

Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) Draft

1. Initial information

Name of the policy, project, strategy, project or service being assessed:

Consultation and Engagement Policy and Protocol

2. Is this a:

New policy

3. Is this:

Both internal and external

4. Please provide a brief overview of its aims and objectives:

This policy applies to all consultation and engagement work undertaken or commissioned by Dorset Council with councillors, customers, residents, businesses, visitors, and other external stakeholders, for example, other agencies and contractors. This may range from a statutory consultation to informal engagement work.

The policy is applicable to external consultation by Dorset Council but excludes internal consultation within the organisation itself. For example please note that consultation in relation to employee pay and conditions is a separate process and led by Human Resources.

Consultation on planning applications, the Local Plan and Traffic Regulation Orders are also out of scope for this policy.

5. Please provide the background to this proposal?

Dorset Council consults and engages on a wide range of topics and issues relating to the services it provides for its residents. Committed to listening to residents and communities when developing and shaping our services, we conduct formal and informal activities and have direct and indirect conversations on a regular basis.

We want to ensure we formalise these activities, both statutory and non-statutory, be more consistent as a council in how we plan and approach our communities, and to ensure we are using accessible methods to allow them to engage with us in a way that best suits them. By doing so, we can develop a better understanding of the aspirations, needs and concerns of the residents of Dorset, and ensure we take these into account in our decision-making and service delivery. Building relationships and having ongoing dialogue leads to richer and more valuable understanding which can help better shape services based on what we have heard from our communities. This process also facilitates building a level of consistency and trust between the council and our residents.

This policy sets out a basic level of principles that consultation and engagement taking place throughout Dorset Council will adopt. Guidance for staff on consultation is given in the Dorset Council Consultation Protocol document. The protocol is also supported by a toolkit which contains practical advice, templates and useful information for officers carrying out consultation and engagement activity.

Evidence gathering and engagement

Evidence gained through engaging with employees through a range of opportunities including 'show and share' engagements throughout the service design transformation process.

6. What sources of data, evidence or research has been used for this assessment? (e.g national statistics, employee data):

Information source 1

Gunning Principles

- Consultation must take place when the proposal is at a formative stage
Sufficient reasons must be put forward for the proposal to allow for intelligent consideration and response
Adequate time must be given for consideration and response
- The product of consultation must be conscientiously taken into account.

Information source 2

The Government has also set out their own standards that should be adopted when engaging and consulting with stakeholders. You can find more detail on the Government principles [here](#). They are that consultations should:

- Be clear and concise
- Have a purpose
- Be informative
- Be only part of a process of engagement
- Last for a proportionate amount of time
- Be targeted – ensure the right people are consulted
- Take account of the groups being consulted
- Be agreed before publication
- Facilitate scrutiny

The following sources of evidence have been drawn on to inform the production of this policy.

- The Consultation Institute Charter and its seven principles which are:
 - Principle 1 The INTEGRITY of Consultation
 - Principle 2 The VISIBILITY of Consultation

- Principle 3 The ACCESSIBILITY of Consultation
 - Principle 4 The TRANSPARENCY of Consultation
 - Principle 5 The DISCLOSURE obligations in Consultation
 - Principle 6 The FAIR INTERPRETATION of Consultation
 - Principle 7 The PUBLICATION of Consultation
- Public Sector Equality Duty requires local authorities to have ‘due regard’ to the impact of changes on those with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010
 - Data Protection Act (2018)
 - Six Show and Share/Tell sessions have been delivered at key points within the organisation to provide updates on activity and gather feedback on the work.
 - Twelve week programme of discovery activities (data collection, interviews, internal/external surveys). These sessions provided an opportunity to understand current activity and provide an opportunity to identify key areas to work on.
 - A report which identified Engagement Platforms which are used by local authorities and other organisations.

7. What did this tell you?

The key findings from discovery were presented to Senior Leadership Team on 14 November 2022.

- Most formal statutory consultations are conducted in line with legislation, including the Gunning Principles, and receive relatively high numbers of responses. However, certain groups in the population are over-represented among respondents (mainly well-educated, middle-income, white, older people) and others are under-represented. This means that results received are not always representative of the population and we are not reaching all groups in a way they would like to engage.
- Most consultation and engagement activity conducted by Dorset Council tends to use a traditional survey methodology, and there is a lack of more creative methods (and the tools and training to deliver this) which would better reach and engage certain audiences.
- There is some good work on service design, user testing and co-production taking place in certain pockets of the organisation – but it is not yet widespread.
- Too many surveys are conducted by Dorset Council, with services conducting their own activity in silos, not sharing results or learning from previous activity, and resulting in survey fatigue among residents.
- Different services procure and use different software for engagement, which is confusing for residents and not cost effective. We need consistency in how we present our consultations and engagement: in the methods but also in branding,

appearance, interfaces, etc., so people are familiar with it, how to access and use it.

- There is no 'ongoing' way for residents to engage with us – activity tends to be conducted as a one-off.
- Residents are engaged in a limited way that means they do not feel listened to and have poor understanding of council decision making. This negatively affects residents' trust in and satisfaction with the council. We need to do more to show what happens as a result of their feedback - 'you said, we did' - and we need to be clearer about what residents can and cannot influence through consultation and engagement.
- It is confusing for residents to know how to engage with Dorset Council – there are lots of different surveys, but a lack of overall clarity about how or where to engage with the council. A single 'one stop shop' approach for consultation and engagement would be much clearer, simpler and more accessible.
- Among some Dorset Council employees, there is a poor level of understanding of consultation, engagement and co-production – terms are used interchangeably. Many colleagues do not know when they should do it / what they should do / how they should do it and what tools and support are at their disposal.
- There is no comprehensive central record or library of all engagement and consultation activity across the council, and the findings from this activity. This means that some activity is duplicated and repeated when it would be better if colleagues could access the data and insight that already exists.
- The council lacks the right tools to enable colleagues to do engagement. This includes software, training and guidance.
- Insufficient time is built into many council projects to conduct consultation or engagement properly, end to end. This includes time to plan, develop stakeholder relationships, to take account of the findings, to embed EQIA (not just one point in process but throughout), and to feedback findings to respondents.
- There are opportunities with the new customer account and platform to use customer data to better target engagement activity at the right audiences.

8. Who have you engaged and consulted with as part of this assessment?

- Dorset Council Employees
- The Constitution Institute

9. Is further information needed to help inform decision making?

None identified at this stage.

Is an EQIA required?

Yes.

Assessing the impact on different groups of people

For each of the protected characteristics groups below, please explain whether your proposal could have a positive, negative, unclear or no impact. Where an impact has been identified, please explain what it is and if unclear or negative please explain what mitigating actions will be taken.

- use the evidence you have gathered to inform your decision making.
- consider impacts on residents, service users and employees separately.
- if your strategy, policy, project or service contains options you may wish to consider providing an assessment for each option.
- see guidance for more information about the different [protected characteristics](#).

Key to impacts

Positive Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the proposal eliminates discrimination, advances equality of opportunity and/or fosters good relations with protected groups.
Negative Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • protected characteristic group(s) could be disadvantaged or discriminated against
Neutral Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no change/ no assessed significant impact of protected characteristic groups
Unclear	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not enough data/evidence has been collected to make an informed decision.

Impacts on who or what?	Choose impact	How
Age	Anticipated positive impact	The commitment of the council to adopting consultation principles, legislation and standards.
Disability	Anticipated positive impact	The commitment of the council to adopting consultation principles, legislation and standards.
Gender reassignment and Gender Identity	Anticipated positive impact	The commitment of the council to adopting consultation principles, legislation and standards.
Marriage or civil partnership	Anticipated positive impact	The commitment of the council to adopting consultation principles, legislation and standards.
Pregnancy and maternity	Anticipated positive impact	The commitment of the council to adopting consultation principles, legislation and standards.

Impacts on who or what?	Choose impact	How
Race and Ethnicity	Anticipated positive impact	The commitment of the council to adopting consultation principles, legislation and standards.
Religion and belief	Anticipated positive impact	The commitment of the council to adopting consultation principles, legislation and standards.
Sex (consider men and women)	Anticipated positive impact	The commitment of the council to adopting consultation principles, legislation and standards.
Sexual orientation	Anticipated positive impact	The commitment of the council to adopting consultation principles, legislation and standards.
People with caring responsibilities	Anticipated positive impact	The commitment of the council to adopting consultation principles, legislation and standards.
Rural isolation	Anticipated positive impact	The commitment of the council to adopting consultation principles, legislation and standards.
Socio-economic deprivation	Anticipated positive impact	The commitment of the council to adopting consultation principles, legislation and standards.
Single parents	Anticipated positive impact	The commitment of the council to adopting consultation principles, legislation and standards.
Armed forces communities	Anticipated positive impact	The commitment of the council to adopting consultation principles, legislation and standards.

Please provide a summary of the impacts:

It is anticipated that the policy and protocol will have a positive impact on protected groups living within the Dorset council area.

Action Plan

Summarise any actions required as a result of this EqIA.

Issue	Action to be taken	Person(s) responsible	Date to be completed by
Feedback	Seek feedback on the policy and protocol from the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Reference Group.	James Palfreman-Kay	31 March 2023
Provision of information	<p>The protocol identifies services will provide information in alternative formats.</p> <p>“Paper forms would normally be made available through the library service and services would need to liaise with the library service early in the process. Libraries would also need copies of supporting documentation. If people request alternative formats (e.g., Large Print, Easy read, Braille, other languages etc.) their request needs to be carefully considered and complied with if possible.”</p> <p>Consultation Planning and Implementation, Guidance/Protocol- p13</p> <p>Important to establish if services understand and can respond to these requests.</p>	Mark Simons – Senior Consultation and Engagement Officer	30 April 2023

Sign Off

Officer completing this EqIA: Laura Cornette Business Partner – Communities and Partnerships

Officers involved in completing the EqIA: James Palfreman-Kay

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