**Representing Your Community**

Communities want to see how their views are being reflected in the decisions made on their behalf by Community Councils. This can be achieved in a number of ways:

• Minutes of Community Council meetings – minutes should accurately reflect the business at a meeting and the decision that was reached. This decision should be made on the basis of known community opinion (evidenced where possible) to clearly show to both the local community and other outside bodies, such as the local authority, that the community have been listened to and their view(s) accurately reflected.

• Community Council meetings – this is the clearest way for Community Councils to share the known views of the community and to demonstrate to those in attendance that they are being listened to. The Annual General Meeting (AGM) is a great opportunity to promote the work that the Community Council has done over the preceding year.

• Public (subject specific) meetings – where these reflect areas of local concern it demonstrates to the community that they are being listened to and consulted, that their concerns are being acknowledged and that action is being taken where appropriate on their behalf

• Attendance at public sector agency meetings – such attendances should be reflected in the minutes to identify where community councillors have attended on behalf of their community. Issues or opinions expressed by the community councillor should be reported back to the community through the minutes.

• Newsletters and public notices – useful to engage and share information but also to gather local views and identify how local views have shaped the views or work of the Community Council.

• Website and social media – these are increasingly important channels to ensure that you are reaching a wide cross-section of your community. As well as sharing information, they can also be a useful resource for gathering opinions from local people.

• Membership – encourage membership from across the geographical Community Council area reflecting the make-up of the community it represents. The Community Council should strive to be diverse and inclusive in its membership and leadership to ensure that all members of the community are represented.

• Communication channels – a Community Council should communicate regularly with community members to keep them informed about their activities, upcoming events, and issues affecting the community, as well as establishing communication channels with key public and third sector organisations in the area. Examples of communication media include notice boards, posters in local shops, suggestion boxes and online via email, newsletters, social media, forums and virtual notice boards.

• Consultation – it is important for Community Councils to represent local views through various mechanisms including consultation where possible.

• All information produced should be available as widely as possible and easily accessible. It is also important that the Community Council seeks out the most effective ways to engage with the residents so that members of the public can inform the Community Council of issues which they would like to see discussed and make their views known.

When establishing views, community councillors should canvass local opinion but be careful not to be perceived as orchestrating campaigns unless endorsed by the community. Community Councils should be aware that it is often only a vocal minority who make representations but that their responsibility is to represent the views of the whole community.