

CONSULTATION & ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY 2021 - 2024

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CONSULTATION & ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY 2021 - 2024

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Defining Consultation & Engagement

The terms Consultation and Engagement are often used interchangeably but they are different and distinct from one another. In Table 1 below, we define consultation, engagement and information and it is important to be clear from the outset if we are simply informing people, if we are asking their opinion on a proposed decision or range of choices or if we are seeking to work with the community in a broader capacity to involve them in the development of policies, services or interventions.

Table 1. Definition

Information	Information is continuous to ensure service users are aware of how to access services and are aware of what services they may be entitled to. Information provision to targeted service users or groups can be provided through information events as well as online and through publications. A number of events and public meetings are also held to provide information to the community on the development of services.
Consultation	Consultation is a two-way process where an organisation seeks views to check whether proposals are right and supported, gauge their impact and identify alternatives before decisions are made. This means that options can be properly appraised in advance of policy or service changes or new laws and regulations being made. Consultation allows choice but not an opportunity to take part in implementing plans.
Engagement	Engagement is broader than consultation and is active, ongoing and informed joint working with communities to develop campaigns and interventions. It includes people in decision making processes and involves working together to implement change and ongoing service delivery. Community engagement refers to activities designed to give communities an opportunity to contribute to local decision-making and service delivery.

Engagement activity can include both information and consultation as part of a wider, ongoing process.

Community engagement is supported by the key principles of fairness and equality, and a commitment to learning from engagement activity and delivering continuous improvement. Good quality community engagement is:

- **Effective:** in meeting the needs and expectations of the people involved;
- **Efficient:** by being well informed and properly planned; and
- **Fair:** by giving people who may face additional barriers to getting involved an equal opportunity to participate.

This strategy defines the framework which the Council will adopt to ensure that the consultation and engagement activity we undertake is effective, efficient and fair.

1.2 National Standards for Community Engagement

The Scottish Government launched the National Standards for Community Engagement in 2005 which have been widely accepted by a range of practitioners as key principles for effective practice. In 2016 the National Standards for Community Engagement were updated and they were incorporated in to the Council's Community & Engagement Strategy 2017 – 2020.

There are seven national standards for community engagement, defined with supporting guidance in the National Standards publication, which is published on the Scottish Community Development Council website: <https://www.scdc.org.uk/what/national-standards>



The national standards remain valid and are:

- Inclusion
- Support
- Planning
- Working together
- Methods
- Communication
- Impact

They therefore remain a key element of the Council's consultation and engagement framework, and are summarised in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Summary of National Standards for Community Engagement

Inclusion	We will identify and involve the people and organisations that are affected by the focus of the engagement
Support	We will identify and overcome any barriers to participation
Planning	There is a clear purpose for the engagement, which is based on a shared understanding of community needs and ambitions
Working Together	We will work effectively together to achieve the aims of the engagement
Methods	We will use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose
Communication	We will communicate regularly with the people, organisations and communities affected by the engagement
Impact	We will assess the impact of the engagement and use what has been learned to improve our future community engagement

1.3 Current Context

The Covid-19 pandemic has fundamentally changed how consultation and engagement activity can be taken forward, and whilst the Scottish Government's National Framework for Recovery will define what can happen when, adjustments to that timetable in relation to increasing infection rates and community spikes in transmission will continue to impact Council service delivery and how we can engage with our communities.

Further, as recovery progresses and face to face meetings might be permitted, there is a significant likelihood that communities might exert continued caution in relation to consultation and engagement activity in the months and years ahead, posing a real challenge to participation levels, particularly in those communities already under-represented.

Whilst digital channels and approaches provide an immediate solution to delivering some aspects of consultation and engagement activity, they also pose barriers to some sectors and going forward, a balance must be reached between digital possibilities and inclusion.

A second and related factor is the new legislation in relation to Accessible Information on public body websites, which came in to effect in September 2020. This legislation requires all public bodies to ensure that the content of their websites is fully accessible and the historic approach of simply publishing substantial PDF documents on line is no longer possible. More creative solutions are required to ensure that digital consultation activity is truly accessible and truly inclusive, and additional engagement methods also need to be identified.

This Consultation and Engagement Strategy 2021 – 2024 will provide the framework and structure to consultation and engagement activity across all Council Services. It also specifies that community outreach expertise should be an important and valuable consideration in consultation and engagement planning and a key mechanism for engaging with the most vulnerable and perhaps most reluctant to participate.

Community outreach and engagement activity through the Community Planning approach is essential in ensuring our Place Areas are fully involved in Council consultation and engagement activity and that established community groups supporting those sectors

protected through equalities legislation are also engaged and invited to participate to ensure their views are heard.

Given the volume of planned consultation and engagement activity across the organisation each year, no one team can be responsible for its delivery and it will be predominantly service-led. This Consultation and Engagement Strategy has been developed to support a consistent approach to the delivery of the Council's consultation and engagement activity across all service areas. It sets out a Framework for consultation and engagement delivery that includes:

- The National Standards we will adopt
- The Council's Principles we will apply
- A summary of the well-established methods and tools we can use
- An approach to effectively planning

The Communications & Engagement team, based in Customer & Business Support Services, can provide guidance and advice to services as they develop their consultation and engagement activity and ensure that all planned activity is effectively publicised and promoted through an effective communications plan, to facilitate maximum participation.

1.3 Purpose of this Strategy

This Strategy, by defining the Council's approach to Consultation and Engagement and better co-ordinating activity across the Strategic Portfolios, will support the delivery of a consistent approach to consultation and engagement activity across the organisation, supporting the following four core objectives:

- To develop and evaluate the Council's policies, services, projects and plans
- To inform the improvement of Council services
- To inform the prioritisation of Council resources
- To increase dialogue and engagement with local communities.

1.4 Scope of this Strategy

This Strategy provides the overall framework for the Council's approach to consultation and engagement from 2021 - 2024. In order for the consultation and engagement activity planned across all Council services to be carried out both consistently and well, this strategy aims to:

- Define the principles the Council will adopt to ensure that consultation and engagement is meaningful
- Provide guidance to help plan and deliver effective consultation and engagement activity
- Ensure consultation and engagement activity is inclusive and aligned to equalities and inclusion
- Co-ordinate consultation and engagement activity across the Council
- Enable those with an interest in helping to shape decisions that affect them to participate.

The principles of this consultation and engagement strategy apply to internal employee engagement as well as external organisations and groups. It will support the delivery of the employee engagement element of the Council's Workforce Strategy, which underpins the 'people' element of the Transformation Programme.

1.5 Legal Considerations

During 2015/16 the National Standards for Community Engagement set out in section 1.2 were reviewed and updated to reflect the developing policy and legislation relating to Community Empowerment in Scotland and to build on and inform the growing range of engagement practice.

Some laws impose specific requirements on the Council to consult with certain target groups on certain issues and to a defined timeframe. Where there is a legal obligation to consult, e.g. statutory consultations on planning matters and statutory consultation on school closures, these requirements remain and the specifications of those statutory consultations must be followed.

2. OUR FRAMEWORK

2.1 Consultation and Engagement Drivers

There are a range of drivers for consultation and engagement activity in addition to any legal and statutory requirements as outlined in section 1.5 above. These include:

Public Sector Financial Settlements

The Council has seen a significant reduction in its financial settlement over the past decade and budget consultation activity has been key to informing the budget reduction strategy. Most recently, in 2020 the '2020 Vision: Your services, Your Choices' consultation informed the 2020/21 budget and led to the priorities identified in the 'Working Together with the People of East Dunbartonshire service commitments.

Establishing Priorities

In addition to identifying budget priorities, a comprehensive approach to consultation and community engagement led to the establishment of the Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2017 - 2027 (LOIP). This strategy and the Community Planning Partnership's approach to engagement are key to the delivery of the LOIP Outcomes.

Developing Policy

As new policies are developed and existing policies are updated and renewed, there is an important role for the community in helping to shape those policies to ensure they are fit for purpose and meet community needs. Seeking community views through effective consultation and engagement activity will help the Council to understand community aspirations and needs.

Improving Performance

Effective consultation and engagement with service users, non-users, service providers and other stakeholders can inform service planning and help to drive service improvements. Community consultation and engagement will be used where possible to gather feedback and inform improvement activity.

Localism and Transforming Service Delivery

The Council has a well-established Place Approach to developing and delivering services in its areas of highest deprivation and need. Developed alongside the LOIP, the Locality Plans for the Place areas of Harestanes and Hillhead, Auchinairn, Lennoxton and Twechar have been developed through consultation and engagement activity with the target communities.

2.2 Principles

The Council will take a proportionate and consistent approach to consultation and engagement activity, based on the National Standards outlined in section 1.2.

So that consultation and engagement activity is meaningful as well as meeting any statutory requirements, the Council also aims to ensure that its consultation and engagement activity follows these eight core principles:

Principle 1: Consultation and engagement activity will be coordinated

- In preparing their Business Improvement Plans, all stakeholder consultation and engagement activity planned for the year ahead is identified.
- This information will be collated across the Council's 11 Strategic Areas to produce an annual Consultation and Engagement Plan to help better co-ordinate activity.
- The annual plan will be shared with partners to inform a joined up approach where appropriate.

Principle 2: It will form the policy-making process and be used to make well informed decisions

- The Council will inform local people about opportunities to have their say through effective promotion and communication.
- Consultation and engagement activity will begin as early as possible and when a proposal is still under consideration.
- Consultation and engagement activity will be proportionate to the scale of the issue being considered.

Principle 3: Consultation and engagement will be meaningful and relevant

- Only issues which stakeholders can influence will be consulted on, and those consulting will be clear on what aspects are open to change and what decisions have already been taken.
- Tick box exercises will be avoided.
- Clarification will be provided on specific consultation activity and wider community engagement activity.

Principle 4: Key stakeholders will be engaged

- Stakeholder mapping will be carried out to identify those potentially affected by a proposal and how best to engage with them.
- An inclusive and tailored approach will be used to gain the views of harder to reach groups and vulnerable groups, using appropriate methods and providing additional support where required.

Principle 5: Timeframes will be proportionate, with sufficient time for participation and response

- Timescales will be determined on a case by case basis.
- Depending on the nature, impact and complexity of the policy or proposal, timescales may vary from two to 12 weeks.
- More complex and more contentious proposals or those with potential major impacts will be given longer consultation periods.
- Defined timescales will also take account of the capacity of the stakeholder groups being consulted.

Principle 6: The right methods will be used

- The consultation method/s chosen will reflect the issue under consideration, the stakeholders being consulted and the available time and resources.
- Written methods will continue to be used where necessary and online methods and digital communications will be increasingly used as appropriate.
- In line with our commitment to hard to reach and vulnerable groups, additional support will be provided as required to facilitate their involvement.

Principle 7: Information will be understandable and accessible

- The right level of information will be made available to enable informed comment and contribution.
- Information will be presented and distributed as appropriate to the needs of the stakeholders being targeted.
- Plain English will be used and jargon avoided.
- Accessible formats will be provided as appropriate.

Principle 8: Feedback to consultation and engagement will be provided

- The Council will report what responses have been received (quantitative) and how these have been used to inform policy or decision making.
- The timescale for feedback should be defined in the consultation or engagement plan.
- Activity will be evaluated and lessons learned used to inform the Council's future approach.

2.4 Methods and Tools

The National Standards are explicit that methods of engagement should be fit for purpose and the Council's Principle 6 (above) further highlights that the right methods will be used when carrying out consultation and engagement activity.

Table 2 below, though not exhaustive, summarises some of the key tools and methods available, with an indication of what the approach achieves, when it might be used and some considerations in coming to that decision. Whilst there is some overlap in tools and methods used, they have been broadly categorised to indicate whether they are best used to deliver information, consultation or engagement.

Table 2: Summary of key tools and methods for consultation and engagement

Method	What does it achieve?	When to use?	Considerations
INFORMATION			
Exhibitions, Roadshows and Public Meetings	Explain proposals to larger groups of people with opportunity for immediate feedback	When presenting complex proposals or large scale plans to large audiences	Audience attending can be self-selecting There can be apathy to attendance Meetings can be overwhelmed by single agenda and protest groups

Attending meetings of established groups	Opportunity to present proposals to targeted audiences through their established processes	When a wide range of target groups are identified which are already constituted with such meetings in place	Keeping to the consultation and engagement agenda rather than the groups agenda Being mindful of single issue responses in relation only to that group
CONSULTATION			
Web based surveys and polls	Potential to reach a wide audience Can provide quick response Needs to be effectively promoted Questions should be well defined	Wide reaching and general consultation activity A less expensive and more immediate alternative to postal surveys	Careful wording of questions Define the amount of time required to complete Can exclude some groups
Face to face surveys	Can ask more detailed questions Opportunity to explore follow on questions Identify target groups at outset	When seeking views from particular groups on specific issues, services or proposals	Requires trained interviewers Higher refusal rates More time consuming More expensive
Telephone surveys	Can ask more detailed questions Opportunity to clarify and explore follow up questions	Can opportunistically survey customers calling the contact survey	Customers may decline to participate Costly and time consuming to conduct bespoke and targeted telephone surveys
Community Forums or Champions Groups	These can be pre-existing or established to specifically address a topic/issue/development	When you want two way engagement with local communities on a specific issue	If not existing/established appropriate invitation/recruitment needs to be undertaken Issue to be explored should be defined with clear aims and objectives for the group
ENGAGEMENT			
Workshops	Can involve delivery partners and/or local groups and organisations in structured activity to explore identified themes	For developing ideas in partnership with others	Not always representative Can include 'usual players'
Focus Groups	Enables in-depth discussion of issues plans and ideas with discreet groups (ideally 8-10 people)	For qualitative feedback on the issue being explored When detailed feedback on a deeper level is desired	Required identification/recruitment of representative respondents
Place Standard Tool	A simple framework to structure conversations around place and find aspects that might be improved	Specifically relevant to locality planning and developing the Place agenda	Developed specific to engagement on Place

2.5 Planning Consultation & Engagement Activity

In order to effectively plan your consultation and engagement activity, you should follow these seven stages:

Stage 1. Define your consultation or engagement

- Be clear from the outset what you want your consultation or engagement activity to achieve
- Define the outcome of your activity
- Set out your aims, which should be focussed and feasible
- What you want to find out will determine how to consult or engage and with whom
- Only issues that can be influenced should be consulted on

Stage 2. Background Research

- Find out what consultation has been done before
- Establish any lessons learned and identify if there is any potential to join with partners for any elements
- Identify any legislative requirements and ensure that these are met

Stage 3. Define your timescales

- Is this legally specified
- Take account of election and holiday periods
- Build in time for preparing background information and questions
- Define your response times
- Build in time for promotion, engaging early with the Communications Team
- Include collation and analysis of results and report writing
- Define when and how you will feedback

Stage 4. Define whose views you need

- All stakeholders affected by or with an interest in the issue should be identified from the outset
- Stakeholder mapping can be undertaken to define this
- Explain the purpose of their involvement and be explicit on what can and cannot be influenced
- Be clear on how participants views will be used
- Existing groups and networks should be used wherever possible
- Stakeholders should be engaged in the process as early as possible
- Ensure you take steps to involve hard to reach and vulnerable groups

Stage 5. Define your methods

- Identify the methods and tools you require to achieve your aims
- Consider whether quantitative or qualitative methods are required or a mixture of both
- Consider where open or closed questions are most appropriate
- Consider how you will analyse your findings and ensure you are able to do this
- Consider whether your consultation and/or engagement can be delivered in-house or whether an impartial provider is more appropriate

Stage 6. What resources do you require?

- Identify all the skill sets you require (preparing questions, designing surveys, planning focus groups, community outreach, analysing results)
- Identify what can be delivered in-house and where external expertise may be required
- Include the development and design of information leaflets or packs

- Include advertising costs, printing costs, postage costs/distribution costs depending on the methods being used
- Identify venue requirements and include venue hire and refreshment costs
- Engage with the appropriate supporting teams as early as possible
- Ensure that your approach is proportionate to the issue being considered

Stage 7. Feedback and Evaluate

- Define how you will feedback and when you will do this
- Consider quantitative and qualitative feedback
- Ensure your feedback includes what has been done, including reasons for not taking proposals forward if that is the outcome
- Review and evaluate your consultation/engagement activity once complete
- Identify what went well and where improvements could be made
- Share experience to inform improvement across consultation and engagement activity across the organisation.

Section 3. Annual Consultation & Engagement Plans

As detailed in Section 1, all Council strategic areas identify their consultation and engagement activity for the coming year in their Business & Improvement Plans (BIPs), which are prepared in February/March for approval alongside the Council Budget for the year ahead, ready for implementation at the start of that financial year in April.

Through the implementation of this Council's Consultation and Engagement Strategy, the Council's Communication & Engagement Team will liaise with all Executive Officers, to better understand and co-ordinate the planned consultation and engagement activity each year. They will also ensure that effective communications plans are in place to promote and support that activity, with early involvement of the team essential to best promote consultation and engagement activity going live and encouraging high participation rates.

By collating a Consultation & Engagement Plan for the year ahead, the Council will be better able to identify opportunities for working across services and with Community Planning Partners to make better use of resources and deliver consultation and engagement efficiencies.

Collating the annual plan each year will also help to ensure that the Council is not engaging with similar groups on different consultation exercises over the same or similar timescales.

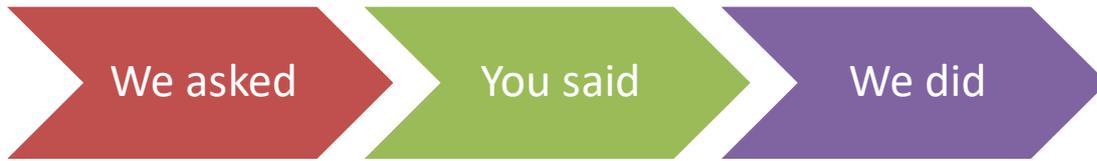
Section 4. Consultation on the Council website

Since 2018, an annual consultation and engagement plan has been collated from the BIPs and published on the Consultation page of the Council website alongside the current Consultation & Engagement Strategy.

<https://www.eastdunbarton.gov.uk/council/consultations>

The consultation page also includes the current live consultations being undertaken and an archive of those that have already concluded.

Plans are in place to evolve the consultation pages and ensure that consultation activity is presented in the three clear stages in Fig. 1 below:



Through this approach, people can clearly see what a consultation exercise was asking, a summary of the feedback and choices that consultation participants provided and, to conclude the process, information on what action the Council then took.

A new consultation platform, to be integrated in to the Council website is planned for implementation during 2021/22 and will support both the individual consultation pages and methods for each consultation exercise carried out and clearer reporting on feedback and outcomes in line with the 'we asked, you said, we did' approach.

Consultation & Engagement Checklist

This checklist is a step by step guide to help those planning to consult or engage with service users, residents, local businesses, voluntary and community groups, partner organisations, employees and any other stakeholders.

Further advice is available from the Communication & Engagement Team whose role is to co-ordinate, support and promote the Council's consultation activity.

Please contact: corpcommunications@eastdunbarton.gov.uk



Step 1. Purpose

The seven National Standards for Community Engagement and the Councils eight Principles of Consultation and Engagement should underpin all consultation and engagement activity.

Step 2. Define

Clarify from the outset what you want the consultation or engagement activity to achieve. Specify your focused and feasible aims and be clear on what you need to find out and what you want to ask. Be clear on the outputs and outcomes you plan to deliver as a result.

Step 3. Plan

Ensure that you involve all the service areas of the Council impacted by or required for the delivery of your consultation or engagement activity at the outset. Ensure you follow the seven detailed stages of planning included in the Consultation & Engagement Strategy:

- Stage 1 Define your consultation or engagement
- Stage 2 Do your Background research
- Stage 3 Define your timescales
- Stage 4 Define who you need to consult or engage with
- Stage 5 Define your methods
- Stage 6 Identify the resources you require and ensure they are in place
- Stage 7 Define how you will feedback and evaluate your activity

Step 4. Implement

Having prepared your consultation and engagement plan, identified opportunities for working with partners and/or other Council services and ensured that the plan is effectively resourced in an achievable timescale, it can now be implemented. Elected Members should be kept advised of all consultation and engagement activity being carried out across the Council.

Step 5. Evaluate

The final stage of all consultation and engagement activity should be the evaluation of the findings and the process to inform future activity and confirm whether the aims and objectives of the activity have been achieved. It is also important to report back to those you have engaged with so that they are informed of the evaluation and the outcome of the activity undertaken.

Guide to Delivering Public Meetings

Preparation is required for all Public Meetings and needs to be in place well in advance of the promotion of the meeting. A minimum of three weeks is required to effectively promote a public meeting at the venue/local area, through the media and digitally (online & social media), ensuring the target audience is aware and able to participate.

Promotion of Public Meetings, clearly stating their purpose and intended audience, will be delivered by the Communications & Engagement Team once the VITAL preparation outlined in the table below is in place. Supporting materials for the meeting (roller banners, displays, presentations, merchandise) should also be agreed well in advance.

Depute Chief Executives should be advised of all Public Meetings taking place within their strategic portfolios and should sign off the Executive Officer who will deliver the event. The Council Leader(s) and relevant Convenor, Vice Convenor and local Ward Councillors should also be advised of Public Meetings at the preparation stage and in advance of them being promoted.

VITAL Preparation	
Venue	Ensure the venue is appropriate for the anticipated numbers and format of the meeting and that it is set up well in advance of the start time. Consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Capacity - Layout (arrival/welcome, displays, top table/panel, seating) - Appropriateness - Facilities (accessibility, appropriate ICT/AV, wifi, refreshments) - Book audio for <i>all</i> meetings with presentations
Itinerary	This is the meeting structure. Have a clear purpose for the meeting with an aim, who needs to be involved, what needs to be achieved (outcome), how it will be achieved and who/what needs to be available to achieve it: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aim of meeting - Who is involved (Council/Partners) - Who's doing what to achieve aim and deliver outcome - Visuals and supporting materials
Timetable	Identify the stages of the meeting, allocate times and stick to these. If not included in the publicity, display the timetable for all to see on arrival e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - meet and greet - view displays - formal presentations/discussion - Q&A
Audience	Be prepared for the audience and their expectations of the meeting. Ensure the meeting purpose has been communicated and refer back to this. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anticipate numbers - Anticipate viewpoints, clarify purpose - Be prepared to address challenges
Lead	There must be a clear Lead from the service to deliver the meeting (appropriate level, signed off and supported by DCE or Executive Officer). Lead should co-ordinate all participants, and at the meeting should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MC/Chair the meeting & introduce who is involved - Outline the timetable - Identify who will respond to questions (Council/Partners) - Keep on track (timetable & purpose) - Agree how responses will be provided if not available at the meeting - Summarise meeting and confirm next steps

Further advice can be provided from Communications & Engagement by contacting corpcommunications@eastdunbarton.gov.uk