


Huntingdonshire
DISTRICT COUNCIL

ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

INTRODUCTION

The Corporate Plan sets out that:

“We all want to live in a place with the highest possible quality of life. A place people are drawn to, where they feel included and can aspire to something. A place people are proud to call home. “

This aspiration is supported by three priorities:

- 1.Improving the quality of life for local people.
- 2.Creating a better Huntingdonshire for future generations.
- 3.Deliver good quality, high value for money services with good control and compliance with statutory obligations.

To achieve these priorities, we need to listen to and work with our community. Huntingdonshire District Council is committed to engaging with and listening to the people who live, work, study and visit our district.

We want to ensure that local people are informed about the work we’re doing and why. That when local people can play a role in informing decision making they are enabled to. That when local people can co-design or co-produce services or projects with us, they are empowered to.

Moving forward, “how we engage, listen and respond, and more importantly share and involve our residents in developing solutions to local issues will be critical.” ([The Community Strategy – Transition Plan 2021 to 2023](#)).



This document follows the **Do, Enable, Influence** approach in the Corporate Plan.

- When you should inform, engage or consult, and how you can **do** that.
- How you can **enable** local people, businesses, organisations and stakeholders to be involved.
- How and when you should support the community to **influence** decision making.

The principles provide you with a road map to ensure our approach to information, engagement, consultation and empowerment meets the needs of our community.

The principles are underpinned in consultation and engagement best practice and are aligned with the council's Corporate Plan.

A supporting toolkit provides details of techniques and approaches you could consider to engage the community to support and inform your decision making.

If you're unsure about whether you need to engage and / or how to approach a conversation with the community please seek guidance from your line manager, or a member of the Senior Leadership Team.

It is also a publicly accessible document so that our community can understand our approach to engagement and hold it to account.



WHEN SHOULD WE ENGAGE?

The first question is should you engage?

An engagement process should only be undertaken if the community can play a role in shaping an outcome or decision.

The flow chart overleaf will:

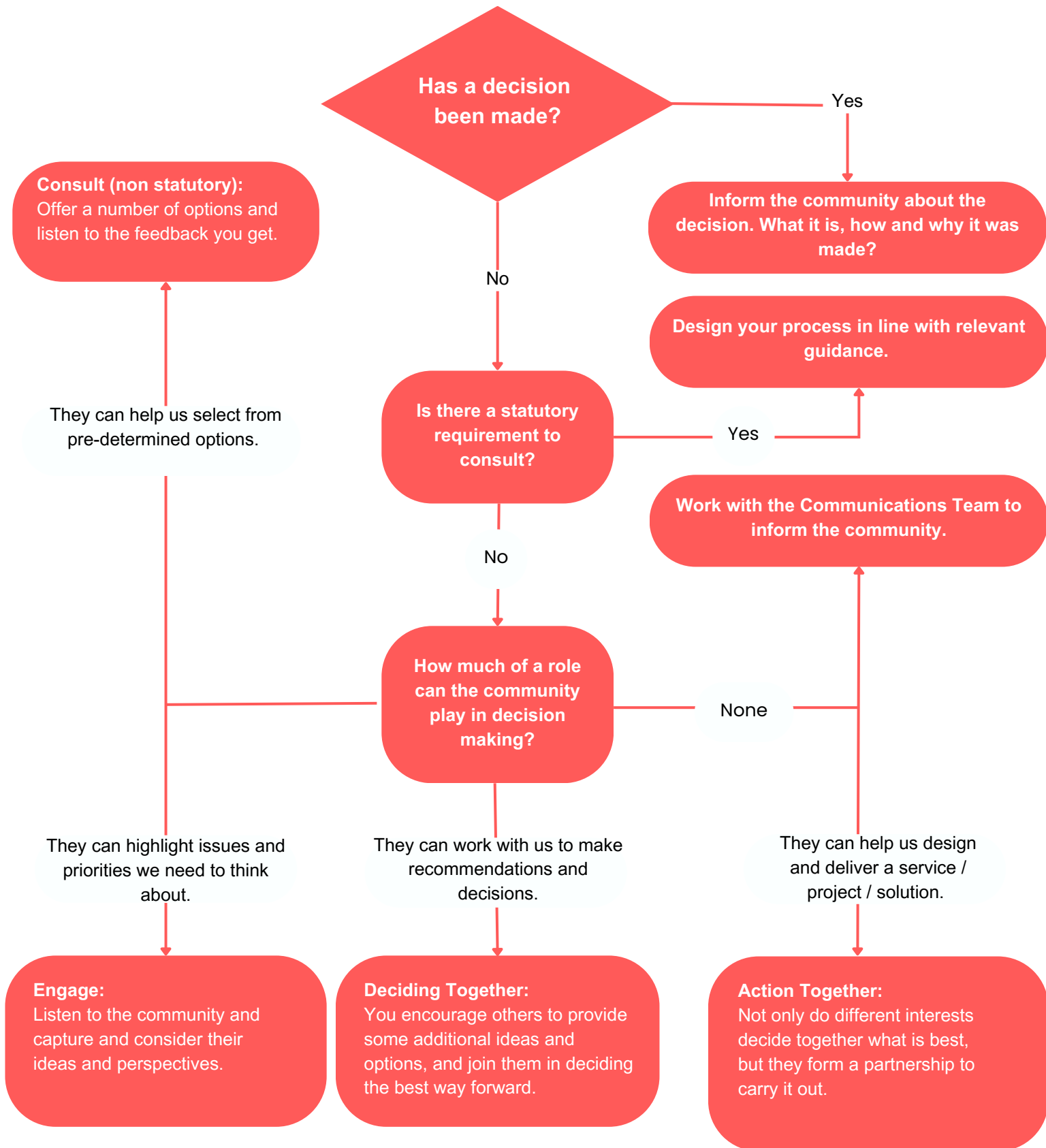
- Let you know if you should engage.
- Identify what type of engagement meets the needs of your project or service design.

In addition you should also seek advice from your line manager and / or a member of the Senior Leadership Team.

The supporting engagement toolkit provides further guidance on ways to engage, stakeholder mapping and monitoring and evaluation.



FINDING THE RIGHT OPTION



MEETING THE NEEDS OF LOCAL PEOPLE

These principles set out how you should approach engagement. All engagement activity should be in line with these principles.

Principles

It is important that any conversation with our community meets a standard. Our principles draw on the [Consultation Institutes: Consultation Charter](#) ensuring we are aligned with best practice. Embedding our principles into every dialogue will enable us to deliver a quality approach that meets the needs of our community and decision-making processes.

Open and honest

As a council we will also ensure that local people are informed about what we are doing and why. When local people can influence decision making they will be engaged. As a council we will be open and honest, explaining what process is taking place and why. We will share the information we can share and explain when there is information that cannot be made public. For example, if it is commercially sensitive.

Visible

When engagement is taking place, we will work to ensure that people who it will impact and who are interested know where they can have their say. By being open and honest we will build trust in the process.

Vision

Our community is enabled and empowered to influence our decision making. They are informed about what we do and how and why we do it.

Accessible

Engagement will always take place in a way that is accessible. This means thinking about which tools and approaches will work for the people you need to work with. It means thinking about where and when to enable as many people as possible to take part.

Depending on the target audience for your project or service you should think about how you engage seldom heard voices. For example, young people, people with additional needs and disabilities, and people living in areas of deprivation.

You should also think about what people will need to enable them to take part. For example, captions during online meetings as well as sign language or translation support.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF LOCAL PEOPLE

You should think about how you will make sure the language you use is accessible. It is important for language to be clear and simple to understand. Any use of acronyms will be explained, and jargon will be avoided to ensure everyone can understand the information we are sharing and the questions we are asking.

Transparent

It should be clear how the results of the engagement will shape decision making. Anyone thinking about and / or participating in the process should understand how and what they tell us will be used. This transparency is vital to our community trusting the process and believing it is worth their time to participate.

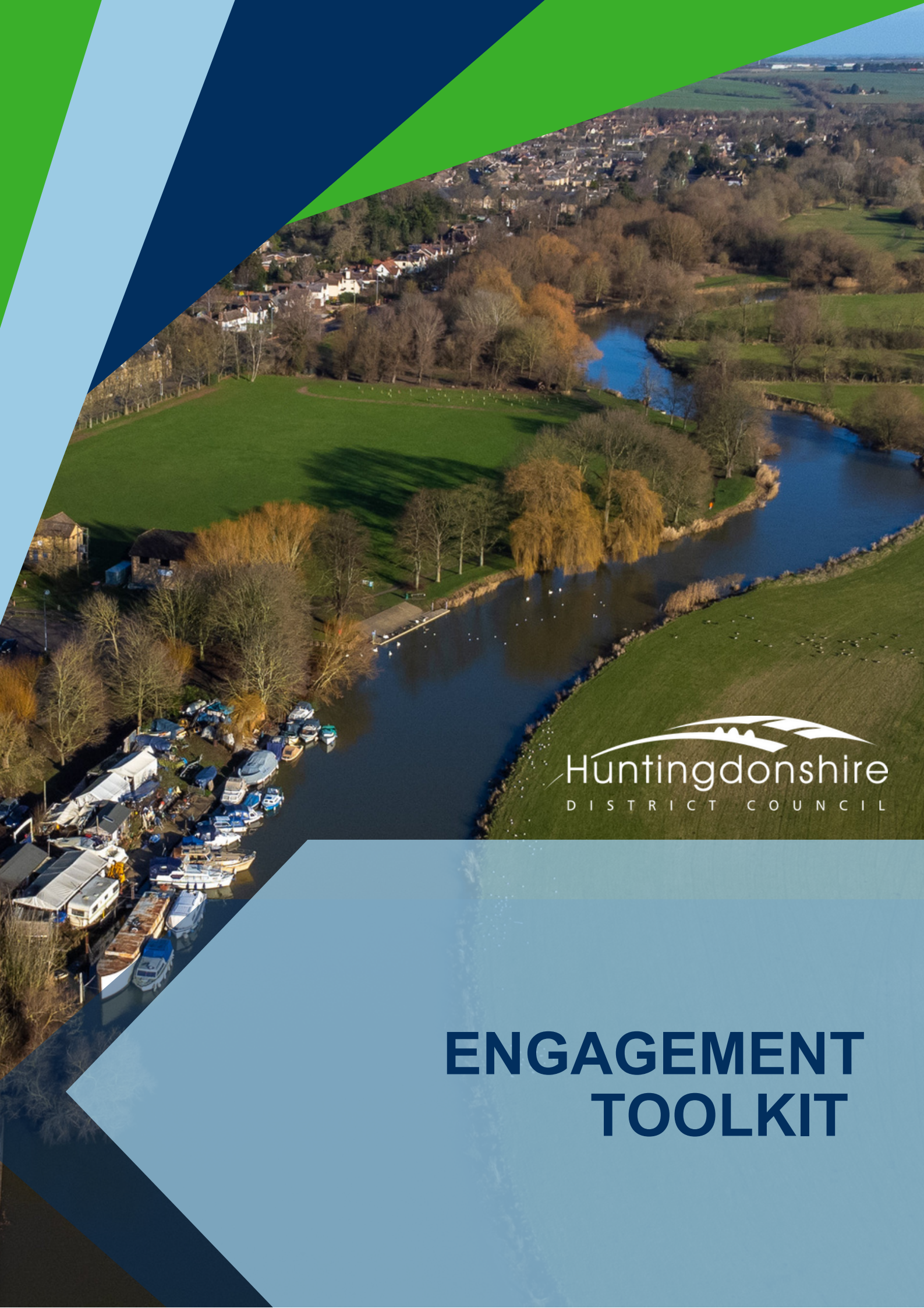
Fair

Anything anyone tells us in a community engagement or a consultation exercise will be treated equally and fairly. Information and viewpoints gathered will be analysed promptly and objectively. Participants and the wider community should be able to understand how the analysis has taken place.

Feedback

Participants and the wider community must be able to see the outputs and the outcomes of the process. This means sharing feedback in a way that is clear and accessible to anyone who is interested.






Huntingdonshire
DISTRICT COUNCIL

ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT

INTRODUCTION

This toolkit provides guidance and techniques to support you to plan and deliver an engagement plan in line with Huntingdonshire District Council's Engagement Principles.

Informing, engaging, consulting and empowering are distinct and specific activities. At certain times we need to inform our community and at others we will consult or engage. It is important to consider these distinctions and select the approach that works for the community and your project or service.

There are numerous definitions. For the purposes of this document, and our approach, we are using the definitions detailed overleaf.



INFORM, ENGAGE, CONSULT OR EMPOWER

Engagement is an overarching process by which we have a conversation with our community. Essentially it is about involving local people in decisions that will impact them.

There are different levels of engagement, for different projects or services and different participants. Consultation and engagement best practice is based around five types of participation:

Inform

The least you can do is tell people what is planned.

Consult

You offer a number of options and listen to the feedback you get.

Deciding Together

You encourage others to provide some additional ideas and options, and join them in deciding the best way forward.

Action Together

Not only do different interests decide together what is best, but they form a partnership to carry it out.

Supporting Independent Community Initiatives

You help others do what they want – perhaps with a framework of grants, advice and support provided by the resource holder.

INFORM, ENGAGE, CONSULT OR EMPOWER

Inform

There are times when local people, our community, cannot influence a decision. It may be that a decision has already been made and asking for opinions that would not be taken into consideration would lack integrity. It may also be that for a range of reasons local people cannot shape a decision-making process. In these circumstances we will inform our community.

If you need to inform the community, you should refer to the council's Communication Strategy. This strategy sets out:

- How to bring the council's priorities to life.
- How to enable better communication across the council.
- How to build stronger relationships with the community.

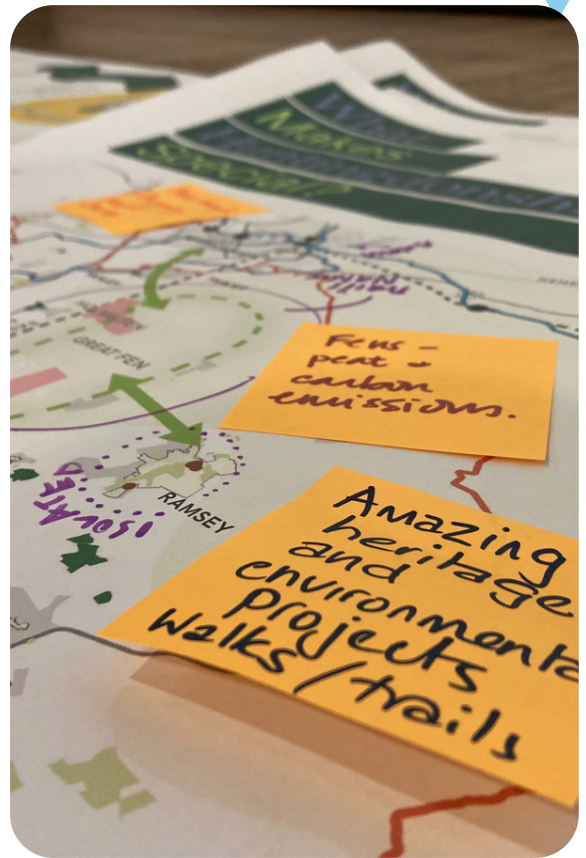
The council's Communications Team can support you to inform local people.

Consult

Consultation is about a choice between pre-determined options, not an opportunity to purpose alternatives. There are two distinct types of consultation.

Statutory Consultation:

[The Local Government Association Guidance Consulting Residents](#), explains that: "Councils sometimes have a statutory requirement to consult their residents, and this is especially true for issues such as planning, or



redevelopments. Statutory consultations are bound by legal requirements, such as Best Value legislation, and can have strict rules surrounding how they should be conducted. If you fail to run a statutory consultation in line with those rules you could be liable for a judicial review."

Therefore, it is important to make sure that you check the guidelines surrounding your specific consultation plans. If you are undertaking a statutory consultation it is important to consider the relevant guidance.

INFORM, ENGAGE, CONSULT OR EMPOWER

Non-Statutory Consultation

There are a wide range of reasons that we might want to consult our community. Non-statutory consultations have no legal status, and are a way to involve a cross-section of the population. A Government [Code of Practice on Consultations](#) is available online.

Deciding together

There are times when the community can play an active role in making a decision. For example, co-design is a process which enables people to work with the organisations that make decisions that affect their lives. It gives people the power to shape the decisions that affect their lives and communities. Other mechanisms such as a Citizen's Assembly enable local people to work directly with decision makers and find consensus around recommendations for the future.

Acting together

Sometimes the solution is to act together, for the community to actively participate in both the decision and the delivery. Co-production refers to *"the joint delivery of projects and services between community members and decision-makers."* [Making the Case for Co-Production:](#) (Future of London, March 2023). *"For co-production to be genuine, there are three key principles that underpin the process: sharing power, sharing knowledge, and being inclusive. Trust will help to get these things right and getting these things right will generate trust."*

Supporting independent community initiatives

There may be occasions when the best solution is for the council to support a community initiative. It may be that the decision to take this approach is reached through community engagement.

Conversations with local people

There are times when we need to listen to the community to understand their challenge, ideas and perspectives, and have conversations with them about the change they would like to see.

How to decide

The way to work with the community, in relation to your project or service is dependent on a number of factors. The key questions are:

- Do you need to tell the community about a decision that has been made?
- Can you enable local people to choose between options?
- How much influence can the community have over decision making and service delivery.

The Engagement Principles contains a flow chart for identifying which approach you should use.

INFORM, ENGAGE, CONSULT OR EMPOWER

The table below shows the approaches in relation to the types of engagement approach. You can use tactics across the table, but in line with our principles you must take an open and honest approach.

For example, you should only use co-design when the community can be equal in the process. Details of each approach can be found in section three.

Type of Engagement	Communication, Engagement and Consultation Approaches
<p>Inform The least you can do is tell people what is planned.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local media • Social media • Website content • Local influencers and networks
<p>Consult You offer a number of options and listen to the feedback you get.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pop up exhibitions • Surveys and questionnaires • Focus groups • One-to-one interviews • Workshops • Collaboration with community groups and organisations • Walk and talks
<p>Deciding Together You encourage others to provide some additional ideas and options, and join them in deciding the best way forward.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-design • Citizen's Assembly
<p>Action together Not only do different parties decide together what is best, but they form a partnership to carry it out.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-production • Asset based community development
<p>Supporting Independent Community Initiatives You help others do what they want – perhaps with a framework of grants, advice and support provided by the resource holder.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grants and funding programmes • Commissioning community-based programmes

INFORM, ENGAGE, CONSULT OR EMPOWER

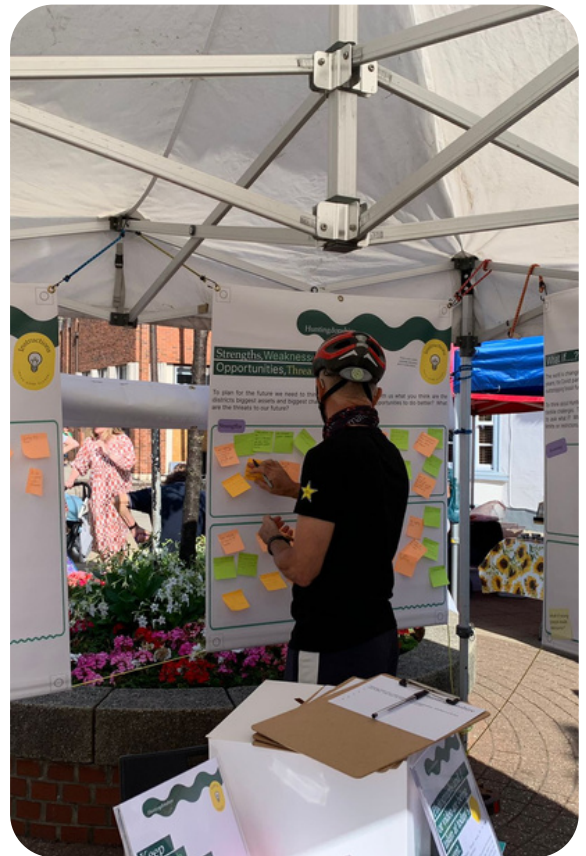
Case Study: Huntingdonshire Futures

Huntingdonshire Futures is the Place Strategy for the District. It sets out a shared vision for the future of the district for the next 30 years, with a focus on the economy, health, the environment, travel, and pride in place.

To inform the Place Strategy we needed local people to tell us what issues and priorities we should think about as well as what approaches they want the council to take.

A two phase engagement approach was designed and delivered to enable local people to inform the Place Strategy. In phase one, pop up events, focus groups, visits to community groups and schools and online activities were organised to understand their priorities, what they valued about Huntingdonshire, and what change they wanted to see. This informed an outline strategy.

In phase two, we tested the proposed strategy with focus groups, schools and colleges, and with community groups. Enabling the local community to raise gaps in the strategy and priorities they thought had been missed. On adoption of the strategy all participants were contacted to ensure they knew how to find and view the strategy.



TARGET AUDIENCE

Who Do You Need To Listen To and How Can You Reach Them

Community is an all encompassing phrase. The community you need to engage with will depend on the service or project you are developing. Some projects will require an engagement process that is open to every person living, working and studying in Huntingdonshire. Others will have a more targeted community that you need to reach.

But how do you identify the community in the context of your work?

The Consultation Institute recommends using the 'six tests method' for identifying who should engage. The people and organisations you identify using the six tests are your stakeholders.

Test 1:

Who is **directly** impacted by this decision?

Test 2:

Who is **indirectly** impacted?

Test 3:

Who is **potentially** impacted?

Test 4:

Whose **help** is needed to make the decision work?

Test 5:

Who **knows** about the subject?

Test 6:

Who will have an **interest** in the subject?

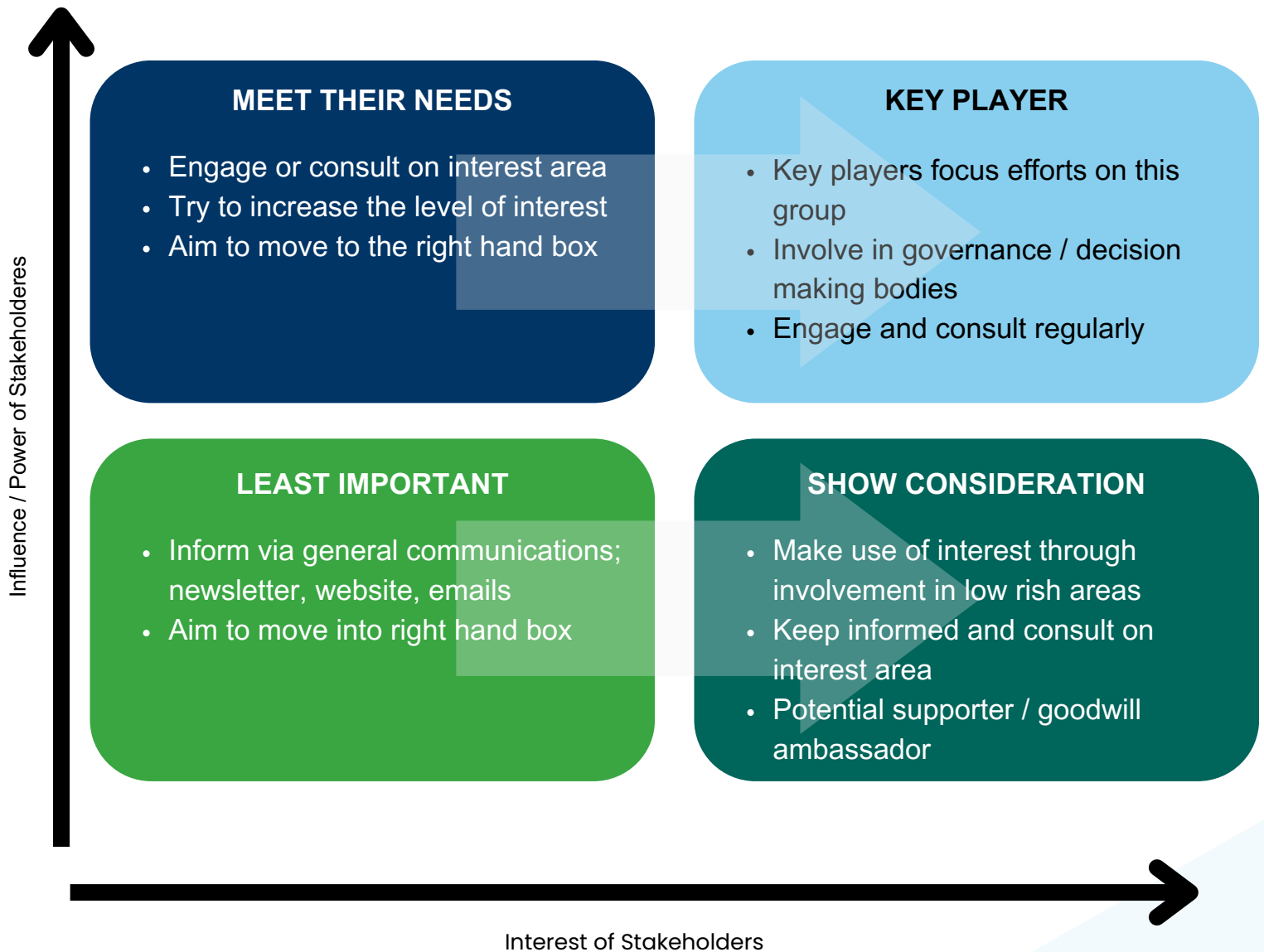
When using the six tests you should think about individuals and organisations. For example, as a District Council, we should think about which of the six tests applies to Town and Parish councils, the County Council and the Combined Authority.

It is useful to think about the demographics that make up your community in relation to the six tests. Are there specific demographics that are directly impacted? As a result are their organisations or groups whose help is needed and / or know the subject. Spend time thinking about how you need to engage as this will be key to defining which tactics you use.

Once you have used the six tests to identify who you should engage, you should use a power-interest matrix (shown overleaf) to start thinking about how you should develop your plan.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Stakeholder Mapping

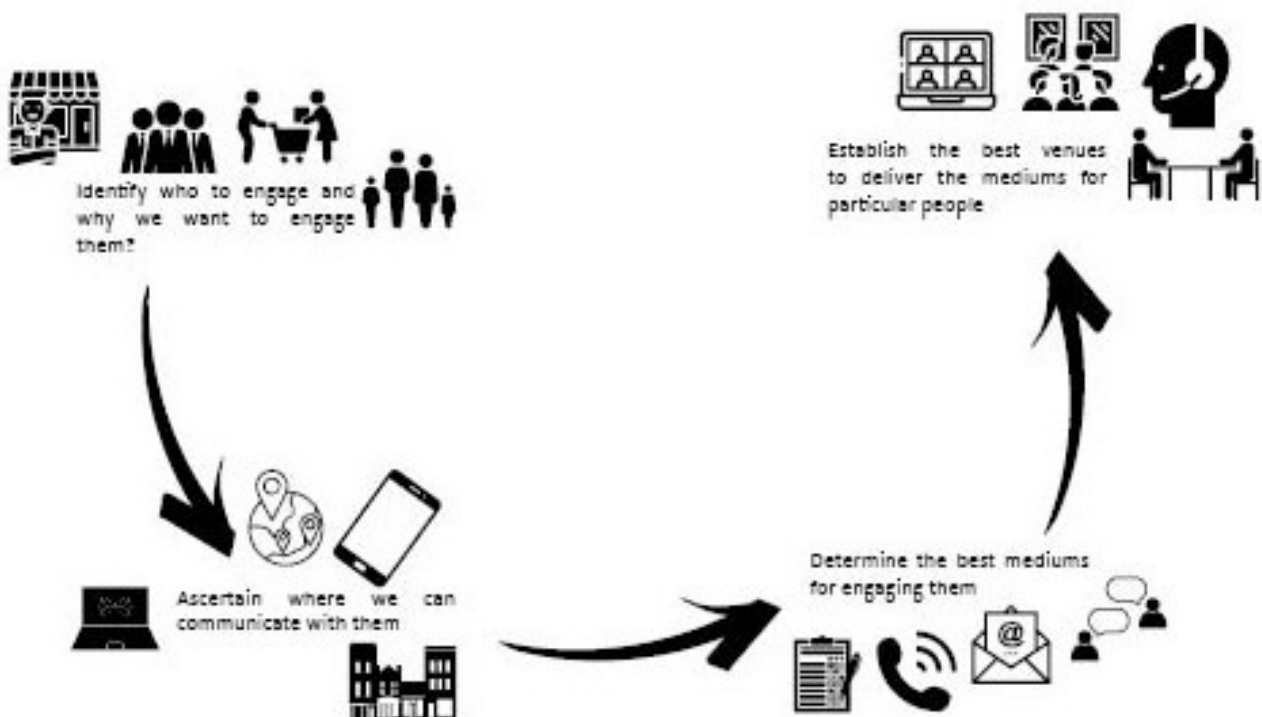


TARGET AUDIENCE

As shown in the power-interest matrix those with the highest interest and influence / power are your key players. These are the stakeholders that you should listen to and work with throughout.

Using the matrix will enable you to think about how you can make the best use of the resources and capacity available to you.

The diagram below shows the relationship between who you want to engage and how to engage them.



TARGET AUDIENCE

Tactics

There are a range of tactics you can use to enable the community you have identified to participate. When thinking about tactics, you need to consider four key elements:

1. The people you need to engage.
2. The type of engagement you're doing.
3. The influence the community can have.
4. How will you analyse what comes out of the conversation.

Identify who to engage and who we want to engage them?

The six tests and interest and influence matrix will enable you to identify who to engage.

You also need to think about why you want to engage them and what you need to ask them. What do you need to learn from your stakeholders?

Different types of conversations are a better fit for different types of engagement. For example, focus groups and one-to-one interviews are a good way to explore peoples lived experiences. Bringing people together in workshops can help build consensus and shared recommendations. Questionnaires are an efficient way of collecting of obtaining large amounts of information.

Ascertain where we can communicate with them?

Different target audiences will need to be reached, communicated with and engaged in different ways. You should think about where the people you need to engage are, who they listen to, and who they work with.

Who are the 'influencers' that they will trust and respond to. Which groups or organisations might they be a member of? Which social media channels might they use? What events might they attend? For example, could they be park runners? Do they shop at St Ives market? Or play cricket in Ramsey?

You also need to think about the language you will use. Different audiences will understand and respond to language in different ways.

Determine the best channels for engaging them

Later in this document you'll find a range of channels or tools you can use to engage. You need to think about which ones your audience will respond to, what processes they will trust and want to participate in.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Is digital first possible?

Huntingdonshire District Council is committed to a digital first approach. A digital approach to engagement can be beneficial, for example online surveys save time and resources in regards to data entry.

However, it is important to consider if a digital only approach is the best fit for your engagement and audience. Is it accessible for everyone you need to talk to? Is it the right channel for the type of questions you want to ask?

Equality Impact Assessment

If your engagement and / or decision making process will have an impact on people with protected characteristics you should complete an [Equalities Impact Assessment](#). This process will enable you to identify any barriers to engagement and ensure people are able to participate.



Photo by Alexander Dummer on Unsplash

DESIGNING YOUR ENGAGEMENT PLAN

Before you start engaging with the community you should take the time to create an engagement plan.

The plan should take into account the capacity, resources and timescales you have available. You should also think about what team you have available to deliver the engagement and the skills they have. This plan should lay out the following:

About the project: A summary of the project or service you are engaging on.

Why engage: An explanation of why you're engaging. As well as the type of community engagement you'll be doing and how this has been selected.

Objectives: What are the objectives for your engagement programme? Is there anything specific you need to achieve through the engagement process.

Target audience: How you have applied the six tests to identify who you need to engage. How the power and influence matrix has been used to identify priorities.

Engagement Principles: The Huntingdonshire District Council Engagement Principles and how you will apply them.

Tactics and engagement activities: How you are going to engage with your target audience. A list of potential activities can be found later in this section.

Analysis: How you will analyse and use the information and data you collate through the engagement process.

Monitoring and evaluation: How you will understand who has participated and ensure it reflects your target audience.

Project programme: When you will undertake the engagement, in the context of the wider project. This should show that your conversations with the community take place at a time when they can influence the project.

The engagement plan is a flexible document, you should keep it updated throughout the lifetime of the project. For example, if you're not reaching a key audience you may need to adapt your tactics, this should be reflected in your engagement plan.



DESIGNING YOUR ENGAGEMENT PLAN

Pop-up exhibitions: In any community engagement approach it is important to go to the community, do not expect them to come to you.

Pop-up exhibitions in high footfall areas, or at popular events can be a good way to engage local people. Displays and tools can be used to capture people's thoughts and ideas. Members of the project team can talk directly to local people.

Focus groups: These groups bring together a small group of people to answer questions in a moderated setting. They are a good way for people to share their experiences. They can also be used to explore ideas and test recommendations. Their value is in people coming together to have a conversation and sharing their perspectives on the same issue. Differences of opinion can tell you as much as a consensus.

One-to-one interviews: Not all people are comfortable in a group situation. Not all conversations are suitable for a group situation.

One-to-one interviews provide an opportunity for people to speak openly about their experiences and ideas.

Workshops: Can enable you to work with bigger groups of people, using tasks and activities to obtain their opinion. Group work enables people to work together and build consensus.

Embedded engagement: Spending time with people in settings like schools, colleges, community groups and other activities can enable you to reach new audiences.

Working with organisations, you can design an approach to engagement that works for their group. For example, for the Huntingdonshire Futures Place Strategy we worked with schools to design activities that could be delivered in the classroom for groups of up to 35 students.

Walk and Talks: If an engagement is about a specific place or location, it can be useful to visit that place with the community. Walks and Talks or site visits can enable a discussion about a place in a place, enabling people to share perspectives and ideas in situ.

Citizen's assembly: A citizen's assembly is a group of people who are brought together to discuss an issue(s) and reach a conclusion about what they think should happen. The people who take part are selected to reflect the wider population / target audience.

They give participants the time and opportunity to learn about and discuss a topic with experts, before reaching conclusions. They ask people to work together, to build consensus and arrive at shared, workable recommendations.

DESIGNING YOUR ENGAGEMENT PLAN

Co-Design: Co-design is a process which enables people to work with the organisations that make decisions that affect their lives. It gives people the power to shape the decisions that effect their lives and communities.

By definition it requires stakeholders to be actively involved in the design of the process. The community are therefore equal partners in the process.

Co-Production: Co-production goes beyond co-design in that it involves the community working with decision makers to design and deliver solutions, and service of a project. [Future of London Making the Case for Co-Production](#) (March 2023), focuses on how and why to co-produce in the built environment. It is a useful summary of what it means to co-produce and why it is critical to share power, share knowledge and be inclusive.

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD): Nesta's report [Asset-Based Community Development for Local Authorities](#) explores how Local Authorities have used this approach. It also suggests how to put it into practice.

Within the report, Mike Ward of Leeds City Council (now retired) explains how he and his team understood the ABCD approach:

“Asset-based community development and asset-based approaches begin by finding out what the people living in a community care enough about to work on together to change, develop and/or sustain.

It recognises and celebrates the uniqueness of neighbourhoods and the interdependencies of communities.

Central to the approach is finding and recognising the assets of an area; anything from a patch of unused land, a neighbour who knows the local baby groups, a local business who is happy to share their office space, a fast-food restaurant where young adults meet or a retired teacher looking to meet new people.

They will be different in every area, but whatever they are these community assets are the building blocks of sustainable community building efforts.”

INFORM, ENGAGE, CONSULT OR EMPOWER

Case Study: Huntingdonshire Climate Strategy

Huntingdonshire District Council's Climate Strategy sets out the priorities to achieve the commitment of a net zero carbon council by 2040.

Local people will have a role to play in getting to the net zero carbon target. Therefore, we needed to engage local people. Firstly, a questionnaire was used to understand residents priorities, identify actions already been taken and understand the impact of climate change.

This was followed by a programme of online focus groups and working with schools and colleges to check and challenge the proposed priorities for change. Focus group participants were paid to take part, helping us engage a more diverse range of people.



MONITORING & EVALUATION

Have you delivered the engagement principles?

Earlier, we set out how you should think about and identify your target audience as well as how stakeholder mapping should enable you to understand which groups, organisations and communities you need to prioritise.

Throughout this engagement and communication you should consistently monitor all activity to ensure that you are reaching your target audiences and ensure you are providing equal and appropriate opportunities for participation.

It is through monitoring and evaluation that you will be able to learn lessons and gain insight into the community's perceptions and aspirations, which will help inform your recommendations.

A communication log should be created to record all activities including participation by demographic characteristics to ensure that you don't exclude any groups. Examples of what you can monitor include:

- Media and social media monitoring and listening.
- Stakeholder feedback.
- Community feedback.
- Equality monitoring – based on your Equalities Impact Analysis.
- Registration for events like focus groups should collate EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) data.
- Scrutiny and challenge from your team.

Monitoring who is, and is not, participating in your engagement will enable you to understand if you need to redesign or change your approach to meet your audience. It will also ensure that your approach is transparent and acknowledges the challenges you may have faced.

The Principles: Throughout your engagement process, you should be thinking about delivering the principles outlined in this document and how you will evidence that your approach has delivered these principles.

THINK ABOUT

There are other factors you should also consider when developing your engagement plan.

Capacity and Resources

Part of community engagement is managing expectations and being clear about what project or service is or is not. Part of engagement planning is also managing expectations. It is important to prepare a plan that is deliverable. You need to consider the capacity, resources, and budget you have available to engage.

Skills

You also need to consider if your team has the skills to undertake the engagement. Listening to and working with people is a skill. Is your team best placed to work with your community.

Timescales

For engagement to meet our principles, it needs to take place at the right time in the wider project. You need to think about what you are asking and what influence the answer can have.

For example, if you're consulting on options, you need to do so before the decision is made, so that the feedback on those options can inform the decision.

You also need to take into consideration how long different processes take.

Approaches like co-design and co-production take time to arrange and facilitate.

Test Your Approach

Before going out to engage you should test your tools and approaches. For example, if you've designed a questionnaire you should ask members of the team to complete it to make sure it makes sense. Display materials, workshop plans, focus group discussion guides and other tools should all be tested.

Promotion and Inform

If you're doing an engagement exercise you need to think about letting people know it is happening and how they can get involved. The council's Communication Team can help you with this.

GDPR

Firstly you should ask if you need to collect participants personal identifying data. If you do please seek advice from infogov@3csharedservices.