



TROWBRIDGE



SLCC 1001

Community Governance

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Front page Images:

(British Listed Buildings, 1976)

(FamilyPedia, 2011)

(Trowbridge Town Hall, 2016)

(Williams, 2007)

(Great West Way, 2021)

(St James's Church, 2021)

Trowbridge is Well Equipped for Community Governance

“Community governance may be defined as community-level management and decision-making that is undertaken by, with or on behalf of a community, rather than by a group of community stakeholders.” (Totikidis, et al., 2005). This essay seeks to investigate how my local community of Trowbridge¹ operates community governance to achieve beneficial outcomes for the community. It does so by closely examining community leadership, democratic accountability, community decision making, partnership, and community engagement. Moreover, it focuses on power and influence and seeks to identify where Trowbridge Town Council (TTC) has real control or minimal influence.

Community Leadership can be defined as “the courage, creativity and capacity to inspire participation, development and sustainability for strong communities”. (Nossal, 1880). (Eaton, 2017) identified several characteristics of effective community leadership² which TTC demonstrates. Firstly, by employing people with the right skill set to work and represent the council, including a qualified Town Clerk³, Responsible Finance Officer (RFO)⁴ and HR Manager⁵, thereby identifying strengths and interests of individuals to

¹ *Trowbridge is the county town of Wiltshire and is recognized as a well-established market town with historical, cultural, and religious architecture,*

² *These characteristics include maximizing strengths, working as a team, mobilizing others, pitching in and being accountable*

³ *To be a qualified Town Clerk means to have achieved the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA): a foundation qualification which tests whether you have a broad knowledge of all the aspects of a clerk's work – roles and responsibilities, the law, procedures, finance planning and community involvement.*

⁴ *To act at TTC's Responsible Finance Office (RFO) according to the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003 s2(2)(a) as: “the person who, by virtue of section 151 the Local Government Act 1972, is responsible for the administration of financial affairs”.*

⁵ *A HR Manager will lead and direct all functions of Human Resources (HR) including hiring and interviewing staff, administering pay, benefits and leave and enforcing company policies and practices.*

maximize financial controls⁶, services and skills. Secondly, the council's sports department, Active Trowbridge (AT), train and develop sports coaches to deliver sport, health and wellbeing to our community, thereby “inspiring participation, development and sustainability” (Nossal, 1880). A great example is walking netball.⁷ Community groups, such as [Friends of Biss Meadows](#) and [Friends of Down Cemetery](#) receive grants⁸ from TTC encouraging sustainability.⁹ Education and performance within schools is also of vital importance to the future of any community, and Trowbridge has several primary and secondary schools, which have favourable Ofsted¹⁰ ratings. [The Bath and Wiltshire Parent, 2019](#) reported, “An academy community in Trowbridge is celebrating after school inspectors, Ofsted, praised its leadership and management, which is having a positive effect on the quality of teaching.”

Community leadership can also be beneficial especially for grassroots innovations such as community energy projects (Seyfang & Smith, 2007). Trowbridge declared a climate emergency in September 2019 and proposed to develop a carbon neutral town by 2030, to mitigate the impacts of climate change and improve ecology and town environment¹¹ (Trowbridge Town Council, 2018). Considering this evidence, it could be argued that TTC is a leader and frontrunner in the community. Furthermore, this evidence suggests TTC focuses

⁶ *Local Government Act 1972 s151: a council is required to appoint an officer who is responsible for the administration of its financial affairs.*

⁷ *Walking netball was developed for elderly residents to keep fit and interact with others in the community.*

⁸ *Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, s.19(3) gives a council power to grant money to voluntary organisations.*

⁹ *The grants are used to assist with the preservation and conservation of the landscape, monuments, and buildings,*

¹⁰ *The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills is a non-ministerial department of the UK government, reporting to Parliament. Ofsted is responsible for inspecting a range of educational institutions, including state schools and some independent schools.*

¹¹ *Through the installation of solar, proposed EV charging stations, bee-friendly landscapes, and water re-fill stations*

on influence¹² rather than power¹³ in community leadership by encouraging desired outcomes; improved wellbeing of residents through sports and developing mind-sets of global warming through their declaration of emergency.

Accountability is essential for a community and vital for community governance. “Accountability is the glue that ties commitment to the result.” (Proctor, 2017) The concept of democratic accountability is about the right and responsibility of citizens to access information, get explanations, check and pass judgement on the conduct of those with public responsibilities. (Governance SDC Network, 2016). TTC actively promotes and encourages democratic accountability. “It’s never been easier to get involved” is a strapline on the TTC website (Trowbridge Town Council, 2018). Meetings are listed on the website, agendas and reports are added before the meeting and residents are provided direct email contact if they want further explanations. Since the coronavirus pandemic, where councils were able to conduct meetings remotely¹⁴, greater access has been given to residents to attend. Despite all meetings reverting to ‘in person’, at a specified location from 7th May 2021, TTC have continued to also stream meetings online, enabling a greater number of residents to observe.

Nevertheless, TTC have received a record number of FOI¹⁵ requests. The demolition of the toilets in 2019 caused negative debate among the community following a resolution¹⁶ by the council. Criticism suggests that not enough consideration was given to

¹² *The capacity to influence the character, development, or behaviour of someone or something, or the effect itself.* (Hoverstad, 2019)

¹³ *“The authority to change the behaviour of others and make them do things that they might not do otherwise.* (Get Smarter, 2017)

¹⁴ *Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 (“the Flexibility Regulations”) On 4th April 2020 Local authorities in England were given new powers to hold public meetings virtually by using video or telephone conferencing technology. The government temporarily removed the legal requirement for local authorities to hold public meetings in person during the coronavirus pandemic, to enable councils to make effective and transparent decisions on the delivery of services for residents and ensure that local democracy continues to thrive.*

¹⁵ *The Freedom of Information Act 2000 provides public access to information held by public authorities.*

¹⁶ *A resolution is a formal decision taken at a meeting by means of a vote.* (Collins Dictionary, 2017)

refurbishing them and the community could have been better consulted. (Pantall, 2019). TTC exercised characteristics of community governance, such as accountability¹⁷ but it demonstrates that in order to really equip the community, several elements of community governance need to work together. TTC could improve its accountability¹⁸ to ensure greater detail is provided for all projects ahead of time, ensuring citizens are informed, get explanations, check and pass judgement.

Building on from the idea of democratic accountability, this section illustrates that community decision making is an essential tool in community governance. The previous example demonstrates that TTC has the power¹⁹ to make decisions; it has the power to buy or sell land²⁰ and, as in this previous example, it had the power to demolish the toilets. Furthermore, as TTC has the General Power of Competence (GPC)²¹, it has even greater power to make decisions. However, one must look at how power and influence impact on decisions. Power can be defined as the ability to influence decisions and control resources (They Differ, 2015), whilst influence can be described as the ability to alter other people's perception of any situation (They Differ, 2015). Had TTC used its position of influence, rather than power, by explaining the reasons behind certain decisions, then the community may have understood and responded more positively, or even better, put forward alternative suggestions.

¹⁷ TTC did so by putting it as a motion on the agenda for the full council meeting, where the public had the option to attend, ask questions and put forward comments.

¹⁸ By being more transparent, responsible and responsive, by providing more information to the public and improved community engagement, through for example a survey or questionnaire.

¹⁹ The authority to change the behaviour of others and make them do things that they might not do otherwise.

²⁰ Local Government Act 1972, ss.124,127

²¹ The General Power of Competence (GPC) was introduced by the Localism Act 2011 and took effect in February 2012. In simple terms, it gives councils the power to do anything an individual can do provided it is not prohibited by other legislation.

In order for a council to use the General Power of Competence, they must meet two criteria: the council has a qualified clerk and two thirds of the council members have stood for election

Trowbridge has always demonstrated a strong sense of community.²² It hosts public events, including the annual AT Festival in the park, and Remembrance Day commemorations, which are well attended, demonstrating how the council engages well in a social setting, enhancing health and well-being. Wiltshire also has a Community Engagement Manager, engaged by Wiltshire Council (WC) and based in Trowbridge, he is responsible for the local delivery of the Council's devolved governance and community-engagement program, including WC's community transformation²³ (Cripps, 2015).

Area boards in Wiltshire are used to promote the development of stronger and more resilient communities (Wiltshire Council, 2021) and do so through assisting projects, such as Storehouse Foodbank²⁴. Resolving community issues such as dog waste around pavements and play areas is demonstrated by TTC by providing dog bag dispensers, putting up signs and organizing community clean ups. They do not have the power to enforce this, but they influence the community by encouraging and assisting dog owners to pick up after their pets. Furthermore, they distribute £10,000 per year in grants to local community groups to help develop and service the community. Some examples include Trowbridge Environmental Community²⁵ and The BIG Community Grow.²⁶ Without the annual grants, these groups would struggle to exist.

²² *A sense of community is the feeling that members have of belonging, the feeling that the members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that their needs will be met through their commitment to be together (McMillian & Chavis, 1986)*

²³ *enabling local communities to do more for themselves*

²⁴ *Storehouse Foodbank is a project that aims to support families, couples and individuals in short term need of food and toiletries. Based in Trowbridge, this service began in 2006 in response to a growing need within the community.*

²⁵ *A local charity who raise awareness of environmental issues, encouraging resident participation within the community.*

²⁶ *A local charity which encourage sustainable growing of own produce*

Nonetheless, no community is perfect when it comes to community engagement. It must evolve in line with society. An interesting consideration for improvement would be for TTC to introduce a community engagement strategy, to encourage the council to look and build on good practices already in place, and consider better ways to engage with residents in the future. The launch of Facebook in 2008 catapulted the use of social media beyond expectation. (Maryville University, 2020) Since then, the development and use of Reddit²⁷, Twitter²⁸, Instagram²⁹, Pinterest³⁰, Hootsuite³¹, Snapchat³² and TikTok³³ have revolutionized how we interact. TTC already uses many of these sites to actively engage with the community, and have recently filmed their first TikTok (Weimar, 2021) to demonstrate the functionality of The Civic³⁴. However, they should consider embracing all forms as they each serve a different purpose and attract a slightly different audience; Facebook is more popular with 30+ age group, while teenagers use snapchat and Instagram. If the council wanted to engage on a topic of building a skate park, they would reach a greater audience through Instagram and TikTok, rather than their website. Nevertheless, it is important to continue with the more traditional means of communication³⁵ as TTC does, to

²⁷ *Reddit is a network of communities where people can dive into their interests, hobbies and passions. There is a community for whatever you are interested in.*

²⁸ *American microblogging and social networking service to follow your interests hear what people are talking about and join the conversation.*

²⁹ *A simple, fun & creative way to capture, edit & share photos, videos & messages*

³⁰ *American image sharing and social media service designed to enable saving and discovery of information on the internet*

³¹ *social media management platform*

³² *multimedia instant messaging app and service that lets you easily talk with friends, view Live Stories from around the world, and explore new*

³³ *Video-sharing focused social networking service used to make a variety of short-form videos, from genres like dance, comedy, and education, that have a duration from fifteen seconds to three minutes.*

³⁴ *The Civic is Trowbridge's community centre and known as the flagship Events and Conferencing Centre of the Town Council. Local Government Act 1972 s.144 and s.19 gives councils the power to provide and encourage the use of facilities and the power to equip and provide buildings for use as clubs with educational and social objectives.*

³⁵ *through newsletters, newspaper articles, noticeboards and advertising on the radio*

ensure they reach the aging population. This evidence highlights that TTC demonstrates good community engagement.

Finally, and leading on from community engagement, is partnership working. “Partnership working can be defined as two or more groups coming together to achieve a common purpose”. (Community Change, 2010). Many examples of partnership working exist within Trowbridge: TTC provide free office space and payroll service to [Trowbridge Future \(TF\)](#)³⁶; AT work closely with local schools offering subsidized sports coaching and community play working; The Mayor³⁷ raises money to address issues for local charities through organized TTC events.³⁸ (Community Change, 2010) discusses the key principles of partnership working: openness, trust and honesty, agreed shared goals and values and regular communication between partners. According to Annett, 2012, “Partnerships are about recognizing the value in each other. “ The future redevelopment of [Trowbridge Town Hall](#) will require excellent partnership working with [The Civic](#). Whilst both could be viewed as offering similar services, they must work together to ensure they operate successfully, and not in competition. Recognizing The Civics’ strengths³⁹, and those of the Town Halls⁴⁰, partnership working will be paramount to maximizing local services for the community and, considering the above evidence, it suggests that TTC will do everything it can to lead on this partnership.

³⁶ TF is a Trowbridge based charity who offer support and advice to the local community.

³⁷ Councillor Denise Bates was elected to serve as Mayor for 2021-22. (Trowbridge Town Council, 2017)

³⁸ Mayor and Councillor Denise Bates’ chosen charities are Bath Cancer Unit Support Group and Dorothy House. She will be raising money for, and awareness of the charities during the Civic Year, whilst representing the town. (Trowbridge Town Council, 2017)

³⁹ Its large capacity, extensive booking system and sound and effective operational management team with structured policies and procedures to undertake a wide range of events and functions.

⁴⁰ Wider arts audience, greater community awareness and central location within the town.

To conclude, this essay has addressed several significant tools demonstrating that the community of Trowbridge is well equipped for community governance. It excels in areas of community leadership, community engagement and community partnership. Whilst it establishes that democratic accountability is taking place, this area needs to continue to progress and learn from experiences. Despite community decision making being an area identified as needing greater enhancement, by using power and influence correctly TTC will greatly enhance the community's overall success, capability and well-being.

Word Count: 1538

“There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about”.

Margaret J. Wheatley⁴¹

⁴¹Wheatley (1944) is an American writer, speaker, teacher, and management consultant who has won numerous awards including the Highest Honour from the American Society for Training and Development. (ASTD) (Wheatley, 1944)

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