



Tenterden Town Council

Community Engagement Policy

Reviewed	Adopted
Reviewed by Policy and Procedure sub-committee	19/10/2023
Revised and adopted by Finance & General Purposes Committee	13/11/2023
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Next review	November 2025

1. Policy Aim: to achieve two-way, effective Community Engagement

Tenterden Town Council aims for its community engagement to be a vital, dynamic two-way process:

- (i) the council aims to keep local people informed about its aspirations, its activities and services, and about how well it is performing;
- (ii) the community brings its voice to the council, they are heard and are involved in the decisions which affect them.

2. Who is involved in the process of Community Engagement:

Councillors are the elected decision makers of the Town Council. Their contact details are available from the Town Council offices and on the Town Council website. Members of the public are welcome to contact Councillors to raise any issues.

The Council's Officers are members of staff who are employed to carry out the day to day functions of the Council and make sure its services are provided for the local community.

The community of Tenterden consists of everyone who lives, works, attends school or has business in the town or visits it; all local voluntary organisations, clubs and societies and any group or organisation representing any such constituents.

Other public bodies are crucial to the quality of life in Tenterden and the Council aims to maintain excellent working relationships with these bodies. These include the police, other tiers of local government and neighbouring town and parish councils.

3. How the Council will achieve the policy aim:

Tenterden Town Council seeks to undertake community engagement through the following.

3.1 By provision of information to the community:

- The Town Council Office Reception provides a wide range of information on both town council services and other activities and issues.
- The Town Council website www.tenterdentowncouncil.gov.uk provides comprehensive information on the work of the Town Council.
- Town Council notice-boards at the Town Hall, St. Michaels, the Pebbles and at The Gateway are used to display agendas and minutes for Council and committee meetings as well as other information of interest to the local community including events of local organisations.
- The Town Council's Newsletter (incorporating the Annual Report) is published twice per year and is available from the Town Council offices, on the website, by email and from the Tenterden Gateway. It is also hand delivered to most households in the town.
- The Town Council's Facebook page is used to post news items and updates.
- The Town Council acts as a hub for information and communication in and about Tenterden, not necessarily as a primary provider but by directing interested parties to other existing providers where appropriate.

3.2 By encouraging resident participation and attendance at town council meetings.

All meetings of the Town Council and its committees are open to the public and a period is set aside at each meeting for the public to address the council. The dates, times, venues and agendas for and minutes of such meetings, and background papers, are available from the Town Council's Office website. Agendas are posted to noticeboards outside the Town Hall, at St. Michaels and at The Gateway.

3.3 By engaging with as many people as possible (and from all sections of the community), who want to participate in decision making, monitoring services and planning for the future:

- The council will actively encourage, through the use of a wide range of approaches, the involvement of residents to capture their views, learn their concerns and effectively use those views as an integral part of the decision making process. Opportunities for residents to be heard will be provided at every stage, and encourage their capacity to be effective citizens. These include but are not limited to:
- questionnaires and surveys;
- workshops and focus groups;
- exhibitions and public displays of information;
- public meetings.

Where significant developments, projects or changes are envisaged, the Town Council will seek to involve affected and interested parties by all appropriate means.

3.4 By developing a network of relationships between the council, individuals, voluntary and community groups:

- The Town Council works in partnership with other organisations such as the Borough Council, and has councillor representation on a large number of organisations within the town. Councillor representatives are appointed to these at the Annual Council meeting and report back to the full council meeting on a regular basis.
- The council can act as liaison between members of the Tenterden community and other tiers of local government on matters of general public interest (as opposed to individual matters).
- Council-hosted events are treated as opportunities to invite representatives of local organisations and residents to meet town councillors informally and to discuss issues.

3.5 Actively encouraging, through the use of a wide range of approaches, opportunities for public involvement and engagement with the community:

- The Town Council has a formal Volunteers Policy to allow volunteers to take part in activities organised by the council.
- The Town Council will endeavour to arrange for youth organisations in the town, and other interested organisations, to be given guided tours of the Town Hall, incorporating a suitable explanation of the role and functions of the council and its place within local government.
- The council will publicise council elections widely, to encourage applications from across the community.
- Residents' concerns and questions can be brought to the attention of the Council at any time in writing to the Town Clerk, by post, email or hand.
- Residents can address council and committee meetings in person (usually subject to giving prior notice).
- Residents may raise specific points with any councillor, who will refer action points to the Town Clerk for consideration or action, as appropriate.

4. The outcomes of effective community engagement:

- a) Greater understanding within the community of the role of the Town Council and of its Councillors, including the opportunities and limitations of the context within which it operates.
- b) Greater awareness of the council's aims and objectives, priorities and responsibilities.

- c) Increased participation in local democracy, through greater local involvement in decision making and better awareness within the council of the wants and needs of the community.
- d) Improved satisfaction with local public services.
- e) Steps towards building resilient communities who are empowered through involvement in and communication with, their local council and as a member of a thriving community.
- f) Increased interest in the council, strengthening democracy through greater interest in local elections, and in the number of candidates seeking to take on the role of councillor.
- g) Towards good governance of the town council, through improved accountability and transparency.