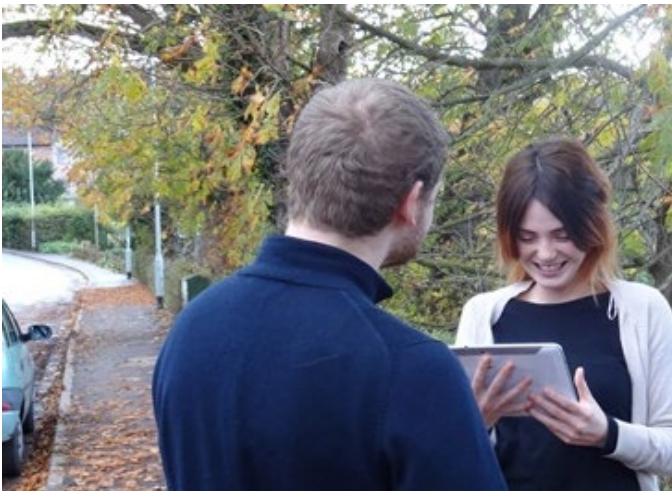


Consultation and Engagement Strategy 2022-2027



Serving People, Improving Lives

Consultation & Engagement Strategy

Approved by Cabinet on 20 September 2022 **TBC**

Due for review: September 2023

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1.0 Introduction: Why we need a Strategy

We are a public sector body and serving our residents is central to everything we do. As such we want to listen to our residents to ensure our delivery is shaped by resident needs and views, and consult with our residents on particular decisions or changes.

The Local Government Act (1999), the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act (2007) and the Housing Act (1985) place duties on local authorities to consult, involve and engage with the public. Likewise, The Localism Act (2011) introduced new rights and powers for communities, giving them the freedom to be better involved in the way local decisions are made and exercise greater influence over the future of where they live. Most recently, the charter for social housing residents, social housing white paper (2020), and the subsequent Social Housing Bill which will put the residents voice at the centre of services and ensure that it is listened to.

There are challenges for local authorities associated with involving and engaging in a way that is effective. These barriers can include the established organisational cultures within the public sector as well as the capabilities and willingness of communities and others to engage. However, through recent years, there have been many drivers for enhanced engagement to support more informed decision making and to develop trust and relationships. Most recently, we can consider the significant impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on communities globally, as well as local communities unique to the district.

We want engagement to be a continuous process that connects us to communities, and facilitates and encourages opportunities for stakeholders (residents, service users and organisations) to share their ideas and experiences to inform changes and/or developments to; current services, policies and strategies, projects, initiatives and services.

Community engagement enables the Council to maintain an understanding of local priorities and needs that can have a positive influence upon service design and delivery. This enables the Council to be able to adapt and improve ways of working by utilising feedback and knowledge gained to better meet the needs of residents. Likewise, engagement can improve the perception residents have of the Council and encourage trust and transparency in how it operates. It is important that the Council understands its audience to ensure that approaches and engagement techniques are adapted accordingly, to make engagement accessible and maximise the outcomes of engagement.

This strategy outlines our approach to consultation and engagement and guides all Council activity, including consultation undertaken by consultants or contractors working on behalf of the Council. Council staff, and those acting on our behalf, undertaking consultation or engagement need to ensure the approach and associated principles outlined in this strategy are followed in practice. Operational guidance and templates are available to support staff.

Our approach to engagement is reflective of our values;

Ambitious and forward thinking - we need to understand what is important to our residents and stakeholders, and know where we need to focus our energy to improve and innovate.

Caring and compassionate - through providing a selection of ways to get involved in a way that works for the individual, removing barriers to getting involved.

Commercial and business-like – seeking views on where we focus our resources securing value for money.

Professional and trustworthy – engagement builds trust and is more transparent demonstrating the Council’s integrity.

Welcoming and responsive - through being approachable, open to feedback and challenge and swift to act when we need to.

This strategy does not cover customer feedback. Consultation and engagement is the important process of listening to and working with communities to gather their views and insights. If you want to feedback on a specific issue or raise a complaint about a service you this is covered within the Customer Feedback Policy.

Finally, please note that the Statement of Community Involvement shared on our website is also separate to this strategy as this statement is purely focused on community involvement in the statutory planning process.

2.0 How we define Consultation and Engagement

There are five levels of community engagement currently adopted by the Council, ranging from low involvement (information sharing) to high involvement (devolved responsibility). The aim is to develop relationships with our communities and ensure they remain informed, aware and involved. The engagement approach taken will vary based on the nature of the service and the particular drivers of engagement. Some services delivered by the Council may require, or allow, for more involvement than others.

Approaches to Community Engagement

2.1 Information Sharing

Providing information regarding events, services, policies and decisions which might affect and/or interest residents. We regularly provide information in a way that can be easily accessed and understood by all communities within the district. Through information sharing, the Council ensures residents remain involved and informed, with the opportunity to contact the Council or respond to a matter, should they wish to do so. Examples include;

- NSDC website, including transparency webpages
- Freedom of Information requests
- Newsletters and E-Newsletters
- Social Media such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube
- News in the local media and press releases (reactive and proactive)
- Letters or other forms of direct mail
- Other point of sale communication materials e.g. posters, adverts, magazines, leaflets
- Published decisions logs and the minutes from decision making bodies

2.2 Consultation

In this approach to engagement communities are invited to give an opinion or share ideas on a particular service they receive or a new initiative, with the purpose of informing decision-making. Examples include;

- Surveys e.g. resident surveys, the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs)
- Forums e.g. Local Influence Networks, sports forum
- Targeted consultations with residents who have expressed an interest
- Neighbourhood Studies
- Community roadshows for tenants and residents
- Community walkabouts including tenants and residents
- Community engagement events, and post event consultations
- Face to face consultation events

2.3 Co-production

This approach to engagement involves the sharing of power with residents; recognising that both parties have vital contributions to make in order to improve quality of life for our communities. This is achieved through establishing platforms and facilitation sessions/resources that enable the co-production of services, including service reviews and commissioning. Examples include;

- Community-run projects such as 'Lost the plot gardening group' in Newark
- Eastern European Community Group
- N&S Health and Wellbeing Partnership and N&S Community Safety Partnership
- Tenant Engagement Board and Local Influence Networks (LINs)
- Service Level Agreements e.g. CVS, Home-Start, Citizens Advice Bureau, Active 4 Today, Community Hub
- Voluntary Community Sector Compact
- Chatham Court Hub

2.4 Devolved Responsibility

This approach to engagement is where communities are considered to have the most advanced involvement, becoming responsible for service delivery. Devolved responsibility requires support from the Council to help communities to build their skills and capacity to deliver services for themselves through community, voluntary and faith groups. This contributes to the creation of self-sufficient communities with a focus on asset based community development and community led planning. Examples include;

- Food clubs
- Asset transfer e.g. a community centre, village hall or open space run by a community

Here is an example to demonstrate what this looks like in practice;

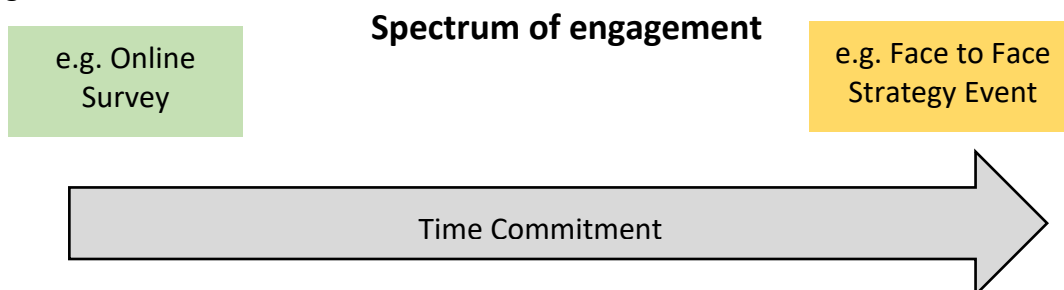


2.5 Statutory Obligations

In addition to the above, are statutory consultations, local authorities are bound by statute and their functions are set out in numerous Acts of Parliament and many of these functions have associated legal duties. Where community engagement is a function of a statutory obligation the Council will follow all necessary and appropriate requirements of the relevant statutory framework in order to discharge its responsibilities. Examples include;

- Housing Act 2004
- Local Government Act 2000
- Town and Country Planning Act 1990

To put these approaches into context, greater engagement takes more time and resource commitment but the outcome is more community involvement and development of solutions/services with communities. This is demonstrated in the ‘Spectrum of engagement’ diagram below;



3.0 Our Approach to Consultation and Engagement

The Council recognises the diverse nature of its community in terms of its composition. This includes individuals and groups of like-minded people who operate collectively and collaboratively as part of the voluntary and community sector, residents and tenants of the Council, the business sector as well as all levels of national and local government. The focus

of the engagement may be 'place' or 'theme' based, or specific to the needs of an individual resident group. The type of engagement should therefore be carefully considered, designed and delivered. Having said this, we have universal principals that apply to all engagement.

3.1 Our Principles of Engagement

- We will co-ordinate our engagement programme so residents, or other key stakeholder groups, don't feel over-consulted.
- We will use the most appropriate engagement method or methods to suit the audience; meaning the method that is the most inclusive for the engagement, allows engagement with a range of groups (where relevant) and uses resources effectively.
- We will use plain English and language that is accessible to all.
- We will share how you can find out the results of any consultation before it starts.
- We will adhere to GDPR legislation, only use feedback/data within the Council and will not give it to anyone else (unless clearly rationalised and communicated).
- We will find appropriate community locations across the district that are accessible when completing face to face activities.
- We will work with individuals to overcome any barriers to participation so they can be involved in areas of interest.
- We will work with underrepresented groups to ensure their voices are heard.
- We will treat responses with respect and welcome feedback that can help us improve.
- Where feedback includes a service request for us, we will forward this on to the relevant team for action. If the request needs directing to another agency, we will aim to ask permission to share this service request on your behalf.
- We will constantly review, revise and make changes to consultation exercises to ensure we learn from what we do while keeping up to date with best practise and new consultation techniques and software.

3.2 When to Consult

The Council, as a public body, is under a duty to consider whether it is necessary to carry out consultation before taking a decision.

The Council is committed to carrying out consultation when: -

- It is considering a significant change to services
- It is considering significant policy changes that could impact on residents
- When there is an express statutory duty to consult, for example local residents in relation to a planning application, or Council tenants in relation to a housing management issue (where there is a statutory duty to consult there may be specific requirements about how the consultation is carried out)

The Council will always seek to meet the following consultation requirements: -

- Consult at a formative stage i.e. before proposals are fully developed

- Ensure the consultation is clear, concise and widely accessible (see principles above)
- Provide enough information to make sure residents are properly informed when responding to a consultation
- Provide an appropriate period of time for residents to respond, where possible a minimum of 2 weeks and a maximum of 12 weeks
- Conscientiously consider the responses received

On rare occasions, due to urgency there may not be time to carry out a consultation before taking an important decision, or the timescale for consultation may need to be shortened. If this happens the Council will clearly give the reason for this when the decision is taken.

3.3 Regular Consultation

We have a Residents Panel, open to any resident over the age of 18 to join and share their views on Council's services, plans, proposals and development of the local area. By being on the panel these residents have said they are happy to share their views so we regularly consult with the panel on a range of issues, and their views and experiences help us make sure our services are the best they can be. We also scoping out the development of a Youth Panel to gather the views of the younger generation. We also have a Tenant Engagement Board who are regularly consulted with on tenant related issues.

In addition, we undertake 'mystery shopping' exercises for key functions/services to make sure the user experience in the best it can be and we are looking to roll this out further. Using mystery shopping as a way to identify areas for improvement in terms of customer experience.

We also have a process for enabling residents to interact with us through the governance structure. The public can ask questions at Full Council. They can also raise an issue to Full Council, for their consideration, via a petition, using the Council's Petitions Scheme. Details on how to do this is within the [public participation section of the Constitution](#).

4.0 Co-ordination

Our Communications team support the business unit leading the engagement on the co-ordination and promotion of the activity, providing guidance on language, tone, questions and ensuring brand consistency so recipients receive a professional document, and are assured the consultation is a genuine request from the Council.

The Communications team also maintain a central log of all engagement and consultation activities across the Council to improve co-ordination, ensure consultation is balanced over the year and contribute to greater engagement by linking consultations as appropriate (to deliver better outcomes for all). Business units will ensure that the communications team are made aware of any consultation or engagement activity as soon as possible. If there is clash between multiple consultation exercises, where the content would compete, the Communications team will make a decision on the best approach to ensure the Council's principles are maintained.

Every team, and consultant or contractor working on our behalf, undertaking a piece of engagement is required to complete an engagement plan, (reviewed by the Transformation and Communications team prior to launch) and follow the Council’s operational guidance.

4.1 Review, Revise, Implement

Upon completion of an engagement exercise, we will undertake the three step review process set out below. This cyclical process will be repeated continuously.

Review

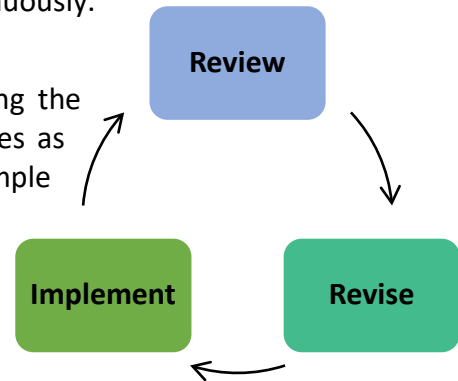
Review the success of the engagement activity, including the approach adopted. This will help us understand successes as well as any barriers to engagement, for example physical/cultural barriers that require an adapted and targeted approach. To ensure that the future approach is refined and meets the needs of the specific community.

Revise

Based on the review, identify any additional engagement opportunities and/or new methods of interaction within service delivery required. Any follow on actions/activity will be captured within an action plan, following the SMART framework to ensure that the outcomes and objectives of the activity are ‘Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time bound’.

Implement

Implement and deliver the revised engagement plans, which reflect lessons learned and new and improved ways of working. Sharing the learning and positive outcomes with residents and colleagues.



5.0 Planning for Consultation

Prior to seeking support from the Communications and Transformation Teams, the service area will develop an engagement plan, supported by the Consultation and Engagement Operational guidance and template plan.

6.0 Approval, Consultation and Review Timetable

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|----------------------------|--|--------------------------------|---|
| Document title | Consultation & Engagement Strategy | | |
| Version number | V1 | Protective marking | Official |
| Lead Director | Director Customer Services and Organisational Development | | |
| Lead Business Unit | Transformation & Communications | | |
| Lead contact | Communications and Marketing Manager Transformation and Service Improvement Manager | | |
| Date approved (SLT) | 9 Aug 2022 | Date approved (Members) | Cabinet 20 Sept 2022 |
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| Consultation | | | |
| Consultee | Date | Comments received | Material change requested (yes/no) |
| SLT | 9 August 2022 | Light amends | No |
| Tenant Engagement Board | 25 August 2022 | None | No |
| Cabinet | 20 September 2022 | None | No |