



ENGAGE CONNECT AND EMPOWER

**ANTRIM AND NEWTOWNABBEY:
CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT
FRAMEWORK**



GIVING LOCAL PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES REAL INFLUENCE AND POWER TO IMPROVE THEIR LIVES.



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PURPOSE OF THE FRAMEWORK

We are committed to listening to what our residents have to say about the services we provide and what they want to see happen in the Borough and their local area. We recognise that to effectively shape and improve, then meaningful consultation and engagement is crucial. We believe that listening to and involving people will lead to better, more responsive services and improved quality of life for all.

We have developed this consultation and engagement framework to guide how we listen, consult and involve people. This will help ensure that our consultation and engagement is meaningful and effective; that it makes a difference.

WHY THIS FRAMEWORK IS NEEDED?

We want the public more involved in our consultations and engagements, building trust and confidence in our systems and continually improving how we interact. Helping people understand why we are consulting them and what they can expect from us, is the first step in building that trust and confidence. We also believe that setting out best practice principles and standards will help us improve and consistently deliver good practice. Therefore, this Framework sets out our vision for consultation and engagement and the principles and standards that we will strive to meet. More importantly, by putting civic engagement and participation at the heart of what we do, it will ensure our residents are more involved in the decisions or services that affect them.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS, EQUALITY AND BEST PRACTICE

The framework has been developed based on current legal requirements and best practice.

It represents a further step towards embedding meaningful consultation into the Council's planning and decision-making processes and supplements the commitments in our Equality Scheme and our responsibilities to consult under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Where there is a defined statutory process for consultation, then the statutory process will take precedence.

For example, requirements to consult on spatial planning issues will be undertaken in line with the Planning Act (NI) 2011 legislation and associated statutory guidance.

OUR COMMITMENT TO CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Our Council vision is to be an “ambitious Council: working towards a prosperous, inclusive, and sustainable Borough.”

We are committed to listening to and involving local people in decisions and issues that affect them and to ensure everyone feels that their opinion matters.

By everyone we mean:



Making our Borough a great place to live, work or visit requires a collaborative effort so our approach to consultation and engagement aims to ensure that everyone, and especially those who live here, have an opportunity to influence:

- *Council services and priorities - so they better reflect local need and provide best value for money.*
- *Local actions and decisions - so they make the greatest impact and improve local quality of life now and for the future.*

Working towards transparency, accountability and efficiency will result in focussing on the outcomes below:

- *We have built trust with engagement processes that are focused, inclusive, accessible, open and transparent.*
- *Our residents, visitors, businesses and stakeholders are provided with the opportunities and power to influence.*
- *The effective use of technology will make it easier for residents to participate.*
- *Staff will develop skills to engage.*

Underpinning this is our commitment to ensure that all voices have an opportunity to be heard, particularly those who may find it more difficult to participate because of disability, age, language, caring responsibilities or any other circumstance. Our consultation will be guided by the principles contained in the Equality Commissions guidance “Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 - A Guide for Public Authorities (April 2010)” and our Equality Scheme.



AIMS AND ASPIRATIONS

The framework is intended to help us meet legal standards and good practice commitments. More specifically:

- *Make our consultation and engagement processes meaningful and fit for purpose.*
- *Ensure our consultation and engagement is inclusive and gives all people equal opportunity to contribute, enabling greater access and participation.*
- *Build trust and confidence in Council through fair, open and transparent consultation and engagement.*
- *Provide value for money, reducing costs and avoiding duplication.*
- *Strengthen strategic planning through a consistent and continually improving use of consultation and engagement - a 'one-Council' co-ordinated approach.*

Our aspiration is to ensure that our consultation and engagement:

- 1.** Values and respects people and acts fairly - it has a meaningful purpose and values people's time and contributions.
- 2.** Gives people equal opportunity to contribute - it is clear, accessible and inclusive.
- 3.** Uses fit for purpose methods - it is well designed, visible and commensurate to need.
- 4.** Keeps people informed throughout - it gives people the information they need to participate and informs them of the outcome (key findings, decisions or actions).

These aspirations or principles form the basis of our framework and approach to consultation and engagement.

Through this framework, we will endeavour to embed a culture of engagement so that it genuinely becomes part of what we do.



DEFINITION – WHAT DO WE MEAN BY CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT?

The terms consultation and engagement are sometimes used interchangeably. But, whilst both processes seek the views, knowledge or guidance of others, there is a difference between them.

The Consultation Institute defines consultation as:

“The dynamic process of dialogue between individuals or groups, based upon a genuine exchange of views, with the objective of influencing decisions, policies or programmes of action.”

In this framework, we define engagement as an activity or process that:

“Brings people together to help to understand and solve local problems, to influence and shape Council policy or Council services, or to address issues of common importance and to achieve positive change.”

Consultation is specific and time bound, with decisions made by the organisation initiating the consultation, in this case Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council. Engagement, on the other hand, describes the wider and longer term or ongoing process of involving people - in discussions, deliberations and action planning - on issues that affect them or which they care about. Effective engagement requires respectful dialogue between everyone involved and is aimed at improving understanding and, where appropriate, joint working so as to achieve more positive outcomes.

OUR DEFINITIONS:

Consultation - A process of dialogue – asking for and listening to the views of people and partners in order to inform or influence a specific Council decision, policy, Framework or action.

Engagement - The processes we use to develop ongoing, mutually beneficial working relationships with our people and partners. For the purposes of this framework the term engagement means the purposeful and participative process which enables people to influence and shape Council policy and local services or to improve local outcomes. It is the cornerstone of partnership working.

Involvement - People actively participating in and being involved with Council and other local service providers in policy development, service planning and review or improving outcomes. Depending on the nature of the issue, decisions may be taken solely by Council or may be shared.

The level of involvement will vary depending on the nature of each consultation or engagement. There is no fixed approach. To help explain the potential different levels of involvement, public bodies have adapted the 'ladder of public engagement' concept as illustrated below. Within this spectrum, there are many different methods available, and we must choose what is the most appropriate based on each individual case.





OUR CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council engages and involves people in a number of different ways.





OUR STANDARDS FOR CONSULTATION

We recognise that there is no fixed approach or one right way to consult. Instead, we will adapt each consultation to suit its own unique situation. To help us make the right decisions about how and when we consult, we have adopted five consultation standards. These underpin all of our consultation activity.

OUR CONSULTATION STANDARDS

These set out what you can expect from our consultations. These are our commitments to you. In any consultation exercise we will:

- *Explain why we are consulting and how we are going to take people's views into account. We will consult openly and with integrity, providing the information people need to participate and ensuring that we consult and engage when there is scope for people to influence decisions and actions.*
- *Involve the widest spectrum of the community. We will strive to give all people affected by or interested in the matter an opportunity to get involved. We will strive to give all people an equal opportunity to contribute especially under-represented, marginalised and seldom heard groups. Above all, we will respect people and act fairly, valuing people's time and contributions.*
- *Organise consultation and engagement in ways that are convenient and accessible to the people whose views we are seeking and use the most appropriate and cost-effective mechanisms - fit for purpose consultation that is commensurate to need.*
- *Report back and keep people informed throughout the process - providing information that is open and easy to understand. This includes reporting back on what people told us, the decisions that have been made and any actions that will be taken.*
- *Use the findings to make informed decisions - consultation for a purpose and with an honest intention.*

We will interpret the findings fairly and make decisions or take actions that ultimately help to improve services, programmes or quality of life for local people.

We have developed a toolkit to help officers apply these standards, which will be updated periodically to reflect new practice and learning, and includes comprehensive advice on planning a consultation.



OUR STANDARDS FOR ENGAGEMENT

Engagement brings people together to help solve local problems, to influence and shape policy or Council services or to address issues of common importance and bring about positive change.

Whilst our consultation standards are equally applicable to engagement activity, we feel that additional guidance and support is needed to build and drive meaningful community engagement. We want communities to feel that they can influence and be part of the decisions that affect them. This means working with communities to help them deal with the issues they experience, involving them in the design and delivery of actions and interventions, and supporting them so they can lead on the issues that affect them. Good community engagement is a process which provides the foundation for:

- **Shared understanding**
- **Improved decision-making**
- **Collaboration**

Engagement good practice is continually evolving and we are committed to learning and maintaining good standards that work for our local communities. In the first instance, we will apply the National Standards for Community Engagement as developed by the Scottish Government and the Scottish Community Development Centre. The standards, which build on the OECD principles designed to strengthen government-citizen relations, are about being open and inclusive, with a focus on collaborative change, continuous improvement and relationship building. They comprise seven good practice principles, supported by detailed performance statements that act as a checklist or reference point for best practice. The standards focus on:

- **Inclusion**
- **Support**
- **Planning**
- **Working together**
- **Methods**
- **Communication**
- **Impact**



By applying these standards to our own community engagement, we aim to ensure that our engagement is meaningful and effective - where everyone feels respected and empowered and which delivers a positive outcome for all.

Learning from best practice: Scottish national standards



KEEPING YOU INFORMED

Our framework commits us to keeping you informed. This means letting you know what is happening and telling you about the decisions that affect you and how you can have a say in those decisions. We will also let you know how we took people's views into account and what happened as a result.

We use a range of mechanisms to keep you informed. This includes, for example, tools like our consultation hub, ANBorough residents app, website and social media. Depending on the issue or matter, we may also produce specific leaflets or summary documents to help raise awareness and understanding.



DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE PROCESSES

Our framework is about giving all people a voice through clear, meaningful and inclusive processes. Whilst much of the framework deals with how we initiate, plan and deliver our consultation and engagement, we also want to make sure that we have sound processes in place that enable communities and individuals to initiate discussions and raise concerns.

Our Elected Members play an important role in representing their constituents, including raising issues of concern with services and the corporate leadership team. We will continue to work with local Councillors to develop clear and open processes that enable local people to be more involved, especially at a local area level.

MEETING OUR COMMITMENTS

As part of the development of the framework, we identified four key areas that we will focus on to improve our practice and deliver the aspirations within this framework.





MEASURES OF SUCCESS

We want this framework to make a difference. We want people get involved in the decisions that affect them and we want it to have a positive impact on how people view the Council. To help us assess whether it is making a difference, we will monitor the following:

HOW MUCH DID WE DO?

Number of public consultations per annum.

Number of responses to our consultations per annum.

Number of focus groups or engagement panel exercises per annum (face-to face or online).

Numbers involved in focus groups and panels per annum.

HOW WELL DID WE DO IT?

Percent of consultation exercises where results are fed back to participants.

Participation by key groups (age, gender, background etc.).

Number of FOIs and complaints relating to consultation and engagement process.

IS ANYONE BETTER OFF?

Percent of residents who agree that the Council consults with and listens to views of local residents.

Percent of residents who agree that they are able to have a say in how services are run in their local area.

Percent of residents who rate Council highly in terms of (a) reputation and (b) trustworthiness.

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

Does this make sense?

Are we on the right track?

What do we need to do to make it easier for people to get involved and have their say?

We have put a lot of thought into this framework, but we are very much open to ideas and suggestions for improvement. This framework is about making sure that people have a voice on the issues that affect them and can influence the services we deliver.

If you have any comments or suggestions, please get in touch:

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