

WEST MOORS TOWN COUNCIL



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Adopted by the Council on: 30th March 2023
Reviewed and Revised: Due on March 2026

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

1. Introduction

West Moors Town Council strives to give the community a voice by engaging with residents and encouraging their participation in the democratic decision-making process. To enable an involved, empowered and active citizenship, we will reach out and seek the views of hard to reach groups including young people.

However, certain barriers may exist due to the capacities of different people (rural areas, computer literacy, single parents, house bound and minority or socially excluded groups, the visually and hearing impaired).

The National Standards for Community Engagement 2016 include; Inclusion, Support, Planning, Working Together, Methods, Communication and Impact.

2. Why is communication important?

The Town Council, through good communication, will understand and better meet the needs of the community, whilst also raising the profile of the area and the Town Council.

Improved communications also lead to recognition and respect. Many Councils fail to effectively communicate who they are and what they do - and the less people know about an organisation, the less likely they are to value it highly.

3. Good communications will enable the Council to:

- Better understand the needs of the community and develop appropriate strategies and priorities.
- Raise residents' satisfaction, trust and confidence by communicating about services provided by this Council.
- Raise the profile of West Moors as a destination.
- Attract businesses/employment to the local area.
- Make best use of technology to innovate and engage with hard-to-reach groups such as young people.
- Proactively challenge inaccuracies and misrepresentations that might undermine the brand image or integrity of the Council.

4. What should we be communicating?

There are two methods of communicating:

- Proactive – telling people information to influence and change attitudes.
- Reactive – giving residents information they have requested.

The most **important drivers of Council reputation** among local residents are:

- Perceived quality of services overall
- Perceived value for money
- Media coverage
- Direct communications
- Council performance
- A clean, green and safe environment
- Positive experiences of contact with The Council

5. Who should we be communicating with?

The Council's audiences are wide and varied but will typically include:

- Residents
- Hard-to-reach groups, including young people
- The media
- Voluntary groups and organisations
- The business community
- Other public sector organisations (Dorset Police, Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service, Public Health Dorset)
- Visitors and those who work in the area.

6. How do the Council reach out?

Process of engagement	The benefit	How often and who is responsible
A West Moors guide delivered to most households.	Reaches the house bound.	Every 2 years. Office staff and the local magazine
Invite residents and organisations to town council meetings.	Encourages transparency and involvement.	Weekly. Clerk.
Newsletters and noticeboards. Send to external bodies.	Reaches those who do not use the internet.	At least quarterly. Assistant to the Clerk
Questionnaires/on-line surveys	Samples local views which can then legitimately be used to influence decision making.	As projects arise. Councillors and Clerk
Public meetings for larger issues. Consider; the best time, a projector, microphones, interpreter, signer, volunteer driver, "meeter and greeter" who sits and talks to the public.	Encourages attendees to feel comfortable. Promotes equality	As projects arise. Councillors and Clerk

Use Facebook and website for; council and community news, agendas and minutes, surveys.	Reaches those who can't get to the notice board or office.	Continuously. Office staff
Maintain links with local businesses, groups, press, clubs and allotment holders.	Strong partnerships lead to trust and integration.	Continuously. For allotment inspections it is quarterly. Council
Be transparent with administrative and financial documents	Empowers the community making it easier for them to contribute to the local decision-making process.	Continuously. Clerk.
Provide grants to groups and organisations where there is direct benefit to the community.	Invests in the future of the community giving people purpose whilst building connections.	Three times a year for small grants. Council.
Regular events (Annual WESTIVAL, Bi-monthly litter pick, Remembrance Day Parade, Carols on the Petwyn).	Opportunity for large scale community participation	Annually. Bi-monthly. Council.
Involve young people in projects (e.g. Annual Christmas Card competition, Remembrance Parade)	Helps them feel more engaged in the community	As projects arise. Council.
Councillor surgeries.	Offers a direct line of communication.	Weekly (Saturdays). Councillors. Records of comments received kept for 12months
Publicise complaints procedure	Indicates openness and accountability.	Adoption and review of policy. Clerk and Councillors
Use 'A' Frames to inform residents.	Increases visibility and exposure of the message.	Continuously. Office staff.
Information stalls.	Offers a direct line of communication.	When appropriate (WESTIVAL) Councillors.
Suggestion Boxes.	Regular feedback on services and residents' suggestions.	As required. The public. Office staff
Annual reports	Good Governance and communication with residents.	Committee chair Annually.

7. Online presence –Council’s website and Social Media.

The Council has a dedicated Communications Officer who regularly monitors the website and updates it accordingly, liaising with local Groups and Associations for information that may benefit residents and non-residents.

Emails can be sent to the council office, via the website and messages via WMTC Facebook page.

8. How the Council should be communicating.

- All communication from the Council should be courteous, timely, professional, appropriate and reflects the decisions and policies of the Council.
- All individuals communicating on behalf of the Council should be aware that every piece of communication has an impact on the perception of the Council in the community.
- Staff and Councillors are ambassadors of the Council and must remember this in all communications.

8.1 Town Clerk

The Town Clerk has overall responsibility for overseeing all communications with members of the community and outside bodies.

8.2 Written Communication

The Town Clerk, Assistant to the Town Clerk and all Councillors have official council email addresses which are to be used solely for the purpose of conducting Council business.

Any email sent from these accounts must include a ‘signature’ as part of all communication so that their name, position and contact information is provided.

8.3 Verbal Communication

8.3.1 Office staff

Members of Staff will be required to communicate on a regular basis with the community as part of their duties. It is imperative that staff handle all such communication with courtesy and professionalism at all times.

Any member of staff who is unsure of how to handle difficult, angry or vexatious complaints will be provided with the necessary training to ensure a positive outcome from such situations.

8.3.2 Councillors

Elected members will be regularly approached by members of the community as this is part of their role. How enquiries from the public are dealt with by Councillors will reflect on the Council.

Enquiries may be in person, by telephone, letter or email.

Councillors should investigate any matter raised with them by residents and respond within a timely manner. All manner of issues may be raised, many of

which may not be relevant to the Town Council. Depending on the issue raised it may be appropriate to deal with the matter in the following ways:

- Refer the matter to the Town Clerk who will then deal with it as appropriate
- Request an item on a relevant agenda (using the request form)
- Investigate the matter personally, having sought the guidance of the Town Clerk, if required.
- All communication must be responded to and the correspondent kept apprised of progress.

The procedure for doing so is as follows:

- Having received an enquiry/complaint, the Councillor should acknowledge receipt (in writing) and advise of what action is intended to be taken
- Advise when that action has been taken and what to expect next (ie a response is now awaited from (a third party)
- Report back on the outcome of the enquiry or ensure that either the third party or the Town Clerk will/has report(ed) back on the matter.

Councillors must ensure that any and all communication with the public on Council related matters reflects the decisions and policies of the Council regardless of the Councillor's own views on the subject.

Any and all enquires by the media should be referred immediately to the Town Clerk or Chairman of the Council.

9. Evaluation

It is extremely important that the Council measures the success of this strategy so that it may inform any future plan.

9.1 How will we measure?

- Increased attendance at public meetings and organised events
- Consultation with residents – perception and satisfaction surveys
- Number of Likes and Followers on Facebook.

10. The Commitment to the Community of West Moors

We work to a set of customer service principles (Code of Conduct), which guide everything we do. They include:

- Integrity
- Courtesy and fairness
- Equality of opportunity
- Responsiveness and reliability.
- Clear communication

We aim to achieve overall customer satisfaction by;

- Being welcoming, polite and helpful
- Treating you with respect
- Listen to any complaints you may have.
- Responding to voicemails, emails and written letters within 2 working days.
- Telling you what we can and cannot do, so expectations are clear.
- Respecting your right to confidentiality, privacy and safety.

- If you need extra help to access our services, we will provide this as much as we are able.

11. Strategy review

West Moors Town Council will review this strategy as is necessary and appropriate, and at a minimum every 3 years.