

OUR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STANDARDS

These service standards are a set of guiding principles that inform the way we carry out our community engagement activities. They incorporate the updated Consultation Principles Guidance (2013) which replaced the Code of Practice on Consultation (2008).

By ensuring that we adhere to these standards, we will support the Council's commitment to achieving high-level equalities standards. We have developed particular standards for some service areas including the Customer Involvement Agreement for Borough Council Tenants and in Planning Services, the Statement of Community Involvement. These are both available on our website www.chesterfield.gov.uk.

1. Our approach to consultation

Where specific standards are not in place, we will:

- Ensure that the objectives of any consultation are clear eg. to gather new ideas or test options.
- Only use community engagement and consultation processes when there is a real opportunity for people to influence and change decisions and services, and be honest where decisions are non-negotiable.
- Ensure that we always consult when there is a statutory requirement to do so, and where it is good practice to do so.
- Ensure that community engagement activities are realistic and that expectations are not raised unnecessarily or unrealistically.
- Provide leadership from Senior Management to ensure that community engagement influences services and plans.

2. When we will consult

We will:

- Coordinate community engagement activities at the council and with partners, to avoid duplication and 'consultation fatigue'
- Begin engagement early in policy development when the policy is still under consideration and views can genuinely be taken into account.
- Make sure that timeframes for consultation are appropriate to the nature and impact of the proposal (eg, the range of interested parties or complexity of the issue). Timescales may vary between two and 12 weeks.
- Establish the timing and length of consultations on a case-by-case basis and make sure they are realistic to allow stakeholders sufficient time to provide a considered response.
- Avoid consulting during holiday periods, where possible, and if not, make allowances within the timeframe.
- Avoid consultation exercises during the six-week period before local or national election periods.

3. How we will consult

We will:

- Consider the most appropriate type of engagement for each circumstance (see community engagement tools below). The type and scale of consultation will be appropriate to the potential impacts of the proposal.
- Ensure that the consultation captures the full range of stakeholders affected.
- Provide information in an easily understandable format, using plain language and clarifying the key issues.
- Ensure that we take into account particular needs and work together to overcome where possible any difficulties participants may have to enable them to fully participate in the activity.
- Make sufficient information available to stakeholders to enable them to make informed comments.
- Ensure that, where appropriate, equalities monitoring takes place, and that survey data is broken down into 'protected groups' (eg. age, disability, gender etc). This will enable us to ensure that our services are fair and accessible to all groups. (The Policy Unit will give guidance on when equality monitoring is appropriate).
- Ensure that participation is voluntary, and that reasonable expenses will be reimbursed to ensure no one is excluded for financial reasons and that participants can withdraw at any time.
- Ensure that the rights and dignity of all participants are respected at all times, and give careful consideration to activities, information and questions to ensure that they do not offend, cause distress or embarrassment.
- Liaise with the appropriate elected Councillors (eg. portfolio holder, ward member) to ensure that information is communicated to the public and employees consistently.
- Treat information confidentially, with particular regard to the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts.
- Ensure adherence to health and safety regulations.

4. How we will feed back and be transparent**We will:**

- Be open and transparent about the aims of community engagement activity and what stage of development the policy or proposal has reached.
- Be clear about what aspects of the policy or proposal being consulted on are open to change and what decisions have already been taken
- Ensure participants know what they are agreeing to take part in and how the information will be used.
- Ensure that information obtained from community engagement activities is honestly interpreted, and enable participants to be part of the analysis process if they wish to.
- Publish consultation responses, including number of responses, and how they have been used within 12 weeks of the end of the consultation. If this is not possible, a public statement should explain why.
- Have clear processes to feed back on community engagement activity and outcomes and give reasons if unable to deliver on expectations in a timely manner and appropriate manner.