

## **Report to Cabinet**

**Subject:** Consultation and Engagement Strategy

**Date:** 10<sup>th</sup> July 2025

**Author:** Director of Transformation

### **Wards Affected**

All

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this paper is to seek Cabinet approval to adopt a new, Council-wide Consultation and Engagement Strategy.

### **Key Decision**

Yes

### **Recommendation(s)**

#### **THAT:**

- 1) The Consultation and Engagement Strategy is adopted.
- 2) The Director of Transformation is authorised to publish the document.
- 3) Following approval, a toolkit and training is developed for managers across the Council.

### **1. Background**

- 1.1 Gedling Borough Council regularly consults and engages with its communities to seek their input ahead of decisions being made. While statutory consultation is undertaken in accordance with the law, there is no overarching Consultation and Engagement Strategy in place that covers additional consultation and engagement that the Council may choose to undertake.
- 1.2 The extent of likely changes to local government, and to Gedling's services over the coming 12 months will require deeper engagement with communities and there is an opportunity to go further than the legal requirement for

consultation, to ensure our communities are effectively engaged in decisions that may affect them, and in the re-design of Council services where it is meaningful for them to do so.

- 1.3 Currently there is no strategic framework in place to enable this, and, as a result, there are inconsistencies in the extent to which non-statutory consultation and engagement is undertaken, with some services engaging extensively and others doing so in a far more limited way. By creating a Consultation and Engagement Strategy, the Council seeks to make clear its intention to strengthen consultation and engagement where possible, and to frame its expectations within the constraints of wider operating context, including financial and resourcing considerations.

## **2. Consultation**

- 2.1 The Strategy was initially created with input from employees within the Council including the Council's Customer and Communities Programme Board (which has representation from all public facing services) and its Senior Leadership Team. 12 pieces of feedback were received and acted upon before the draft Strategy was published.
- 2.1 Following approval from the Council Leader on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2025, public consultation was then undertaken. Consultation was open to all residents and advertised on the Council website. Additionally, it specifically targeted existing networks including the Senior's Council, Youth Council, Community Hubs and Partners Network and Parish Clerks. The consultation period ran for a period of just under 12 weeks between 11<sup>th</sup> February 2025 and 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2025.
- 2.2 A total of 88 comments were received from all consultees, of which 80 related to the consultation and a further 8 comments related to feedback on other matters. This feedback has been shared separately with the relevant Council directors for consideration. 18 surveys were received directly via the online form on the Council's website, 5 from organisations and 13 from individual members of the public.

Excluding the groups above, the 5 organisational responders were:

Gedling Borough Council Planning Team

Nottinghamshire County Council Adult Social Care

The Ark, Gedling

Netherfield Forum

Spritely Sustainable CIC.

Of the consultees using the online form, 83% were White British and 17% were from other ethnic backgrounds. 35% of respondents declared a disability, 41% did not, and 24% preferred not to answer.

A small number of comments were made by respondents questioning the relevance of the capture of equalities information.

- 2.2 Additional feedback was captured during each of the meetings with the Senior's Council, Youth Council, Community Hubs and Partners Network and Parish Clerks. Details of all feedback received on the draft Strategy and the Council's response to each element of feedback is set out at **Appendix A**.
- 2.3 The Consultation and Engagement Strategy, attached as **Appendix B**, has been revised to address comments received during the public consultation period.

### **3. Next steps**

- 3.1 Comments made during the consultation period have been carefully considered and amendments have been made to the Strategy as a result. Some of the feedback is more relevant to the follow-on toolkit and will be incorporated as the toolkit is created. A summary of the consultation output is below.

**Improving accessibility and inclusivity.** Consultees want consultation materials to be simplified to a reading age of 9-11 years and for the Council to avoid jargon. Accessibility for hard-to-reach groups, including full-time workers, is recommended to be prioritised and new inclusive channels of engagement are recommended for consideration. Inclusive processes must ensure all voices are heard, including quieter and reflective individuals. As a result of feedback, the vision has been updated to include reference to inclusivity and the more detailed suggestions will be included in the toolkit guidance.

**Plain language should be used and a summary of the Strategy created in very simple language for all audiences.** Following this feedback, a summary has been co-produced with a volunteer nominated by the Senior's Council. A copy of the resulting summary document is included at **Appendix C**. This document will be made publicly available alongside the Strategy.

**Enhancing consultation practices:** Consultees agreed with the necessity for consultation to be undertaken only where it is meaningful, with some consultees suggesting improvements to resourcing (this is not however affordable for the Council). Other suggestions included joining up consultations to reduce costs, ensuring transparency in communication, and targeting impacted groups effectively. Consultees considered that both structured and unstructured feedback should be encouraged, and consultation

periods and timings should consider holiday periods. This feedback will be incorporated into the Toolkit and training.

**Engagement should be seen as a wider concept than consultation.**

Suggestions were made including incorporating community development, communication, and the use of social media as a mechanism through which to engage on an ongoing basis. Youth and inter-generational engagement were highlighted as opportunities to exchange and build on ideas, and there was a desire from the Youth Council for improved engagement with and through schools. This feedback will be incorporated into the Toolkit and training.

**Where co-production is used it should be genuine and not ‘rubber stamping’.** Consultees wanted co-production to begin at the start of processes and involve genuine collaboration. Training for staff and simplified materials were considered essential. An initial co-produced summary of the Strategy indicates the Council’s positive intent in this area, with further guidance to be made available in the resulting Toolkit.

**Consultees wanted it to be recognised that community groups can play a vital role in supporting consultations and community engagement.** The Council embraces the necessity for community engagement and ‘going where people already are’. Ideas were shared about how community groups and networks can engage with their members to extend the reach of consultations and to generate creative ideas on engagement. Guidance will be included within the Toolkit to reflect the recommendations made by consultees.

**‘Closing the loop’ on what has happened because of public input is considered important.** Consultees felt that more could be done to demonstrate the impact of people’s inputs and that feedback loops could be improved, so that people understand what has happened as a result of the input they have had. Consideration will be given to how this might be achieved as part of the creation of the Toolkit.

**Lessons learned from past activities should inform future approaches.**

There were references to the need to ensure continual improvement in the Council’s consultation approaches and the sharing of lessons learned across the organisation. The Strategy has been updated to include an expectation of inclusion of Lessons Learned as a result and this will also be included as guidance in the follow on Toolkit.

**There was general agreement that consultation should be value for money.** With some mixed responses in this area, requesting that the Council prioritise service delivery over engagement activity, and other respondents welcoming deeper engagement. The ‘test’ for when to conduct consultation provided within the Strategy seeks to ensure that balance is achieved.

#### **4. Next steps**

- 4.1 The next step is for Cabinet to authorise the adoption of the Strategy. After adoption, a Toolkit will be created for internal use and will form the basis of training on Consultation and Engagement for Council managers and employees.

#### **5. Alternative Options**

- 5.1 While the Council is required to consult where it has a statutory requirement to do so, it is not specifically required to have a Consultation and Engagement Strategy.
- 5.2 'Doing nothing' was considered, and was not considered appropriate, given the desire of the Council to operate transparently and to engage residents and businesses appropriately when changes to services are being made.
- 5.3 There is no Consultation Lead, or Consultation Team within the Council. 'Doing more', including creating a centralised capability to manage consultation, was considered, and was referenced by a small number of consultees. This is not an affordable option for the Council due to wider budgetary constraints. Equally the Council requires all of its managers to engage effectively with the communities it serves. The Strategy and subsequent Toolkit are considered a balanced response to extending beyond purely statutory provision while working within the Council's overall budgetary considerations.

#### **6. Financial Implications**

- 6.1 None. The revised Consultation and Engagement Strategy has been drafted by the Council's own staff within an agreed budget. The resulting toolkit and training will be created and delivered internally.

#### **7. Legal Implications**

- 7.1 The Council's Consultation and Engagement Strategy seeks to go beyond the legal requirement for consultation, and not to replace existing statutory requirements. It aims to provide a consistent framework for determining when to consult in situations where there is no legal requirement to do so. The accompanying toolkit which is to be developed following Cabinet approval of the Strategy will support Council managers to consider Consultation and Engagement in a structured way.

All councils are under a duty to consult with representatives of a wide range of local people. Authorities must consult representatives of council tax payers, those who use or are likely to use services provided by the authority, and those appearing to the authority to have an interest in any area within which the

authority carries out functions as laid out in the section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999. The Localism Act 2011 also requires the involvement of residents. An effective consultation strategy should comply with the relevant statutory framework under which the consultation is being undertaken, the general legislative regimes, statutory guidance whilst also having regard to the Equality Act 2010.

## **8. Equalities Implications**

- 8.1 When consulting and engaging with the public, the Council has a responsibility under the Equalities Act 2010 to ensure that this is done in an inclusive way, considering reasonable adjustments that may be required to enable people with protected characteristics to engage.
- 8.2 Advice and guidance on inclusive Consultation and Engagement will be included in the subsequent management Toolkit and training.

## **9. Carbon Reduction/Environmental Sustainability Implications**

- 9.1 The document will be electronically available to discourage the use of paper copies. Summaries of the document will be made publicly available in printed format at Council offices.

## **10. Appendices**

- 10.1 **Appendix A:** Consultation log.

**Appendix B:** Consultation and Engagement Strategy for approval.

**Appendix C:** Summary version of the Strategy, co-produced with a representative of the Senior's Council.

## **11. Background Papers**

- 11.1 Draft Consultation and Engagement Strategy

## **12. Reasons for Recommendations**

- 12.1 To authorise the adoption of the Consultation and Engagement Strategy.

### **Statutory Officer approval**

**Approved by:**

**Date:**

**On behalf of the Chief Financial Officer**

**Approved by:**

**Date:**

**On behalf of the Monitoring Officer**