

# SOUTHWATER PARISH COUNCIL

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## COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT POLICY



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*“Community Empowerment is the giving of confidence, skills, and power to communities to shape and influence what public bodies do for or with them”.*

## 1. Empowering People

- 1.1. The Parish Council wants to build and support strong, active and inclusive communities in Southwater, to encourage people to take an active part in making decisions, delivering and influencing services across the Parish.

## 2. What is Empowerment?

- 2.1 The aim is to build empowered communities so the Council can: -

- Improve services to local people.
- Increase opportunities for volunteering.
- Give confidence and skills to individuals.
- Help to build more cohesive communities.

## 3. How will the Parish Council empower communities?

- 3.1 In putting this strategy into practice, the Parish Council of Southwater and its partners should agree to follow ‘Empowerment standards’. The Council will :

- Work in partnership and co-ordinate the Council’s efforts.
- Be inclusive and open up access to services.
- Be clear what the Council is asking and why.
- Act with respect and honesty.
- Communicate what the Council is doing.

- 3.2 The Parish Council has set a list of objectives and a detailed action plan/corporate plan, which outlines how it will set about achieving the objectives. The Corporate/Action Plan includes the development of a detailed performance management framework for empowerment. The targets will be monitored and reported back to the community.

## 4. What are the Parish Council’s priorities?

- 4.1 Its initial priorities to empower communities are :

- Developing expertise to ensure that everyone can be involved in community empowerment, including people and groups that are often missed out.
- Improving awareness of volunteering opportunities within the Parish, supporting volunteers to find appropriate roles, and within organizations to help them support and develop their volunteers.

- Rolling out enhanced, more accessible and inclusive community structures.
- 4.2 There are five stages of empowerment: from limited involvement to full involvement. Southwater has adopted the ladder format shown below to demonstrate these stages.
- 4.3 High involvement is not necessarily better than low. Each stage is important and has its place in the empowerment process.

	5. Individuals and groups making decisions and delivering services	
	4. Sharing power and resources, and joint decision-making and/or delivery.	
	3. Community building and involvement (deciding together)	
	2. Consultation (opinion sought)	
	1. Information sharing	

## 5. The Parish Council’s Empowerment Policy

5.1 The Parish Council has signed up to the following Empowerment Policy, and it is vital that all empowerment work meets these standards.

5.2 In conducting future empowerment activities the Council will :

### 5.21 Work in partnership and co-ordinate its efforts

- Co-ordinate community empowerment activities with partners, to avoid duplication and ‘consultation fatigue’, caused by too much consultation and too little action and feedback.
- Provide leadership from the top, to ensure that citizens’ voices influence services and plans.

## **5.22 Be inclusive and open up access to services**

- Ensure that the Council takes into account particular needs and overcomes any difficulties people may have to enable them to participate.
- Involve communities that are usually excluded.
- Ensure that there is equal access to services, and that services meet the needs of all communities.
- Ensure adherence to health and safety regulations.

## **5.23 Act with respect and honesty**

- Ensure that participants are aware of the purpose of research and that those undertaking research know and adhere to the relevant legislation.
- Ensure that community empowerment activities are voluntary, and that participants can withdraw at any time.
- Ensure that information obtained from community empowerment activities is honestly interpreted.
- Ensure that the rights and dignity of all participants are respected at all times.
- Give careful consideration to activities, information and questions to ensure that they do not offend, cause distress or embarrassment.

## **5.24 Communicate what the Council is doing**

- Ensure that those most directly affected by plans and decisions are aware of opportunities to get involved and/or have their say.
- Engage with key stakeholders and/or representative groups in advance of specific community empowerment activities – to provide advance warning and to seek views on the most effective means of publicising parish events, grants, etc.
- Ensure the Council feeds back the results and its effects to communities as soon as it can, through a variety of channels.

## **5.25 Including People – More Information**

- 5.25.1 This guide includes additional information about including people in empowerment activities. Remember that within all communities, there will be diversity!
- 5.25.2 Everything you produce must be in clear, plain language. If you are writing anything such as letters, posters, leaflets or materials for use at events, get someone not involved to read them first.

5.25.3 Make sure anything you produce is accessible to people with visual impairments, and where appropriate people whose first language is not English.

5.25.4 Make sure everyone has an equal opportunity to take part. This means thinking about the needs of a whole range of groups, including :

- black and minority ethnic people;
- refugees and asylum-seekers;
- travellers;
- members of faith communities;
- disabled people;
- people who are deaf or hard of hearing;
- people who have reading and writing difficulties;
- unemployed people;
- people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender;
- older people;
- people in poor health, who may be house-bound or unable to travel far;
- carers;
- children and young people.

## **5.26 Including People – More Information**

5.26.1 The Parish Council will encourage participation both at its meetings and those of its partner organizations by:

- being clear about what the consultation or other empowerment activity is for and how it will be used;
- using accessible buildings for meetings and events;
- having meetings at places people already know, use and feel safe in;
- timing events such as exhibitions/consultations/public meetings, so people can get to them. Perhaps repeating them at different times of day and including evening or weekend events;
- considering whether meetings should include a mix of ages, genders, etc., or whether it will be more appropriate to hold separate meetings;
- including your activity onto the agendas of existing meetings, rather than setting up new meetings;
- using plain English, without unnecessary jargon or acronyms;
- making sure information and surveys are available in large print;
- interviewing people who might have difficulty reading and writing;
- including reply-paid envelopes for postal surveys where appropriate;
- encouraging the use of the community website as a tool for communication;
- recognizing differences, but building on shared values and a common future;
- providing good feedback as quickly as possible after your consultation or activity.

5.26.2 The Parish Executive Officer holds a list of all meeting dates for the Parish Council. The Executive Officer may be contacted during office hours on 01403 733202.

## **5.27 Gender**

5.27.1 Unless your issue only affects men, or only women, the Parish Council will aim to involve equal numbers of people both at its meetings and at those of its partners.

5.27.2 Other things you should consider are:

- try to have a gender balance in the team that manages the organization, facilitation and promotion of an event;
- alternate the chairing of meetings between male and female participants if appropriate for outside community organizations working in partnership with the Council. The Parish Chairman is elected annually and therefore there can be no alternate chairing of Parish Council meetings;
- if one gender is dominating a meeting, actively encourage people from the other to get involved;
- try to get a good balance of men and women attending – you may have to think about extra encouragement for the gender less likely to turn up;
- some women may feel they cannot express their views in mixed groups, so provide women-only group activities if appropriate;
- think about safety and security when deciding when and where you hold events;
- aim for responses to surveys to be 50% male and 50% female;
- check for differences in consultation responses between men and women.

## **5.28 Young People**

5.28.1 Young people are often very keen to be involved in consultations and making decisions about services that affect them, and involving them in this way at a young age can help encourage them to grow into adults who take an active part in their communities. Southwater currently has a high population of young people 38.9%, compared to that of the District and National averages.

5.28.2 It is important to make sure that young people's involvement is meaningful, and therefore, you may need to think about:

- planning to involve young people from the start of the process, not as an afterthought;
- allowing young people themselves to influence how they can get involved;
- finding out about the young people in the community you want to target. For example, how many of them are there? What services do they use? Where do they meet up?
- not expecting young people to fit into adult structures such as formal meetings, but considering how to suit their needs, abilities, interests, and availability;

- sharing all the information in an easily understood way, so they can have informed opinions and decisions;
- treating the young people as equals;
- making the consultation or event relevant to the young people, and helping them understand how they will benefit from getting involved;
- provide a vehicle for their views to be heard;
- what you wear when working with young people – wearing a suit or a uniform may make it harder for them to feel comfortable talking to you.

5.28.3 You must get consent from any young people you want to be actively involved in your consultation or event. Under-18s with enough understanding to make up their own minds may be able to do this themselves but it is good practice to get parental/carer and/or school consent for all young people under 18. This is particularly important if they are :

- meeting with workers they do not know;
- going to meet regularly;
- travelling some distance from home;
- staying away from home.

5.28.4 Remember – you will need to obtain an emergency contact name and contact details for each young person taking part.

5.28.5 For more advice, speak to the Parish Council’s Executive Officer on 01403 733202 or [enquiry@southwater-pc.gov.uk](mailto:enquiry@southwater-pc.gov.uk)

## **5.29 Older People**

5.29.1 Older people are frequently very heavily involved in their local community, and keen to make their views known on issues that affect them.

5.29.2 Make sure that when involving older people, you do not make incorrect assumptions about them, such as their level of expertise or experience, or their access to the internet.

5.29.3 When you are planning to involve older people, you should think about :

- asking older people how they would like to be involved;
- contacting older people’s networks for information about where older people go and what appeals to them;
- asking colleagues who have worked with older people for their examples of good practice;
- trying to avoid holding meetings after dark;
- using accessible venues;



- making sure that older people feel their contribution is valued and will be included along with all other people involved;
- working in smaller groups, as it may be difficult for some older people to hear a speaker at the front of a large room;
- using plain language and large print in any documents produced.

5.29.4 Consider contacting the Horsham District Council Older People’s Council, who may also be able to facilitate discussion.

### **5.30 Disable People**

5.30.1 Involving disabled people both formally and informally at an early stage means that potential barriers can be identified and removed before they arise. It also means that policy and services are more effective, more inclusive and better targeted and that public money is not wasted.

5.30.2 Most of us have impairments at some point, either temporarily or permanently. These could be physical, mental or learning-related. People are disabled by barriers that are created because their impairments have not been taken into account. For example, do not assume everyone can :

- climb stairs;
- see;
- read and understand written materials;
- have stable moods or perceptions.

5.30.3 To avoid disabling people, you should :

- be flexible and sensitive in your procedures;
- avoid prejudice and stereotyping;
- choose buildings that are accessible;
- make sure people can get there, and are able to park if necessary;
- make sure your information is easy to understand and available in a range of different accessible formats.

5.30.4 If planning an event, the Parish Council and their Partner organizations will aim to :

- have disability awareness training for those assisting with events;
- identify local organizations that might be able to provide support;
- ensure you consider disability and accessibility issues;
- identify accessible venues, possibly asking disabled people or local specialist organizations to recommend appropriate venues;

- a loop system is available in one of the Council managed facilities. These may need to be booked a month in advance;
- tell people what support will be available, and give them the opportunity to request any additional support they need.

5.30.5 Consider contacting organizations such as the District Accessibility Group/Access Officer 01403 215100.

### **5.31 Black and Minority Groups**

5.31.1 Southwater is an ethnically low Parish, with % of the population from black and minority ethnic groups. There are established groups, such as Bangladeshi, Chinese, Indian, as well as new arrivals, such as Polish, Slovaks and Russian, etc. Every attempt will be made to ensure people from these communities can engage fully in your consultation, consideration therefore should be given to issues such as language, culture and social customs, although cost implications may at times prevent this.

### **5.32 Faith Communities**

5.32.1 There is a diverse group of religious traditions in Southwater. The largest religious groups are Christians, but there are also a large number of Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, Buddhists and Jews, and a multitude of smaller groups.

5.32.2 Before you consult with faith communities :

- research what faith groups there are in the area;
- understand their different needs;
- find out what people believe and value;
- respect people's convictions about food, dress, social etiquette and belief systems, though not at the expense of good professional judgements;
- get a faith calendar to help you plan events that avoid religious festivals;
- think about which day of the week you are holding your event on – for example, Jewish people are unlikely to attend an event on a Saturday.

### **5.33 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender, Queer, Intersex and Asexual (LGBTQIA) People**

- 5.33.1 If the Parish Council and its Partner Organizations are planning to engage with people from LGBT communities, they will consider the equal access issues already mentioned, such as childcare, transport and interpretation or translation. Consider using existing LGBT groups to help you make contact, as some people may be suspicious or reluctant if you do not approach them through an organization they trust.
- 5.33.2 Remember, there is no such thing as a single LGBT community, and you need to have sensitivity to the differences between lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people. You may need to consider some LGBT awareness training before planning your event or consultation.

Remember:

- do not assume everyone in your group is heterosexual;
- discuss with participants how you can consult with them;
- accept that you may have to work to gain participant' trust, especially if their past experience of public organizations has been negative;
- guarantee confidentiality from the start;
- use LGBT-friendly environments when you consult;
- use LGBT researchers, or heterosexual researchers who are LGBT-aware;
- agree in the group that homophobia will not be tolerated;
- hold meetings in safe places at safe times – remember LGBT people (especially young people) do not necessarily feel safe in the same places as straight people.

*(Based on Nottingham City Council's Empowerment Toolkit)*