks.

Mayoral and Civic Engagements

The Mayor is elected annually and represents the town at civic and ceremonial events. Their role is to promote and uphold the unique character of Chippenham.

They are invited to and attend engagements across the town. The Mayor also selects a local charity and fundraises during their tenure.

The Council hosts several civic and ceremonial events throughout the year. The public are invited to observe ceremonies to mark occasions such as Wiltshire Day, Armed Forces Day, Remembrance Sunday and Chippenham Pride. A full list of civic and ceremonial events can be found in the Council's calendar of meetings and events.

Civic Sunday is an annual event which acknowledges the work and contribution

made by the many local organisations, groups, and individuals who work selflessly to enhance the quality of town life in Chippenham.

Grants

The Council's grants scheme meets three times a year to hear from applicants applying for either a climate and ecological grant or a community grant.

This is a great way for the Council to engage local groups and charities and help fund projects which support the Council's climate and ecological objectives or have other community benefits for Chippenham.

Working Parties

Working parties are smaller groups formed by a Committee to focus on specific projects. They do not have any decision making powers but can explore options and make recommendations. Working parties may also include external consultants and members of the public, selected to provide their expertise and involve residents in shaping plans.

Community Groups and Schools

Community groups provide an essential role in helping the Council to reach a wider range of residents so we can capture the views and opinions of those who may not otherwise engage with the Council.

The Council embraces opportunities to work with others to support mutual aims.

Where appropriate, the Council may choose to jointly fund projects that align with the Council's priorities and values.

The Council also engages with local schools, primarily through educational activities ran by the Museum, the Youth Council and civic events.

The Council is committed to continuing to engage with and improve relationships with community groups.

Forums

In March 2019, Chippenham Town Council set up a multi-agency Community Safety Forum to facilitate local partnership working for the wellbeing of the residents, visitors, and business owners in Chippenham.

In 2024 Councillors agreed to establish a Community Environmental Forum to discuss the wider climate and biodiversity impacts within the town.

Forums have no decision-making authority on Town Council operational matters or budget expenditure, but facilitate a space to share information, address and discuss issues of concern.

Forum attendees are from local organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors all with varying roles to play in taking a proactive approach to tackling challenges that are being faced locally.

Volunteers

Volunteers support many of our services including the Chippenham Museum, CCTV and Stanley Park Sports Ground. Without our volunteers we would not be able to deliver these services for the benefit of Chippenham.

The Council encourages employees to undertake volunteering activities, especially within the local community. Participation in voluntary activities creates mutual benefits for our staff, the Council and the organisations or charities for which our employees volunteer. Our Volunteering Days policy sets out our commitment to support employees by offering time off work to participate in volunteering.