



Halstead Town Council Community Engagement Strategy

In order to make community engagement really effective, it has to attempt to bring in those who are beyond the usual contacts for the council. In a small town like Halstead there are many community groups, some of them outward looking and designed to help others, and others existing purely for the pursuit of a pleasurable activity. Some people will belong to many of these groups and are already part of a network of local contacts. The council's role is to represent the views of its constituents and to give people a voice, and to involve them in decisions affecting their quality of life. The council will engage all those who are stakeholders by using a range of different methods to gather opinion.

1. Halstead Town Council aims to:

- Represent and promote the interests of Halstead and its people of all ages in all its activities
- Provide the best possible amenities and services by the efficient use of available resources
- Actively involve local people in decisions affecting activities in the local area
- Promote equality of opportunity and oppose discrimination
- Be open and accountable in all it does
- Enhance quality of life by protecting and enhancing Halstead's river area and environmental assets.

2. In order to achieve these aims, the Council will:

- Work closely with residents, local businesses and community groups, schools
- Engage with as many people as possible who want to participate in decision making, monitoring services and planning for the future (particularly those hard to reach groups such as the disabled and those whose mother tongue is not English)
- Ensure that, through the use of a wide range of approaches to public involvement and community engagement, we actively encourage the involvement of residents to capture their views and learn their concerns, and then effectively use those views as an integral part of the decision-making process
- Ensure that residents have opportunities to be heard at every stage, and the capacity to be effective citizens.

3. The Halstead community consists of:

- All local residents and users of the council services
- all the existing local community groups
- parents of those in school
- the leaders of the schools
- local businesses
- faith groups
- those who live in local care homes
- those who live in housing provided by local social housing associations
- those who do not belong to any of these groups but have opinions (what barriers are there to their involvement)
- all relevant local authorities, services and interested bodies including local police officers assigned to Halstead and Special constables
- representatives of the district council who provide services in Halstead, from street cleaning to maintaining the Public Gardens

4. Halstead Town Council provides the following to enable community engagement:

- A website with full details of the Council's work, council meetings and events organised by the council and details of how to contact the Town Clerk's office and Councillors
- An annual report delivered at the Annual Town meeting, and also available from the website
- Regularly updated noticeboards promoting the work of the Council, its partners and other local organisations
- Residents may contact the Town Council offices in person and by telephone Monday to Friday 9.00 – 16.00. with an answerphone provided for messages outside these hours
- All meetings of the Council are open to the public and press with a period set aside for residents to speak. Further time is allowed for large planning applications
- Town surveys are carried out to address important issues affecting the community
- Additional public meetings are arranged to address controversial issues for example with the police, and those caring for young and old with disabilities
- Holding a wide range of community events which provide opportunities to engage with the public and raise community spirit – bands in the park, Christmas lights switch-on, Torchlight procession, senior citizens' outings and summer fun for primary aged children
- Annual events leaflet to promote events organised by the council and other local groups, and support for events organised by other bodies in the town, such as the Empire Theatre
- Press releases to manage the media effectively to promote the Council and its activities
- Leafleting of households on really important issues to try to contact those more elusive groups
- Use of the Council logo to promote the work of the Council
- Good internal communications – making sure staff and councillors are informed and give out consistent messages and representations on behalf of the community.
- Town Councillors represent the Council on various outside bodies to ensure good two-way communication with regular reports of these meetings made to the Council.
- Councillors provide informal opportunities for residents to speak to them.
- Web-based engagement – inviting comments from the young, and may be more accessible to those whose mother tongue is not English
- Workshops/focus groups – these engage with the different social groups, either the elderly in the care homes or children in schools, or the teenagers at the youth club, or parents of children at nursery
- Annual Town Meeting at Council offices to invite the residents in for discussion, requests, and explanation of the work of the council

5. Improving community engagement

The Town Council will:

- Publicise the positive results from working with the community, in particular of the town survey undertaken in 2016; and work closely with BDC and ECC to realise the wishes of the Halstead residents. The report was published in early 2019
- Work closely with local Youth Groups to ensure the views of young people are taken into account.
- Identify new opportunities to work with local community groups, including those who may not have access to the internet and may not be familiar with online communication
- seek out newcomers to the town, particularly those from other language backgrounds
- Liaise with local businesses in the organisation of Christmas parties and other events, to get the businesses on side
- Organise additional events for residents
- Make full use of modern communication methods
- Work with all relevant local authorities, services and interested bodies