

SOUTHWATER PARISH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT POLICY



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INDEX

Contents

1. Empowering People	2
2. What is Empowerment?	2
3. How will the Parish Council empower communities?	2
4. What are the Parish Council's priorities?	2
5. The Parish Council's Empowerment Policy	3
6. Inclusivity in Community Empowerment	4
7. Monitoring and Review	4

“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 shaping and influencing the decisions and services across the Parish.
- 1.2. Effective communication is fundamental to community empowerment. This policy should be read alongside the Council’s Communication Strategy, which outlines how the Council engages with residents, businesses, and community groups

2. What is Empowerment?

- 2.1. The aim is to build empowered communities to the Council can:
 - Improve services to local people.
 - Increase opportunities for volunteering.
 - Give confidence and skills to individuals.
 - Help to build more cohesive communities.
- 2.2. The Council recognises that effective empowerment is dependent on strong communication. The Communication Strategy 2025 provides clear mechanisms for ensuring that residents and stakeholders are aware of empowerment opportunities.

3. How will the Parish Council empower communities?

- 3.1 The Council will follow ‘Empowerment standards’ to ensure:
 - Partnership working and coordination of efforts.
 - Inclusivity and access to services.
 - Clear and honest communication.
 - Regular engagement with residents.
- 3.2 The Council has set a list of objectives and a detailed action plan/business plan, which outlines how it will set about achieving the objectives.

4. What are the Parish Council’s priorities?

- 4.1 The Council’s priorities to empower communities include:

- Developing expertise to ensure everyone can participate, including underrepresented groups.
 - Raising awareness of volunteering opportunities within the Parish.
 - Expanding inclusive community engagement structures.
- 4.2 The Council will ensure that these priorities are effectively communicated through the channels identified in the Council’s Communication Strategy, including Councillor Surgeries, public meetings, digital platforms, and printed materials

5. The Parish Council’s Empowerment Policy

5.1 The Council is committed to meeting the highest standards of empowerment and will:

5.21 Work in Partnership and Co-ordinate its Efforts

- Align empowerment activities with the Communication Strategy to ensure outreach is coordinated and effective.
- Provide leadership from the top, to ensure that residents’ voices influence services and plans.

5.22 Promote Inclusivity and Access to Services

- Engage with communities that are traditionally underrepresented.
- Provide multiple avenues for participation, ensuring accessibility through digital and non-digital means
- Ensure adherence to health and safety regulations.
- Use various communication channels, including the Council’s website, social media, newsletters, noticeboards, and Councillor Surgeries, to provide accessible information about empowerment initiatives

5.23 Act Respectfully Providing Clear and Honest Communication

- Ensure that participants are aware of the purpose of consultations and that those undertaking consultations know and adhere to the relevant legislation.
- Ensure that participation is voluntary, and that individuals 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 Regularly Engage with Residents

- Ensure that those most directly affected by plans and decisions are aware of opportunities to get involved and/or have their say.
- Use the Communication Strategy to guide the dissemination of information, ensuring a mix of digital and traditional media is used to reach different community groups.
- Regularly update residents on the outcomes of community engagement activities via Council meetings, social media, newsletters, and public noticeboards

6. Inclusivity in Community Empowerment

6.1 The Council acknowledges that different groups within the community may face unique barriers to participation. The Council will:

- Provide information in accessible formats, including large print and translations where necessary.
- Engage with young people through social media, schools, and youth organisations.
- Ensure that older people have accessible venues and clear communication tailored to their needs.
- Facilitate inclusive meetings and events that accommodate individuals with disabilities.
- Collaborate with community networks to support ethnic minorities, faith groups, and LGBTQ+ individuals.

6.2 The Council will ensure that its empowerment initiatives are inclusive by:

- Using accessible buildings for meetings and events (where possible).
- Providing online and offline engagement opportunities.
- Consulting with underrepresented groups to understand their preferred engagement methods.
- Actively seeking feedback to improve inclusivity in community empowerment activities.

7. Monitoring and Review

7.1 The Council will monitor the effectiveness of its empowerment initiatives by:

- Reviewing participation levels in engagement activities.
- Reviewing feedback and consultation responses.
- Assessing community satisfaction with engagement opportunities.

- Ensuring alignment with the Communication Strategy.

7.2 The policy will be reviewed every three years, or sooner if required, to ensure it remains relevant and effective in achieving community empowerment.