



## Policy & Resources Committee 28 July 2014

### Consultation & Engagement Strategy 2014-17

#### **Purpose of report**

To seek Member approval of the Consultation & Engagement Strategy 2014-17

#### **Attachment(s)**

Appendix 1: Draft Consultation & Engagement Strategy

Appendix 2: Equalities Impact Assessment

#### **1.0 Background**

1.1 The attached strategy sets out the Council's approach to consulting and engaging with residents, businesses, service users and non-users, partners and stakeholders. It updates the existing strategy to reflect new consultation techniques and the legal obligations upon the Council to consult.

#### **2.0 Consultation & Engagement Strategy**

2.1 The Consultation & Engagement Strategy, in a similar way to the Communications Strategy to which it is closely linked, sets out:

- the reasons why we consult with various stakeholders
- who those stakeholders are
- the methods we might use to consult and engage with them
- when we will consult.

2.2 Subject to the strategy being approved, it will be accompanied by an interactive toolkit for staff which will assist in designing consultation. It will ensure that consultation is carried out efficiently and inclusively, and it will encourage the sharing of feedback from consultations with staff and participants.

2.3 It will replace the Council's existing Consultation Strategy 2008 – 2011.

#### **3.0 Equality and Diversity Implications**

3.1 The accompanying Equality Impact Assessment has identified positive impacts for a number of groups. This is because the strategy and accompanying interactive toolkit encourages staff to consider who might need to be consulted about issues and the range of consultation and engagement methods available to ensure that consultation is inclusive.

#### **4.0 Legal Implications**

4.1 The Council has a duty to consult, as set out in the Best Value Statutory Guidance. In addition, the Council must also fulfil its Public Sector Equality Duty, which means it must have regard to the Equality Act 2010. This strategy will help the Council to meet its legal obligations by setting out when the Council must consult and supporting staff to consider how and when consultation is appropriate.

#### **5.0 Risk Management**

5.1 As set out in paragraph 4.1, the strategy will help the Council to meet its legal obligations regarding the duty to consult, and therefore mitigate the risk of a legal

challenge due to decisions being taken without adequate consultation.

## 6.0 Resource and Financial Implications

6.1 There is already provision for consultation within existing budgets and the methods that are recommended in the toolkit will potentially significantly reduce the cost of consultation by ending the contract with existing external providers who manage the Council's Residents' Panel. The Council will continue to retain the flexibility of a Residents' Panel in partnership with Northamptonshire County Council, Northampton Borough Council and the Police & Crime Commissioner at a much lower cost.

## 7.0 Constitutional Implications

7.1 There are no constitutional implications.

## 8.0 Corporate Outcomes

8.1 The strategy recommended for approval will help to deliver the following corporate outcomes:


- Good Value for Money – by moving towards a more efficient option for consulting with residents and recommending electronic consultation where possible
- Effective Partnership Working – by working in partnership with Northamptonshire County Council, Northampton Borough Council and the Police & Crime Commissioner
- Effective Management – the strategy will promote the effective management of the use of consultation by encouraging staff to join up on consultation where possible and to share the results more effectively
- High Quality Service Delivery – consulting effectively with customers will help to ensure that the Council's services are customer-focused
- Strong Community Leadership – the strategy demonstrates that the Council is a proactive and listening Council
- Knowledge of Customers and Communities – effective consultation with customers and the wider community will help the Council gain customer and community insight

## 9.0 Recommendation

9.1 The Committee is recommended to

- (1) Note the Equality Impact Assessment at Appendix 2
- (2) Approve the Consultation Strategy 2014-17

*[Reason: to update the existing Consultation Strategy and recommend an approach to consultation which is cost effective and will support the Council to meet its legal obligations]*

<b>Legal</b>	Power: None				
	Other considerations: Best Value Statutory Guidance (September 2011)				
<b>Background Papers:</b> None					
<b>Person Originating Report:</b> Katy Everitt, Head of Resources & Organisational Development ☎ 01832 742120 ✉ keveritt@east-northamptonshire.gov.uk					
<b>Date:</b> 16 July 2014					
<b>CFO</b> 17/7/14		<b>MO</b>		<b>CX</b>	



East  
Northamptonshire  
Council

## Consultation & Engagement Strategy

**QUESTIONS**

**ANSWERS**

**2014-17**

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## Change History

Issue	Date	Comments

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## Consultees

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## Links to other documents

Document	Link

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

## 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 Technology and digital media has moved on significantly since we developed our last Consultation Strategy. We now need to make full use of all the tools available to us to allow us to engage 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
  - GovMetric feedback
- 6.3 We will encourage the use of online responses for reasons of efficiency 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 to allow anyone to consider the proposal and made 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](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](http://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. We will produce and publish a consultation timetable to show what we are consulting upon and when.
- 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
<b>Impact Assessment</b>	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
<b>Protected characteristics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age</li> <li>• Disability</li> <li>• Gender reassignment</li> <li>• Marriage and civil partnership</li> <li>• Pregnancy and maternity</li> <li>• Race</li> <li>• Religion and belief</li> <li>• Sex</li> <li>• Sexual orientation</li> </ul> <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"> <li>• Rural isolation (i.e. living in a rural area of the district with little access to services)</li> <li>• Social exclusion (those who may disadvantaged or excluded because of poverty or poor access to education, health care, other public services etc)</li> </ul>
<b>Public Sector Equality Duty</b>	<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"> <li>• Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010;</li> <li>• Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristics and those who do not;</li> <li>• Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not</li> </ul>
<b>Residents' Panel</b>	A group of East Northamptonshire residents who have agreed to take part in consultations carried out by East Northamptonshire Council from time to time



## EIA Initial Screening Form – policy

<b>1. Name of Policy:</b>	Consultation Strategy 2014-17
<b>2. Name and Job title / role of person completing Initial Screening:</b>	Emma Gadsby, Policy & Performance Manager
<b>3. What is the main purpose of the Policy?</b>	The strategy sets out the Council's approach to consultation and engagement (statutory and non-statutory)
<b>4. Who is the Policy aimed at?</b>	It is to be used by staff to inform their consultation and engagement activities with residents, businesses, service users and non-users, partners and stakeholders. The strategy is supplemented by a toolkit which is a practical document to be used by staff to encourage a wide range of consultation techniques.
<b>5. How is the success of the Policy measured?</b>	Participation in consultation exercises; satisfaction with the Council; people feeling informed; people feeling able to influence the Council
<b>6. Are equality monitoring systems for the Policy in place?</b>	The decision to monitor participation in consultation exercises will be taken on an exercise by exercise approach and will be used where it is appropriate and will enhance the exercise to know more information about the participants.

**7. Use the following table to indicate using a ✓:**

- a) Where you think that the Policy could have a positive impact on any of the groups or contribute to promoting equality of opportunity or improving relations within equality groups.
- b) Where you think that the Policy could have a negative impact on any of the equality groups i.e. it could disadvantage them.
- c) Where you think that the Policy could have a neutral impact on any of the equality group i.e. no impact

Equality Group	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	Neutral Impact	Reason
<b>Gender:</b>				
Women/Girls			✓	
Men/Boys			✓	
Transgender people	✓			The accompanying toolkit encourages staff to consider how they might engage with seldom heard groups, which may include transgender people.
<b>Sexual Orientation:</b>				
Lesbians, gay men and bisexuals	✓			The accompanying toolkit encourages staff to consider how they might engage with seldom heard groups, which may include lesbians, gay men and bisexuals.
<b>Race/Ethnicity:</b>				
White British people			✓	
White non-British people (including Irish people)	✓			The accompanying toolkit encourages staff to consider how they might engage with seldom heard groups, which
Asian or Asian British people	✓			
Black or Black British people	✓			

Equality Group	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	Neutral Impact	Reason
People of mixed heritage	✓			may include people from ethnic minorities.
Chinese people	✓			
Travellers (Gypsy/Roma/Irish heritage)	✓			
People from other ethnic groups	✓			
People who do not have English as their first language	✓			
<b>Disability:</b>				
Physical impairment, e.g mobility issues which mean using a wheelchair or crutches.	✓			The accompanying toolkit encourages staff to consider how they might engage with seldom heard groups, which may include people who have a disability.
Sensory impairment, e.g blind/having a serious visual impairment, deaf/having a serious hearing impairment.	✓			
Mental health condition, e.g depression or schizophrenia	✓			
Learning disability/difficulty, e.g. Down's syndrome or dyslexia, or cognitive impairment such as autistic spectrum disorder	✓			
Long-standing illness or health condition, e.g. cancer, HIV. Diabetes, chronic heart disease or epilepsy	✓			
Other health problems or impairments ( <i>please specify if appropriate</i> )	✓			
<b>Age:</b>				
Older People (60+)	✓			The accompanying toolkit encourages staff to consider how they might engage with seldom heard groups, which may include older and younger people.
Children and Young People (see guidance for definition)	✓			

Equality Group	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	Neutral Impact	Reason
<b>Religion/Belief:</b>				
Christian			✓	
Buddhist			✓	
Hindu			✓	
Jewish			✓	
Muslim			✓	
Sikh			✓	
Other religion (including holding no belief)			✓	
<b>Other Potentially Affected Groups</b>				
Rural Isolation - People who live in rural areas e.g isolated geographically, lack of internet access	✓			While the strategy encourages the use of online consultation for reasons of efficiency, we will always have alternative methods available for anyone who is unable to access consultation electronically, for example because of lack of internet access.
Socio-economic Exclusion – e.g. people who are on benefits, have low educational attainment, single parents, people living in poor quality housing, people who have poor access to services, the unemployed or any combination of these and the other protected strands	✓			The accompanying toolkit encourages staff to consider how they might engage with seldom heard groups, which may include people affected by socio-economic exclusion.



Equality Group	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	Neutral Impact	Reason
Any other potentially affected groups ( <i>please specify</i> )	✓			A number of other groups have been identified within the toolkit, and it is intended that it is not an exhaustive list, but that staff are encouraged to think about who might be affected by the issue that are consulting on and whether it would help to think of ways to engage particular groups of people.
<b>8. If you have indicated that there is a negative impact on any group: N/A</b>				
a) Is that impact against legislation?	Yes		No	
b) What is the level of impact?	High		Low	
9. Could you minimise or remove any negative impact that is of low significance?	N/A			
10. Could you improve a positive impact of the Policy?	By encouraging staff to consider who they need to consult and what might be most appropriate method, this should open up the Council's approach to consultation and make it more open and accessible.			
11. If there is no evidence that the Policy promotes equality of opportunity or improved relations, could it be adapted so that it does?	A more open, accessible and inclusive approach to consultation should have a positive effect in terms of promoting equality of opportunity and improving relations.			
Head of Service signature				
<b>Date of Initial Screening:</b>				