

GREAT DUNMOW TOWN COUNCIL

COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT POLICY

1. Purpose

This policy sets out how the Town Council will engage with the community, ensure that residents are informed about council activities, and create opportunities for meaningful involvement in local decision-making.

2. Vision

To build a well-informed, inclusive, and connected community where residents understand the role of the Town Council and feel confident contributing to its work.

3. Mission

To provide clear, accessible, and consistent engagement that enables residents and stakeholders to participate in shaping services, projects, and local priorities.

4. Engagement Principles

The policy enshrines the following Engagement Principles:

Consult

We will seek input on proposals before decisions are made and invite feedback afterwards.

Example: Before replacing playground equipment, a survey will be issued to parents and young people.

Prove

We will show how public feedback has influenced decisions or explain why a particular view could not be acted on.

Example: Following consultation on Christmas lighting, a report summary will be posted online and in the newsletter.

Promote

We will communicate the Council's services and decisions clearly and regularly.

Example: Monthly website updates, social media posts, and short video explainers.

Include

We will ensure engagement is accessible to all, including underrepresented and harder-to-reach groups.

Example: Printed surveys for older residents and school visits to engage young people.

Listen

We will actively listen to community concerns and ensure there are straightforward ways to raise them.

Example: Councillor surgeries and a public comments box at council events.

Inform

We will keep residents up to date with decisions, projects, and service changes.
Example: A quarterly newsletter and regular website updates.

Identify

We will maintain a consistent house style, tone and visual identity in all communications.
Example: Use of a Council-branded template for newsletters and notices.

Empathise

We will take account of how residents feel, not just what they say.
Example: During planning discussions, we will consider both concerns and emotional responses, such as safety or heritage attachment.

5. Legal Framework

The policy aligns with the following:

- Local Government Act 1972, enshrining obligations to hold public meetings and publish agendas and minutes
- Equality Act 2010, enshrining the Public Sector Equality Duty to consider the needs of diverse groups
- Freedom of Information Act 2000, enshrining the duty to disclose information on request
- UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018, enshrining the protection of personal data collected through engagement

6. Methods of Engagement

The policy exists in symbiosis with the Great Dunmow Town Council Communications and Engagement Strategy, and paragraphs 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3 should be informed for detail by reference to that Strategy. **[Forthcoming]**

6.1 Digital Engagement

The Town Council will employ the following and other methods for digital engagement:

- Council Website: Includes contact forms, project updates, meeting documents, and consultation pages
- Social Media: Used to share news, highlight consultations, and promote events (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok)
- Email Updates: Residents can sign up to receive notices and consultations directly

Example: A post on Instagram inviting residents to vote on the colour scheme for spring flower planting.

6.2 In-Person Engagement

The Town Council will employ the following and other methods for in-person engagement:

- Public Meetings: Town Meeting and council surgeries open to all residents

- Community Events: Council gazebo present at the Soap Box Race, Christmas Fayre, and other events
- Working Groups: Residents may be invited to sit on project-specific working groups

Example: A stand at the town carnival with a “wishing well” for residents to submit suggestions.

6.3 Educational and Creative Engagement

The Town Council will employ the following and other methods for educational and creative engagement:

- School Talks: Local schools invited to sessions with councillors and staff
- Competitions: Art or writing competitions about the Council’s role
- Local Radio and Press: Council updates and interviews

Example: A Year 6 art contest on the theme “What Does a Town Council Do?”

7. Reaching All Residents

The Council will take extra steps to include:

- Older or isolated residents
- People with limited internet access
- New residents unfamiliar with local governance
- Youth and schools
- Minority and marginalised groups

Example: Delivering welcome packs to new housing developments with a summary of Council services and how to get involved.

8. Using Engagement to Shape Decisions

Feedback from residents will be reviewed by officers and shared with councillors. It will:

- Inform reports to committees or Full Council
- Be summarised in decision papers
- Be referenced in any final public communications

Example: If 60% of playground survey respondents prefer natural play equipment, that preference will be reflected in design proposals.

9. Measuring Engagement

The Council will track engagement through:

- Survey response rates
- Website and social media analytics
- Attendance at public meetings and events
- Subscriptions to council updates
- Qualitative feedback from events and outreach
- An annual summary will be published, including key figures and outcomes.

Example: A year-on-year comparison showing increased awareness of Town Council activities from 40% to 65% based on resident surveys.

10. Review Schedule

This policy will be reviewed every 12 months, or sooner if engagement patterns or legal requirements change. Progress on the Action Plan will be monitored quarterly by the Engagement Working Group.

ADOPTED BY FULL COUNCIL 4th SEPTEMBER 2025