

Draft Leicestershire County Council (LCC) Consultation Principles

This document sets out the principles that Leicestershire County Council will adopt for engaging residents, service users and stakeholders when reviewing or changing existing services, policies and commissioning arrangements or developing new ones.

These principles reflect the Coalition Government's Consultation Principles and replace the 2005 County Council Consultation Standards.

It aims to help policy makers and service managers make the right judgements about when, with whom and how to consult. The key principle is that the potential impact of the change or decision on which we consult is proportionate to the scope and type of the consultation undertaken.

This is therefore not a 'how to guide' as each consultation will be different and tailored. The focus is on achieving real engagement rather than a bureaucratic process. The County Council uses a range of engagement activities, of which consultation forms a part. Whether and how to consult should in part depend on the wider scheme of engagement.

Residents, service users and stakeholders may find this document a useful guide to understand what they can expect from Leicestershire County Council with regards to consultation.

Why do we undertake Consultation?

There are a number of reasons why we consult. For example, we may want to

- gain the views, opinions and preferences of our communities;
- understand the possible unintended consequences of a policy/service change;
- get views on different options for the implementation of our policies or service change, or:
- there may be a legal requirement for us to consult.

Increasingly we need to work more closely with communities, partners and stakeholders to deliver the best possible services within the budgets available.

The purpose and objectives of our consultations should be clear, and will depend on the stage of the policy making, commissioning or service change process.

These principles are not prescriptive with regards to length and format of consultation. Rather, they require services and policy makers to consider carefully what type of consultation and engagement will be the most appropriate.

The principles contained within the Compact agreement with the Voluntary and Community Sector and the 'Hear By Right' standards framework for engaging with young people will continue to be respected.

We will try and reach relevant sections of the community

The amount of time required to undertake consultations will depend on the nature and the impact of the proposal/plan/service change and could typically vary between two and 12 weeks. The timing and length of a consultation should be decided on a case-by-case basis. The important requirement is that the consultation takes place at a formative stage before proposals are too far developed. Some, more technical changes, may not require consultation at all. In many cases, we will be working alongside stakeholders throughout the process and therefore a formal time period in which consultation takes place may not always be necessary.

When we undertake engagement we need to think carefully about who we should be working with, including who will be affected by the plans under consideration. We will consider the best way of involving those affected and other stakeholders, in particular any hard to reach or vulnerable groups that will be affected. This may include a range of methods for communication and involvement, such as on-line tools as well as face-to-face engagement such as public meetings and focus groups. Whatever method or tools we use, we should present the information in a clear format that is easy to comprehend, using plain language and making the issues we want consultees to consider clear. There should be enough information to allow the consultees the opportunity to properly consider all of the issues and to allow them enough time to respond. We should also consider the ways in which we communicate.

However, how and what we do will be proportionate in terms of resources (cost, time etc) to the impact of what is being consulted on, within the time and resources available.

Open and Transparent Use of Information

We will be clear on what the purpose of the consultation or engagement is and what is within the scope of the consultation. We need to ensure that we provide the right information so that informed responses can be made. This includes making available relevant evidence underpinning the policy or service change under consideration. Where we do not know something (for example something that is dependent on a Central Government decision) it is important that we communicate this.

We will also make it clear at the outset with consultees what the time-frame for 'change' is and communicate this. An essential part of our engagement activities will be to inform those that have taken part how the feedback they have provided has been used.

We will be clear how we have come to the decision to consult in a particular way and relevant Councillors should be involved in that decision.

We will ensure Cabinet Members and other relevant Councillors and decision makers have access to information and insight gained through consultation and can use this to inform decision making.

Other forms of Consultation

There will be other occasions where we are required, by law, to undertake more formal consultations in a particular way or format.

