

Abingdon Town Council

Policy in relation to consultations

1 Reason for this policy

1.1 The Town Council believes that effective consultation is important in meeting the needs of our community and involving them in decisions that affect them. We are committed to delivering services that reflect our residents' priorities, requirements and aspirations. The policy sets out when we will consult and the matters we will consider when undertaking consultation so that all members of the community can have a voice in the debate around how services are delivered.

2 Objectives

2.1 The policy directly links to all the council's key objectives, in particular:

- Key objective 1: To respond effectively and speedily to the climate emergency
- Key objective 2: To develop a resilient, sustainable town which will provide a home for residents now and in the future.
- Key objective 3: To manage the Council's assets efficiently and effectively to meet for the needs of the community now and in the future.
- Key objective 4: To work with community partners to support those who are vulnerable and in need and to create opportunities to increase social inclusivity

2.2 The specific policy objectives are:

- To detail when and how we consult with our residents;
- To ensure the quality and value of our policy and decision-making processes by taking into account the views of the residents and other stakeholders concerned and consulting on key issues;
- To ensure that residents and other stakeholders have been offered the opportunity to be involved in key decisions affecting them;
- To assist in informing residents of Council plans, policies, decisions and outcomes.

2.3 We are committed to giving local people a voice and involving them in decisions that affect them and their community. We will provide the opportunity for residents of the town to express their views on matters that are important to them. This will inform and advise the town council and improve the quality and value of our policies and decisions on behalf of our residents.

2.4 Consultation can assist to inform residents about the town council's services and explain how, when faced with limited financial resources, it prioritises those services.

3 Consultations - when we will consult

- 3.1 The Town Council is guided by its Strategic Forward Plan 2020-24. However, there may be circumstances when the Town Council wishes to seek the views of local people on a proposed project, action or policy. In such circumstances, a consultation may be conducted and this policy aims to set out how such consultations may take place.
- 3.2 Abingdon Town Council already engages and consults on a wide range of issues utilising many different forms of engagement, both formal and informal. Town Council services are the responsibility of four standing committees, each of which have delegated powers to make decisions and develop our services. It is therefore important to have a policy to ensure that there is a consistency to the way in which we plan, develop and share learning from consultations to influence the way in which we provide services in the future.
- 3.3 We will consider whether to consult before making any new policy or decision which will impact on residents, communities or other stakeholders. In deciding whether to consult and in designing a consultation the governing committee will have regard to a number of issues including:
- The scale and materiality of the proposal;
 - The cost of the proposal;
 - The geographical range of any impacts and/ or benefits and the residents/ communities who may be affected by the proposal;
 - The timing of the consultation;
 - The length of the consultation period;
 - The cost of the consultation.
- 3.4 It will not be appropriate to consult on every action of the Town Council. A decision about whether to consult will be made by the appropriate committee having due regard to this policy.
- 3.5 A consultation will not be carried out in connection with any action required to be carried out by the Town Council by law or where a project, action or activity is proposed on the grounds of health and safety or in connection with required repairs and maintenance, or in any circumstances where the proposed project, action or activity is outside the power of the Parish Council to undertake.
- 3.6 It should be noted that all meetings of the otown cuncil and its committees are open to the public and residents will continue to have the opportunity to share their views with Members regarding any items on the agenda through the public participation sessions at these meetings.

4 How we consult

- 4.1 Having regard to the above, the Town Council may employ any one or all of the following consultation methods:
- a) Handing or posting the consultation to those most likely to be impacted
 - b) Notices in local media outlets
 - c) Notices on notice boards
 - d) The use of the Council's website and online survey / consultation methods
 - e) Article/ notice in the Town Crier
 - e) Directly consulting relevant partners, stakeholders or other community/ voluntary organisations
 - f) Directly consulting local residents known to have particular knowledge or interest in the matter
 - g) Holding meetings either on-line or in person
 - h) Face to face informal surveys
 - i) Formal written questionnaires
 - j) Telephone surveys
 - k) Interviews
- 4.2 It is acknowledged that effective consultations should include reaching the widest cross-section of our community. It will be for the relevant committee, to decide how this is done, taking this policy into account. Whilst all efforts should be made to engage the widest cross-section of the community, it should be acknowledged that this will inevitably involve some compromises and decisions. Again, taking this policy into account, there may be occasions when committees consider that the Town Council should engage professional assistance to design and undertake a consultation so that it is truly representative of the views of the residents of Abingdon.
- 4.3 Abingdon Town Council is the parish council elected by and financed by the people of Abingdon. However, many of its services will be used by non-residents. In designing a consultation, committees will need to consider the implications of this.
- 4.4 When proposals come before the relevant committee, the recommendation to Members will include details of the proposed consultation approach. This will ensure that Members actively approve both the plans and the consultation approach. This recommendation should be discussed and agreed by the lead officer and the committee chair as part of the agenda planning meeting.
- 4.5 When consulting, consideration should be given to the following:
- A summary of the nature of the issue being consulted on;
 - A clear indication that the consultation is being undertaken by Abingdon Town Council;
 - A statement indicating that the results of the survey/questionnaire will be used to inform Members, who will remain responsible for making a decision on the matter;

- An opportunity for members of the public to add comments about the project/activity;
- A clear indication of how to respond and by what date;
- How we will communicate the results of the consultation and whether, for instance, this would include directly informing consultees by e-mail;
- A timeline on when a decision will be made.

4.6 Members are well-placed to in the community to build relations with residents and are often well known to residents in their locality. Their involvement can significantly assist effective consultation, so Members will be encouraged to promote consultations and engage with residents to improve the response rate.

4.7 We will make available the results of any public consultation or survey that affects the town. A separate notification of the results may be given to those surveyed if the town council so chooses, either through a separate written notification or a notice on a nearby noticeboard for example.

5 Considering consultations

5.1 Councillors are elected by residents every four years. They will often have campaigned with a manifesto and are elected to make decisions. These decisions are made by committees and the council. The results of any consultation will be used solely for the purpose of informing councillors of the general wishes of those consulted. The Council is required to take the needs of the town as a whole into account when making decisions. It should not, for instance, reflect the wishes of a minority if these may conflict with the needs of the parish as a whole. The results of the consultation will be just part, albeit an important part, of the information made available to councillors in decision-making. The results of a consultation will not be binding on any final decision of Council.

6 Review

6.1 This policy will be reviewed on or before 31 March 2024 or sooner if the Council so desires.

Policy date: 27 March 2022
Author: Nigel Warner, Town Clerk