



CITY OF
Lincoln
COUNCIL

CORPORATE CONSULTATION and ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

2021-2025

Business Manager Corporate Policy (CX)



CITY OF
Lincoln
COUNCIL

Together, let's deliver
Lincoln's ambitious future



Strategic priorities in Vision 2025

- Let's drive inclusive economic growth
- Let's reduce all kinds of inequality
- Let's deliver quality Housing
- Let's enhance our remarkable place
- Let's address the challenge of climate change

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Foreword

This strategy shows the way in which the City of Lincoln Council wishes to undertake consultation with our residents and customers of our services.

Consultation is part of a wide spectrum of participation which ranges from continuous, active involvement to occasional questions about people's opinions, with or without actual evidence. Well-designed consultations seek to verify intended consequences are those that are needed, as well as establish the risk of any unintended consequences of decisions about policies, projects and programmes. Thorough, relevant consultation produces credible evidence on which good decisions are based.

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 – Best Value). It is also a feature of the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 in relation to procurement practices.

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. Better still, where possible we should try to test out new policy/process with customers and get their views before rolling out new services or changes. This will help the council ensure we maximise potential, minimise cost, eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between our communities.

The council's five-year Strategic Plan – Vision 2025, identifies our key priorities, and sets out how we see the priorities being delivered. Engaging the local community is essential if we are to achieve our aspirations and deliver efficient, effective, and targeted services. We understand that listening to opinions early and trying things out – quickly, at low risk and low cost – can reduce costs by getting the basics right before spending time and money on a bad investment

Aims and objectives of the strategy

The aim of the 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, to deliver 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 and children
- Effective – the outcomes from consultation should inform decision-making and service delivery
- Co-ordinated – a consistent and co-ordinated approach

Key considerations

Some Council functions such as planning, require statutory public consultation to be undertaken as part of the process. Statutory consultations are bound by legal requirements and can have strict rules surrounding how they should be conducted. There are also a range of other non-statutory reasons that the council might want to run a consultation exercise. It is important that residents are clear as to the background and reason for the consultation. These include:

- to improve planning, policy and decision making
- to make better use of resources, including budget constraints
- to access new information, ideas, and suggestions
- to encourage greater participation in the activities of the council
- to measure residents' satisfaction with the council
- to shape council activities around residents' needs and aspirations

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 in advance of implementation.

ONE COUNCIL

As part of our drive towards one council, we need to understand our customer, we need an evidence base for each service. Customers are at the centre of everything we do, and as such we need to have a clear picture of their needs in today's world. Consultation is no longer just about basic demographics (which are still important), but also about customer's needs – e.g. how and when they like to be contacted (and to contact us).

The key questions that still remain as the starting point for any consultation are:

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 children, hard to reach or vulnerable groups, they should take the necessary actions to engage effectively with all groups, without making assumptions in advance. Further information on which groups to contact is available in the staff 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 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 – This is the area that has changed the most in recent years, with the change in the way that the general public interacts with each other and business. Some of the basics

remain the same - 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. So, for example if you are engaging with young children, it may be appropriate to make the questions 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, telephone surveys and electronic 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.

If the consultation forms part of the decision making of the Council's committees in particular, Executive, or one of the regulatory committees such as planning and licensing, there must be a clear written reference to the feedback in the decision making process, so this shows that members and officers took the decision being fully aware of the consultation feedback (this would also apply if the decision is delegated.)

Roles and responsibilities

Consultation is not simply the job of the Service Manager to arrange – there are roles for all levels of officer's 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 and is clearly understandable to those being consulted, by using appropriate language and explanations. Expectations of the opportunities and limits of how the results of the consultation will be used in the review must be managed right from the start.

- Consultation owners need to understand their service users so that they are aware of all the groups that should be contacted during a consultation
- Professional 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
- Corporate Policy will produce the Corporate Strategy, Staff 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 surveys when needed. Corporate Policy will not run service consultations - full details of what support is available is included in the Consultation Guidelines

The approach

All consultation should ideally be passed through the Corporate Policy team and Communications team 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 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 below – table 1)



INFORM

- WHY - to give people information about plans and services
- WHAT - Information provided will be accurate, balanced and up-dated as necessary
- HOW- through City People Website, Your Lincoln, Lincoln Fact sheets, Specified information sharing sessions, Members briefings, Social media, Tenants 'Home' magazine



CONSULT

- WHY - to collect information about attitudes, opinions and preferences, and ask for views that will assist our understanding, policy making and decision making
- WHAT - 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
- HOW - 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.



INVOLVE

- WHY - 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 - 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 - Theme Groups, Workshops, stakeholder conferences, service user panels, public meetings, volunteering, other local partnership arrangements

Table 1

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 are ambassadors for the council and can play a key role in council's consultative processes through their community leadership functions. In particular Members have a crucial awareness of local needs, hard to reach communities in their areas and can thus form a link between the community and council. Through their regular consultation with ward constituents, citizens, hard to reach groups, Neighbourhood Boards and other stakeholders, Members are able to positively influence the level of participation and thus the 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 and can be on-line or paper (or a mix). From time to time comprehensive large-scale surveys such as the Place Survey are conducted. On a biennial basis the Housing Teams conduct a 'Star Survey' aimed at understanding the views of our tenants and benchmarking them against other Local Authorities.

Citizens' Panel

The panel comprises up to 800 residents who are consulted on a range of strategic and service issues via postal and electronic surveys up to three times per year. The results are analysed centrally and fed back into services for action. Panel members are provided with feedback via results placed on the website. The panel membership is refreshed on a regular basis with the aim of reflecting diversity within Lincoln.

The council has a preferred aim of moving towards a primarily electronic based panel, which is more cost effective, efficient and meets modern requirements. However, we also recognise that not everyone can or wants to use electronic media – thus we will retain the option of paper responses for those that still require that route.

Lincoln Tenant' Panel

The Lincoln Tenants' Panel exists to represent council tenants and ensure their views are being taken into account when decisions are made about the services they received. They should be consulted on matters relating to council housing services

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. This may work better if you are working with children with the aim of finding out their views.

City of Lincoln website

A page on the CoLC website called "Consultation and questionnaires" where online surveys can be accessed, results can be disseminated and links to specialist areas are made. In addition, there is a facility to ask brief questions directly from the website.

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. Opportunities to promote customer engagement are made through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and advertised on the Central Bus Station screen.

Consultation updates in Your Lincoln and the tenants' Home magazine

We 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 and the library of past consultation results, reports and feedback.

Innovative consultation

The above section shows ways that already exist to get in touch with residents for their views and for some consultations they will provide a good base. However, as already noted – more than 80% of the population now owns a smart phone and are therefore more likely to be knowledgeable about and indeed expect, contact through this way - on line/live consultation has become the norm in today's world. When developing your strategy for a consultation, this needs to be one of the key factors for consideration.

- Do you know how your customer likes to be contacted?
- Have you maximised the power of our website to reach the right audiences?
- Have you used (paid) social media to maximise exposure to your consultation?
- Can your customers access/respond 24/7?
- Could you attend local community events taking a device to capture responses?
- Have you found out the best route to engage with harder to reach groups?
- Are there any relevant Junior Council's to access? Will school help?
- Have you used your consultation to offer respondents direct links to services?
- Could you use social media analytics to review responses?
- Have you tried engaging with the local colleges and universities?
- How will you analyse the questions – especially if using multiple sources?
- Can you utilise Power BI for large volume data crunching and results reviews?
- Have you drawn on the skills and expertise of relevant voluntary groups and community organisations who have good relationships with defined sectors

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 affect 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 2018* and the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which came into effect from 2018 (under EU rules initially) and has been the most important change in data privacy regulation in 20 years. Privacy statements are required for all services collecting and storing personal and/or sensitive data, including consultation exercises.

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 anybody 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 Net Consent.

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 Corporate Leadership Team will undertake regular evaluation of whether our public consultation is meeting its objectives and what service improvements are being achieved as a result.

Links to useful documents

[Engagement and the Equality Duty](#)

[Statement of Community Involvement](#)

[The Housing Act 1985](#)

[Corporate Monitoring form](#)

[New conversations – the LGA guide to engagement](#)

[Decision making in the council – City People](#) (Staff only)