



# Ross-on-Wye Town Council

## Community Engagement Statement of Intent

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### 1 Aims and Objectives

The Town Council exists to serve the community of Ross-on-Wye and the Council believes it can operate more effectively by engaging the community in its decision making and the provision of its services to those residents. The Town Council also considers it necessary to develop and maintain dialogue with residents and their representative groups.

This strategy is part of the Council's commitment to creating and maintaining effective working relationships with all sectors of the community, based on trust, openness and constructive challenge.

To achieve this, the Town Council has the following aims, objectives and wished for outcomes.

#### **Aims:**

- work more closely with residents, businesses and voluntary groups to achieve agreed aims for the benefit of the town
- engage with as many people as possible who want to participate in decision making, monitoring services and planning for the future
- 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 views and learn their concerns and effectively use those views as an integral part of the decision-making process
- ensure that residents have the opportunities to be heard at every stage, and the capacity to be effective citizens

#### **Objectives:**

- to develop an annual strategy process that involves public consultation and links a three-year rolling work programme to the annual budget setting
- to continue to support the Neighbourhood Plan process, including the production, implementation and review stages of the Plan
- to provide information via the website, facebook page, newsletter, and press
- to receive and consider information through the system of Councillor representation on groups; public sessions before Council meetings; and other communications
- to monitor the implementation of the Sustainable Communities Act in Herefordshire and play a full part in any initiatives arising from this
- to consider the needs of minorities and hard to reach groups when designing its communications
- to hold Full Council meetings within the wards and be more accessible to the residents

## Outcomes:

- improved communication through establishment of new channels of engagement
- residents understanding the role of Councillors
- improved engagement with local communities, with more people feeling that they are involved in decision-making and a higher percentage of people involved in volunteering
- improved satisfaction with local public services

## 2 Defining the Community

Ross-on-Wye is a small market town in Herefordshire, with a population of approximately 11,500. It has a large number of small, independent local shops and businesses, several national chain shops, banks and building societies. It has a weekly market on Thursdays and Saturdays which is run by the Town Council. In addition, there are occasional markets throughout the year. There are a number of industrial estates providing employment. There are also a number of primary schools and one academy. The town is well served by doctors and dentists and benefits from a community hospital.

The community may be defined as consisting of:

- residents of the parish of Ross-on-Wye
- retail and industrial businesses in the area
- young people who live/attend school in the parish
- The local Police, Fire & Rescue and Ambulance Services
- Local clubs and societies
- Voluntary organisations
- Residents with disabilities or illness, both mental and physical
- Church groups
- Other groups of people defined by a common factor such as age, disability, faith etc.
- Councillors and public service representatives including Council staff and contractors
- Visitors to Ross for work, leisure or services

## 3 Provision of Information to the Community

The Town Council Newsletter is circulated half yearly by inclusion in Ross Voice which is delivered to every household in the town. Copies of the newsletter can be collected from public outlets around the town, including the Library.

There is a Town Council notice board, situated outside the Corn Exchange displaying contact details for the Town Clerk, notices and agendas of Town Council and Committee meetings and community information. There is also a Notice Board under the Market House. The notice board located at the cemetery is used for displaying regulations relating to the management and maintenance of the cemetery and there is one at the Bandstand to display events in the area.

The Town Council web site address is widely published, and the site contains all the information an individual might wish to know about the Town Council, including minutes of meetings, policy documents, accounts, annual report and contact details for the Mayor and Town Councillors. Agendas and minutes of meetings are available in the Town Council Office, the Library and to download from the website.

The Council's Facebook page is a useful tool for promoting events and passing on information to a wider audience.

#### 4 Opportunities for Community Involvement

The Town Council engages with the community in a variety of ways, from half yearly newsletters and use of notice boards, through the web site, through the Annual Town Meeting, occasional public meetings on specific issues and surveys on the website.

The Council welcomes feedback from members of the community and recognises a desire to engage with the Council at different levels, ie, letter or e-mail, telephone or through the submission form on the web site and in some instances, regular attendance at Council meetings or the weekly surgeries held at the Library.

Town Councillors are available to talk face-to-face upon request.

#### 5 Opportunities for Formal Representations to Council

During Council meetings 15 minutes is set out aside for public participation and the Town Council invites and welcomes public participation. However, if a comprehensive and/or detailed response is required, it is suggested that the Town Clerk is notified at least 10 days prior to the meeting to enable research to be undertaken.

#### 6 Involvement in Partnerships

The Town Council is represented on Outside Bodies and committees of a number of town organisations/groups. In addition, it has representation on the Market Towns Forum (MTF). The MTF meets regularly with officers and councillors of Herefordshire Council where there is an opportunity to discuss issues of mutual interest.

#### 7 Role of Council Members and Officers

The Town Council consists of 18 Councillors whose contact details are made available to all residents in the newsletter, on the Town Council website as well as in a regular column in the local newspaper.

Councillors actively engage in communicating with residents, face-to face, and respond to telephone calls and e-mails with swift follow-up action. In a private capacity, they belong to local clubs and organisations, where they may, if they so wish, promote the work of the Town Council and be available to residents.

The Town Council Office at The Corn Exchange, High Street and is open each weekday from 09.30 until 13.00 and outside these times staff can be contacted by e-mail or personal appointment.

The Council also employ grounds maintenance staff who work in a number of locations. Staff often have direct contact with the public and naturally have to field questions and enquiries. The ability to do this effectively and courteously is as important as any other element of the Council's work in the community and can provide good feedback on the views of people on the services offered by the Council.

## 8 Specific Areas for Community Involvement

The Town Council undertakes to consult the community should it resolve to facilitate any major projects within the town and to widely publicise these through the media and its own communication channels.

## 9 Other

If any resident is dissatisfied with the services of the Town Council, the Town Council has a complaints procedure for handling complaints which is available from the office or to download from the website.

This document will be reviewed on an annual basis by the Policy & Management Committee of the Town Council to ensure it reflects the changing aims and objectives of the Town Council.

*Adopted by the Policy & Management Committee November 2018*