

Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee

24 October 2024

Review of the 'A Big Conversation' public engagement

For Review and Consultation

Cabinet Member and Portfolio:

Cllr R Hope, Customer, Culture and Community Engagement

Executive Director:

A Dunn, Executive Director, Corporate Development

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Report Status: Public (the exemption paragraph is N/A)

Brief Summary:

Cllr. Lacey-Clarke, Chairperson for the Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee, has requested the following four questions are answered at the committee meeting on 24 October. This paper seeks to answer these questions.

- How were the arrangements for the Big Conversation made/planned?
- What methods were used for the selection of the places visited?
- How many people were expected to attend (as defined during the planning stage) compared to the numbers of people who actually attended?
- How was the success for the events defined during the planning stage and has this been met?

Recommendation:

That members of the scrutiny committee review and consider the answers to the Chair's questions.

Reason for Recommendation:

Scrutiny committee's views can be used to improve and help shape future engagement programmes that Dorset Council officers undertake.

1. **Background**

- 1.1. The purpose of the 'A Big Conversation' engagement programme was to engage residents on the Cabinet's proposed strategic priorities for the next 5 years, with a view to feedback given being used to help shape the developing Council Plan. The Council Plan is a strategic planning document, setting out the council's vision and strategic priorities for the period 2025-29.
- 1.2. The four strategic priorities that were engaged on are set out in Appendix A below.
- 1.3. The aim of the Big Conversation was to engage with a wide cross-section of residents from different geographical areas of the county, different ages, gender, socio-economic backgrounds, people from under-served groups, people with different protected characteristics, etc.
- 1.4. The engagement activity needed to run to tight timescales. The planning process began following the local elections on 2 May and the formation of the new Cabinet. Engagement proposals were submitted to Cabinet members for their approval in late spring/early summer. The activity was scheduled to take place over the summer, allowing for further development of the Council Plan in early autumn, attendance at Joint Overview on 29 October, Cabinet on 19 November, and Full Council for final approval on 5 December.
- 1.5. The Big Conversation was a public engagement exercise, as opposed to a statutory consultation, giving residents an opportunity to have their say on the council's priorities over the next 5 years.
- 1.6. The full and final A Big Conversation engagement report and draft Dorset Council Plan will be made available to Dorset Councillors and town and parish councillors and clerks between 16 October and 8 November 2024.

2. **How were the arrangements for the Big Conversation made/planned**

- 2.1. The original timeline for the Big Conversation was planned to run from the end of June 2024 and run to mid-September. However, when the former Government called the general election for 4 July 2024, the Big Conversation was delayed due to the pre-election period. There was no opportunity to extend the timeline at the other end due to Cabinet's desire to get the new Council Plan approved at Full Council on 5 December.

- 2.2. The Big Conversation ran from 24 July to 15 September and was planned to utilise a mix of known engagement techniques to attract responses from a cross-section of Dorset Council residents. The in-person events were one part of the engagement programme: there were 8 events for residents and 4 for town and parish councils. The details of these events can be found in appendix 2.
- 2.3. Residents were also invited to contribute to the Big Conversation online using the Dorset Council 'Citizens Space' platform Dialogue feature - an online interactive application where residents can 'like' suggestions and propose their own, thus replicating the in-person activities; over the telephone via customer services: and in libraries - either assisted by library staff online or via paper copies.
- 2.4. The Communities and Partnerships team also attended several in-person youth events to seek the views of young people (primarily age 13-18). The team also reached out to the EDI reference group to promote the Big Conversation to organisations representing residents with different protected characteristics.
- 2.5. A communications plan was developed and delivered to promote all opportunities for residents to engage with the Big Conversation.
- 2.6. Participative conversation training was provided to all Dorset Council staff attending the in-person events, and for those councillors who wanted to attend, to support their skills development to help get the best qualitative responses from our residents.
3. **What methods were used for the selection of the places visited?**
 - 3.1. Each in-person event location was chosen to have an even geographical spread across the Dorset Council area and attract a high footfall of passing residents. We carefully selected events to ensure there were no obvious barriers to attending. For example, we intentionally did not attend any events that had an entry fee (such as Melplash or Dorset County Shows).
 - 3.2. The majority of the resident events were held on weekends in order to be available for working people to attend. We purposely sought to attend 2 locations in the north of the Dorset Council area due to the rurality. We ran an event in Weymouth and another on Portland as those areas have the highest indices of deprivation in the Dorset Council area with further events in the east and south-east.

3.3. During the planning phase, there were several geographical locations the team considered, but were unable to secure venues for various reasons, for example, no response from the location contact, no availability of pitches (markets) within the required dates/time. This list of these locations can be provided if required.

3.4. All resident locations were chosen to have amenities nearby such as toilets, shops, parking, bus routes, and were physically accessible and that could accommodate a 3mx3m gazebo.

4. How many people were expected to attend (as defined during the planning stage) compared to the numbers of people who actually attended?

4.1. In the planning phase of the engagement programme, we did not set specific target numbers of residents to attend events or respond either online. The aim instead was to encourage high quality responses from a wide cross-section of residents, and to give an early opportunity for town and parish councils to comment.

4.2. We received a good response online and high attendance at all events – we consider high attendance as a continual flow of conversations with residents throughout the event. The only exception was the Portland event, but this can be attributed to torrential rain and high winds throughout most of session.

4.3. The total number of resident interactions across the whole engagement is 780 (approximate). Further detail will be available in the full engagement report once it is available. We collated approximate attendee numbers from the ‘dot’ exercise, although this is not an exact figure.

4.4. The total number of attendees (approximate) for each in-person event are laid out in this table:

Event location	Approximate number of attendees
Resident events	
Bridport	43
Dorchester	156
Wimborne	78
Portland	44
Shaftesbury	52
Wareham	68

Weymouth	63
Sherborne	45
Town and Parish events	
Wimborne	22
Bridport	29
Durweston	34
Dorchester	23

4.5. We took the decision not to ask for demographic data from residents as this may detract from the organic conversations that were had. We chose the locations and designed the communications plan to ensure we were able to reach a broad range of residents.

5. How was the success for the events defined during the planning stage and has this been met?

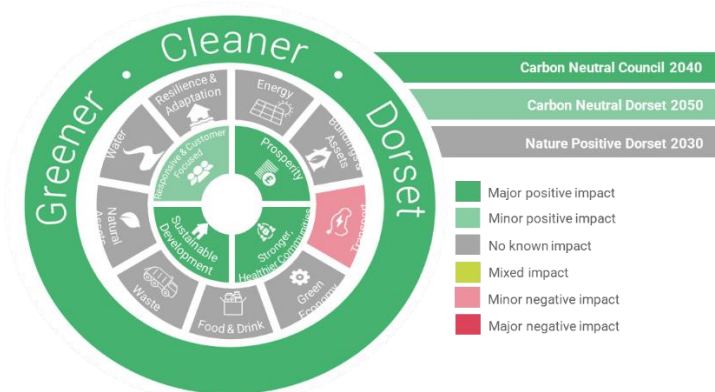
5.1. We were successful in terms of achieving the following objectives:

- A good level of attendance at most events from a wide cross-section of residents
- Good quality quantitative and qualitative feedback from attendees on the proposed council plan priorities which is now being used to shape the Council Plan
- Residents had multiple ways to access the ‘A Big Conversation’, making the engagement accessible to residents who wanted to contribute
- Engagement was delivered within the required timescale.

6. Financial Implications

This report has no further financial implications.

7. Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications



ACCESSIBLE TABLE SHOWING IMPACTS

Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Strategy Commitments	Impact
Energy	No known impact
Buildings & Assets	No known impact
Transport	No known impact
Green Economy	No known impact
Food & Drink	No known impact
Waste	No known impact
Natural Assets & Ecology	No known impact
Water	No known impact
Resilience and Adaptation	No known impact

Corporate Plan Aims	Impact
Prosperity	strongly supports it
Stronger healthier communities	strongly supports it
Sustainable Development & Housing	strongly supports it
Responsive & Customer Focused	works against it

TABLE OF RECOMMENDATIONS	
Recommendations	Responses -will this be incorporated into your proposal? How? And if not, why not?
Energy	
No recommendations found for this category	N/A
Buildings & Assets	
No recommendations found for this category	N/A
Transport	
Use more ULEZ vehicles such as pool fleet where appropriate in future consultations	Logistics made using pool fleet on some occasions more difficult, e.g. staff who lived outside Dorchester. Lack of charging points at staff home also made pool car usage difficult.
Green Economy	
No recommendations found for this category	N/A
Food & Drink	
No recommendations found for this category	N/A
Waste	

No recommendations found for this category	N/A
Natural Assets & Ecology	
No recommendations found for this category	N/A
Water	
No recommendations found for this category	N/A
Resilience & Adaptation	
No recommendations found for this category	M/A

8. **Well-being and Health Implications**

There are no specific well-being and health implications for this report. However, from a strategic perspective, implementation of the new council plan has significant co-benefits for health and wellbeing for Dorset's residents

9. **Risk Assessment**

9.1. **HAVING CONSIDERED:** the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Low
Residual Risk: Low

A risk assessment was completed to cover the in-person events, this can be found in appendix 3

10. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

Please see appendix 4

11. **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – The proposed priorities and overarching themes

Appendix 2 – Dates and locations for the In-person events

Appendix 3 – In-person event risk assessment

Appendix 4 - Equality Impact Assessment

12. **Background Papers**

None

13. **Report Sign Off**

- 13.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s).

Appendix 1 – The proposed priorities and overarching themes

Communities for all

- Make Dorset the best place to be a child (education and children's social care)
- Make Dorset an all-age friendly county
- Hold conversations with communities – listening and working together to develop solutions

Respond to the climate crisis

- Reduce Dorset's impact on climate change
- Support the recovery of nature
- Help communities adapt for climate change impacts

Provide high quality housing

- Increase the supply of housing that local people can afford to rent or buy
- Improve the quality and standard of homes to rent or buy
- Reduce the number of long-term empty homes in Dorset

Grow our economy

- Support more businesses to grow and thrive
- Kickstart the regeneration of Weymouth and surrounding areas
- Support local and sustainable tourism

Appendix 2 - Dates and locations for the In-person events

Resident Events

- Bridport (Bucky Doo Square), Wednesday 24 July, 10am to 3pm
- Dorchester (Food and Arts Festival), Saturday 3 August, 10am to 3pm
- Wimborne (Town Square), Friday 16 August, 8am to 2pm
- Portland (Easton Gardens), Saturday 24 August, 10am to 3pm
- Shaftesbury Town Market, Thursday 29 August, 9:30am to 2:30pm
- Wareham (The Quay), Saturday 31 August, 8am to 1pm
- Weymouth (New Bond Street), Saturday 7 September, 10am to 3pm
- Sherborne (Market), Sunday 15 September, 10am to 3pm

Town and Parish Council Events

- Wimborne (Leigh Park), Wednesday 21 August, 4.30pm to 6.30pm
- Bridport (Town Hall), Tuesday 27 Aug, 5pm to 7pm
- Durweston (Durweston Hall), Friday 6 September, 5.30pm to 7.30pm
- Dorchester (United Church - The Main Hall), Thursday 12 September, 5pm to 7pm

Appendix 3 – In-person event risk assessment



Risk Assessment – Dorset Council 'A Big Conversation' Engagement Events

Workplace – Towns around Dorset

Date of Assessment – 27/6/2024

Assessment completed by (Name) Chantel Ingarfield
 (Designation) Senior Consultation & Engagement Officer

Due for review – TBC

Hazard / Risk e.g. slip/trip hazards, electricity, equipment/activity related hazards	Who is at risk?	Current Controls in Place Are they adequate? Is the risk reduced as far as possible?	Level of Residual Risk Low, medium, high or very high?	Additional measures to control the risks
Engagement events - Verbal and physical abuse from public towards elected members and staff Suspicious behaviour	Members and staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Never hold events in the street alone, always have support • Check Mobile phone signal at site and ensure battery is charged • Choose event location to ensure the safest place possible (i.e. public place such as open busy street within business hours) 	Medium	None at this time

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up of gazebo/tables to enable safe refuge/escape • Safe escape route available • Call Police 999 • Shout or call for help • Report any suspicious behaviour to event control • Be aware of / report any suspicious bags/packages 		
Parking and General Safety	Members and staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Park in a safe easy to get to place, avoiding isolated car parks or deserted streets. • Ensure it is adequately lit • Park facing the route you will need to go, avoiding having to turn around • Never leave valuables on view • Keep car keys in your hand • Keep personal phone easily accessible to call for help/999 • Have good awareness around you and where you have parked when approaching vehicle 	Low	None at this time
Engagement events – equipment Wind/storm/weather effect on gazebo and other equipment	Members/staff/public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • Cancel events in the street if poor or extreme weather is forecast • Ensure equipment is erected safely in accordance with manufacturer's instructions • Ensure equipment is weighted/ tied down • Ensure any pins used are secure • Do not use damaged equipment 	Medium	None at this time
Engagement events – setting up. Both enclosed venues and open events	Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure two members of staff (relatively physically fit) are available for unloading/loading and set up 	Medium/low	None at this time

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follow safe lifting advice Take extra care in windy weather Identify any risks on site and install accordingly 		
<p>Engagement events – supply of food and drink.</p> <p>Sweets are being offered to members of the public at the 8 town events.</p> <p>Tea and coffee to be offered at the enclosed events. Risk of spilling boiling water.</p> <p>Healthy food and drinks may be distributed at the young person’s event at Echo Festival.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> choking allergies incorrect storage of food scalds/burns from hot drinks poor standards of hygiene 	Staff, members and the public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any food and or drinks to be stored appropriately ahead of the events Make clear to participants what the food and/or drink is Allergy and special dietary requirements to be checked to identify any concerns Staff to demonstrate good hygiene practices when preparing and distributing any food and/or drinks Cuts and open wounds to be covered with a coloured plaster Work surfaces to be cleaned before and after the activity Tea and coffees to be served separately from the main activity 	Medium/low (no cooking will be taking place. Only distributing sweets and drinks like fruit juices or smoothies)	Hot water dispensers have been purchased to minimise any issues
Heat and dehydration	Staff and members of the public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have some bottled water on site due to heat 	Medium	
First Aid – insufficient and or unsuitable first aid cover to deal with minor or major injury	Event staff, members and the public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff to know where the first aid point is located. Signpost to appropriate first aid (festival or market organisers) 	Medium	All staff to be sent lead officers phone number in case of emergencies

<p>Overcrowding Inadequate space / exits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk of injury through stampeding, knocking over furniture, trip on branding / chairs / general equipment 	<p>Event staff, members and the public</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum number of attendees known • Ensure adequate space between stands, tables and walk-ways • Adequate staffing • Agreed emergency procedures in place • Appropriate space between stands/branding 	<p>Low</p>	
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