



Westmorland
& Furness
Council

Consultation and Engagement Strategy





Community
Conversation ...




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Foreword

This Consultation and Engagement Strategy builds on our 'Together we are powered by communities strategy' which outlines our approach to embedding Community Power into how we work as an organisation. Enabling our residents and communities to shape the places they live and influence the services that affect their lives.

Through our 'Together we are powered by communities' strategy we have committed to becoming a community powered council. To achieve this, we need a clear and consistent approach to how we consult and engage and encourage residents and communities to participate in local decision making. This strategy also recognises the significant challenges currently faced in the public sector.

In particular:

- Increasing financial pressures
- Increasing expectations for greater involvement in the provision of future services and the development of services
- The demographic change that will impact on the services that we provide to our area
- The need to influence behaviour, in particular around waste, climate change, travel and health

The Consultation and Engagement Strategy builds upon the processes and good practice that already exists across the council and with our partners, whilst recognising that improvements can be made.

It aims to embed best practice and maximise the benefits of quality consultation and engagement for all. It outlines how the council will continue to strengthen the way in which we involve residents, communities, businesses and the voluntary sector to ensure that their continued involvement makes a real difference to our local area, the type of services we provide and the ways in which we provide them.

This strategy aims to deliver the following:

- A joined-up approach to co-ordinating and planning consultation and engagement that leads to better outcomes
- A clear approach to help us to meet our legal consultation duties
- A way of working with residents and the community to help make joined up decisions that improve Westmorland and Furness and make it a great place to live, work and thrive
- Provide support and guidance to ensure our seldom-heard groups can be heard and fully take part in consultation and engagement
- An approach that ensures that residents, and the community, understand how their involvement can, and where possible, has influenced decisions
- A strategy that ensures that our staff have the knowledge, skills and resources needed to consult and engage with residents and the community effectively
- An approach that ensures that our residents can get more involved in their community

Introduction

We believe that residents and communities should be able to shape the places they live and to influence the decisions and services that affect their lives – this is what being a community powered council means to us. By listening to, working with, and learning from local people and communities, we will make better decisions.

This document outlines our approach to embedding Community Power into how we work as an organisation, enabling our communities to shape the places where they live and influence the services that affect their lives. To achieve this, we need a clear and consistent approach to how we consult and engage. As a public document it helps others hold us to account for our actions.. If you're unsure about some of the terminology used, there is also a handy glossary at the back of this document.

What is engagement?

Engagement refers to the **ongoing and regular process of involving residents and communities** in the planning, development, and delivery of public services that affect their lives. It is about developing relationships and building opportunities for ongoing dialogue with residents.

Engagement includes a spectrum of activity which we will explore in this document.

Engagement is about influence. How we engage with local people and communities directly affects the level of influence they have over the decisions we make. There is no 'one size fits all' approach to involving our communities and residents.



Why engagement matters

Good engagement is key to ensure we work in a community powered way. It will lead to better democratic participation, better services and better outcomes for communities – building productive relationships between communities and public bodies. It is not an add on or afterthought for a project or piece of work or a single activity or event.

When done well it can lead to:

- Better public services that are planned, developed and delivered with community input and that respond to community priorities
- Better relationships are formed between Westmorland and Furness Council and communities which build on trust and help to make joint action possible
- Communities influencing and sharing in decisions that affect their lives including those who may find it difficult to get involved for example because of language barriers, disability, poverty or discrimination

What does good engagement look like?

When residents, customers and communities are engaged in local decision making, they can see how their contributions make a difference, we heard recently from residents that took part in the Cumbria Climate Assembly. They developed recommendations and a set of principles for how councils and other organisation can engage communities better. Though the deliberation was specifically around climate the principles they created are relevant for all community engagement and reflect what people want to see locally – check out toolkit 3 'Methods' for more detail on the principles and to learn about other methods of engagement like Citizens Assemblies.



Principles for good engagement

- **Engage at an early stage** - before decisions are made
- **Make information understandable and accessible**
- **Treat people as citizens not consumers**
- **Listen to young people** - guided by the Lundy principles
- **Honesty and transparency** - be clear about what's been decided, why and what's possible
- **Reaching out to specific groups** - proactively include people whose voices are often missed
- **Accountability and feedback** - be honest about what's been done and what hasn't and commit to learning and improving
- **Engagement methods** - make it fun, creative, inclusive and well publicised
- **Routine dialogue with communities** - ongoing not one-off
- **Bringing people together** - from different ages and background
- **Who engages matters** - facilitate engagement through trusted, relatable people

Engaging with Members

Members have many roles, but it is their role in their local community that is arguably the most important. Members are often the first point of contact, especially if local people, stakeholders and other community groups are concerned about an issue or have queries about services or plans for the area.

It is critical that Members are informed about all significant developments affecting their electoral ward before other groups and always before the council makes public announcements.

Members understand the people and communities that they are elected to represent and as such are a key stakeholder when engaging in their ward. Members should also always be invited to attend council initiated events held within their ward.

There is an agreed member/officer protocol and a clear commitment to keeping local members informed and engaged in the council's constitution (section 10) which can be found on the council's website.



Engaging with Partner Organisations

Much of the work the council does is alongside partner organisations like the NHS, police or national parks. In many cases, only by working in partnership can shared goals be achieved. The principles and approaches in this strategy are described with local people and communities in mind, but they apply equally to how we should work with other organisations. When considering any decision, our partnerships should always be fully considered.

Case Study - Highways

There were major highways infrastructure updates needed along the A592, and the project team focused on engagement at the start so residents were well informed of any works, the impact they would have, and have the chance to influence and shape them.

The team worked alongside communities to overcome challenges and to embed community expertise - in some cases shifting the programme based on feedback at the stakeholder working group which regularly met throughout delivery.

This way of working is now becoming a benchmark for major infrastructure projects, working alongside communities effected by them.

"If we're involved we can do it better and make sure the right decisions are made at the right time." - Andy Laverick, Catstycam Glenridding.



Case Study - 20mph Zones

Through their role as community representative, a local councillor highlighted concerns about speed limits in a village. Changing the speed limit would require a formal Traffic Regulation Order and a statutory consultation.

Responding to the councillor's feedback and to test wider local opinion, the highways service wrote to residents asking them for their views and invited them to a feedback event at the local village hall. The community response was strongly in favour of the principle of reducing the speed limit.

The highways team used that feedback to help design the proposal for the speed limit reduction, they then followed the statutory consultation process to bring the speed limit change into effect.



What is consultation?

Consultation has legal requirements and formal processes - councils often have a statutory duty and are bound by legislation to consult before making changes to policy or service provision.

Consultations have a clear remit, start and end points and there is clear scope for people to influence decisions. Consultation is part of a formal decision-making process.

It is usually time limited, subject to law and guidance and failure to follow specific principles or conducting a consultation incorrectly may lead to legal challenge. We have more information and detail in toolkit 1 'Consultation' around the principles, legislation and best practice around conducting consultations. This toolkit looks at why consultation matters, principles and legislation and the Gunning Principles, the legal basis for judicial review decisions.

Why does consultation matter?

The Council has a Best Value duty, that is a requirement to secure continuous improvement in the way it delivers services having regard to economy, efficiency and effectiveness. There is also a duty to consult representatives of tax-payers, residents and service users (see the Local Government Act 1999 sections 3 and 3A).

Gunning Principles

Any consultation should be carried out in accordance with the four Gunning Principles - they are referred to as a legal basis for judicial review decisions – they state that a consultation should:

1. Be undertaken at a **formative stage** in the decision-making process when the options are still open.
2. Provide **enough detail** to allow respondents to the consultation to provide informed feedback on the matters in question.
3. Allow **reasonable time** for responses to the consultation to be made.
4. Demonstrate that **conscientious consideration** has been given to the consultation feedback by decision makers

Case Study – Local Plan

We have a statutory obligation to consult on the Local Plan, the Planning Policy team met all statutory obligations and went above and beyond to ensure communities were able to feed into the Local Plan by running a series of early conversation events.

A roadshow of drop-ins (16 in total) were delivered across Westmorland and Furness at venues where communities were active and comfortable e.g. Libraries, shopping centres, supermarkets, existing events.

They collaborated with Community Development teams, Highways and Flooding teams so they could coordinate and align engagement across multiple services and have wider discussions with communities.



Case Study – Waste Harmonisation Programme

This was a two-stage process starting with a 'Community Conversation' in November/December 2024, during which residents were invited to share their thoughts on current waste and recycling collection services in their area - what they like, what they don't like and what they would like to change.

Stage one included online and paper copies of a survey and in-person public 'workshop feedback' sessions in Kendal, Penrith and Barrow.

Nearly 3,000 people responded to that initial engagement.

Feedback from the Community Conversation survey and workshop sessions indicated a strong desire to explore different types of container/collection methods.

In response we ran pilot trials in Penrith and Ulverston, testing different containers (wheelie bins instead of bags) and collection methods (co-mingled recycling) and surveys were conducted with residents in pilot trial areas to gather their thoughts and views on the trial systems.

The feedback from the Community Conversations and pilot trials were used to directly shape and develop the potential options for a future harmonised waste and recycling service.

A full 8-week consultation on options for changes to waste and recycling collections was launched in May 2025 including online and paper surveys, dedicated website, briefings and information for key stakeholders. There were also in-person 'market stall' sessions and targeted information on consultation sent to more than 50 organisations in our Disability, Equality and Inclusion Partnership.

The 8-week consultation saw 4,300 people respond and share their views on the options presented.

This feedback was used to shape the final proposals for the harmonised waste and recycling service put before Cabinet in September 2025.

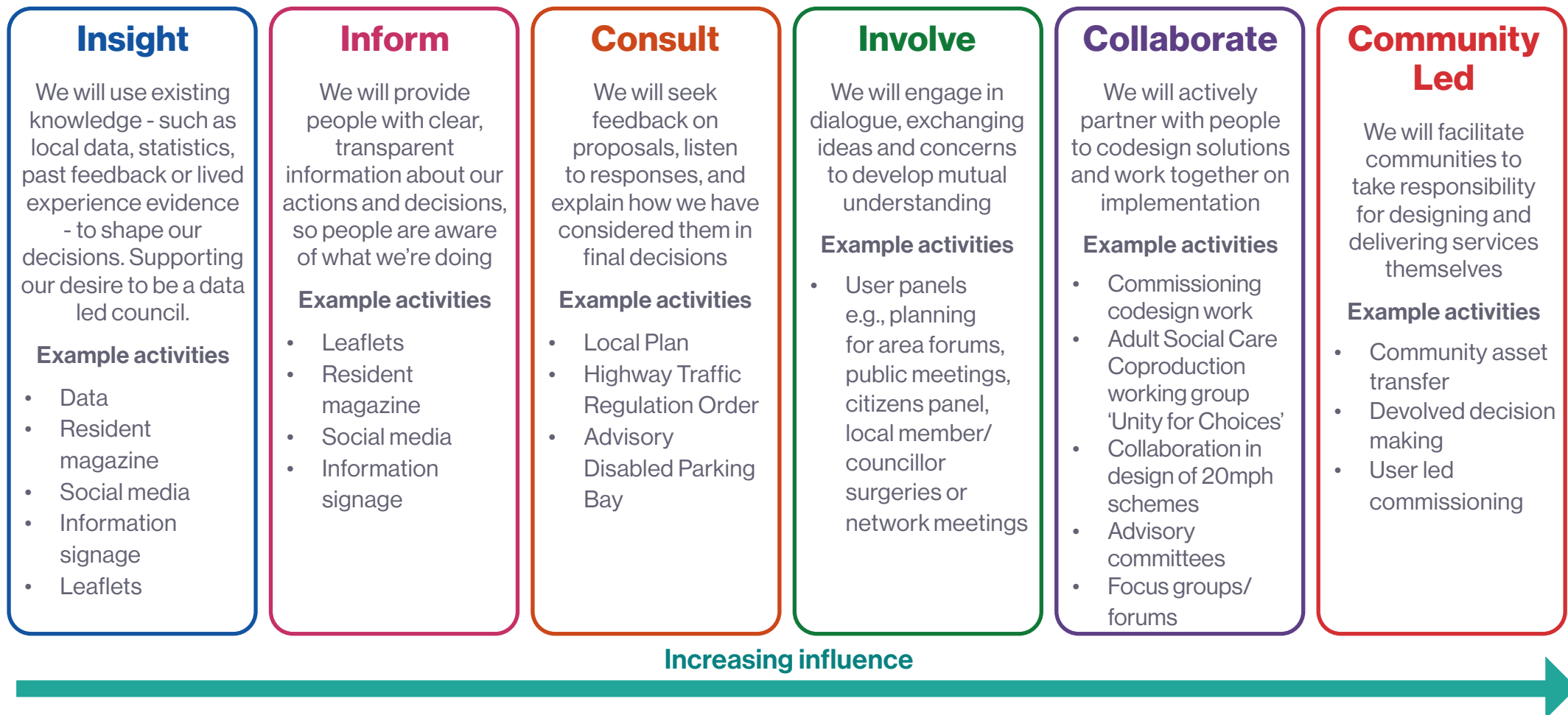


Consultation and Engagement Spectrum

How you want communities to participate in your project or activity will depend on a range of factors, including how much influence communities will have and how deeply they will be involved.

The context of decisions is important and will shape, or sometimes determine, the approach we take. Sometimes a piece of work might include more than one approach to engagement for example a **consultation** on overall plans for a park and then **collaborating** with communities to **codesign** the play area of the park.

It can be useful to think about engagement as a **spectrum** ranging between approaches that offer least influence to those that offer most. The table below describes this spectrum of engagement, and we have case study examples throughout this document:



Thinking about engagement we will frequently use multiple forms of engagement when we make a decision, but our intent is to increasingly use approaches which offer local people and communities greater influence, and as we move toward realising Community Power, we will explore more community led approaches that facilitate communities designing and/or delivering services themselves.

We already have some great examples of collaboration between services and communities with coproduction work going in adult social care, children's services and commissioning.

If we are getting out and talking to people in our communities we have been framing this face to face engagement as a 'community conversation'. For examples of previous community conversations check out toolkit 2 - planning and engagement.

Our W&F Guiding Principles

Engaging people and communities in decision making can feel difficult. With an organisation as complex as ours, doing so many different things, for different people, under different legal frameworks, fixed rules can be unhelpful. Professional judgement about what is appropriate is required. These principles will help us make those judgements and hold ourselves to account:

Involvement

We **involve people** and communities in what we do and the decisions we make.

We **do not make decisions in isolation**.

Our job is to consider how to maximise involvement, not to look for reasons why we should not.

There will be situations when we cannot involve people, but we will be transparent about why that is the case.

Inclusion

We make better decisions when we hear from **different voices and perspectives**, especially those we seldom hear from.

We will actively seek input from people of different backgrounds, experiences, and identities to ensure diversity of thought in decision making.

Where appropriate we will ensure Equality Impact Assessments are undertaken to help support inclusion for all.

Transparency

We are clear about the **purpose, scope, and potential impact** of the work and communicate this clearly.

We are open and honest about the challenges, opportunities and competing demands that exist in any situation.

We recognise that through the process of engaging with people the purpose, scope and impact can change and we welcome that.

Action

Involvement leads to action, and something should happen as a result of involving people and communities - **changes in what we do or how we do it**.

These changes should be communicated clearly and promptly.

These **four principles** provide a framework to guide how we consult and engage with people and communities across our different service areas.

Roles and Responsibilities

We all have different roles to play to ensure that the consultation and engagement work we do is meaningful and communities have a real chance to participate and influence local decision making so our services are fit for the future and reflect the views of our communities.

Communities	Town and Parish Councillors	Elected Members/ Councillors	Westmorland and Furness Staff
Stay informed and participate in engagement opportunities that matter to you	Engage with council elected members to share information on a regular basis as a local representative	Support and uphold the principles in this strategy.	Follow the Consultation and Engagement Principles and talk to key teams before acting, including communications, engagement teams and where appropriate legal services
Review relevant materials and respect different points of view	Support and uphold the principles in this strategy.	Encourage participation and identify key issues for consultation and engagement	Ensure local members are always sighted on consultation and engagement activity in their area (in line with the constitution)
Follow the provided process and timeframe		Participate in consultation and engagement opportunities and share views and ideas	Give sufficient time for planning, participation, and review
Acknowledge that final decisions may not be what you wanted		Review and provide input on consultation and engagement plans and findings	Collaborate to design meaningful consultation and engagement processes and continuously evaluate and improve consultation and engagement practices.
Provide feedback about the engagement process and help us improve		Consider community feedback when forming opinions and making decisions	Ensure transparency, inclusivity, and clear communication
		Acknowledge that final decisions may not be what you wanted	Document, report, and integrate community feedback into decision-making
			Acknowledge that final decisions may not be what you wanted

How will we know we're getting this right?

We will know we are getting this right when local people and communities tell us we are and when we can clearly evidence how consultation and engagement has influenced our decision making.

- When we consult and engage, we will ask participants for feedback on the engagement process itself. This will help us to continually refine and improve how we work.
- Through residents' surveys we will check whether local people feel they are able to influence decisions, and we will track this over time.
- When we make formal decisions, we will include evidence of the consultation and engagement that has taken place and explain how it has influenced our decisions.
- We will monitor the diversity of those taking part in our consultation and engagement processes to ensure we are hearing a wide range of voices, including those who are often
- underrepresented or face barriers to participation. Achieving greater inclusivity will be a key indicator of success.
- The ultimate measure of success will be the visible, tangible ways in which our engagement has shaped decisions, policies, and services and improve the quality of our services.

National Guidance

The [New Conversations Guide](#) from Local Government Association (LGA) is a great resource that can support the basic aspects of consultation and engagement and they also have some great examples of council [innovation in community engagement](#).

Next Steps

To embed best practice across the whole organisation as part of this strategy the council will also make the following commitments to embed effective consultation and engagement.

A single source of all consultation and engagement activity

We will introduce a single portal for all consultation and engagement activity – allowing easy access, visibility and also to support effective forward planning. We will publish and promote all consultations in a single, easily accessible site. It will also provide feedback to residents on how we have acted on the results of specific surveys to demonstrate how the council has listened and how it has made its final decision. This is a large piece of work and will be implemented as soon as is possible.

Collecting key base 'resident and community' data

We will look to develop and roll out a regular Residents' place Perception Tracker Survey. In line with LGA advice. As well as residents' views on specific policy and service proposals it is important that the council carefully tracks residents' perceptions of services on the area and ensures that services consider residents' concerns and wishes wherever possible.

Other W&F engagement documents

- Children's Participation Framework (based on the Lundy model of participation)
- Tenants Engagement Strategy
- Employee Engagement Framework

Case Study – Translation and Interpretation Services

The council commissions a translation and interpretation service. As part of a recommissioning exercise our commissioning team reached out to local people that had utilised the service in the previous year to hear more about their lived experiences, including local refugee groups.

The team went out and met them in person, using their feedback to help design the specification for the new contract. The team plans to work with the same groups to test the new service before it goes live and will continue to engage with them about their experiences of the service in the future.



Glossary

Phrase / Word	Explanation / Meaning
Collaboration	Collaboration is creating value through working together towards shared goals
Community	Community refers to a group or network of people that share a common geography (place), interest, experience, history, identity or culture and communities can collaborate informally or formally.
Community Power	Community Power is about communities having greater influence over the places they live and the services that affect their lives. Westmorland and Furness Council have committed to shifting our ways of working to become more 'community powered'.
Consultation	<p>Is a specific kind of engagement with legal requirements and formal processes – councils often have a statutory duty and are bound by legislation to consult before making changes to policy or service provision.</p> <p>Though consultation involves seeking input it does not typically include people as equal partners in decision-making or service design.</p> <p>It is usually time limited, subject to law and guidance and failure to follow specific principles or conducting a consultation incorrectly may lead to judicial review.</p>
Codesign	Also known as co-operative design or participatory design, stakeholders (including community) work as equal partners to define a problem and shape.
Coproduction	<p>A collaborative process where stakeholders (including community) take an active and equal role in the design and delivery of services – it requires shared decision-making with stakeholders (including community) contributing actively to decisions about how services are developed, tailored, and delivered.</p> <p>Coproduction fosters a sense of ownership and ensures that services are genuinely responsive to the needs of those who use them.</p>
Engagement	<p>Is the wider, ongoing and regular process of involving communities and residents – in discussions, deliberations and collaborative approaches (like coproduction) – on issues that affect them or which they care about.</p> <p>There is a spectrum of engagement from insight, consulting to collaborative approaches like coproduction.</p>



Translation Services

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