

MEARE PARISH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY – STATEMENT OF INTENT

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Meare Parish Council aims to ensure that through the use of a wide range of approaches to public consultation and community engagement it actively encourages residents to inform its decision-making process and make an input into decisions which affect their day to day lives in the parish.

Meare Parish Council is committed to creating and maintaining effective working relationships with all sectors of the community. The Council recognises that there are different levels of engagement and will endeavour to involve the community in the following ways:

- Inform people about its work and the services it provides
- Consult with and seek out the views of the community
- Encourage community participation in local government
- Collaborate with individuals, community groups and organisations where appropriate, to achieve agreed aims for the benefit of the parish
- Build up effective working relationships within the community and encourage a sense of ownership of assets, infrastructure and new projects.

THE COMMUNITY

Meare Parish Council seeks to engage with all sections of the community regardless of age, ability, gender, ethnicity, faith or sexual orientation i.e. parishioners (particularly hard to reach groups such as the young, disenfranchised, disaffected and the elderly), the local business community, clubs, organisations and societies which are active in the town, its partners such as Somerset County Council, the neighbourhood policing team and all organisations and individuals who attend various committees and groups. The Parish Council is also committed to engaging with any persons who appear to have an interest in matters relating to the economic, social and environmental well-being of its area.

PROVISION OF INFORMATION TO THE COMMUNITY AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Meare Parish Council recognises that members of the community may wish to engage with it at different levels and in a variety of ways, from the occasional email or letter with a suggestion on how a service could be improved, to attendance at meetings etc. The Council will therefore use many ways to actively seek the views of its residents and involve them in its work:

Website: The Parish Council website is a resource which publishes information about the Council, including agendas, minutes and other documents. It is also a source of information about the local community. Enquirers are invited to contact the Parish Council via the website, or email mearepc@aol.com

Direct Access: The Parish Council will display a list of Councillors (contact details together with other important information on all of its website. This medium will also be used to directly advertise other important events e.g. notices relating to the annual audit of accounts; vacancies, elections and forthcoming meetings etc.

Meetings: Notice of all Council meetings is given on the parish notice boards and on the website. Residents are encouraged to attend Council Meetings and time is set aside at all meetings for public participation. Parishioners are also actively encouraged to attend the Annual Parish Meeting, which is advertised as above.

Surveys: Meare Parish Council will undertake surveys and other related forms of information gathering from time to time to ascertain the community's views on particular issues.

Specific Projects: From time to time Meare Parish Council may undertake specific projects for the benefit of the community, tree planting, parish clean up etc.) Working parties may be set up and parishioners are encouraged to participate and involve in these projects.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FORMAL REPRESENTATIONS TO THE COUNCIL

Representations to Meare Parish Council will normally be considered at the next meeting of the council. If, however, they require the provision of information only, then the clerk will provide it directly to the enquirer. The Parish Council has a Code of Practice for handling complaints, which is available from the Clerk, published on the website and reviewed regularly. The publication of agendas on the Parish Council's notice boards and website gives parishioners the opportunity to make representation to the council before agenda items are discussed. All formal representations received are responded to in writing.

INVOLVEMENT IN PARTNERSHIPS

Meare Parish Council is committed to partnership working where it is clear that it will be of benefit to the parish or to fulfil its statutory requirements. For example the Council supports the Warm Spaces initiative and the Street Community Transport initiative.

ROLE OF COUNCIL MEMBERS AND OFFICERS IN CONSULTATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Councillors are powerful advocates for their community and their leadership role enables them to have a major input into the consultation and engagement process.

Meare Parish Councillors are very accessible:

■ Their contact details are published on the notice boards and on the website.

■ They are available to talk to residents during the public sessions prior to the commencement of each Council meeting and at the Annual Parish Meeting.

■ In a private capacity, they belong to many other local clubs, societies and organisations, where they may, if they so wish promote the work of the Parish Council and be available to parishioners.

Officers of the Council will endeavour to answer and address any concerns or queries raised by members of the public. They will also support and guide residents through the appropriate procedures for engaging with the council and councillors.

Adopted – March 2023

Next review – May 2024