Exmouth Town Council
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Community Engagement Policy

Community Engagement is the process through which the community is informed about and/or invited to contribute to proposals or policy changes relating to Exmouth Town Council's responsibilities and services.

Community engagement is important to Exmouth Town Council because:

- it increases the representation of the community and helps Exmouth Town Council to shape service delivery in ways that have most impact locally;
- it helps to improve the community's understanding of how Exmouth Town Council operates, how decision- making processes work and what their role and contribution can be; and
- it helps to ensure that strategies and plans are developed which take account of local social, economic and environmental factors.

Community engagement matters to local people because:

- it encourages involvement and participation in decision making,
- it helps to ensure 'hard to reach' groups are represented, and
- it helps to engage local people in the resolution of their own problem and involves them in decisions on the allocation of resources to address local issues.

Every community is made up of different individuals and groups, whose particular views, interests and expectations may often be at odds and in some cases, not reconcilable. The challenge for Exmouth Town Council is to ensure that we seek the views of as wide a representation as possible. Our role is to support, encourage and work alongside local people, community organisations and local interest groups to get people more actively involved in decision-making and the achievement of local outcomes and to work collaboratively with other leaders (e.g. of local organisations, networks etc) to help establish a shared vision for the future of our community and how best to work towards it.

True engagement must go beyond bringing people into the Town Council's own discussions and move towards engaging with people outside the Town Hall on topics, and in spaces, that are chosen by them. Working with residents should mean more than consulting on Council decision making. It must put local people at the centre of efforts to redefine what local government is for, while helping them to shape their own community.

1. Policy statement

The aim of the policy is to ensure that Exmouth Town Council sets clear and specific standards for community engagement in order to:

- help the community understand and engage with democratic processes;
- improve transparency and accountability;

- identify what people's needs are and take action to meet those needs;
- promote opportunities for people to provide their opinions and get involved;
- improve people's experience of involvement and give them the power and confidence to be part of the solution to community problems and issues.

2. The scope of the policy

For the purposes of this policy, community engagement is the conversations we have with people about decisions that may affect them. It is about providing opportunities for people to have a say in reviewing, designing, approving, influencing or commenting on the decisions, activities and services
in the Town, whilst being clear that the Council is not always the statutory decision maker and cannot involve all 35,000 residents.

Local councillors are the elected representatives of our communities. By having a base in our communities and making themselves accessible to people in their wards, they will get to know what the local issues are. Councillors will develop an understanding of the needs and hopes of local people through engaging with them, providing representation and acting as their 'champion'.

This policy provides the Town Council with a framework to guide the appropriate engagement in relation to Council services and issues. It applies to all facets of council operations including financial, asset management, environmental, as well as day-to-day business activities.

In respect to this policy Council will:

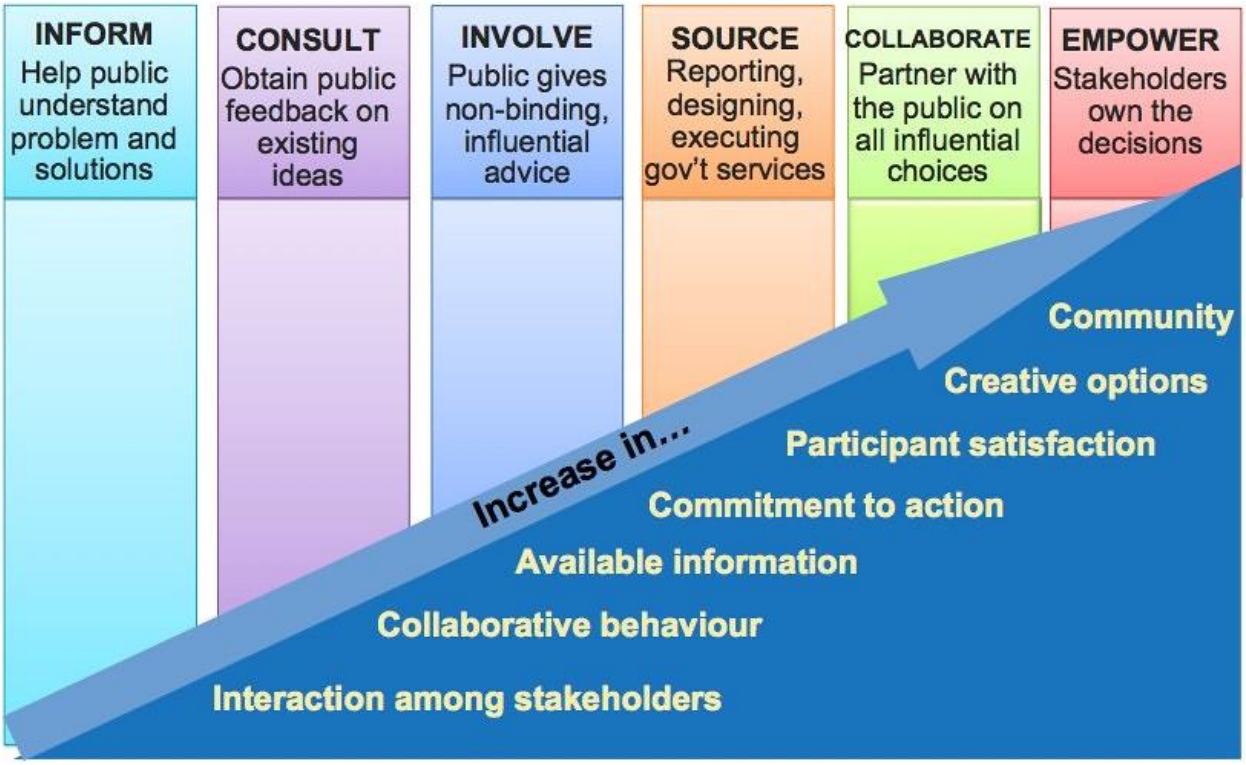
- Undertake appropriate and purposeful engagement with the community;
- Ensure engagement information and communication is timely and accurate;
- Adopt a consistent and transparent approach to community engagement;
- Consider the different communication and physical needs of the diverse communities in Exmouth when undertaking engagement;
- Build skills and knowledge across Council in the delivery of community engagement activities and processes;

Our Quality Council accreditation demonstrates our commitment to providing the best possible service and will help to drive our engagement activities with citizens and customers to ensure that our services meet their needs.

3. How we will engage

The Spectrum of Public Participation is used internationally to define the public's role in any public participation process:

Public Engagement Spectrum



Remix of info from IAP2, and Pat Bonner, USA EPA and Susanna Haas Lyons' practice (Engaging.ly)

Informing

Aim: to provide the community with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding what is happening:

- The Freedom of Information Act requires every public authority to have a publication scheme, approved by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), and to publish information covered by the scheme. The scheme sets out our commitment to make certain classes of information routinely available, such as policies and procedures, minutes of meetings, annual reports and financial information.

- Exmouth Town Council's website is the primary source of information relating to Council business and priorities and it will be kept up to date with content routinely monitored and updated. The Council aims to actively publish a wide range of information relating to the Council and its business.
- The Council has Twitter Facebook and Instagram accounts and will them to direct the community to relevant information to encourage a more informed debate and encourage participation in an engagement process.

- The Chairman of the Council will publish a regular news blog.

- The Council will make additional ad-hoc use of printed leaflets, posters, press releases, radio interviews and social media where appropriate.

- The Council will utilise noticeboards at the Town Hall and in the Magnolia Kiosk.

- Where requested, the Council will appoint members to represent the Council on outside bodies and organisations, e.g. Community Safety Partnership.

- The Council will publish an Annual report for distribution at the Annual Town Meeting, at key public locations throughout the Town and online.

- All Full Council, Planning and Finance Committee meetings are open to the press and public, except in limited defined circumstances where legislation allows the meeting to be closed. Notice of the meeting, specifying the business to be discussed, will be placed on the Town Hall notice boards at least 3 clear days before the meeting and on the Council's website.

- All Full Council, Planning and Finance Committee meetings will be audio recorded and the recordings will be uploaded to the Council's website immediately after the respective meeting.

- National legislation requires the Town Council to make a copy of the minutes available for inspection after a public meeting. The Town Council will aim to publish draft minutes of its Committee meetings within four weeks.

- All meeting notes relating to the Town Council's Working Parties and Forums will be published in draft format on the Council's website within four weeks.

Consulting

Aim: to listen to community, consider their input, and feedback results.

- The Council will continue to set aside dedicated time at its meetings for members of the public to address the Council.

- A Community Liaison Panel (COLP) has been established as a means of providing regular, two-way communication between the Town Council and the local community. Its aim is to provide a platform through which the Council can inform local community organisations of any relevant matters, and for local organisations to feed back their views.

- Several of the Town Council's working parties (through which work is progressed to the point of Town Council consideration and decision-making) have co-opted additional members from the community.

- The Town Council acts as a barometer for opinion in relation to District and County Council consultations by collecting, analysing and propagating information to use in its role as a statutory consultee.

- Where necessary, the Council will participate in local events or organise road shows and mobile surgeries as a means of engaging with the public.

- The Annual Town Meeting will continue to invite the views of residents on matters affecting the community.

Involving

Aim: to work directly with the community throughout a process to ensure that concerns and aspirations
are consistently understood and taken into consideration.

- We will give people opportunities to get involved with decision making and commissioning of services as equal partners through forums such as the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and Exmouth Transport Partnership.

Collaborating

Aim: to work with communities and the voluntary and community sector to identify what people's needs are and take action to meet those needs.

- The Town Council will look to the community for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate its recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible. e.g. S106 participatory budgeting consultation.

Empowering

Aim: To provide support and funding to a range of local providers, including organisations from the voluntary and community sector.

- The Town Council will actively support members of our communities to lead their own projects by facilitating conversations and using our network to kick start conversations and provide practical advice.

- The Council will, subject to eligibility criteria, provide financial support via the Council's grant scheme for community projects.

4. Who we engage with

Our communities can be defined in a number of different ways and we need to ensure that we reach out at all levels:

Place:
community defined by an area with a physical boundary, such as a housing estate, the town centre or ward boundaries;

Interest:
community defined by shared experiences such as a particular interest in an activity or project i.e. Exmouth Civic Society;

Identity:
community defined by how people wish to identify themselves or how society identifies them e.g. young people, disabled people, ethnic minority groups, the working population, men, women, business leaders etc.

Concern:
community activists or lobby groups;

Service user:
users or potential users of local government services. This covers essential front-line services such as waste collection, highways and recycling or services for specific users such as planning, sports centres or libraries.

We also need to be aware that online technology and communications are having a profound effect on the way communities interact. It is important to understand how this influences the formation of communities, both geographically and virtually.

Exmouth Town Council is committed to engaging with a wide range of stakeholders on our work in a transparent and open manner.

Reaffirmed 18th May 2026
Review date: May 2027