

Newark and Sherwood District Council

Consultation and Engagement Strategy

Introduction

Consultation and engagement encompasses the things that we do to inform, consult or involve people in our work.

Through our consultation and engagement strategy we want to:

- Keep people well-informed about our services and policies
- Listen and respond to people's views and concerns
- Encourage participation so we can take a wide range of views into account
- Encourage new ideas
- Improve our accessibility and accountability to local people, and
- Build trust and public confidence.

Newark and Sherwood District Council sets out its standards and policies for communications in a Communications Strategy. This Consultation and Engagement Strategy, which forms part of our overall Communications Strategy, sets out our approach to consultation and engagement including:

- Our consultation principles and values
- How we determine the level of consultation and engagement
- Who we will engage with
- How and when we will engage the public
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Our Consultation and Engagement strategy will be complemented by an Action Plan which will set out proposed consultation activities and regularly review outcomes.

Consultation principles and values

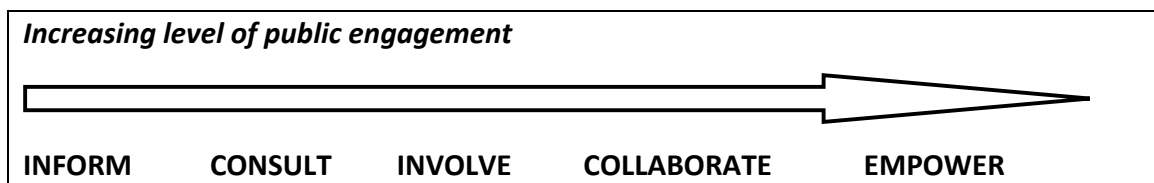
The Council aspires to the highest standards of consultation and engagement.

1. We should help people to have a say in decisions that affect their lives
2. We should take account of the outcomes of consultation when we are taking decisions
3. We should consult in ways which are appropriate and proportionate to the matter being considered

4. We should take care to consult those who are most affected and make efforts to consult with people whose voices are not always heard
5. We should develop new ways of involving people where appropriate
6. We should provide people with the information they need to participate in any consultation
7. We should let people know how their input affected our decision.

Determining the level of consultation and engagement

When planning consultation and engagement, we will consider the appropriate level. Different levels of participation are sometimes described as a “ladder of participation” or a “spectrum of engagement”. At one end of the spectrum this simply means **informing** people. **Consultation** means we seek the views of people. Taking the consultation process deeper still might mean **involving** people in an advisory role. **Collaboration** means working in together with people to reach a shared decision. Finally, **empowerment** means placing the decision in the hands of a group of people.



It is important to determine the level of participation when planning public engagement. It will depend on the extent to which the decision-maker is prepared or able to involve people, and the context for a particular decision.

Who we will engage with

The Council engages with many different people and organisations in many different ways. We will consider which particular groups and individuals are most appropriately consulted about a particular issue.

When we use the term “public engagement” we are referring to a wide range of people. In the main, they can be grouped as follows:

- ***the public - including our residents, council tax payers, people who work in the district and people who visit the district***
- ***our customers – people who use our services and people who might become users of our services***

- ***stakeholders and partners – the people and organisations who share common goals with us in trying to deliver public services and improvements for our community***

We will ensure that the diversity of our community is taken into account in the way we choose to engage people, that we are sensitive to different cultural needs, and that we seek out voices that are less likely to be heard and take steps to ensure they are included. We recognise that it may be more difficult to engage certain groups in the population including rural communities, young people, older people, people with disabilities, and minority ethnic groups.

How and when we will engage the public

We will engage the public:

- When we are preparing to take a decision that will have a significant or widespread impact on our community
- When we are preparing the Council’s annual budget
- When we are required by law to consult
- When we need to understand how well our services are run and how they can be improved.

When we plan, prepare and carry out public engagement we will:

1. Define the issue or decision involved
2. Decide on the level of public engagement we are seeking
3. Choose and use appropriate techniques
4. Consider an approach that is proportionate to the scale and impact of the issue or decision
5. Engage people in a sustainable, inclusive and cost-effective way
6. Consult alongside other partners where it makes sense
7. Check that what we propose to do meets our public engagement principles and values
8. Publish our public engagement plans
9. Publish the results of our engagement
10. Be clear about how we have taken account of the outcomes of public engagement
11. Publish our decision.

There are many different ways in which the Council can engage the public. We produce a regular news magazine – the Voice - which is distributed to all households in the District. A Citizens’ Panel enables the council to consult regularly with around 1,000 local residents. We have produced a public statement about the way we consult and involve people in planning issues – our Statement of Community Involvement. We organise a

range of meetings and exhibitions around individual topics and with service users. We ask people for feedback and our customer comments system receives a wide range of complaints and compliments. Along with other councils, we commission a wide-ranging survey about the council and the area every year.

Making the most out of consultation and engagement

As part of our approach we will take steps to refine the way we undertake public engagement, re-focusing our efforts through methods which are proven and effective. We will increase the training and advice available to council staff so that our engagement is more consistent, effective and efficient. We will develop a toolkit to support staff who are planning consultations. We will plan and coordinate public engagement so that the dangers of consultation fatigue and ineffective consultation can be minimised.

We will produce an Action Plan setting out the specific actions we are undertaking to deliver the Consultation and Engagement Strategy. Our plans will be shared within the council and we will develop the Council website to ensure that our public engagement plans and the outcomes are publicly available. We will monitor and report on the effectiveness of our consultation.

Where we work with partners to engage the public, we will work within a shared approach where possible, for example, by working within the shared framework for partnership engagement being developed within the Nottinghamshire Partnership.

