



Corporate guidance on consultations and engagement

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Our approach to consultation and engagement

Understanding the needs of our communities and residents is essential to sound decision-making and the provision of efficient and effective public services.

Many of our decisions are routine in nature and do not materially affect local people. However, some changes to council policies or services have the potential to have significant impact on the local community. It will frequently be appropriate for the council to engage with local people and groups to better understand their circumstances and their views before making decisions.

Our approach is guided by the council's [Local Code of Corporate Governance \(/content/doclib/4703.pdf\)](#) which emphasises openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement. This means making it easy for people to participate, listening carefully to what they tell us, and showing clearly how their views help to shape decisions.

The purpose of engagement and consultation activities

These activities help us make decisions that reflect the need of local people who live and work in the borough, community groups and partners. This is important because understanding people's views leads to better decisions.

As the council recognises that engagement offers a number of benefits:

- It promotes transparency about the council's decisions

- It facilitates trust; and
- It shows respect for the people that the council serves
- It helps the council to be responsive and to make fair decisions
- It facilitates the making of informed decisions

Types of activity we use

Activity	Description
Engagement	is an ongoing process which helps the council to learn, share information, ideas and to evolve. Engagement does not start and end when a particular decision is made.
Consultation	are typically focussed on particular decisions or changes which the council is proposing or considering. It must follow rules to ensure fairness, including providing enough information, allow enough time for people to respond, and take all feedback into account before a decision is made.
Market research	gathers insight to help the council understand behaviours, needs, preferences or experiences through activities such as surveys, interviews, user testing or focus groups. These help us understand people's needs and preferences and often inform early thinking, before any proposals are developed.

When to consult - our duty

When carrying out any type of consultations, engagement or market research activity, the council adheres to the [Government's Consultation Principles](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consultation-principles-guidance) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consultation-principles-guidance>), which provide general guidance on how consultations should be conducted.

Statutory consultation:

This is where there are legal requirements mandating that a consultation must take place.

They are present in several crucial areas:

- Best Value Duty - Local Government Act 1999
- Environment - Town and County Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment)
- Equality - Equality Act 2010

Non-statutory consultation

Statutory consultation:

This is where there is no requirement specified in statute; however, best practice shows that engaging with the public and stakeholders leads to more informed policy making and better decision-making.

Factors which tend to support the need for a consultation may include:

- Where the council is making a significant policy change which adversely affects many local people.
 - Where the council is proposing to remove a vital service which is relied upon.
 - Where the proposed change is likely to affect vulnerable persons or persons with protected characteristics.
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Consultation principles

The legal expectations of what is an appropriate consultation are outlined in the Gunning Principles.

These are a set of legal principles that have been established as good practice when conducting consultation exercises:

1. **Proposals must be at a formative stage:** No final decision has been made or predetermined, by the decision makers.
2. **Sufficient information is provided to give 'intelligent consideration':** The information must be relevant, accessible, and understandable for participants to make informed responses.
3. **There is adequate time for consideration and response:** The timeframe should suit the subject and impact of the consultation and allow a reasonable amount of time for effective participation in a consultation process.
4. **Conscientious consideration' must be given to the consultation responses before a decision is made:** Decision-makers must fully consider the outcome of the consultation and evidence they have considered consultation feedback before making a decision.

These principles help create consultation processes that are transparent, inclusive and grounded in meaningful dialogue that meet legal expectations.

Our standards for consultation

We recognise that effective consultation requires flexibility and transparency.

To guide our efforts, we have adopted key standards:

1. **Clarity and Purpose:** We will clearly explain why we are consulting and how feedback will be used. We will ensure consultations are open, honest, and conducted at stages where public input can influence decisions.
2. **Inclusiveness:** We aim to involve a wide range of community members, ensuring that everyone, particularly under-represented and hard-to-reach groups, has an equal opportunity to participate.

3. **Accessibility:** We will organise consultations that are easy for all to access and understand, using appropriate language and cost-effective methods suited to the needs at hand. Providing the information required in a manner suitable for participants to make informed responses.
4. **Transparency and Feedback:** We will keep participants informed throughout the process, reporting back on input received, decisions made, and actions taken.
5. **Informed Decision-Making:** We will use consultation findings to make decisions that improve services and enhance the quality of life for the community.

The [Statement of Community Involvement \(https://www.basingstoke.gov.uk/BD03\)](https://www.basingstoke.gov.uk/BD03) sets out how the council intends to involve the local community in planning issues.

By integrating these standards into all consultation and engagement activities, we aim to ensure the delivery of meaningful and effective consultation and engagement.

[To see our current and past consultation visit Your Say webpage \(https://www.basingstoke.gov.uk/yoursay\).](https://www.basingstoke.gov.uk/yoursay)

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