



ALFRETON TOWN COUNCIL COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT POLICY

This policy aims to establish a standard for effective communication and engagement with its residents and partners and to identify the different ways in which it can provide and receive information, more importantly to engage with and consult the residents of Alfreton.

It recognises that the services it provides should aim to reflect the needs of its parishioners and the locality and that its residents should be involved in decisions affecting them and their neighbourhood and in shaping the future of the town. This policy sets out the ways in which the Town Council will ensure views are listened to and used to develop, enhance and improve services, the environment and the quality of life for residents.

The Town Council is accountable to members of the public and has a duty to convey its decisions and actions through various media. All communication will be conveyed in an open and straightforward manner.

The Town Clerk is the Proper Officer of the Town Council and is responsible for all formal communication between the Council, the press and members of the public. All Press Releases should be signed off by the Town Council Communication Committee. This process is managed by the Town Clerk.

Style

The Council respects individual's right to express one's ideas and opinions freely through speech, writing, and other forms of communication but without deliberately causing harm to others' character and/or reputation by false or misleading statements.

The Council has a duty to provide a safe working environment for all staff. The Council will not tolerate abusive language in any communication channel. Where foul language or unpleasant comments are made on social media the Council will remove the persons comments from their site so that it does not offend others.

Councillors who wish to communicate directly with the press or social media should make it clear that they are speaking as a private individual and not as a representative of the Council.

The Community

There are a number of different communities in Alfreton.

1. Residents – The built environment where we work and live. Alfreton has a population of 7,971. 3,520 households. (2011 census).
Alfreton is a former coal mining town located in the north east of Amber Valley Borough. The area adjoins the districts of Bolsover and North East Derbyshire and it is approximately 14.4 miles north of Derby and 17 miles north-west of Nottingham. Alfreton is a fairly urban area that also provides an excellent location from which to explore both the Peak District and Derbyshire Dales. At the same time it is close to the big regional cities of Nottingham and Derby. The main transport corridors connecting Alfreton to other parts of the country include the A38 and the A61. Alfreton Railway Station provides services to the north and south of the country. The town has some wonderful examples of 18th century architecture and shares close ties with settlements in Somercotes, Swanwick, and South Wingfield and has cross boundary links with settlements in Bolsover and North East Derbyshire. (AVBC website) The Town Council covers the Town of Alfreton bordered by the A38, the Railway line and Alfreton Brook.
2. Communities of Interest – There are a number of communities of need and interest that cut across geographical areas, including (but not exclusively) people with different faiths, ethnic origin, older people, people with disabilities, young people and vulnerable adults. There are diverse voluntary and community groups that serve the area.
3. Business - Alfreton town is a busy urban centre with a number of national chain stores, along with independents and charity shops, but is dominated by a large branch of Tesco. There are several banks, building societies, estate agents and other services. There is an indoor market, library, post offices, a job centre and numerous pubs and food outlets. There is a health centre, a leisure centre, swimming pool and park at the west end of the town, and a golf course outside the town to the west.
4. Elected members – Fifteen elected members make up Alfreton Town Council they play a key role in community engagement, they engage with local residents using different methods from attendance at events, sitting on steering groups, becoming involved in the community through their interests in youth projects, the community library, sporting clubs and attending the meetings of other groups. They also represent local people in resolving particular concerns or grievances. The area is governed by Amber Valley Borough Council three of their members represent the Alfreton area and one Councillor represent Derbyshire County Council.

We recognise the diversity in the community and want to make sure that everyone in Alfreton has the opportunity to have their voice heard and get involved in shaping the future.

Procedure

The Town Council's requests that any press or other social media request for an oral or written comment or statement from the Council, its Councillors or staff, shall be handled in accordance with this policy.

Councillors who wish to communicate directly with the press should make it clear that they are speaking as a private individual and not as a representative of the Council.

The following procedure sets out how the Council's decisions and actions will be disseminated to interested parties.

1. Using themes approved by the Town Council, the Mayor will be responsible for presenting the Town Council's Annual Report at the Annual General Meeting of the Council.
2. Once a formal written draft has been approved by Full Council, the Annual Report will be published.
3. The Town Clerk is solely responsible for the preparation of notices of Council meetings, agendas and minutes.
4. The Assistant Town Clerk is responsible for the overall development and maintenance of the Council's website and social media so that it remains current.
5. All correspondence addressed to the Town Council will be actioned by the Town Clerk.
6. Information that needs to be considered by the Town Council, or one of its committees, will be placed on the first agenda after its receipt.
7. Agendas for Council meetings will be accompanied with sufficient written reports and information to enable Members to make an informed decision. Agendas will be issued via email to those Councillors who wish to have the information forwarded this way or alternatively, as hard copies, and will be posted to Members at least 3 clear days before all meetings of the Council.
8. Agendas and minutes for all meetings of the Council will be published on the Council's website. Agendas and minutes for Full Council will also be made available at Alfreton Library.
9. Other relevant information will be emailed or posted to Lead Members in-between meetings.
10. Council information will be made available to members of the public in accordance with the Council's 'Publication Scheme'.

Requests for Information

Information held by the Council shall be handled in accordance with the Council's policy in respect of handling requests under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Data Protection Act 1998. Correspondence from, and notices served by, the Information Commissioner shall be referred by the Proper Officer to the Council. The Council shall have the power to do anything to facilitate compliance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Working for the Community

The Council will not disclose confidential information that is exempt under the Freedom of Information Act. The agenda and its supporting papers, and the minutes from a meeting where confidential or sensitive information is discussed, shall not be disclosed.

Looking forward what will we do?

The aim of the community engagement strategy is to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of engagement activity to enable communities to influence decision making and empower them to take action to tackle issues that affect them. In turn, this supports Alfreton Town Council to make better decisions and get policy and services right the first time, meeting the needs of individuals and communities.

The objectives below identify how the Council are going to ensure that the engagement activity is flexible, targeted and appropriate for the diverse needs of the community.

Our objectives

We will:

- Ensure all people have an equal opportunity to have their voices heard by increasing the accessibility of consultation and engagement activity
 - Improve communications between, and increase collaboration by, partners on engagement activity to make best use of limited resources.
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Our Community Engagement Principles

While the methods we use to engage with the community may vary according to circumstances and needs the following engagement principles underpin all community engagement activities.

- Clear purpose – The purpose of any engagement activity will be clearly outlined to the local community from the start.
 - Inclusion and access – We will ensure all relevant parties are included, explaining who we are trying to engage with and why. We will identify and tackle barriers to engagement and seek alternative methods to engage a wider range of people or groups.
 - Valuing all views – We will regularly ask for residents' views, as well as those of local businesses and voluntary, community and faith groups. Those views will be respected and valued and will form part of the planning of our services and future work.
 - Feedback – We will ensure feedback is given after any engagement activity and this will include the findings and the outcome of how it has helped to shape decision making.
 - Use of appropriate tools – We will use the most appropriate methods to engage with local communities, recognising that 'one size does not fit all' and that many different approaches are often needed to ensure we can engage with our diverse communities.
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Action Plan

An action plan and related budget responding to community engagement setting out a timetable for action and review:

Activity	Method of Communication	Responsibility	When	Budget £	Review (A/Q/M)*
Approved Minutes	Website Notice Boards Social Media	Town Clerk	Monthly (except August or when no meeting held)	None required	M
Agendas	Website Notice Boards Social Media	Town Clerk	Monthly (except August or when no meeting held)	None required	M
Annual Report	Website	Town Clerk (following approval from Communications Committee)	Annually at the Parish Meeting	None required	A
Consultation (Planning, public participation)	Website Notice Boards Social Media Newsletter [#] Posters	Town Clerk or Assistant Town Clerk	Monthly with Agendas Share details from other Councils as appropriate	None required	M
Press Release	Website Local Media Social Media Newsletter [#]	Town Clerk (following approval from Communications Committee or member nominated at the relevant Council Meeting)	Monthly as agreed at Full Council	None required	M
Annual External Audit	Website Noticeboards	Town Clerk	Annually	None required	A
Annual Accounts	Website Noticeboard	Town Clerk (following approval from Full Council)	Annually	None required	A
Councillor Vacancies	Website Noticeboards Social Media Newsletter [#]	Town Clerk	When required	None required	M
Financial statements and other financial	Website	Town Clerk	Annually as part of Report and Monthly details	None required	M

information			(Transparency)		
Weekly Blogs	Website # Social Media	Town Clerk (following approval from Communications Committee)	Weekly topics as agreed at Full Council	None required	M
Catch-up Newsletter	Website Social Media Post to DE55 Distribute to: Library Tearooms Doctors/Dentist Wetherspoons Co-op	Town Clerk	At least twice yearly (May and November)	#Website/Newsletter £3000	Q
Involvement in decisions	Website Notice Boards Social Media Newsletter#	Town Clerk or Assistant Town Clerk	Monthly with Agendas	None required	M
Developing Communities	Members on: ACTS Alfreton Community Forum Alfreton Business Club Alfreton Heritage Amber Valley Access Pub Watch Derbyshire Unemployed Workers Alfreton Community Hall Pentrich Revolution Police Forum	Nominated Member	When meeting held	None required	A

- * A = Annually at Annual Meeting
Q = Quarterly starting at the Annual Meeting
M = Monthly at Full Council Meeting

Newsletter – see Catch-up Newsletter for budget details