



Cambridgeshire County Council Community Engagement:

Listening and Involving Strategy Summer 2013

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1 Introduction

Cambridgeshire County Council is committed to consulting with and engaging local people in the planning and delivery of its services.

This public document outlines the Council's approach to consultation and user involvement, and also summarises internal staff guidance on how to use consultations to support the decision-making process. The Council already consults extensively, and this document is designed to ensure a consistent approach is adopted and that the information collected is used to good effect.

Consultation and the involvement of service users in decision-making is of course not a new goal. For many years the Council has had a duty and a commitment to consult the public on many aspects of its work. Changes in Government policy broaden the way authorities engage with communities and have placed an increasing importance on this aspect of our work. This, the Council's fourth 'Listening & Involving Strategy', seeks to reflect these changes.

Members of the public can easily review current consultations via the County Council website, which has a clear link on the front page directing people to a Consultation Database. All consultations or surveys with service users or the public must be registered on the Consultation Database by the relevant Council officer.

The 2013/14 Business Plan for the council outlines our core aims as being to:

- Develop the local economy for the benefit of all
- Help people live healthy and independent lives
- Support and protect vulnerable people

In terms of community engagement, it is important we enable the diverse communities of Cambridgeshire to have their say in planning and reviewing services provided for them as far as is possible. We have made use of public surveys, community events, meetings and road-shows to ensure we identify the key areas the public want us to invest in.

2 Strategy Purpose and Aims

There is already extensive involvement of service users and members of the public in the Council's decision-making process and many examples of good practice exist. For any of the Authority's consultation and involvement to be effective however, a consistent and co-ordinated approach to engagement with local people must be adopted.

There is also a need to share effort and resources effectively between county council directorates and with partner agencies to gain 'best value' from involvement and consultation activities.

There are strong links between the corporate management of consultation and the management of general communications. Communicating should be managed centrally through the Corporate Communications Team using the service communicators, where appropriate, and in partnership with the Research Team. This is to give an overview and provide governance as well as good best practice in communicating consultations. Communication Plans will be drawn up looking at how best to inform and engage target audiences and stakeholders with the consultation. This will look at the most effective channels to reach these target audiences and be a whole life strategy from pre-launch to results. Communications will also look at emphasising how feedback has been taken into account - for example where it has helped change a scheme or policy.

This Strategy is designed to outline the ways in which Cambridgeshire County Council ensures that all consultation and involvement exercises carried out are of a consistently high standard and that the results feed into the decision-making process. It is also intended to demonstrate that the organisation identifies opportunities to work with partners and continues to adopt new and innovative methods for involving local people.

This document:

- Sets out the principles that should apply to all of the Council's consultation work;
- Sets out Cambridgeshire County Council's policy on consultation and involvement;
- Focuses on specific areas for improvement and sets out a strategy for achieving these improvements over the coming year;
- Summarises good practice in consultation and provides guidance on carrying out this activity effectively.

3 Why Consult?

It is important that stakeholders are involved in influencing the policy direction of the organisation as well as the services it provides. These “stakeholders” include members of the public. The Big Society agenda in 2010 emphasised the need to develop a society that actively empowers local communities to guide domestic policy. The agenda encourages communities to engage more in decisions-making, and for people to take an active role in their communities. As a Council we are responsible for promoting that agenda, and in empowering local communities to guide decision-making processes at all levels.

More generally consultation and community engagement are at the heart of local government's role in championing the needs of its communities and democratic renewal. There is clear direction that local service providers must make greater efforts to reach beyond community group leaders and into the communities themselves.

The leadership of the Council has stated the importance of consultation and engagement. The key reason for consulting is to ensure that, as far as possible, the Council provides the services that people want in the way they want them.

Where the Council has carried out a successful consultation and involvement programme it has been found that:

- Services can be targeted more precisely to provide services that better reflect people's needs;
- The take up of services can be improved;
- User satisfaction can be monitored and improved over time;
- The quality of services can be improved;
- Issues arising from proposed changes to services can be addressed;
- Involving local people more in decision making helps to stimulate the local democratic process;
- The community leadership role of the Council is strengthened through the continuous involvement of the public in how we make decisions about service changes;
- There is no perception of duplication or repetition.

4 Statement of Principles

By setting out the principles of good practice in relation to consultation and involvement we are emphasising the strong link between the Council's aim of providing high quality services and the effective involvement of the public in decision-making.

It is the aim of this Strategy that all consultation and involvement exercises carried out by the Council, or on behalf of the Council by external bodies, should adhere to the following principles.

A. Consultation and involvement will be clearly linked to decision-making and take place as early as possible in the decision-making process.

It should be clearly explained to those with whom we consult how their views will be used, and where and when their views will be considered as part of the Council's decision-making process. We need to be clear from the outset on exactly what we are consulting on. Those we consult with should be informed of any limitations and expectations should not be raised beyond the Council's ability to deliver. Feedback should be given to consultees on how their views were taken into account and what changes to services or other activities are planned. Consultations will therefore be added to the Database and placed online as soon as possible in the process.

B. Consultation and involvement will be carried out to a high standard.

Consultation and involvement should be carried out to appropriate timescales that will give consultees plenty of notice and time to participate. Involvement should be targeted to make sure that the right people are involved and that others are not bothered unnecessarily. The method of consultation or involvement should be appropriate and members of staff should be competent in using these consultation methods. Whenever possible, innovative consultation methods based on national and local 'good practice' will be encouraged and the Council has developed a Toolkit for officers to support this, which is updated annually.

C. Consultation and involvement will be inclusive.

Different sections of the community in Cambridgeshire have different needs and views. In order to meet the Council's core priorities (with specific regard to "support and protect vulnerable people) every effort will be made to involve a representative cross-section of the community in decision-making. The Council will actively seek ways of engaging with communities who have not had a voice in the past, for example, people with a disability, people from ethnic minority communities, Travellers, young people, people from rural areas, and the elderly.

D. Consultation and involvement will be cost-effective and co-ordinated.

Where appropriate, the Authority will seek to work in partnership with other agencies to ensure that consultation is cost effective and is not repetitive and confusing for the people who are consulted. Where opportunities exist, consultation and involvement should be carried out in partnership with other local service providers. Within the Council new processes will allow all staff to be more aware of what involvement exercises have taken place and with whom in order to avoid problems of consultation 'fatigue' and 'overload'. The strategic framework for Cambridgeshire clearly illustrates recent efforts and future intentions to continue collaborating with partners and stakeholders across all areas.

Through this Strategy the Council will put in place an action plan to ensure that the organisation works according to these principles. Sharing information and ensuring our database of consultation activity is fully up-to-date is a requirement of all staff.

There is an on-going internal communications campaign to reinforce the procedures services need to go through in carrying out consultations. This ensures that services understand the Corporate Communications Team and Research Team are there to help as well as the role played by each in overseeing consultations. This also emphasises the need for teams to go through their own service communicators and will be monitored by the Corporate Communication team as part of their management role.

5 Who do we Consult With?

Those people who the Council is committed to consulting with regularly fall into four distinct groups:

- Council-Tax payers and the public overall.
- Local Business & Commerce users
- Potential service users.
- Those with an interest in the service area (including partner agencies such as district councils, the Police, NHS and Fire service, and voluntary and community organisations).

Council-Tax Payers and the Public Overall

Council-Tax payers contribute to the funding of the County Council's services and they have elected representatives (County Councillors) making day-to-day decisions on their behalf. Both generic issues such as crime and disorder, quality of the environment and the long-term growth of the County, and service specific issues affect them. We commit to consult on the budget and Business Plan annually and to use that feedback to guide our priorities for future spend. Methods used to consult with members of the public during the last year include door-to-door interviews, web-based questionnaires, roadshows, focus groups, open meetings, street surveys, workshops, open days and telephone surveys.

Local Business & Commerce

Local Business and Commerce (through the business rating system) also contribute to the funding of services that the Council provides and have an interest in a variety of subject areas. For instance the Council under trading standards and other legislation regulates local businesses. The County Council also has influence over issues that affect the long-term economic growth of industry and commerce such as education, transportation and the availability of land for development. Current methods for consulting the business community include surveys, breakfast seminars and special interest meetings.

Service users, potential service users, families and carers of service users

These are the groups of people that the County Council understandably spends considerable time consulting and involving in decision-making. For example, with an ever-increasing older population, we need to prepare to increase our spending on adult social care. Across Directorates, the long-term involvement of service users is key to providing efficient and effective services. Methods used to involve service users include user feedback forms, quality surveys or setting up regular service user groups.

Partner agencies and voluntary & community organisations

For many years the County Council has built strong partnerships with other local service providers and interest groups. Methods for involving partners include workshops, seminar sessions and joint forums. A Consultation Partnership is being set up to draw together partners to discuss areas of joint working.

6 Involving all Groups in the Decision-making Process

It is important to ensure that certain groups in the population are not excluded when carrying out consultation and other involvement exercises.

The County Council has a statutory duty to consider unlawful discrimination, equal opportunity and foster good relations. The Council takes very seriously the need to be aware of the impact that our policies, decisions and services have on communities across Cambridgeshire, and the importance of using this information to inform the preparation of the annual Business Plan. Where relevant, for each of the detailed proposals, services have undertaken an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA).

EIAs have been prepared alongside the development of detailed proposals and are published separately to the Business Plan. The EIA's cover a wide range of areas and consider the "Getting the process right" section of this Listening and Involvement Strategy.

Groups that do not always respond well to traditional consultation methods such as postal surveys have been categorised as being 'hard to reach'. However, it is better to think about these groups as those where a bit more time and thought is needed on the best way to establish and maintain contact.

The County Council aims to target these groups and ensure that they have an equal opportunity to participate in decision-making. Such groups include:

- People living in isolated rural areas
- Older people
- Minority Ethnic Communities including Migrant Workers
- People at risk of social exclusion
- Teenagers
- Gypsies and Travellers
- People with a disability.

For some of these groups there are particular barriers to communication such as language, visual impairment or mental health and for others there are potential problems with the style of consultation. The Consultation Toolkit offers guidance on how to take forward work in this area. Advice can also be sought internally from consultation experts within the Cambridgeshire County Council Research Group.

Partnership Involvement

As outlined within the Business Plan 2013/14, It is essential that we work together towards a common vision for growth, particularly with the District and City Councils, education providers, the NHS, and the police and fire authorities. That is why we

have taken the lead in bringing our District and City Councils together to set up a Joint Strategic Planning Unit so that we plan for growth in an integrated way.

We are setting up a consultations partnership so that we can work more closely with district councils, the Police, NHS and Cambridgeshire Fire & Rescue services to ensure we consult as efficiently as possible, avoiding duplication of efforts, and enabling us to more easily share the results of consultations.

These collaborations are essential for the future growth of the county, especially in these harder economic times, with an ageing population and with the continuing goal of Cambridgeshire being 'a place worth living'.

7 What do we Consult About?

Public consultation has always been fundamental to the Government's modernisation programme. The Local Government Act (2000) highlighted consultation as an important building block in the process of reinvigorating local democracy, and there is a detailed legislative framework for consultation. In 2009, the "Duty to Involve"¹ came into force, statutorily requiring councils to inform, consult and involve citizens in decision-making wherever appropriate. The development of the Localism Act (2011) looks further into requirements to consult with the public. The Duty to Involve was scrapped and replaced with Best Value Statutory Guidance, retaining a requirement for councils to consult, but focusing on detail around the commissioning of services².

Statutory Consultations

The County Council is committed to meeting the statutory consultation requirements placed upon it and, where possible, exceeding these requirements.

Findings from 2012/13 Consultations

There have been a wide variety of consultations undertaken by all areas of the County Council over the past year. These have ranged from smaller localised surveys to larger policy-driven consultations. Despite the continuing budget cuts we have endeavoured to make use of these findings at all point in decision-making processes. Within the 2013/14 Business Plan, we have invested in areas that our residents told us to prioritise. This has meant some hard choices and being innovative about the way we deliver services.

Feedback from surveys has been specifically listened to within the annual budget-planning processes. For the 2013/14 Plan it was recognised from consultations that the public want us to continue to invest in caring for our elderly and children. A second clear area of importance was identified around keeping Cambridgeshire moving. Over recent months we have consulted on a number of issues regarding highways and public travel, ranging from guidance on redesigning busy intersections, to the development of new support services for those in more rural communities. Reducing congestion and giving people the right public transport choice is critical for helping the economy, people's health and reducing isolation."

Our community engagement processes with the public have not only included consultations on a specific or local issue. We have also hosted wider events addressing cross-district issues. A full outline of all consultations that the County Council has run can be reviewed on our Consultation Database.

Continuous Service Improvement

The Authority is committed to the on-going review and improvement of services. In order to achieve improvement it is important to listen to the views of services users. This can be done through the use of user satisfaction surveys and complaints procedures. However, we also establish a longer-term relationship with users through involvement groups who can regularly comment on services and receive feedback.

¹ <http://www.cdf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Duty-to-Involve-Making-it-Work.pdf>

² <http://www.involve.org.uk/blog/2010/06/23/duty-to-involve-2/>

8 The Action Plan

In the previous iteration of this document, goals were set around three priorities:

- To improve the co-ordination of consultation economy for the benefit of all across the County Council
- To improve the quality and effectiveness of all consultations
- To improve the communication of the outcomes of all consultations

These priorities will be retained, with a minor alteration of Priority 1 to read “To improve the coordination of consultation for the benefit of all across the County Council”. The focus on economy as a primary element is less relevant now that we have redeveloped our Consultation Database.

As part of the 2012/13 Audit Plan an audit was undertaken on Consultation and Use of Intelligence throughout the Authority. This audit and its findings feed directly into the following 2013/14 action plan alongside the targets set out in the 2013/14 Business Plan.

This section of the strategy will be reviewed annually and include further action plans for improvement.

Priorities for improvement 2013/14:

Improving co-ordination

| ACTION POINT | | Lead Officer | By When |
|--------------|--|--|--|
| 1. | A ‘network’ of County Council officers will be revitalised to spread best practice and share information about current consultation exercises taking place across the County Council. The network will build upon established groups and networks currently operating within departments (will subsequently be rolled out to include partners). | Senior Research Officer (Consultations & Customer Knowledge), Research Group | Nov 2013 |
| 2. | The Consultation Database will be maintained to record all consultations and the stakeholder groups involved. This database is shared with the public via the CCC website. It has been agreed by Cabinet and our Senior Management Team (SMT) that all consultations run by the County Council must appear on the Database. Specific “key users” have been identified within each service to offer local support on consultations. | Senior Research Officer (Consultations & Customer Knowledge), Research Group | Ongoing goal, to be reviewed regularly |
| 3. | The new Head of Communications and Community Engagement will produce a communications strategy for the authority. This will include better co-ordination of communication channels and consultations across the authority. | Head of Communications and Community Engagement | July 2014 |

Improving consultation quality and effectiveness

| ACTION POINT | | Lead Officer | By When |
|--------------|---|--|-------------------------|
| 4. | The Consultation Toolkit will be updated for 2014 and promoted across the County Council and partners. | Senior Research Officer (Consultations & Customer Knowledge), Research Group | June 2014 |
| 5. | A new Listening & Involving Strategy for 2014/15 will be produced and then actively promoted across the County Council | Senior Research Officer (Consultations & Customer Knowledge), Research Group | September /October 2014 |
| 6. | National and local best practice will be collated and shared within the organisation via the Consultation Network (mentioned in action point 1) and CCC Intranet and supported by the Consultation Toolkit. | Senior Research Officer (Consultations & Customer Knowledge), Research Group | Ongoing |

Improving the communication of outcomes

| ACTION POINT | | Lead Officer | By When |
|--------------|--|---------------------|---------|
| 7. | Guidance on giving feedback – considerations, methods etc – will be provided on the intranet as part of the consultation guidance package | Research Group | Ongoing |
| 8. | The Communications Team with the Research Group will ensure all consultations are appropriately promoted, and will work together to ensure appropriate use of resources such as the Consultation Database. | Communications Team | Ongoing |

The County Council's Research Group will oversee the implementation of this strategy and will manage an annual review of progress and agree targets for the year ahead. The day-to-day monitoring of the strategy will be the responsibility of the Research Manager for Consultations.

9 Guidelines for Carrying out Listening & Involving Activities

There are many different techniques for involving service users and members of the public in decision-making. Each of these techniques has its advantages and disadvantages depending on who we wish to consult with, the outcome sought and the resources available. This section of the Strategy outlines some of the considerations to be taken into account when initiating consultation.

A Consultation Toolkit has been developed and is refreshed annually. It contains clear guidance on different methods of consulting, and ways to ensure a consultation process is as effective as possible. It also highlights the importance of effective preparation and of feeding results and decisions back to those we consulted. A public version of this Toolkit will be available later this year via the Cambridgeshire Insight website: <http://www.cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk/>

Getting the Process Right

It is important to be clear from the outset of the aims of a consultation and to have a full understanding of your consultation and involvement processes. Before commencing work we guide officers to consider the following questions:

- Have you really considered consultation and involvement from the outset?
Token consultations at the end of a process cause annoyance.
- Have you allowed enough time for consultation in your project plan?
Activities that are rushed give a poor impression and are often ineffective.
- Have you agreed the objectives for your consultation?
Vague or un-targeted work wastes time and resources.
- Have you checked to see if the information already exists? (You may not necessarily need to carry out a survey.)
Repeating similar exercises wastes resources and can cause consultation fatigue.
- Have you identified the decision-making process and how the results of consultation will be used?
If the results are not properly considered people will be less likely to help next time.
- Are you clear about the purpose of the consultation and can you give people clear information on the reasons for involving them and inform them clearly how their involvement can make a difference?
During a good quality involvement exercise people should be aware of why we are talking to them, what we will use the information for and how they will be told of the results of the exercise.
- Is there any other planned consultation with which your proposal could be combined?

Talking to the right people

As previously highlighted, the County Council is committed to involving all sections of the community in consultation exercises. When undertaking any consultation, consideration needs to be given to who we are going to involve, why, when and what are the best ways to reach them.

- Have you identified all of the groups of people who should be involved?
Carry out a 'stakeholder' analysis to ensure everyone is involved. If you find that you will need to frequently consult with a group of people try to establish longer-term consultation arrangements such as a 'service user group'.
- Have you thought about how you will include non-users?
Talking to people who have used a service and stopped or who can't currently use a service can be as important as consulting current service users.
- Have you thought about how you will make your consultation inclusive so you can get the views of hard to reach groups?
Activities should be designed so it is easy for all sections of the community to take part. Issues of ethnicity, disability and background should be considered when undertaking involvement activities.
- Have you addressed issues of confidentiality?
Those taking part should understand how their views will be used and the limits to confidentiality.
- Have you thought about whose views will be most influential and how you will weigh up the views of various groups?
Some groups in the community are well organised and vocal yet may not represent the majority view. Make sure you give due weight to all opinions.

Choosing the right method

After establishing what to consult on, and with whom, we can begin to match this with possible consultation methods. There are many different consultation and involvement methods, some well established and some comparatively new. These methods generally fall into one of two groups, qualitative or quantitative.

1. Quantitative Research Methods

Quantitative methods include closed questions (perhaps via a survey) which produce any data that is in numerical form such as statistics, or percentages to analyse.

These methods are used to establish facts and answer questions such as how many? Or what proportion? The most common quantitative method is the survey (carried out face-to-face, by post or electronically). Other newer methods include the establishment of panels and deliberative opinion polls.

The key features of quantitative research are:

- Asking standardised questions;
- Selecting samples of a defined 'population';
- Assuming that opinions, perceptions and behaviours of the sample are representative of the population as a whole;

- Quantifying sample error.

The benefits of quantitative research are:

- If the sample is properly constructed, findings can be considered to be representative and therefore applicable to the population as a whole;
- It produces results which are easier to summarise and analyse;
- It allows comparisons to be made over time and between places if the same questions have been asked.

The limitations of quantitative research are:

- The questions are determined by the researcher so that any issues falling outside the framework of the questions will be missed;
- Samples may need to be large and therefore costly before results can be considered to be reliable and therefore representative of the population they refer to.

2. Qualitative Research Methods

These methods do not necessarily produce a statistically representative picture of the population as a whole, but they do allow for the exploration of particular issues in depth. Qualitative methods can be used to understand people's attitudes to a service and get in-depth information about behaviour or motives.

These methods are generally open-ended, and therefore time consuming, and usually involve small numbers. Common qualitative research methods include focus groups, in-depth interviewing and workshops.

The key features of qualitative research are:

- Exploring issues in greater depth with a relatively small number of people;
- Ability to clarify opinions and test reactions;
- Ability to explore sensitive subjects;
- Exploring issues when people need help to extract their views or need to be encouraged and in an environment where they feel comfortable to open up.

The benefits of qualitative research are:

- The open-ended nature of answers to questions is more likely than standard questions to capture what is important to people in the research;
- It lends itself to a wide variety of techniques that enhance people's active participation and researchers' understanding of the issues in question.
- Qualitative techniques are particularly suitable for consultation with 'hard to reach' groups.

The limitations of qualitative research are:

- It cannot be assumed that those taking part are representative of different population groups although it is possible to get an overall balance (e.g. by gender, age, socio-economic group etc) in selecting participants;
- The data generated is more time-consuming to process and less straightforward to analyse.

10 Feeding Back to the Public

The key to Cambridgeshire County Council's commitment to carrying out effective consultation is that we listen to the messages we are receiving and respond. To achieve this objective we must feedback the results of consultation and involvement.

The Consultation Database should be updated as soon as an officer has results available for the public.

The results and any action arising from the consultation should be reported to the people who took part. Equally, if the Council chooses not to act on some or all of the ideas arising from consultation then we need to clearly explain the reasons for this. There can be very good reasons for not taking forward work after a consultation and people will understand these if clearly explained.

In some instances, the analysis and decision-making process can be slow so people need to be kept informed between stages about what is happening and have a realistic idea about how quickly things will happen.

Feedback to stakeholders on consultation should be:

- Provided in a suitable format for the service user;
- Simple and comprehensive. No jargon;
- Short and to the point;
- Presented clearly;
- Interesting and relevant;
- Honest and explain why a certain course of action has been chosen or is recommended;
- Distributed before a chosen course of action is implemented to allow stakeholders time to comment.

For very small scale face-to-face consultations, feedback can be done in person. Normally, it will be easier to use online publications, including publishing results via the Consultation Database. Social media, such as the County Council Facebook and Twitter feeds can also be used. Other options include leaflets, or council newsletters. A press release can also be effective as local newspapers are a widely used source of information. Other specialist media should be considered, for example most Parish Councils receive the Cambridgeshire Association of Local Councils newsletter and many Parish Councils have their own parish newsletter.

For all of the above, the Consultation Database should be used. It is possible to update records with results including summary documents, and this is where the public are likely to look.

11 Moving from Consultation to Involvement

There will be occasions when the same groups of people are being regularly consulted. If this is the case then it may be more suitable to set up an involvement group. This is a group of people (usually service users) who have a common interest and who meet regularly with Council officers to discuss issues that affect them. Some of the key points to remember when establishing such groups are:

- Agree a proper written terms of reference with members of the group;
- Arrange a suitable meeting style and location to suit the group;
- Make sure there are sufficient resources available to fund and service the group over the longer term;
- Agree how group views will be considered and taken into account;
- Establish clearly what commitment there is to take action on these views;
- Have arrangements for feeding back regularly to the group;
- Agree arrangements for refreshing the group's membership at regular intervals.

Further advice on consultation methods is available to Council staff on the County Council Intranet site. Guidance can also be sought directly from the Research and Performance Team (contact details in Section 12).

12 Contacts

If you would like further details about this document or advice on how to consult or involve members of the public then please contact:

Research Manager (Consultation & Business Development),
Trevor.Baker@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

Senior Research Officer (Consultations & Customer Knowledge)
Louise.Meats@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

There are a collection of documents available internally for staff to review when preparing to consult, including the Consultation Toolkit. You can also be put in contact with someone from your own department who is experienced in carrying out user involvement exercises.

As a member of the public, you can also ask to be added to a mailing list advising people of when significant surveys are being uploaded to the database – such as annual budget consultations. Please e-mail rg_surveys@cambridgeshire.gov.uk with the word “register” in the subject line.