

Local First

Swale Borough Council's

Statement of Intent

for supporting Town and Parish Councils

**Post-consultation –
February 2015**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Swale Borough Council (SBC) is committed to continuing to support Town and Parish Councils (T/PCs).
- 1.2 This **Statement of Intent (SOI)** has been developed to provide clear guidance for the level of support T/PCs can expect from SBC. It provides a framework within which SBC and T/PCs can work together in partnership and cooperation.
- 1.3 This statement draws on the principles of **OPEN First** – SBC’s charter for engagement (<http://www.swale.gov.uk/open-first/>), which sets out the approach officers should take when liaising with T/PCs.
- 1.4 SBC will also work with other agencies, such as Action for Communities in Rural Kent and Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC), to improve collaboration.
- 1.5 SBC understands that its limited resources mean that it cannot do everything at once. Should demand from T/PCs be high at a point in time, then it may be necessary to prioritise work to ensure those resources are not spread too thinly, helping to ensure that the highest standard of service can be maintained.
- 1.6 It is recognised that this Statement of Intent is about the level of support T/PCs can expect from SBC. We remain open to any suggestions, collectively from the T/PCs or from Swale KALC, about how this document can be developed in the future to reflect what support T/PCs can provide to SBC.

2. THROUGH ITS STATEMENT OF INTENT, SWALE BOROUGH COUNCIL WILL:

2.1 Consultation and engagement (discretionary)

- Invite T/PCs to place items for discussion and to attend the Rural Forum and Local Engagement Forums, each held quarterly in Faversham, Sheppey, Sittingbourne, and the rural hinterland.
- The relevant SBC officers and Cabinet Members will endeavour to attend KALC Swale Area meetings when invited to do so by KALC.
- Ensure T/PCs are informed of any consultations relevant to them and their residents, are invited to have their say, and that their views will be given due weight and consideration.

- In particular, consult T/PCs when commissioning new services where it affects their local areas.
- Ensure SBC feeds back on the outcomes of all relevant consultations.

2.2 Bespoke additional services (discretionary)

- Provide bespoke additional services when requested to do so e.g. undertake ground maintenance via our contractor, print T/PC newsletters, to share artwork (eg. dog fouling and fly tipping designs for posters etc) and provide financial, legal and HR advice, at a charge which does not seek to make a profit for the Council.

2.3 Democracy and community leadership (mainly discretionary)

- Support its ward members so that they may be effective community leaders working in partnership with T/PCs in their areas to tackle issues that are important to the local community.
- Send its agendas, committee reports etc to T/PCs via email and also publish these online.
- Maintain T/PC Clerks' contact details on its website.
- Manage T/PCs elections and Neighbourhood Plan referendums according to its statutory responsibilities (statutory).

2.4 Finance and funding (mainly discretionary)

- Provide information about external funding opportunities through the Rural Bulletin.
- Provide support through the Local Loan Fund on receipt of a valid application form.
- Collect precepts on behalf of T/PCs (statutory).
- Consult with T/PCs about any changes to its budget that impact on them.

2.5 Advice, support and guidance (discretionary)

- Use best endeavours to respond to specific questions, queries or issues raised by T/PCs where the answer is not available elsewhere.
- Support T/PCs to develop channel shift, encouraging new technologies to offer a choice for residents and local communities as to how they interact with local government whether that is online, face-to-face or by telephone.

- Where appropriate, provide signposting to other agencies, such as Kent County Council or KALC, for assistance, for example, business planning guidance, legal advice, health and safety advice, and governance advice.

2.6 Learning, development and training (discretionary)

- Work with partners such as Swale Community and Voluntary Services, Visit Kent and Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce to support, for example, the delivery of capacity-building training, business support, and trustee development.
- Offer places to T/PC members and clerks on its own Member Training and Development courses as appropriate, eg. planning.
- Work with KALC to identify further training needs, and consider the best way to meet those needs.

2.7 Planning

- Ensure T/PCs are fully involved in the development of Swale's Local Plan and associated policy documents (statutory).
- Ensure T/PCs have sight of planning applications relevant to their areas, and ensure they receive the statutory 21 days response period (statutory).
- Encourage developers to involve T/PCs in their plans (discretionary).
- Ensure a named SBC officer is provided so T/PCs can raise queries – eg. on planning casework (discretionary).
- Parish and town council consultation responses to planning applications, including how any Section 106 monies might be spent, will be included in the officers report to the Planning Committee (discretionary).

2.8 Neighbourhood Planning (the decision to pursue a Neighbourhood Plan is discretionary, but if pursued many obligations on SBC are statutory)

- Recommend Town or Parish Councils discuss the opportunity for undertaking neighbourhood planning with SBC's Planning Service before proceeding with any designation or plan. SBC Officers are in a position to advise on the most appropriate course of action to deliver the objectives of the T/PC.
- Support T/PCs by providing:
 - start-up advice and guidance on the process of preparing a Neighbourhood Development Plan or Order;
 - sign- posting of data and evidence on our web site;

- sign-posting to available guidance, including bespoke geographic analysis of key data where available; and
- sign-posting to relevant Department for Communities and Local Government, Local Government Association and National Association of Local Councils resources;
- SBC would also have statutory responsibility to:
 - publicise and designate neighbourhood areas and neighbourhood planning forums;
 - produce a map of all the neighbourhood areas;
 - publicise the plan / order and invite representations to send to the examiner;
 - appoint the examiner and pay their costs, and make arrangements for the examination;
 - assess whether the plan / order meets basic conditions so it can proceed to a referendum; and
 - organise the referendum and pay any costs involved.

SBC's web site includes a link (<http://archive.swale.gov.uk/assets/Planning-General/Planning-Policy/Faversham-Creek/FINAL-Community-Led-Planning-Guidance-March-2014-3.pdf>) to a Kent-wide Community-led Plans Guidance Note which provides general advice, and includes a flow chart showing the process involved.

2.9 Community Rights (statutory)

- Support the statutory rights in the Localism Act 2012.
- Ensure the list of Assets of Community Value is available on the Council's website.
- Ensure that the 'My Community Rights' website is signposted clearly on the Council's website (<http://www.swale.gov.uk/localism/>) to offer guidance.

2.10 Community Asset Transfer (discretionary)

- Support T/PCs in the transfer of appropriate assets, in accordance with the Council's Asset Transfer Policy (<http://www.swale.gov.uk/community-asset-transfer-policy/>).