EXMOUTH TOWN COUNCIL
Community Engagement Task & Finish Forum (TAFF)

Notes of the meeting held at 4pm on Tuesday 20th January 2026 in the Town Hall Chamber

Present

Nicky Nicholls	NN	ETC Councillor (Chair)
Aurora Bailey	AB	ETC Councillor
Louise Venables	LV	ETC Councillor
Brian Bailey	BB	ETC Councillor
Graham Deasy	GD	ETC Councillor (ex-officio)
Lisa Bowman	LB	ETC Town Clerk
Lisa Greenway	LG	ETC notetaker

Apologies

Steve Gazzard	SG	ETC Councillor
Dianne Conduit	DC	ETC Councillor (ex-officio)

1. **Welcome, introduction and apologies**

NN welcomed members and it was noted apologies were noted.

2. **To approve the notes from the meeting on the 25th of November 2025 and matters arising**

Members approved the notes from the 25th of November 2025 with no matters arising.

3. **Review documents circulated:**

Community Engagement Policy

The Community Engagement Policy was circulated to members prior to the meeting.

NN emphasised the importance of ensuring the policy is clearly connected to a practical, deliverable plan, with a clear line of accountability and a mechanism for reporting back to Full Council.

Groups in Exmouth and how do we engage

A document containing lists of groups and how and when we could engage with them was circulated to members prior to the meeting.

The discussion focused on how the council can strengthen engagement with different community groups and make better use of upcoming events. Members reviewed the document outlining potential opportunities, and NN guided the group through identifying next steps.

Questions were raised about whether additional support would be available for this work, but LB explained that the council would have to prioritise staffing needs before looking into the possibility of funding a dedicated communications manager. Although outsourcing communications had been attempted in the past, it proved unreliable due to a lack of local

knowledge. Suggestions included creating a pop-up presence on the Strand and, ideally, appointing a Community Engagement Officer who could attend meetings and support communications more consistently. Members briefly touched on HR matters, which LB confirmed would be addressed at the upcoming HR meeting.

LV highlighted the success of Matt Helmes humorous police Facebook posts and expressed interest in adopting a similar tone to improve public engagement. LB raised the idea of forming a communications working party to plan engagement around specific events, though this would depend on staffing capacity. Members agreed on the need to reach a wider audience, with GD suggesting that councillors take a more active role at events and that an events calendar would help identify opportunities to participate.

Budget considerations were also discussed. NN emphasised the importance of understanding what residents want before planning future work, and LB reiterated that the purpose of the TAFF is to keep the public informed about council activities and gather feedback. Past press trips were noted as useful but slow to produce visible results due to long publication timelines.

4. Consider how the Community Engagement Policy fits with a new Community Engagement Plan

NN explained the Community Engagement Policy, but the group recognised that the next step is to develop a fuller, more practical implementation plan. This will need to set out how the policy will work in practice, the actions required, and the specific recommendations that should ultimately be put before Full Council for approval.

5. Discuss recommendations to Full Council

LB discussed improvements to council communications, external engagement, and the future of the COLP Working Party. Members supported introducing a dedicated Communications Officer and establishing a Communications Working Party. It was agreed that all working parties should include a standing communications update on their agendas. It was noted that expectations for new councillors should be clarified to ensure understanding of roles and responsibilities, and the reinstatement of chairs meetings was suggested to improve internal information sharing.

Councillors were encouraged to increase attendance at community group meetings and events. It was noted that some organisations may be unaware they can formally invite councillors to attend. Ward councillors were encouraged to improve internal communication and share updates from their areas. Members also discussed the potential for councillors to act as champions for specific community groups.

LB explained that COLP is not representative of the wider community and proposed that it be formally dissolved at Full Council. Members supported replacing COLP with seasonal informal drop-in sessions hosted by the Mayor and Town Clerk. These sessions would be open to former COLP organisations, resident groups, youth groups, and other community organisations. Sessions would be informal, without an agenda, and could be held outside the Town Hall on occasions. Printed posters were suggested to reach residents who are less digitally engaged. Exmouth Town Council has rejoined the Chamber of Commerce, and LB informed members that this renewed involvement should strengthen communication and engagement with local businesses.

Members supported undertaking an online resident survey to identify priorities and agreed that additional external bodies for engagement should be identified. LB suggested producing a quarterly newsletter, with limited printed copies available in public venues, and using Mailchimp to allow residents and groups to subscribe and creating welcome packs for new residents, distributed via estate agents.

LB and NN will finalise recommendations for submission to Full Council in February. Recommendations will include:

- Adding a Communications Update to all Working Party agendas
- Establishing a Communications Working Party
- Recruiting a Community Engagement Officer
- Dissolving COLP and introducing seasonal drop-in sessions
- Undertaking an online resident survey
- Producing a quarterly newsletter
- Encouraging increased councillor engagement with community groups

6. Agree re next meeting

To be confirmed

The meeting closed at 17.20

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