



FAIR OAK & HORTON HEATH PARISH COUNCIL

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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Adopted: 21 July 2021

1. Background and principles

1.1 Fair Oak & Horton Heath Parish Council (FOHHPC) recognises the need to consider the impact of its actions on others and the surrounding environment.

1.2. A key component in FOHHPC's corporate plan is to get residents involved in the democratic process.

1.3. The Localism Act 2011 places considerable onus on increased involvement and therefore, initial guiding principles are required

1.4 Involvement principles

- FOHHPC cannot force any individual or group to become involved, but it can, and will, make it as easy as possible.
- It will always be clear, before the start of any participation or consultation activity, to what extent the result will inform a decision.
- If the outcome of a participation or consultation activity is intended to inform a decision and a different decision is taken, the reasoning behind that decision will be explained where necessary.
- Not every decision requires community involvement.

1.5 Engagement principles

- FOHHPC will be clear at the start of the event what output is expected, e.g. are commendation, strategy suggestion etc
- Engagement events are not intended as an opportunity for individuals with an interest to lobby decision makers
- While individuals may well have links with groups that have a vested interest, they should not represent those groups in informing the process.
- The process should encourage people to take the wider view, and to ensure that those not able to be at an event have their views expressed by others.

1.6 Consultation principles

- If an event calls for wider public involvement, the event will be advertised locally allowing people time to organise their engagement with the event.
- Consultation events will sometimes be targeted at the relevant group or groups.
- Events will be time-bound.
- Specific, non-leading questions will be asked.
- Questions can be open (e.g. where do you think swings should be sited?) but not open-ended (e.g. what do you think should be done?).

2. Corporate aims and objectives

2.1 Community engagement is embodied in the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan.

2.2 Areas of focus in the Plan are: well being: to build and foster a flourishing community

and environmental sustainability: covering the attractiveness, variety and accessibility of the Parish's green spaces and an increased focus on renewable energy, energy efficiency, waste reduction, and environmental enhancement to increase bio-diversity.

2.3 FOHHPC recognises that wellbeing, prosperity and environmental sustainability are intrinsically interlinked and none of the aims can be achieved without a high level of community engagement.

2.4 The objectives of this strategy are to:

- Encourage effective local community engagement.
- Ensure that there is a clear understanding of the need to engage with communities about decisions which affect them and that this is embedded throughout FOHHPC.
- Enable the aspirations/comments/suggestions etc. obtained from community engagement to have an impact on decision making and the way in which services are being delivered.
- Identify the principles behind how FOHHPC can enhance its profile by improving engagement with the wider community (with specific reference to hard-to-reach groups).

3. Fair Oak & Horton Heath Parish Council and community engagement

3.1 The Council currently facilitates community engagement in the following ways:

- Allocation of public participation at the beginning of each Council meeting, providing the opportunity for residents to talk to the Council or ask questions relating to items on the agenda.
- The publishing of agendas, minutes & reports for all council meetings on the website and social media.
- Active involvement in the annual parish meeting with its open forum for questions.
- The annual External Auditor provides the opportunity for questions to be asked about the latest statement of accounts and balance sheet. A synopsis of the financial accounts is published within the annual report.
- The ability to provide Council information in alternative formats or languages upon request.
- Making councillor contact details available on the website.
- News and events are publicised through the Council's website, social media and monthly e-bulletins.
- The annual report and statements of accounts are made available on the website and upon request in paper format.

- 3.2 Consultation exercises, surveys, Facebook polls and questionnaires are undertaken with residents, young people and local user groups and organisations for specific projects and tasks.
- 3.3 Inviting members of the public to Open Forums & Task & Finish Groups.
- 3.4 Press releases featured in local media keep the general public informed of community events, projects and other Council items of interest.
- 3.5 Where and when appropriate, external resource maybe utilised for a large and time-consuming consultation or engagement exercise.
- 3.6 Unlike other tiers of local government, Parish Cllrs always live within 3 miles of the area they serve and therefore have close ties to their constituents and local voluntary and community organisations on a day-to-day basis, making them uniquely placed in terms of informed representation.

4 Future improvements

- 4.1 The Council is committed to improving community engagement by enforcing the principles in section 1 and:
 - I. Continuing all the above activities and services into the future, improving relationships with community groups, developing measures to harness the views and opinions of people and groups who are often missed out of community engagement activities.
 - II. Identifying and embracing opportunities to work with other local community groups as and when the need arises.
 - III. Extending and developing the range of electronic communication including a presence on social networking media such as Facebook & Instagram.
 - IV. Participation in local networks to share knowledge and experience of community engagement activities in other areas.
 - V. Publishing the positive results that have been achieved from working relationships between the Council and other groups in order to encourage new relationships to be formed and raise community spirit.
 - VI. Ensuring that appropriate evaluation is carried out following consultation exercises to ensure that lessons learned are carried forward and an assessment of how effective and useful the consultation was for residents and the council.