

Draft Consultation and Engagement Strategy

Canterbury City Council
2025 to 2030

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Introduction

Welcome to Canterbury City Council's Consultation and Engagement Strategy.

As we address the evolving needs of our community, it is important our decisions reflect the perspectives and experiences of those living, working and studying in our district.

The development of this strategy has been shaped by the voices of our community.

Through extensive early engagement with residents, businesses and community stakeholders, we have developed a framework that reflects the priorities, aspirations and unique character of our district.

This collaborative process has been instrumental in ensuring our approach is not only inclusive, but also responsive to the needs of those that live, work and study here.

At the heart of this strategy is a commitment to co-production – working with our community to design and deliver services that address their priorities and build pride in where they live.

This approach fosters shared ownership, encourages creativity and delivers positive outcomes.

The need for strong and meaningful engagement is even more critical as we go through the process of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). The transition to a larger unitary authority represents a significant change to local governance. While this shift will present opportunities, it also raises concerns about how local voices will continue to shape decision-making.

We recognise the importance of ensuring engagement does not diminish in a larger structure but instead becomes a cornerstone of how we listen, respond and act on behalf of our residents

This aligns closely with the values in our Corporate Plan, *Restoring Pride To Our District*, which emphasises partnership, innovation and sustainability as essential to creating a more equitable district.

By embedding engagement at the heart of our forthcoming LGR transition, we can ensure our communities remain empowered, informed and involved in shaping their future.

This strategy represents our commitment to strengthening relationships, breaking down barriers and delivering meaningful change. We encourage you to explore this strategy and engage with us as we move forward.

What is consultation?

Consultation is the process of asking for feedback from the community before making decisions.

It helps the council understand people's views, concerns and ideas to help make better decisions.

For example, asking residents what they think about a new service or policy before a decision is made on the final outcome.

However, consultation is not a referendum. While community input is considered, the council retains the responsibility for making the final decision.

Why is it important?

Consultation ensures decisions are well-informed, transparent and the views of the community are taken into account. Done well, it builds trust and shows that the council values public input.

What is engagement?

Engagement is a broader, ongoing relationship with the community, where people are involved throughout the decision-making process, not just at the beginning.

It includes regular communication, working together on projects and keeping people informed.

Why is it important?

Engagement creates stronger, more connected communities by making people feel involved and valued.

It leads to better decisions and outcomes, informed by an ongoing conversation with the community.

Two parts, one purpose

Consultation and engagement go hand in hand to create meaningful connections with our community.

Consultation ensures people's voices are heard on specific issues or proposals, while engagement builds ongoing relationships that encourage collaboration and positive outcomes over time.

Together, they empower residents to take an active role in shaping the future of the district, fostering collaboration, trust and a shared sense of responsibility for the outcomes that matter most.

We asked, you said (early engagement)

Quick feedback survey

We received 274 responses to our early engagement pulse survey which helped us understand how our community views the council's current engagement efforts and the improvements they want to see.

Who responded:

- 89.1% were residents of the district
- 5.1% represented voluntary or community sector groups
- 1.5% were local businesses
- Other respondents included councillors and individuals identifying as 'Other'.

What we do well:

Respondents highlighted several strengths in our engagement efforts, including:

- Offering various channels for feedback (34.7%)
- Providing clear and timely information (30.3%)
- Actively seeking input from diverse community groups (17.5%)
- However, areas like transparency in decision-making (9.5%) and responding effectively to feedback (10.2%) were identified as needing improvement.

Challenges faced:

The biggest barriers to participation were:

- Lack of awareness about engagement opportunities (59.5%)
- Perceived lack of impact of feedback (51.8%)
- Difficulty accessing information or meetings (31.8%).

Suggested improvements:

You recommended the following changes to improve engagement:

- Better promotion of engagement opportunities (61.3%)
- More frequent and varied communication methods (54.7%)
- Greater transparency in how feedback is used (50.4%)
- Enhanced accessibility for people with disabilities (25.9%).

Community workshops

We hosted workshops with a range of groups, including voluntary and community sector organisations, societies, key district organisations, cultural groups, student representatives, parish councils, the BeConnected Panel and the Tenant Disability Forum. These workshops offered valuable insights into what we're doing well, the barriers people face, and how we can improve.

What you told us:

Strengths:

Participants recognised:

- A willingness to improve and openness to collaboration (societies, parish councils)
- Effective face-to-face engagement and addressing digital exclusion (parish councils, Tenant Disability Forum)
- Growing use of social media and lived experience in consultations (voluntary groups, BeConnected Panel).

Barriers and challenges:

Common challenges raised included:

- Trust issues: A lack of transparency, perceived tokenism and no visibility of impact (all groups)
- Accessibility concerns: Barriers include cultural, physical, digital and intellectual limitations (key organisations, Tenant Disability Forum)
- Complexity: Information overload, jargon-heavy communications and unclear council responsibilities (societies, parish councils)
- Engagement gaps: Underrepresentation of certain groups, apathy and limited consultation methods (all groups).

Suggested improvements:

Across the workshops, participants shared actionable ideas, such as:

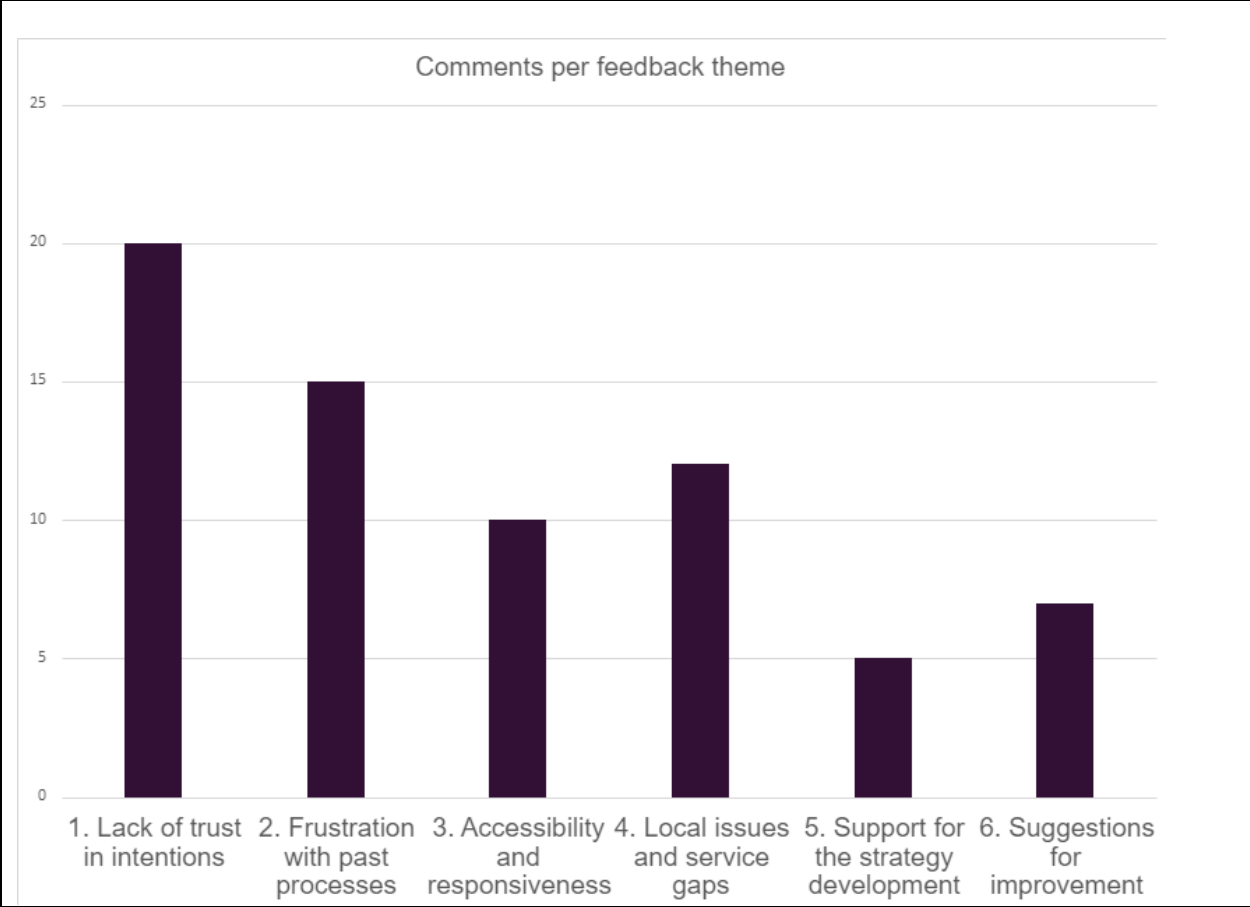
- Better communication: Simplify language, avoid jargon, personalise content and pre-check materials with outside groups (societies, voluntary groups)
- Engage diverse communities: Tailor outreach to young people, underrepresented groups and those with digital limitations (parish councils, BeConnected Panel)
- Transparency and follow-up: Provide clear feedback, show how input influences outcomes and set measurable engagement principles (Tenant Disability Forum)
- Innovative engagement methods: Use fun and interactive consultations, leverage existing community networks and adapt to new media platforms (key organisations, voluntary groups).

Social media feedback

In response to our recent engagement pulse survey shared on social media, we received feedback in the comments sections of our posts.

The feedback is categorised into six primary themes:

- Lack of trust in intentions
- Frustration with past processes
- Accessibility and responsiveness
- Local issues and service gaps
- Support for the strategy development
- Suggestions for improvement



National and local context

The landscape of consultation and engagement is shaped by both national trends and local challenges, each influencing how we connect with and involve our communities.

National context

Councils have a clear responsibility to involve their communities in decision-making.

This isn't just good practice.

In most cases it's also a legal requirement. Several key pieces of legislation guide how we consult and engage:

- **The Local Government Act (1999) and Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act (2007)** encourage councils to involve people in shaping services to ensure decisions are informed by those who will be affected.
- **The Equality Act (2010)** highlights the need to engage with underrepresented groups, helping councils create more inclusive policies.
- **The Health and Social Care Act (2012)** reminds us to listen to those who use our services, ensuring their voices help shape the support they receive.
- **The Social Housing (Regulation) Act (2023)** requires housing providers to work meaningfully with tenants, giving them a real say in how their homes are managed.
- **The Localism Act (2011)** gives communities more power to influence local decisions, encouraging councils to share responsibility for shaping local areas.

On top of this, the Gunning Principles set out what good consultation looks like.

These principles say we need to engage early, provide the right information to enable informed responses, allow enough time for feedback and, importantly, take that feedback seriously when making decisions.

Evolving best practice

Councils and local organisations are increasingly adopting more collaborative approaches to consultation.

Co-production, for example, is gaining recognition as best practice.

Unlike traditional consultation, co-production involves working alongside residents and stakeholders as equal partners to design and deliver services.

This approach fosters shared ownership, deepens trust and often leads to more effective answers to problems.

Local context

In our district, the need for meaningful engagement is further driven by our unique challenges and opportunities. These include:

- **Local Government Reorganisation (LGR):** the process of LGR will significantly reshape local governance, bringing both opportunities and challenges. As we transition towards a larger unitary authority over the coming years, it is essential our residents feel informed, heard and involved in shaping the future of local services. This strategy reinforces our commitment to ensuring that community voices play a central role in influencing the transition and implementation.
- **Financial constraints:** reduced funding means tough decisions must be made and early engagement ensures resources are directed to where they are most needed.
- **Diverse communities:** our district spans urban and rural areas, with varying needs that require tailored, inclusive approaches to consultation and engagement.
- **Rebuilding pride:** residents have expressed a strong desire to play an active role in shaping their communities and this strategy reflects our commitment to listen and respond.
- **Sustainability and liveability:** addressing climate, housing and other challenges requires collaborative efforts to find answers to problems together to benefit current and future generations.

Given these dynamics, we know that we must innovate and adapt our consultation approaches to be more inclusive, accessible and reflective of the diverse and ever-changing needs of our community.

The changes brought by LGR will make this more critical than ever as we seek to ensure the transition does not dilute local voices but instead strengthens community influence over decision-making.

Aligning with the UN Sustainable Development Goals

Our Consultation and Engagement Strategy aligns closely with the principles and ambitions of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

These global goals provide a framework for addressing the most pressing social, economic, and environmental challenges of our time. By embedding the spirit of the SDGs into our engagement practices, we aim to support the creation of a fairer, more inclusive, and sustainable district.

Key SDGs that our strategy supports include:

Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

By creating opportunities for early, inclusive, and meaningful engagement, we empower residents to contribute to decisions that shape the future of their communities. This ensures that our policies and services are responsive to the needs of all, fostering safe, resilient, and sustainable communities.

Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities

Our focus on including seldom-heard voices directly supports this goal by addressing barriers to participation. Through targeted outreach to underrepresented groups, we aim to amplify diverse perspectives, ensuring that no one is left behind in our decision-making processes.

Goal 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions

Transparency, accountability, and trust are central to our strategy. By clearly demonstrating how community input shapes council decisions, we uphold the principles of strong and responsive institutions that are open to the voices of those they serve.

Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals

Collaboration is at the heart of effective consultation. Our strategy emphasizes co-production, working closely with residents, businesses, and community organizations to achieve shared goals. This partnership approach mirrors the ethos of SDG 17, fostering collective action for sustainable outcomes.

Embedding the SDGs in Our Engagement Practices

By aligning with these goals, we aim to strengthen the role of consultation and engagement in delivering a sustainable and equitable future. Our strategy not only reflects local priorities but also contributes to the broader global vision set out by the SDGs, ensuring that the voices of our district's residents are part of a global movement for change.

Our guiding principles

Our approach to consultation and engagement is embedded within the vision and priorities set out in our Corporate Plan. As a council, we are committed to empowering residents and building pride in where they live.

Our guiding principles for engagement reflect this ethos, ensuring consultation is not an isolated activity but an integral part of how we operate and deliver our shared vision.

As the famous Aristotle quote says: ***"The whole is greater than the sum of its parts."***

Our guiding principles, embodied in the PARTS framework, form the foundation of this engagement strategy.

These principles support our Corporate Plan by fostering partnership, creativity and innovation – helping to position us as a catalyst for positive change across the district.

By working together and aligning all the principles of engagement, we create a stronger, more impactful process that brings lasting benefits to our community.

Each of our guiding principles represents an essential part of this process and, when combined, they enable us to deliver a meaningful, collaborative and responsive engagement.

PARTS

Proactive engagement:

In line with our Corporate Plan's focus on being partnership-centred, we prioritise early and meaningful engagement to involve residents and stakeholders at the outset of decision-making where we can. By proactively seeking input and fostering coproduction, we empower the community to take an active role in shaping their environment and the services we provide.

Accessibility:

Reflecting our commitment to targeting inequality, we design engagement to be accessible to all, particularly those who have previously been underrepresented. Our focus on inclusivity aims to ensure we reach those who need our support the most, aligning with our vision of a more just and equitable district.

Responsiveness:

Our engagement process is designed to reflect our emphasis on being results-focused. By listening to and acting on community feedback, we will demonstrate the tangible impact of residents' input. This strongly aligns with our commitment to achieving ambitious outcomes, such as those underpinning the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Transparency:

Transparency is a cornerstone of inspiring trust and pride in our district. It mirrors the approach outlined in the Corporate Plan, where openness and clarity foster collaboration and empower community members and stakeholders to make informed decisions.

Supporting communities:

Supporting our communities means working closely with community groups, sharing knowledge, breaking down silos and prioritising the building of trust and the shared ownership of creative answers to problems.

Objectives

Objective 1: Engage people early to shape policies together

By engaging people early in the process we aim to shape council policies and services that genuinely reflect community needs.

Early engagement may not always be possible, or indeed even needed. But where it is feasible and can add value, it creates opportunity for co-production and collaboration in key areas. This leads to policies that better meet the needs of the community.

Engaging early builds transparency, accountability and trust. This helps residents feel heard and valued in the decision-making process.

Early input can lead to more relevant and practical policies by identifying concerns and opportunities before they impact the community.

This collaborative approach fosters a shared sense of ownership in council projects, ultimately leading to stronger, more sustainable outcomes.

We aim to create avenues for community impact that meaningfully shape our policies from the very beginning, where possible. This might include early surveys on community priorities for a service or, holding workshops and focus groups early in the process, and considering co-production principles, so we can embed community perspectives into the foundation of our work.

Policy decisions can sometimes be developed without adequate early community input, leading to policies that may not fully respond to residents' priorities.

Where appropriate, we will host workshops and focus groups with community groups during the formative stage of policy development. This will provide residents and stakeholders with a structured platform to contribute to insights early, making them partners in the process rather than just respondents to finalised plans.

Traditional consultation methods can be limiting, with residents feeling like their input doesn't significantly influence council outcomes and decisions. There's often no clear structure for truly collaborative policy development.

We'll develop co-production principles to guide more collaborative efforts between the council and the community, ensuring alignment with evolving Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). By embedding co-production principles, we aim to empower residents to co-design solutions where appropriate, fostering shared ownership of local decision-making.

Consultation sometimes takes place after significant milestones have been achieved. We know this reduces the impact of resident feedback and fosters a 'what's-the-point' mentality and a general sense of disengagement.

Engagement shouldn't be an afterthought. We'll ensure that engagement, where appropriate, is embedded into project timelines right from the beginning. By identifying early touchpoints for consultation and engagement, we can integrate community insights when they have the most potential to shape policy direction.

Objective 2: Include all voices, especially the underrepresented

This objective centres on actively seeking and including the voices of all community members, especially those who are often underrepresented through traditional consultation methods.

By talking to underrepresented groups, including young people, vulnerable adults and individuals facing language or digital barriers, we can create a more inclusive and representative decision-making process.

Certain groups might feel disconnected from or overlooked by council processes and an inclusive approach can help to bridge this gap, allowing the council to understand and address community needs more effectively.

This builds a more equitable, engaged community where every voice can contribute to shaping decisions.

We will develop targeted, accessible ways to involve underrepresented groups in council processes.

This includes creating tools for effective communication, establishing connections with community groups and building resources to reduce engagement barriers.

We want to ensure everyone in the district feels encouraged and supported to have their say. Lack of awareness of our engagement and consultation activities can limit residents' participation, especially for those who may be isolated or unaware of how to get involved.

We will develop an interim of local services and community groups to improve outreach and connection for our engagement work, exploring alignment with potential LGR structures. This will make it easier to directly communicate with and involve key groups, ensuring they receive relevant information and opportunities to engage with us.

General messaging often fails to reach certain groups well, especially those with unique needs or preferences.

We will target our messaging to resonate with specific groups; such as younger audiences, non-English speakers and digitally excluded residents. This will include, where appropriate, creating accessible formats and using relevant channels to ensure our communication reaches its intended audience.

Traditional engagement methods can be inaccessible or unappealing to some groups, leading to low participation from underrepresented communities.

We will pilot pop-up engagement events in partnership with other east Kent councils to test scalable approaches. By bringing engagement into community spaces such as libraries, community centres

and local neighbourhoods, we can create more visible and accessible opportunities for people to participate.

Young people often feel disconnected from council decisions and may not always see the relevance of civic engagement in their lives.

We will expand partnerships with schools and universities, ensuring alignment with wider LGR engagement efforts. This could include partnering on projects, embedding young people's perspectives into council strategies and policies and creating early civic engagement opportunities to give young people an insight into local government.

We know language barriers can exclude non-native English speakers from fully participating in council consultations and accessing information.

Using data insights to understand the language needs of impacted communities, we will adapt our resources to ensure accessibility where needed. This may include translating key documents, event invitations and feedback forms, as well as arranging interpreters where necessary to facilitate engagement.

Businesses are valuable community stakeholders but often have limited input to policy development.

We will explore opportunities for joint business engagement initiatives with LGR partners. This may include roundtable discussions, surveys and structured liaison with businesses to ensure they have a voice in decision-making processes affecting our local economy.

Objective 3: Equip our staff for strong engagement

This objective focuses on equipping council staff, councillors and stakeholders with the tools, skills and resources needed to carry out meaningful and consistent consultation and engagement activities.

By creating a structured approach to engagement, we can ensure all our consultations are effective, accessible and align with best practices.

Clear guidance on consultation processes enhances the quality and consistency of engagement across the council.

When staff and councillors are equipped with the right resources and skills, they can connect more meaningfully with residents and stakeholders.

Standardised practices also foster trust in the council's decision-making process, as the community can see a consistent approach in how their input is gathered, used and reported.

We will develop comprehensive resources and training programs that help staff and councillors plan, execute and evaluate engagement efforts effectively.

By creating a toolkit, training programs and a calendar to streamline consultation activities, we aim to make engagement an integral and well-supported part of our decision-making processes.

Inconsistent approaches to engagement across departments can lead to varied outcomes and affect community trust.

Without clear guidance, our staff may lack the confidence in planning and delivering effective consultations and engagement.

We will create a practical toolkit which outlines best practice, provides templates and step-by-step guidance for how to deliver effective consultation and engagement. This toolkit will help our staff consistently apply effective methods of engagement that align with our standards.

Our officers can sometimes be faced with complex or sensitive issues that require a tailored approach to engagement. In these cases, staff may not have the necessary skills or confidence to conduct meaningful consultation.

We will deliver targeted training sessions for staff, with a focus on LGR-related consultation challenges where appropriate. This will include key consultation skills, such as facilitating focus groups, analysing feedback and engaging with diverse communities. By investing in skill-building, we will ensure staff are well-prepared to engage with residents in a meaningful and effective way.

Councillors, your elected representatives, may not always be familiar with engagement techniques or the tools available, particularly when first coming into the role.

We will offer tailored training sessions for councillors on consultation, incorporating LGR considerations over the coming years. This will equip them with the knowledge and skills to communicate effectively with their residents about engagement opportunities and ensure they play an active role in local decision-making.

Without regular monitoring and evaluation, it can be difficult to gauge the effectiveness of consultation efforts or learn from past experiences.

We will set evaluation criteria and processes to regularly assess the success of engagement activities. By collecting data on respondent rates, feedback quality and impact on decision-making, we can continuously refine our approach and improve future consultation and engagement.

Objective 4: Make it clear how community input shapes our choices

This objective is about enhancing transparency in the decision-making process by clearly demonstrating where and how community feedback influences council decisions.

By providing accessible ways for residents to see the impact of their input, we aim to build trust and encourage ongoing engagement.

Transparency is essential for fostering trust between the council and the community.

When residents can see how their contributions shape policies and services, they are more likely to engage in future consultations.

Demonstrating the influence of feedback also reinforces the council's commitment to being responsive and accountable to residents' needs and priorities.

We will implement accessible tools and reports that showcase the impact of public input, ensuring residents have a clear view of how their voices contribute to council decisions.

The council has a legal duty to make decisions on a wide range of matters and sometimes, decisions will be made that do not align with feedback from consultations. Even in these instances, we will provide clear reasoning for decisions made to support transparency and ongoing trust with our communities. This will include creating a feedback dashboard and regular reports that provide clear, measurable updates on the outcomes of consultations.

We know residents often lack a clear and accessible way to see how their feedback has influenced council decisions, which can lead to feelings of disengagement and scepticism.

We will aim to improve the information we present online, ensuring residents can clearly track ongoing and past consultations, view summaries of input received and understand how feedback has impacted policies and services. We want to create a transparent resource for the community to understand the influence of its feedback.

Without regular updates, residents can feel uncertain about our responsiveness or lose interest in engaging altogether.

We will develop a pilot consultation report to assess the feasibility of regular updates, taking into account LGR developments. This report will highlight key consultation results and provide specific examples of how community input has shaped council decisions. By increasing visibility and accountability, we aim to demonstrate the tangible outcomes of ongoing engagement work.

After providing feedback, residents don't always receive follow-up communication, which can lead to frustration and a sense that their input was ignored.

We will develop a an approach to ensure respondents receive feedback, considering how this may evolve under LGR. This could include email summaries, updates through community newsletters, or other direction communication methods to close the feedback loop and reinforce that their contributions are valued.

Without clear metrics, it can be challenging to evaluate the effectiveness of engagement or identify areas for improvement.

We will ensure community feedback is documented and explore how this process can align with future LGR structures. This could include reporting on specific adjustments made in response to consultations and explaining how resident input has influenced decision-making. By continuously reflecting on these outcomes, we can refine our approach to better reflect the district's needs.

Objective 5: Collate frequent feedback to understand community priorities

This objective focuses on implementing a systematic approach to gathering timely insights into residents' concerns, preferences, and priorities.

By using varying survey methods and data insights, we can adapt policies to better align with the current needs of the community.

This objective is important because understanding the evolving priorities of residents is crucial for effective governance.

Timely feedback helps the council respond proactively to community needs, fosters trust in the decision-making process and ensures services remain relevant and impactful.

More frequent insights into resident sentiment can also guide resource allocation and strategic planning.

We will adopt a range of tools and methodologies to continuously gather and analyse resident feedback, providing a clear baseline of community priorities to inform the planning and development of future projects.

This will include conducting surveys, utilising pulse surveys for quick feedback and leveraging data insights to accompany consultation reports.

Static consultation processes, such as on a specific project or policy, can miss emerging concerns or changing priorities within the community which can ultimately result in outdated policies and services.

We will pilot quarterly surveys to gauge community priorities, with a focus on LGR-related themes where relevant. These surveys will provide deeper insights into residents' views, capturing perspectives on key issues. To maximise participation, they will be promoted through multiple channels and designed to be accessible to diverse audiences.

Long and detailed surveys about resident priorities can be counterproductive; making engagement from across the community less likely and can take a long time to analyse and report, missing opportunities to inform policy development.

We will explore the feasibility of pulse surveys for real-time feedback from the community, ensuring sustainability with LGR changes. These shorter surveys will allow us to gather quick insights on emerging issues, helping to ensure timely and responsive decision-making.

Consultation reports often present qualitative feedback without integrating quantitative data, which can limit understanding of the broader community context, including demographics.

We will improve how consultation data is reported by incorporating relevant demographic insights

and participation statistics. This approach will provide a more comprehensive view of community feedback, helping to contextualise findings and inform-decision making.

Traditional consultation methods may exclude residents who prefer to engage through digital channels or may not have the time to take part in longer surveys.

We will explore how we can leverage social media and other online platforms to gather quick feedback on specific issues. Regularly posting questions or polls will create ongoing opportunities for residents to share their opinions in a format that suits them.

How we will monitor progress

Monitoring the progress of our consultation and engagement work is essential to ensuring we meet our objectives and continuously improve the way we involve residents in decision-making.

By tracking key metrics and regularly assessing our activities, we will be able to identify successes, address challenges and adjust as needed to ensure our strategy for consultation and engagement continues to respond the needs of our communities.

Setting clear metrics

Each of our objectives is supported by specific actions, and for each of these actions, we will define measurable outcomes.

These metrics will include both quantitative data (e.g. participation rates, response times, demographic representation) and qualitative insights (e.g. community satisfaction, feedback quality).

These indicators will help us assess how effectively we are engaging with our residents and stakeholders and ensure that our actions are having a meaningful impact.

Regular reporting and feedback loops

Progress reports will be shared internally and publicly, outlining our successes, challenges and how community input shaped decisions.

We will also, where possible, gather feedback after engagement activities to improve our efforts in future.

Continuous improvement

Based on monitoring results and feedback from residents, we will continue to review our approach and refine practices to address challenges and align with community needs.

This will include regularly updating staff training to maintain high standards of consultation and engagement across the council.

Stakeholder collaboration

We will collaborate with community groups, organisations and businesses to gather insights and ensure our engagement methods remain inclusive and relevant.

By monitoring these areas, we will ensure our strategy remains responsive, transparent, and aligned with the evolving needs of the district.

Action plan

Delivering our objectives

This strategy outlines five key objectives that will guide how we approach consultation across the council.

To ensure these objectives are translated into meaningful action, we have developed a detailed action plan.

The action plan identifies specific activities beneath each objective, alongside information on:

- Ownership: which team or department at the council will be responsible for delivery
- Timeline: whether the activity is short, medium, or long-term
- Priority: the level of importance assigned to each action
- Feasibility: a consideration of cost, resource, and practicality
- Status: whether the action is already underway or planned.

This structured approach ensures transparency and accountability while providing a clear roadmap for delivering meaningful engagement across the district.

As we progress, we recognise that Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) presents opportunities to collaborate more closely with other local authorities to strengthen our consultation and engagement work. Where possible, we will seek to align and share best practice, ensuring our approach remains adaptable to potential changes in governance structures.

This action plan will be kept under review, allowing us to respond to emerging opportunities while maintaining our commitment to high-quality engagement.

The table below details how we will put our objectives into practice.

Action plan by objective

| Action | Owned by | Timeline (short, medium, long) | Priority (high, medium, low) | Feasibility (high, medium, low) | Status (ongoing, TBC) |
|--|---------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|--|--|
| Objective 1: Engage people early to shape policies together | | | | | |
| Host workshops and focus groups during the formative stage of policy development, where appropriate and relevant to the policy being developed | Across teams/projects | Short term | High | Medium – requires moderate budget for events and/or facilitation | Underway |
| Develop co-production principles to guide collaborative efforts, which can also inform LGR engagement | Policy and Communications | Short to medium term | High | Medium – feasible with cross-team coordination | Not started – research phase to begin in 2025 |
| Embed early engagement into project timelines by identifying touchpoints for consultation from the outset | Across teams/projects | Short term | High | High – minimal cost to integrate into current workstreams | Underway |
| Objective 2: Include all voices, especially the underrepresented | | | | | |
| Develop an interim directory of local services and community groups | Policy and Communications | Short term | High | High – low cost, using existing resources to compile the directory | Underway |
| Target messaging to resonate with specific groups (e.g. young people, non-English speakers, digitally excluded) | Policy and Communications | Medium to long term | High | Medium – requires adaptation of current processes and development of materials | Some action underway – comms pilot during early engagement |
| Pilot pop-up engagement events | Across teams/projects | Medium to long term | Medium | Medium – cost dependent on venue and logistics; flexible in terms of scope | Not started – planning phase for event schedule |

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| Expand partnerships with schools and universities to involve young people in shaping decisions | Across teams/projects | Medium to long term | High | High – strong potential for partnerships, could be time-intensive | Action underway – partnership with EKST, local secondary schools |
| Adapt and improve resources for accessibility for non-English speakers, including translations and interpreters | Case Services | Short term | High | Medium – will require dedicated resources for translation and interpreter services | Underway |
| Explore opportunities for joint business initiatives (e.g. roundtable discussions, surveys) | Policy and Communications | Medium to long term | Medium | Medium – relies on forming ongoing relationships, but feasible with existing networks | Some action underway – building directory for specific areas (e.g. Herne Bay) |
| Objective 3: Equip our staff for strong engagement | | | | | |
| Create a practical toolkit outlining best practices, templates and step-by-step guidance for delivering effective consultation and engagement | Policy and Communications | Short term | High | High – can leverage existing resource and expertise | Developed, now rolling out to staff |
| Provide training sessions for council staff on key consultation and engagement skills | Policy and Communications | Medium term | High | High – can leverage existing resource and expertise | Not started – training sessions to be scheduled for 2025/2026 |
| Offer tailored training sessions for councillors on consultation and engagement, incorporating LGR considerations | Policy and Communications | Medium term | Medium | High – can leverage existing resource and expertise | Not started – planning in 2025 |
| Set evaluation criteria and processes to regularly assess the success of engagement activities | Policy and Communications Digital, Data and Improvement | Medium term | Medium | High – low cost and feasible using existing frameworks | Not started – metrics to be defined following CP Action Plan |
| Objective 4: Make it clear how community input shapes our choices | | | | | |

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| Improve online content to allow residents to track ongoing and past consultations, view summaries and understand how feedback has impacted policies | Policy and Communications | Medium term | Medium | Medium – can utilise existing platform), low cost but dedicated resource required | Underway – some improvements have taken place, feedback loop can be improved |
| Develop a pilot consultation report to assess feasibility of regular updates | Policy and Communications | Long term | Medium | Medium – requires resource for report production/distribution | Not started – planning in 2025 |
| Develop an approach to ensure respondents receive feedback | Policy and Communications | Medium term | Medium | High – low cost, could integrate into existing comms channels | Not started – planning in 2025 |
| Ensure community feedback is documented and explore how this process can align with future LGR structures | Policy and Communications Digital, Data and Improvement | Long term | Medium | Medium – requires cross-team collaboration | Not started – metrics to be defined following CP Action Plan |
| Objective 5: Collate frequent feedback to understand community priorities | | | | | |
| Pilot quarterly surveys to gauge community priorities, with a focus on LGR-related themes where relevant | Policy and Communications | Short term | High | Medium – may need to scope out smarter survey tools to enhance data collection | Not started – planned in line with CP priorities for 2025 pilot |
| Explore the feasibility of pulse surveys for real-time community feedback | Policy and Communications | Short term | High | Medium – can use existing survey software, but smarter tool may need exploration | Pilot underway – reviewing feedback/effectiveness |
| Incorporate relevant data insights, including demographic trends and statistics, into consultation reports to provide context for findings | Policy and Communications Digital, Data and Improvement | Medium term | Medium | High – district-level data collection is already underway | Pilot underway – reviewing feedback/effectiveness |

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|---|---------------------------|----------------------|------|---|---|
| Leverage social media to gather quick feedback (i.e. through polls, or questions, or post comments) | Policy and Communications | Short to medium term | High | Medium – existing tools can be used, but limited resources could constrain implementation | Pilot underway – reviewing feedback/effectiveness |
| Pilot a community feedback loop, assessing how this could be scaled under future LGR structures | Policy and Communications | Medium term | High | Medium – limited resource could implement scale of implementation | Not started – planned in line with strategy development |

