

Somersham Parish Council

Community Engagement Action Plan & Policy

Adopted 26th October 2015

1. Policy intent

Somersham Parish Council recognises that decision making is enhanced, that services are better delivered and that strategies and policies are likely to result in better outcomes for the community, when community members are involved in decisions which affect them.

This Action Plan & Policy will promote good governance and guide effective community engagement practices to support good decision making in the public interest. It will provide community members with a clear understanding of the Council's role and the avenues for meaningful public participation in Somersham Parish Council decision making.

2. Purpose/Objective

The purpose of the Community Engagement Action Plan & Policy is to articulate Somersham Parish Council's commitment to robust, rigorous and well evaluated community engagement processes. The Action Plan & Policy will guide the delivery of these processes across the organisation to better inform decisions about policy, service planning and delivery.

This Action Plan & Policy reflects Somersham Parish Council's 2012 Community Plan aim which is to effectively engage with our community.

3. Scope

This policy applies to Councillors, all Council staff, Council contractors, Council Engagement Forums, Working Groups and Networks as well as short term engagement bodies such as steering groups and advisory committees.

The policy articulates Somersham Parish Council's commitment to engaging the community as a matter of principle and is guided by a framework that contains techniques to ensure a fair and equitable processes. The application of the policy is intended to support the Council's deliberation and decisions around issues affecting the parish now and into the future.

The policy will be supported by community engagement guidelines that provide clarity on when it is appropriate to engage, and at what level. Community engagement guidelines and supporting documents will address:

- All activities relating to the planning of community engagement activities,
- Stakeholder management,
- Identification of appropriate tools and recording techniques
- Evaluation of community engagement activities

The outcomes of a robust community engagement process include quantifiable and attributable information about community needs, aspirations and opinions that can be considered prior to Council resolving on an issue. This process can enhance the democratic process by increasing the likelihood that Council's decisions are understood and supported by the community and reflect broader community needs and aspirations.

Community input accrued through engagement processes will be considered along with financial, legal and sustainability considerations in decision making.

Statutory Community Engagement

While community engagement is not mandated in all cases, in some matters the Council is bound by legislation to engage with the community. In these cases Somersham Parish Council will adhere to the legislative requirement as a minimum standard.

Community engagement is required under the following legislation:

- Local Government Act 1989
- Planning and Environment Act 1987
- Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008
- Road Management Act 2004

While these Acts stipulate required community engagement in certain circumstances, Council is not prevented from carrying out further community engagement where local sensitivities or project complexities merit additional effort.

4. Roles & Responsibilities

Somersham Parish Council as the corporate body is responsible for ensuring policy implementation, compliance, monitoring, evaluation and review.

5. Monitoring, evaluation & review

Compliance with the policy will be measured through evaluation of individual community engagement plans submitted for approval prior to the commencement of engagement activities.

6. Policy statement

Somersham Parish Council believes that the community should have the opportunity to participate in decision making activities about issues that affect their lives. In giving effect to this the Council makes a commitment to:

- Clearly articulate the issue under consideration
- Clearly identify the level of community influence and limitations if appropriate
- Seek out those potentially affected by the decision

- Offer a range of accessible opportunities to participate
- Recognise and make provision for Somersham's socio-cultural diversity
- Consider the needs and values of those involved in the process including decision makers
- Consider the community input in the decision making process
- Provide feedback to the participant on how their input influenced the decision
- Evaluate the engagement process and outcomes
- Provide adequate resourcing to the community engagement process.

The outcomes sought through this Community Engagement Policy include:

- Improved governance through assisting elected representatives and Somersham Parish Council officers/staff to understand, and be informed by, the views of Somersham's community when making decisions on their behalf.
- Improved decision-making, by ensuring decisions are soundly based on evidence of informed community opinion and take account of the views and experience of those affected by them.
- Improved community ownership of the decisions made by Somersham Parish Council, particularly in relation those directly affected by council developments.
- Community members feel they have had adequate opportunity to express their views and feel their interests have been considered in the planning, decision making and implementation of those activities.
- Feedback to the community on how their input affected Somersham Parish Council's decision-making.
- Appropriate tools and techniques are used to plan, carry out and evaluate community engagement.
- Somersham Parish Council aims to be open and transparent through following an accessible, clear and systematic participatory process.
- Somersham Parish Council officer/staff and councillors will be adequately trained and resourced, and confident in undertaking community engagement activities.
- Somersham Parish Council will actively collaborate with relevant organisations & groups to develop robust and inclusive engagement processes.
- The skills and capacity of community members to participate in decision making processes are enhanced.

Spectrum of Engagement

The table below illustrates the approach that will inform Council practice.

| | Inform | Consult | Involve | Collaborate | Empower |
|----------------------------------|--|---|--|--|---|
| Community engagement goal | To provide the community with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions | To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and /or decisions | To work directly with the community throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered | To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and tie identification of a preferred solution | To place final decision making in the hands of the public |
| Promise to the community | We will keep you informed | We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge aspirations and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision | We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how community input influenced the decision | We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible | We will implement what you decide |
| Example techniques | Social media Websites Newsletters Fact sheets Open meetings | Consultation Events Workshops Focus groups Surveys Questionnaires | Workshops Deliberative polling | Advisory committees/working groups Consensus building Participatory decision making | Citizen Juries Ballots Delegated decision |

Somersham Parish Council recognises that community engagement enriches the Council's decision making processes and supports evidence based decision making. It recognises that community engagement helps it fulfil its mandated roles of providing governance and leadership for Somersham through advocacy, decision making and action and fostering community cohesion and encouraging active participation in civic life.

BUDGET

- Somersham Parish Council has an annual budget of £500 for community engagement.
- Many aspects of Somersham's community engagement process can be met at a relatively low cost to the council through its website, social media and bi-monthly newsletter (hand delivered by volunteers to every household in the parish). The council also has access to meeting rooms for community meetings, consultation events and workshops etc.
- As a matter of general good practice the Council will source funding for major projects as and when these arise and are identified as being high expenditure such as a Neighbourhood Plan or Community Plan

REVIEW PROCESS

Somersham Parish Council will review this Action Plan and Policy annually in October as part of the budget process for the coming financial year.

Ends.