



Melton  
Borough  
Council

# Community Consultation Strategy





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## WHAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE ...

### Introduction

The Council's vision is :

*'We want to enhance the quality of life for everyone in the Borough of Melton to achieve a sustainable, prosperous and vibrant community... a place where people want to live, work and visit.'*

To achieve this, it is important that we listen to our residents and customers and act on what they tell us to make things better.

Whenever Melton Borough Council makes a decision about improving or changing its services, it needs to be confident the decision is properly informed by public opinion.

This plan is designed to make sure that we improve the way we carry out public consultations, involve the community in decision-making and respond to their views.

We aim to consult on important Council issues and whilst we cannot guarantee the public will always agree with proposals and policy changes it is hoped there will be some public satisfaction that we have listened and considered their views before making decisions that matter to the people of the Borough.

This strategy also seeks to reflect the growing use and potential of the internet and social media to capture the opinions of people on local issues and further encourage them to get involved. [Return to Contents](#)

### Know what consultation is

For the purpose of this strategy we use the term 'Consultation' but there are other words often used for similar purposes and they are 'involvement' and 'engagement'. Here are our meanings of these terms in the context of community consultation :-

**Community Involvement** - describes the full range of research, consultation and participation of communities and individuals in the decision making process

**Consultation** - provides effective ways for citizens, service users and stakeholders to understand and influence decisions and policies that affect them

**Engagement** - informs and communicates with people, builds awareness of strategic issues and creates opportunities for dialogue and involvement in decisions and solutions

### Legal Compliance

The Government's White Paper – Strong and Prosperous Communities makes it a requirement to consult and involve communities in decision-making. The aim of the White Paper is :

*'... to give local people and local communities more influence and power to improve their lives. It is about creating strong, prosperous communities and*

**delivering better public services through a rebalancing of the relationship between central government, local government and local people.**

**It enables people to show confidence in local government, local communities and other local public service providers by giving them more freedom and powers to bring about the changes they want to see ...**

**... People no longer accept the 'one size fits all' service models of old. They want choice over the services they receive, influence over those who provide them, and higher service standards. We want this to be the case everywhere – for people to be given more control over their lives; consulted and involved in running services; informed about the quality of services in their area; and enabled to call local agencies to account if services fail to meet their needs. Local authorities will involve and consult service users more fully and provide better information about standards in their local area ...'**

The Government's new Localism Bill which is currently going through Parliament sets out the Government's aims for a radical shift of power from the centralised state to local communities and has six essential actions required to deliver decentralisation down through every level of government to every citizen. This bill could affect this strategy and the way consultation works in the future.

## **Our Commitment : The 7 Key Rules of Consultation**

It is our aim to work within the following rules when carrying out consultation :

### **1. Time consultations well and allow sufficient time to respond**

- Consultations should be timed to allow the results to influence policy/proposal development
- The timing of consultations should consider the availability of target groups
- Wide scale public consultations, eg borough-wide or large parts of it, should run for a period of 12 weeks and for no less than 6 weeks
- Reasonable time will be allowed for people to respond to a consultation

### **2. Clearly present relevant information and encourage informed opinion**

- The consultation should clearly state the proposal, why we are consulting, and how we will use the findings
- The consultation should provide enough information to enable consultees to give an informed opinion and not simply an instant reaction
- This information should be written in plain English

### **3. Be well targeted and reach out to seldom heard groups**

- The views of those people/areas most affected by the proposal should be sought
- Attempts should be made to listen to the views of non-users, especially when service changes are being consulted on
- Attempts should be made to include the views of groups frequently excluded or overlooked
- Consultations should consider the needs of people with impaired sight or hearing or people whose first language is not English

### **4. Offer genuine options and ask objective questions**

- Where options are offered, they should be realistic and deliverable
- Surveys and questions should be written in an objective way allowing people to express their views

## 5. Be well planned, managed and coordinated

- The Council's Consultation Toolkit contains step-by-step instructions to enable us to effectively manage consultations

## 6. Be well communicated

- We will publicise consultations and make attempts to let people know they are happening
- Major consultations – eg. borough-wide or affecting a large number of people – will be publicised by the Council's website, press release and in Council publications such as 'Melton Mail' and the Tenants' Newsletter

## 7. Provide fair, accessible feedback

- We will publish the findings of consultations and later how they have been used
- The findings will be reported in a balanced way [Return to Contents](#)

## WHY IS CONSULTATION IMPORTANT ...

### What can effective Consultation achieve?

- Encourage greater public involvement and interest in local democracy
- Deliver stronger community leadership
- Plan services and policies based on the needs / views of people
- Identify priorities and improve strategies
- Improve the take-up of services
- Monitor the performance of services over time [Return to Contents](#)

### How effective consultation shapes what we do

The Council has a policy framework that shapes how the Council works and this strategy will form part of that framework. Other obvious strategies that inform and link into this strategy are :

- Corporate Plan
- Communications Strategy
- Community Strategy
- Social Media Policy

The purpose of this document is to set out a consultation framework within which Melton Borough Council can :

**INVOLVE** customers and stakeholders in :

- identifying issues which affect their lives
- voicing their needs
- helping to identify solutions to problems
- influencing and assisting in the continuing improvement of Council services

**EMPOWER** our customers and stakeholders to influence the decision-making process, the strategic planning of services and the monitoring of service delivery

**PROVIDE A FRAMEWORK** and co-ordinate the consultation process within Melton Borough Council to enable effective consultation to take place

**IMPLEMENT** a Consultation Strategy that ensures :

- residents feel they have adequate opportunity to make their views known
- high customer perception of their ability to influence Council decision-making
- results of consultation exercises are shared and acted upon
- residents are aware that the Council actively seeks and values their views
- co-ordination and best use of resources in consultation

This strategy includes the corporate procedures for carrying out consultation. It complements the Corporate Plan which sets out the Council's plans for the year ahead. [Return to Contents](#)

## **Consultation and the Democratic Process**

Councillors and Council officers will always need to weigh the views expressed through consultation against a wide range of other factors: such as legislation and government guidance; demographic data; financial costs; environmental impact.

Councillors and officers will often have to make their own judgment about the weight to be given to one or other of the views expressed. They may also have to consider carefully whether the aspirations and needs of future generations - who will perhaps be most affected by any change - might differ significantly from those of today's population.

In other words, the results of consultation are never a substitute for the democratic process – and do not replace the legitimate role of Elected Representatives in decision-making.

However, effective and consistent consultation can certainly help inform good and responsible decision-making and ensure that, as far as possible, those decisions - and the actions that flow from them - properly reflect and respond to the needs of the Borough and its people. [Return to Contents](#)

## **Outcomes and Links to the Corporate Outcomes**

The outcomes to be delivered by this strategy are :

- Residents make their views known
- Well informed residents
- High customer perception of ability to influence Council decision-making
- Improved knowledge of our customers and communities
- Community insight
- Good reputation
- Satisfied residents
- Effective internal communications

The strategy contributes particularly to the following corporate outcomes :

- Good reputation with customers and stakeholders
- Strong community leadership

- Knowledge of our customers and communities [Return to Contents](#)

## [HOW WILL WE DO IT ...](#)

### 3 Models of Consultation

There are 3 models of consultation and each one has a different purpose. It is important to make it clear to people at the outset whether the Council is information sharing, consulting or encouraging participation in decision-making. The 3 models of consultation are :

- **Public Information:** *'Here's what we are going to do'*  
Public information is about the Council informing people of its intentions, procedures and practices. This level of consultation will underpin more active participation and will often act as a precursor to other levels. However, in isolation it is only appropriate where a range of options regarding the items under discussion is not available
- **Public Consultation** *'Here are our options, what do you think?'*  
Public consultation is where people are invited to express their views, usually on a range of options and on which the Council is willing to use public opinion as an important criterion for deciding upon a particular course of action
- **Public Participation** *'We want you to help us develop our options and decide our actions'*  
Public participation is where people have a significant voice in the planning and decision-making process. Public participation, as a consultative measure is only appropriate either where no pre-determined decisions have been made or where the Council is willing to be led or influenced by public feedback

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### The Consultation Process

Clarification of the nature of the consultation exercise at an early stage will avoid misunderstanding and possible disillusionment later. Any limitations upon the degree of consultation, ie legislative or financial restrictions, will also be made known.

Identifying consultees is of prime importance when constructing a consultation exercise and especially how to target the widest section of the community affected by a proposal. The Council is committed to consulting those known as 'hard to reach' and there is guidance on how this can be achieved further into this strategy as well as in the [Consultation Toolkit](#).

Early involvement of consultees is not only desirable in terms of allowing people real input into the decision-making process but also confirms the credibility of the consultation exercise. People will then not feel that crucial decisions have been made prior to their participation.

Early involvement promotes interest, community involvement and ownership. Clear objectives will be set for any consultation exercise and the nature of consultee involvement will be defined early on in the consultation process.

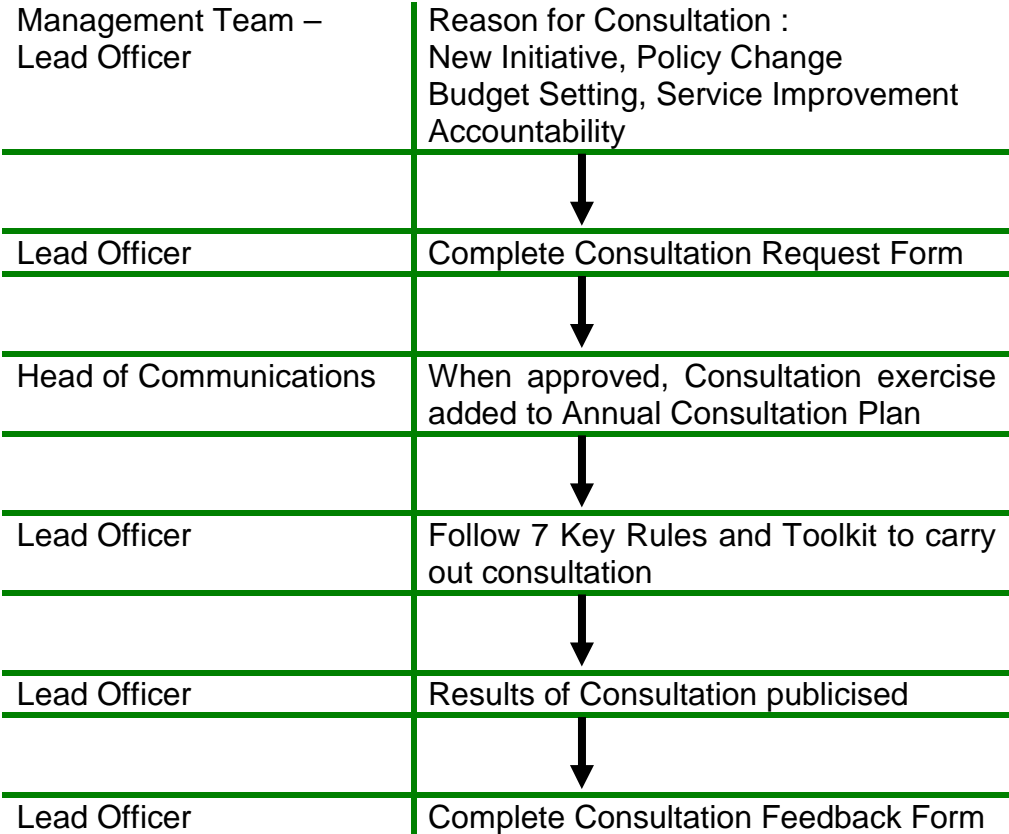
Appropriate methods of feeding back to consultees will need to be identified and such feedback will always be undertaken. Feedback will take place as soon as possible after any consultation exercise and within an agreed timescale.

In pursuing the Council’s New Ways of Working and strategic aim to be paperlight, the Council supports electronic means of communication. Therefore the use of the website and other e-communication tools are recommended to be used wherever possible.

[The 7 Key Rules of Consultation](#) are our commitment in how we will deliver a consultation exercise. The Council’s Toolkit [Consultation Toolkit](#) at Appendix B sets out the 5 stages of planning a consultation exercise which are as follows :-

- Stage 1 : Decide WHO to consult with
- Stage 2 : Decide WHAT to consult on
- Stage 3 : Decide HOW to ask them
- Stage 4 : START the consultation
- Stage 5 : EVALUATE and use the results

The Consultation Process is as follows :



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**Methods of Consultation**

Once the model of consultation has been decided and a Consultation Request Form approved, other criteria must be considered as detailed in the Toolkit.



The Council's Consultation Toolkit provides detailed guidance on how to reach your target audience, how to construct questions, different methods of consultation and when it is appropriate to use them.

Opportunities for e-consultation should be taken wherever possible and appropriate eg. website, email, Twitter, Facebook and text messaging.

We will continually try to improve our consultation process through the identification of new and innovative ways to consult.

Advantage will be taken of the MOSAIC customer segmentation to provide opportunities for more focused consultation.

The main methods and channels used for consultation include :

- Residents' Panel
- Consultation with Partnership organisations, including MCP, Community Safety Partnership, Youth Council etc.
- Public/open meetings
- Use of the media (including the Melton Mail and Corporate Messenger)
- Focus groups
- User surveys (corporate & service)
- Community and business newsletters
- Questionnaires and surveys
- Residents' surveys
- Mystery shopping
- Complaints, comments and compliments
- Open days and exhibitions
- Advice leaflets and reports
- Electronic communication - websites, email, Twitter, Facebook and text messaging [Return to Contents](#)

## Co-ordination of Consultation

The Council will co-ordinate its consultation initiatives effectively in order to avoid consultation fatigue amongst people being consulted and to ensure the best use of Council resources. Internal liaison and partnership working is key to this.

The Council will produce and publish an [Annual Consultation Programme](#), setting out proposals to consult and involve the community. This will be updated as required to include ad hoc consultation which is responsive to public concern at any particular time.

The co-ordination of all consultation exercises will :

- Allow Council staff and the public to see what consultation is taking place and when
- Help avoid targeting the same groups, avoid repetitive questioning and 'consultation overload'
- Allow co-ordination of consultation efforts
- Allow the creation of a library of consultation information, available to all staff and Councillors

- Ensure that Councillors and staff are informed about forthcoming consultation events
- Avoid unnecessary duplication of time and resources by enabling consultation exercises to be co-ordinated and to be combined where appropriate
- Inform the public of what consultation is planned [Return to Contents](#)

## WHO WILL DO IT ...

### **The Role of Officers**

The Senior Democracy Officer in the Communications Section will lead on the co-ordination of both external and internal consultation projects however it is the responsibility of individual Heads of Service to initiate a consultation exercise in their area of work.

Heads of Service are to alert the Head of Communications of a new policy or a review of an existing policy/initiative that would have public interest and need to be the subject of a consultation exercise.

The [Annual Consultation Programme](#) (Appendix C) will be updated by Management Team on a regular basis and at least each time a new consultation initiative is agreed.

To help officers in progressing a consultation exercise, a [Consultation Toolkit](#) has been produced (Appendix B). A [Consultation Request Form](#) (Appendix A) is to be completed for each consultation exercise. Each request will be considered as to whether it is a corporate or a service-led consultation project.

Following each Consultation exercise, the Lead Officer is to complete a [Consultation Feedback Form](#) (Appendix E)

It is noted that the consultation on the Melton Local Development Framework and regulatory consultation will remain with the relevant service areas and this work is not included in this strategy.

### **The Role of Councillors**

The representational and scrutiny role of Councillors is crucial to the consultation process through their formal involvement in :

- local community initiatives
- community development
- the scrutiny process

Their role as community leaders means Councillors will play a key role in the implementation of this strategy, as set out in the Council's Constitution under Article 2, Section 2.2(a)(ii) :

***'All Councillors will ...***

***... contribute to the good governance of the area and actively encourage community participation and citizen involvement in decision making'***

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## WHERE ARE WE NOW ...

### Annual Budget Consultation

There have been various appeals for public opinion on the budget setting proposals over the past 2 or 3 years, mainly via the Melton Mail. In 2010, a specially constructed online public consultation exercise was carried out which resulted in a significantly higher level of interest and results which were able to inform budget reductions and the overall process.

### Ad hoc service related consultation

Each section arranges consultation as required on their own service areas and there is no centrally co-ordinated approach or record of such consultation exercises eg.

- Council Tenants are consulted as and when required on changes/new initiatives on their neighbourhoods, tenancy arrangements and living conditions
- New Build proposals – Sounding Board meetings and Roadshows
- Dogs on Leads in the Country Park (December 2010)

### Internal Consultation

Internal consultation has mainly focused on initiatives that involve staff such as the annual Staff Satisfaction Survey, ICT Service Survey and New Build projects such as Green Travel Planning and most of these are organised by the relevant service area.

Due to limited corporate resources for consultation, service areas will continue to lead on their own consultation initiatives with support from the central service.

## WHERE DO WE WANT TO GET TO ...

### Co-ordinated approach to Consultation

A co-ordinated approach to Consultation across the Council is to be developed by :

- completing a [Consultation Request Form](#) (Appendix A) everytime a consultation exercise is proposed
- using the [Consultation Toolkit](#) (Appendix B)
- the [Annual Consultation Programme](#) (Appendix C) being updated regularly and used as a record of consultation activity
- the 7 Rules of Consultation be followed [MBC Commitment.doc](#)
- following each Consultation exercise, the Lead Officer is to complete a [Consultation Feedback Form](#) (Appendix E)
- an Action Plan be developed setting out the what the Council wants to achieve and how we intend to get there, by when

### Residents' Panel

Consideration be given to recruiting a panel of residents specifically for consultation purposes.

This would be a permanent channel for consultation to ensure a benchmark level of interest in a subject and panel members would be surveyed as required. Method of consultation would be varied to suit individual needs but electronic means would be pursued wherever possible. [Return to Contents](#)

## Engaging Hard to Reach Groups and removing Barriers

This strategy is committed to working within the Council's Equalities Policy by :

- Developing appropriate information channels to ensure effective communication of information such as web based methods
- Providing guidance on making written information accessible, in other languages where appropriate and large print for people with a visual impairment and by ensuring we use plain English in all our communications
- Identifying appropriate methods such as face to face interviews to reach people who have literacy problems
- Agreeing all timescales with consultees and using realistic time scales when feedback is required
- Making every effort to ensure that the consultative process is anti-discriminatory and does not preclude participation on grounds of age, race, disability or gender
- Exploring creative possibilities to enhance community consultation in terms of accessible venues, transport provision, crèche facilities, signing and interpreting services etc.
- Choosing venues for consultative meetings carefully, not only for physical accessibility but also to ensure a welcoming and non-threatening environment
- Every effort will be made to ensure the involvement of people who may be under represented in consultation exercises including young and elderly people, people with disabilities and those from ethnic minority groups [Return to Contents](#)

## HOW WILL WE KNOW IF IT WORKS

### Delivering Effective Consultation

In order to ensure effective consultation clear objectives must be set at the start, both internally and externally Each consultation exercise will be subject to evaluation against its purpose, and any costs involved need to be built into service budgets as appropriate.

The evaluation process is to include :

- How the results influenced decisions and what was learnt from the process
- Sharing the results of the consultation within the Council, with consultees and the wider community in the case of public consultation
- The number of responses the consultation exercise generated

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### Corporate Measures

2 questions will be added to all consultation activities where practical to monitor overall customer satisfaction with the Council's services and the percentages in each case be recorded centrally following each exercise.

Questions to be worded around the following :

- Satisfaction with customer service
- Satisfaction with Council services overall [Return to Contents](#)

### **Key measure for Residents' Panel**

When the Residents' Panel is in place, 2 questions be added to all consultation activities where practical to monitor satisfaction due to involvement :

- Residents' Panel satisfied or better with opportunity for participation in local decision-making
- Residents' Panel agreeing they can influence decisions affecting their local area

Percentage of Residents' Panel members taking part in each consultation exercise be recorded also following each exercise. [Return to Contents](#)

### **Monitoring and Reviewing Progress**

We will judge our overall success using the following measures :

- % of Customers feeling fairly satisfied or better with customer service
- % of Customers feeling fairly satisfied or better with Council services overall
- % of Residents' Panel satisfied or better with opportunities for participation in local decision-making
- % of Residents' Panel agreeing they can influence decisions affecting their local area
- % of Residents' Panel members taking part in survey

To enable results to be maintained and assessed centrally, following each consultation exercise, the Lead Officer is to complete a [Consultation Feedback Form](#) (Appendix E). [Return to Contents](#)

## **APPENDICES**

**[Appendix A : Consultation Request Form](#)**

**[Appendix B : Consultation Toolkit](#)**

**[Appendix C : Annual Consultation Programme](#)**

**[Appendix D : Our Commitment – The 7 Key Rules of Consultation](#)**

**[Appendix E : Consultation Feedback Form](#)**  
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