

Document Properties

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Castle Cary Town Council

Community Engagement Policy

Aims: Castle Cary Town Council aims to ensure that through the use of a wide range of approaches to public consultation and community engagement. It actively encourages residents to inform its decision-making process and make an input into decisions which affect their day to day lives in the parish.

Objectives: Castle Cary Town Council is committed to creating and maintaining effective working relationships with all sectors of the community. The Council recognises that there are different levels of engagement and will endeavour to involve the community in the following ways:

- Inform people about its work and the services it provides through newsletters, website, social media and Cary Crier
- Consult with and seek out the views of the community using a variety of different consultative methods such as: community coffee mornings, voluntary groups, regular Community Conversations
- Encourage community participation in local government by promoting the work that all the Councils do and inviting Unitary councillors to report back regularly.
- Collaborate with individuals, community groups and organisations where appropriate, to achieve agreed aims for the community
- Build up effective working relationships within the community and encourage a sense of ownership of assets, infrastructure and new projects by encouraging working groups and supporting our many volunteers

The Community

Castle Cary Town Council actively seeks to engage with all sections of the community regardless of age, ability, gender, ethnicity, faith or sexual orientation i.e. parishioners (particularly hard to reach groups such as the young, disenfranchised, disaffected and the elderly), the local business community, the many clubs, organisations and societies which are active in the town, its partners such as Somerset Council, the Neighbourhood Policing team, the Churches and our elected members for neighbouring Councils. The Town Council is also committed to engaging with any persons who appear to it to have an interest in matters relating to the economic, social and environmental well-being of its area.

Provision of information to the community and opportunities for Community Engagement

The Council recognises that despite its active approach to community engagement it is unrealistic to expect to consult at all times on every aspect of the Council's agenda: for example, some matters have to remain confidential for personal or commercial reasons and in the wider public interest, and constraints of time and resources may limit or prevent consultation, for example, when urgent decisions are needed or minor matters would not justify the cost of consulting.

The Council is a representative body in which Councillors use their best efforts to decide matters on behalf of the town/parish where it lies within their legal competence to do so. Consultation and community engagement inform their best efforts but public consensus is not possible to achieve in every case: the Council recognises not everyone in the town will agree with every decision. Some matters of town and parish interest are reserved to the principal local authority, Somerset Council. For example, planning in which the Council can express an opinion but the decision rests with Somerset Council.

Castle Cary Town Council will therefore use many ways to actively seek the views of its community and involve them in its work:

- 1.Desk volunteers:** Our team of trained volunteers provide a unique link for our community to feedback and seek information. They are also tourism volunteers providing information about the town. They staff the information desk daily excluding Sundays and support community events. Their community involvement is invaluable to Councillors to support achieving the aims and objectives of the Council.
- 2.Publications:** Castle Cary Town Council will communicate with our community through regular articles in the quarterly town newsletter, as well as the annual report at the Annual Town Meeting which is held in conjunction with Ansford Parish Council. We will report up to date information about payments and receipts and monies held by the council on the Town Website.
- 3.Website:** The Town Council website castle-cary.co.uk. It is a community resource which publishes information about the Town, its Council, and the many organisations and businesses which flourish in the Town. Council agendas, minutes, finance and other documents will be regularly posted on this website for information. Residents are invited to contact the Council via the website, or email at addresses published on the website. Residents can expect an acknowledgement within three working days but a substantive reply may take longer. The Town Council is committed to developing and improving the website and actively encourages voluntary groups and businesses to use it to exchange information through the quarterly Newsletter and FaceBook as a means of improving communication.
- 4.Direct Access:** The Council will display a list of all Town Councillors' email addresses together with other important points of contact on its website and the town noticeboard. This medium will also be used to directly advertise other important events in our community e.g. notices relating to the annual audit of

accounts; casual vacancies, elections and forthcoming events and meetings etc. Details of the Council's publication scheme and the address of the Somerset Council Monitoring Officer will also be displayed on the website for information.

5. **Co-option:** The Council encourages the involvement of the community in the work of the Council through co-option to a working group. Any working party of the Council is empowered to co-opt interested members of the community onto any working party.
6. **Meetings:** Notice of all Council meetings is given on the town notice board and on the website. Residents are encouraged to attend Full Council and Committee Meetings and time is set aside at all meetings for public participation at all these meetings. Residents are also actively encouraged to attend the Annual Town Meeting jointly held with Ansford Parish Council which is widely advertised on the website, through Cary Crier, FB, newsletter and noticeboards.
7. **Consultation:** Castle Cary Town Council will undertake questionnaires, community conversations and other related forms of information gathering from time to time to establish the community's views on a particular issue.
8. **Specific Projects:** On a regular basis Castle Cary Town Council will undertake specific projects for the benefit of the community. The normal method for undertaking these is via working groups set up under a relevant sub committee with Terms of Reference agreed by the Town Council. Co-option (see above) is used to ensure that the community is fully represented and involved in these projects.

Opportunities for formal representations to the Council

Representations to Castle Cary Town Council will normally be considered at the next meeting of the relevant sub-committee. If, however, they require the provision of information only, then the Clerk will provide it in accordance with the Council's publication scheme. The Council has a Complaints Policy for handling complaints, which is published on the website and reviewed annually. The publication of agendas on the Town Council's notice board and website gives residents the opportunity to make representation to the Council before agenda items are discussed. All formal representations received are responded to in writing.

Involvement in partnerships

Castle Cary Town Council is committed to partnership working where it is clear that it will be of benefit to the Town or to fulfil its statutory requirements. For example; it is

has initiated joint working with Bruton Town Council, Wincanton Town Council and Milborne Port Parish Council regarding youth provision. The Town Council has also hosted consultations to include our very close smaller village Parishes. CCTC has a partnership with Somerset Skills & Learning to support provision of learning opportunities in our community.

Castle Cary Town Council is actively committed to working jointly with Ansford Parish Council through a formal partnership agreement.

Role of Council members & officers in consultation & community engagement

Elected members are powerful advocates for their community and their leadership role enables them to have a major input into the consultation and engagement process.

Castle Cary Town Councillors are very accessible - their contact details are published on the Town notice board, on the website and in the quarterly newsletter.

They are available when possible to talk to residents during the public session prior to each Full Council, at the Annual Town Meeting and at regular community events such as weekly coffee mornings.

In a private capacity, they belong to many other local clubs, societies and organisations, where they may, if they so wish promote the work of the Town Council and be available to residents.