



East
Northamptonshire
Council

Consultation & Engagement Strategy

QUESTIONS

ANSWERS

2018-2021

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Links to other documents

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Additional Comments to note

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Consultation and engagement encompasses the things that we do to inform, consult or involve people in our work.
- 1.2 East Northamptonshire Council is committed to delivering excellent services to all its residents. To ensure that we listen to and give serious consideration to public opinion, we will consult and engage with residents, customers and other interested stakeholders at appropriate times, for example:
 - When we are preparing to take a decision that will have a significant or widespread impact on the community
 - When we are required by law to consult
 - When we need to understand how well our services are run and how they could be improved or adapted

2.0 Scope

- 2.1 This strategy covers all statutory and non-statutory public consultation carried out by the Council and establishes the principles and best practice that should underpin all our consultation and engagement activity.
- 2.2 It applies to all staff and will impact on residents, businesses, service users and non-users, partners and stakeholders through the way we carry out consultation and use the results to influence service provision and decisions we must take.
- 2.3 It links with the Customer Service Strategy and the Communications Strategy, and it is underpinned by a toolkit for staff to use when planning and carrying out consultation.

3.0 Strategy outcomes

3.1 The outcomes to be delivered by this strategy are:

Consultation & Engagement Strategy outcomes	Links to corporate outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents feel able to influence Council decisions • Residents and stakeholders feel well-informed • Effective use of resources • Statutory duty fulfilled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council services which provide good value for money – good value for money • High quality service delivery – customer-focused services • Effective partnership working – strong strategic partnerships • Strong community leadership – a proactive and listening Council • Effective management – good use of resources • Knowledge of our customers and communities – customer and community insight

4.0 Why do we consult/engage?

4.1 As a local authority, we have a duty to consult with people who may be affected by the decisions we make. The Best Value Statutory Guidance states that

“...authorities are under a Duty to Consult representatives of a wide range of local persons; this is not optional.”

4.2 There is an expectation, rightly so, that we ensure that anyone who might be affected by our decisions is given enough information so that they can make their views known having understood the full facts. We must ensure that the decisions we take are informed by the feedback we receive from people who have taken part in consultation exercises and that the views of affected people have been considered.

4.3 We must also fulfil our Public Sector Equality Duty, which means we must have due regard to the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. We must consider the potential impact of any decision we make on groups of people with protected characteristics. This means we must take particular care to ensure that we seek their views, and that they are presented to Members so that they can make decisions based on all the facts.

4.4 As well as helping to inform our decision-making, it is also important that we consult with people to get their views on what is working well and how we can improve our services.

4.5 We also have a statutory duty to consult on planning proposals, and have adopted a Statement of Community Involvement in partnership with the North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit. This sets out how we will consult with people in the preparation of plans and planning applications.

5.0 Who do we consult/engage?

5.1 The Council engages with many different people and organisations in many different ways. Some consultations will be suitable for and open to anyone to respond to; at other times, we will consider which groups and individuals are appropriate to consult about a particular issue.

5.2 The main groups of people we are likely to consult with are:

- The public – including our residents, businesses, members of our Residents' Panel, the voluntary sector, people who work in the district and people who live in the district
- Our customers – people who use our services and people who might become users of our services (this includes our employees)
- Stakeholders and partners – the people and organisations who share our goal of trying to deliver public services and improvements for our community
- Seldom-heard groups – we want to ensure that, when we consult, we do it as widely as possible and that we include specific groups who, for a variety of reasons, do not tend to take part in consultation activity.

5.3 Some people might find participation in consultation difficult, or may be less likely to take part, because of their:

- Age
- Disability
- Race
- Gender
- Religion or belief
- Sexual orientation
- Social exclusion
- Rural isolation

5.4 An impact assessment will be carried out whenever we are considering major changes to our policies or service delivery to alert us to any potential negative impact on specific groups and to better inform us who we need to consult.

5.5 We will use appropriate techniques to engage with these groups and to ensure that the information we provide is accessible to all.

6.0 How do we consult/engage?

- 6.1 -We need to ensure that we make full use of all the tools available to us, particularly technological ones, to allow us to engage as effectively as possible with our stakeholders.
- 6.2 The consultation toolkit used by our staff includes a wide range of consultation methods. By taking a blended approach and using a range of different methods, we maximise the opportunities that people have to give us their views. These include (but are not limited to):
- Consultation papers
 - Face-to-face interviews
 - Postal and online questionnaires
 - Telephone surveys
 - Focus groups
 - Workshops
 - Public meetings
 - Sign-posting to consultation using social media techniques
 - Dialogue between frontline staff and our customers
- 6.3 We will encourage the use of online responses for reasons of efficiency and best value but will always have alternative methods available for anyone who is unable to access consultation electronically.
- 6.4 We will ensure that any consultation we carry out includes enough information and time to allow anyone to consider the proposal and make an informed contribution to the consultation.

7.0 When do we consult/engage?

- 7.1 Clearly there will be times when consultation is a legal obligation and we must meet our statutory duties. When this is the case, we will allow adequate time for people to respond, make sure that the consultation is accessible in a number of formats, and ensure that we work hard to consult with people who might have a particular interest in the consultation but that might need more support or encouragement to get involved.
- 7.2 When consultation is not statutory we will carefully consider the best approach to take. By asking people for their views, we inevitably raise people's expectations that things will automatically change, or that their view will be the one that is taken forward, although clearly we cannot please everyone all of the time – even less so during challenging economic times. Because of this, it's really important that we only consult when there is a genuine opportunity for people to have this influence. It is our intention that by doing this, we can make sure your input is really valued when you give it.
- 7.3 We can also act as a facilitator of consultation for others, by helping parish councils and community groups develop Community and Neighbourhood Plans. Our Community Development Team has helped a number of parish councils and community groups to consult with residents to get their views on

how they want to see their local area develop and improve. Our Community Plan Resource Kit is available online at http://www.east-northamptonshire.gov.uk/site/scripts/documents_info.aspx?categoryID=100003&documentID=1364 and includes some innovative approaches to gathering feedback that we can learn from ourselves.

8.0 Next steps

- 8.1 We will make sure that people receive feedback on the consultation that has been carried out and a summary of responses will be published on our website at www.east-northamptonshire.gov.uk/consultation
- 8.2 We will set up a process to ensure that our consultation is co-ordinated and people are not overloaded with surveys and questions all at once.
- 8.3 We will keep the strategy under review to make sure it reflects current good practice and legal requirements.

9.0 Glossary of terms

Term	Definition
Impact Assessment	A way of documenting the process of checking whether a decision, policy or change in the way that we do things will have a positive, negative or neutral impact upon a particular group, because of its protected characteristics
Protected characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Disability • Gender reassignment • Marriage and civil partnership • Pregnancy and maternity • Race • Religion and belief • Sex • Sexual orientation <p>At East Northamptonshire Council we have also chosen to consider the following as protected characteristics that are relevant in the district:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural isolation (i.e. living in a rural area of the district with little access to services) • Social exclusion (those who may disadvantaged or excluded because of poverty or poor access to education, health care, other public services etc)
Public Sector Equality Duty	<p>Those authorities subject to the equality duty (including East Northamptonshire Council) must, in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010; • Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristics and those who do not; • Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
Residents' Panel	A group of East Northamptonshire residents who have agreed to take part in consultations carried out by East Northamptonshire Council from time to time

