



CITY OF
Lincoln
COUNCIL

CORPORATE CONSULTATION and ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

2015 - 2018

Business Manager Policy Unit (CX)



Together, let's deliver
Lincoln's ambitious future

Strategic priorities as of January 2017

- Let's drive economic growth
- Let's reduce inequality
- Let's deliver quality Housing
- Let's enhance our remarkable place

Plus

- Professional, high performing service delivery

Document control

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Organisation | City of Lincoln Council |
| Title | Corporate Consultation and Engagement Strategy |
| Author - name and title | Pat Jukes, Business Manager, Policy Unit |
| Owner - name and title | Pat Jukes, Business Manager, Policy Unit |
| Date | November 2014 |
| Approvals | AD Group/CMT/Policy Scrutiny |
| Filename | CX Management/Policy Team/Consultation/Consultation Strategy |
| Version | V.01 |
| Protective marking | Not protectively marked |
| Next review date | June 2018 |

Document Amendment history

| Revision | Originator of change | Date of change | Change description |
|----------|----------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| V.02 | Pat Jukes | 24 th March 2017 | Amendments to reflect new Vision 2020 |
| | | | |
| | | | |

Distribution and training history

| Details | Date |
|------------------------------|------|
| Tbc when dates agreed | |
| | |
| | |

Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Foreword | 4 |
| Aims and objectives of the strategy | 4 |
| Key considerations..... | 5 |
| Roles and responsibilities | 6 |
| The approach | 6 |
| Existing Corporate consultation vehicles | 7 |
| Government legislation and guidance | 9 |
| Local statutory requirements | 10 |
| Review of strategy | 11 |
| Links to useful documents | 11 |
| Forward action plan | 12 |
| Appendices | 13 |

Foreword

This strategy is provided for the purpose of enabling staff to understand the way in which the City of Lincoln Council wishes to undertake consultation with our citizens and customers of our services.

An abbreviated overview containing the key points will be made available for all on the City of Lincoln website.

Like all councils, the City of Lincoln Council has a statutory duty to provide relevant, cost effective and efficient services and to consult with our communities on service delivery (Local Government Act 1999). In order to achieve and maintain the best quality services at the least cost, our stakeholders must have the opportunity to provide feedback on current service provision and have a say in the planning and delivery of future services.

The council's three year Strategic Plan – Vision 2020, identifies our key priorities, and sets out how we see the priorities being delivered. Engaging the local community is essential if the Council is to achieve its aspirations and deliver efficient, effective, and targeted services.

This strategy outlines the way we will consult with the local community and citizens in making decisions that affect their lives. It also seeks to outline how we will manage our consultation programme in line with our Strategic Priorities, best contemporary consultation practice in local government and any central government requirements.

Aims and Objectives of the strategy

The aim of the city council is to comprehensively engage with users of the city council services – that includes residents, businesses, the third sector, visitors and other stakeholders and partners in a meaningful and cost effective way, delivering outcomes that demonstrate real benefits for the community and value for money for the authority.

Consultation in Lincoln is designed around the following principles, it should be:

- Bespoke – one size does not fit all, and consultation should be developed to meet the specific policy, project or service need
- Timely – consultation should be undertaken early on in decision making
- Appropriate – there should be a defined need for the consultation, which should be proportionate, relevant and accessible
- Inclusive – all affected groups should have the right to express their views including those harder to reach groups
- Effective – the outcomes from consultation should inform decision-making and service delivery
- Co-ordinated – a consistent and co-ordinated approach

Key considerations

There may be a number of reasons to consult – for example to gather views and preferences, to understand possible unintended consequences of a policy or to get views on implementation plans. Increasing the level of transparency and engagement improves the quality of our policy making by bringing together expertise and alternative perspectives; as well as identifying unintended effects and practical problems.

WHO – Decision makers should be able to demonstrate that they have considered who needs to be consulted and ensure that the consultation captures the full range of stakeholders affected. In particular, if a policy or decision will affect hard to reach or vulnerable groups, they should take the necessary actions to engage effectively with these groups. Further information on which groups to contact is available in the consultation guidelines.

Information should be presented in a way that will be accessible and useful to the key stakeholders. The form of consultation will largely depend on the issues under consideration, who needs to be consulted, as well as the available time and resources.

WHEN - Engagement should begin early in policy development when it is still under consideration and views can genuinely be taken into account. The objectives of any consultation should be clear, and will depend to a great extent on the type of issue and the stage in the policy-making process – from gathering new ideas to testing options.

Consultation exercises should not generally be launched or published during local or national election periods unless there are exceptional circumstances which make a consultation absolutely essential.

HOW - Information provided to stakeholders should be easily understandable –, it should use plain language and clarify the key messages or issues, particularly where the consultation deals with complex subject matter. If you are engaging with children, it may be appropriate to make the surveys more ‘youngster friendly’ e.g. using more pictorial background. Consideration should be given to more informal forms of consultation that may be appropriate – for example, email or web-based forums, social media public meetings, working groups, focus groups, and surveys – rather than always reverting to a written consultation.

Modern communications technologies enable us to engage in such discussions more quickly and in a more targeted way than before, and mean that the traditional written consultation is not always the best way of getting those who know most and care most about a particular issue to engage in fruitful dialogue

FEEDBACK – When consultation is undertaken, it is critical that it is used in the decision making process as well as being fed back to those taking part. Feedback should be provided directly to those who took part in the survey; Service Manager(s) organising the survey; as well as the wider public and Members (where appropriate). How this is done will depend on the method used to some degree – but using the

website is acceptable for most. However, if you have been consulting with hard to reach groups such as children or vulnerable people, then you may have to make a special effort to ensure the feedback is given in an appropriate way to suit their needs.

Roles and responsibilities

Consultation is not simply the job of the Service Manager to arrange – there are roles for all levels of officers right across the organisation:

- Decision makers (Executive and Senior Management)need to ensure consultation has occurred and have a duty to question the absence of consultation
- The consultation owner (the Service Manager or team leader usually) is responsible for ensuring consultation is conducted within our corporate guidelines and standards
- Consultation owners need to understand their service users so that they are aware of all the groups that should be contacted during a consultation
- Statutory Officers and Assistant Directors – need to have knowledge of the consultations underway within their teams so that they can avoid duplication, ensure standards are applied, monitor progress to the planned schedule, and most importantly ensure that the outcome informs the plans for the service.
- Policy Unit – will produce the Corporate Strategy, Guidance and advice for those operating consultation activities; offer advice to officers embarking on consultation, run the Citizens Panel (accessible by any service); and conduct corporate consultation, such as a Place Shaper style survey when needed. Policy Unit will not be running service consultations - full details of what support is available is included in the Consultation Guidelines
- The Policy Unit, working with the Communications Team will act as a central co-ordination body, monitoring corporate standards, helping to avoid duplication, offering advice on content and quality as well as collating information on what consultations have been completed.

The approach

All consultation should ideally be passed through the Corporate Policy Unit during the set up stages – time should be built into the project plan to allow for this. The purpose of this is to:

- Apply corporate standards to all consultation
- Ensure there is no duplication/contradictory activity
- Spot opportunities for joint consultation
- Ensure there is no consultation fatigue with specific groups
- Monitor and collate information on all consultation activity

The first consideration of consultation is to decide what is needed to be achieved as this will inform the decision on which aspect of consultation is the most appropriate. (See table 1 below)

For consultation to be effective it must include communication of the outcome of the activity to the participants and other stakeholders. People who have taken the time to participate should be informed of how this information will feed into the decision making process and how participants views have influenced the Council.

It is the responsibility of the consultation owner/service manager to ensure this feedback takes place and that it is undertaken in a timely fashion

| | INFORM | CONSULT | INVOLVE |
|-------------|---|---|---|
| Why | To give people information about plans and services. | To collect information about attitudes, opinions and preferences, and ask for views that will assist our understanding, policy making and decision making | To actively involve people and encourage participation, in improving existing services and designing new services In partnerships - To maintain an equal and effective working relationship |
| What | Information provided will be accurate, balanced and up-dated as necessary. | Information collected will be used responsibly and reported honestly. Feedback will be taken seriously, and decisions influenced. Customers will be informed of the influence they have had. | Local people will be able to help shape processes. There will be transparency, and they will have some influence over decisions. Possibly some resources will be held in common |
| How | City People Website, Your Lincoln, Lincoln Fact sheets, Specified information sharing sessions, Social media, Tenants 'Home' magazine | Citizens Panel Surveys, Surveys from services, Ward based surveys, other questionnaires, Focus groups, "You Choose", Place Shaper, Public meetings, service user panels, social media and member's surgeries. | Theme Groups, Workshops, stakeholder conferences, service user panels, public meetings Other local partnership arrangements, |

Existing Corporate consultation vehicles

The council uses a wide variety of consultation mechanisms to ensure that all citizens and stakeholders in Lincoln can influence the development of policies and inform the way in which services are delivered.

Some of the key consultation methods regularly used by council are:

Elected Members

Elected Members play a key role in council's consultative processes through their representative, scrutiny and community leadership functions and in furthering the development of democratic processes within local government.

In particular Members have a crucial awareness role and form a link between the community and council. Through their regular consultation with constituents, citizens, groups, Neighbourhood Boards and other stakeholders, Members are able to positively influence the level of participation and impact of consultation outcomes on the local community.

Surveys

Services across the council conduct numerous surveys during each year depending on their requirements. Survey techniques may involve questionnaires, telephone or face to face interviews. From time to time comprehensive large-scale surveys such as Neighbourhood Surveys or the Place Survey equivalent are conducted.

Citizens' Panel

The panel comprises up to 1,000 residents who are consulted on a range of strategic and service issues via postal and electronic surveys approximately three times per year. The results are analysed centrally and fed back into services for action. Panel members are provided with feedback via a regular newsletter. The panel membership is refreshed on a regular basis and the council aims for the panel to reflect the diversity of the people of Lincoln.

Focus Groups

A more traditional but still highly significant public consultation method is to hold focus groups. This provides an opportunity to talk to people face to face and answer questions as well as provide more detail on the issue being consulted on. The council often holds a series of focus groups to consult on Council Tax levels in the first two months of the year.

City of Lincoln website

A page on the CoLC website called "Community Voice" where on line surveys can be accessed, results can be disseminated and links to specialist areas can be made.

Social Media

In today's technologically savvy world, it is more important than ever to approach people in a way that they understand and may consider their norm. Social media will attract a different audience to standard paper surveys, but used together they are more likely to cover a broader base

Consultation updates in Your Lincoln and the tenants' Home magazine

We will use both of the council's newsletters - the citywide 'Your Lincoln' newsletter and the tenants' Home' magazine to inform residents and other stakeholders of forthcoming planned consultations as well as results and outcomes of public consultation initiatives where appropriate

City People (staff intranet)

Pages on City People will contain links to the Corporate Consultation and Engagement Strategy; the forward plan of consultation to be undertaken; and the library of past consultation results, reports and feedback (to be developed).

Neighbourhood working

In Lincoln we have eight Neighbourhood areas covering parts of the city, and a key function of the Neighbourhood Working teams is to conduct detailed consultation with their neighbourhoods on a myriad of subjects.

Government legislation and guidance

Equality and Diversity

The Council is firmly committed to promoting equality for its employees and the community and to avoiding all forms of discrimination. The Council aims to ensure that the services it provides are non-discriminatory and free from prejudice.

Following the introduction of the Equality Act 2010, the Council implemented the use of Equality Analyses for all new and changed policy and services. The analysis ensures that consideration is given to all nine protected characteristics as defined under the Act, as well as Safeguarding issues.

There is a corporate 'Monitoring form' available on the E&D section of City People which can be used to capture demographic detail. However, it should be noted that the corporate recommendation is to capture ONLY the data that is necessary and appropriate for the consultation being undertaken.

Best Value Statutory Guidance

Local authorities are under a general Duty of Best Value to *"make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness."*

The "Best Value Statutory Guidance (2012)" makes recommendations on how to consult when dealing with changes in services where Voluntary Services or small businesses are the prime providers

The Housing Act 1985

The council has a different relationship with council tenants than it does with other citizens living within its boundaries as there is a legal contract – the tenancy agreement – in place, covered by the Housing Act. (Part iv; section 105)

This legislation gives the statutory right of consultation to all secured council tenants on matters that effect them especially on housing management. A matter is one of housing management if, in the opinion of the landlord authority, it relates to:

- a) The management, maintenance, improvement or demolition of dwelling-houses let by the authority under secure tenancies
- b) The provision of services or amenities in connection with such dwelling-houses

But the right to consultation does not cover the rent payable under a secure tenancy or to charges for services or facilities provided by the authority.

Data protection

Personal information obtained by council as part of its consultation responsibilities must be dealt with properly irrespective of how it is collected, recorded and used – whether on paper, by computer, or on any other material.

The City of Lincoln Council has adopted strict safeguards in its Information Management Policies to ensure that data is treated properly in accordance with the *Data Protection Act 1998*.

In all cases the consultation lead will protect the privacy of those involved in a consultation and will only accredit responses to individuals when permission has been given by that individual, or has been clearly identified as part of the consultation information.

Section 11 of the Children’s Act.

This is a duty under the Children Act 2004 that requires all agencies with responsibilities towards children to discharge their functions with regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. They must also ensure that any body providing services on their behalf must do the same.

Services at the City of Lincoln Council that should have particular care for this including all services where children are involved. Children should be asked to help shape the services that they use, and thus special effort may be required to consult them during initiation stages. Consultation with children does require a little more care as there is a need to gain parental agreement, as well as ensuring the consultation is undertaken in clear and appropriate language

Legal Services

For key corporate decisions whereby there is a substantial change proposed to any service or policy, or the impact of any decision introducing or changing something may be controversial, have major equality impacts or large financial implications, Legal Services advice must be sought. This is to ensure that the consultation is robust and could withstand a legal challenge. Decisions must be lawful, reasonable and fair to avoid a ‘Judicial Review’, however this is an area where many councils are challenged. For further information see the Decision Making Guidance on City People. (<http://citypeople/intranet/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Decision-making-guidance.pdf>)

Local Statutory requirements

The Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) outlines how the Central Lincolnshire Joint Strategic Planning Committee (CLJPC) expects to involve and consult the public and stakeholders when preparing planning policy documents, namely local plans and supplementary planning documents. In addition it also outlines how and when the public can have their say on planning applications and provides brief commentary on neighbourhood planning.

The Vision for Community Involvement is “To comprehensively engage with users of the City and Districts, including residents, service users, stakeholders and partners, in a meaningful, appropriate and cost effective way”

The commitments made in the SCI are legally binding on CLJPC and its constituent district authorities (in compliance with the Town and Country Planning Act).

Review of strategy

The council will undertake regular evaluation of whether our public consultation is meeting its objectives and what service improvements are being achieved as a result. This will include a review of progress on the Strategy's Action Plan, to be presented to the Council's Performance Scrutiny Committee annually.

The implementation of the Corporate Consultation and Engagement Strategy will help Lincoln continue to grow and develop to meet the changing needs of service users and citizens.

Links to useful documents

[Lincoln Drivers report](#)

Communications Strategy (to be completed in 2016/17)

[Engagement and the Equality Duty](#)

[Statement of Community Involvement](#)

[The Housing Act 1985](#)

[Corporate Monitoring form](#)

Forward action plan

| Ref | Description | Expected start | Expected completion |
|------------|--|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 | Develop a communications strategy for the roll out of the new strategy and guidelines | 2016/17 | |
| 2 | Roll out of new strategy to AD Group; CMT; DMT's; Policy scrutiny and Exec | Jun 2015 | |
| 3 | Complete consultation guidance for staff and implement | Sep 2017 | |
| 4 | Agree, implement and then ensure compliance of new corporate standards | Jul 2017 | |
| 5 | Consider a virtual internal network group for those with regular consultations | Aug 2015 | |
| 6 | Complete a revamp of the Corporate Monitoring form | June 2017 | |
| 7 | Scope, plan and implement a refresh of the Citizens panel | Sep 2015 | |
| 8 | Undertake up to four Citizens Panel surveys annually (two permanent ones for trended data) | Ongoing | |
| 9 | Undertake consultation on any major service change both internally or externally focussed | As required | |
| 10 | Undertake consultation on all major policy changes | As required | |
| 11 | Undertake face to face consultation on Council Tax annually (if required) | Annually in January | |
| 12 | Develop a forward calendar of consultations and publish on the website | Sep 2017 | |
| 13 | Revamp the consultation section of the website | Sep 2015 | |
| 14 | Ensure there is a clear route to the staff guidelines and strategy on City People | Sep 2017 | |
| 15 | Progress reports to Performance Scrutiny Committee | Oct 2015 | |
| 16 | Review the consultation strategy with a view to merging with the Communications Strategy | Mar 2017 | |
| 17 | Continuous review of legislation and government guidelines | Ongoing | |
| 18 | 3 year review of the Consultation Strategy and guidelines | June 2018 | |

CHECKLIST FOR ENGAGEMENT Appendix 1

Taken from 'Engagement and the equality duty':

The following actions can help public authorities undertake successful engagement and give proper consideration to the aims of the general equality duty:

- **Leadership:** Engagement should be built on genuine commitment from all participants to the values and principles of citizen engagement. Leadership plays an important role in ensuring that engagement is a success and leaders, senior managers and staff with a scrutiny role need to commit the necessary time, effort and financial resources to deliver it effectively. This may include providing support and training for participants, and staff, so everyone can participate effectively.
- **Proportionality:** Engagement should be proportionate to the size and resources of your organisation, as well as to the significance of the policy. This means that the greater the impact of your policy on equality of opportunity and good relations, the more likely you are to need significant public or tailored engagement.
- **Evidence base:** Consider how engagement can help you to fill information gaps, interpret qualitative data, assess the impact on equality of your policies, and evaluate how successful your initiatives are.
- **Decision-making:** It is important to integrate engagement procedures and outcomes into your decision-making and service design. This will ensure that engagement becomes part of evidenced-based policy making across your organisation. It also demonstrates to stakeholders that their contribution has a real value and purpose.
- **Timing:** Engagement is most successful when people are engaged at an early stage, prior to key decisions being made. Aim to incorporate engagement through the different stages of developing or reviewing a policy. Respond to the stakeholders that you have engaged with.
- **Partnerships:** Drawing on the skills and networks of voluntary and community organisations and Trade Unions can help you to plan and carry out your engagement activity. They often have positive relationships with the groups of people that they serve, so working with them can lead to higher participation and better outcomes. Engagement can be undertaken with other public authorities to make better use of resources and reduce the burden on participants.
- **Accessible engagement:** Public authorities should ensure that their engagement methods take into account the needs of people with all the protected characteristics, and enable them to fully participate. Take steps to capture the views of people with protected characteristics who are rarely or never heard. Ensure that participants have clear and sufficient information in order to be able to participate effectively. Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities are obliged to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people, including during engagement.
- **Transparency:** If you are covered by the specific duties, consider what engagement information (e.g. your methods, participants and findings) would be useful for you to publish as part of your equality information. Build engagement with key stakeholders into the development and prioritisation of your equality objectives.