

Consultation Charter

Introduction

Exeter City Council recognises that to deliver effective services and to make decisions that meet the needs of its residents, business and visitors it must consult on the formation and development of its services and policies.

Consultation is just one element of community engagement and feedback and includes activities such as:

- complaints and suggestion schemes
- interviews, polls, surveys and questionnaires
- user and focus groups
- public meetings and residents' panels

This charter sets out our commitment to meeting best practice in consultation and complying with statutory requirements. The Charter covers all consultations, but recognises that some consultations e.g. boundary changes or the Local Plan, are governed by statutory arrangements or dedicated frameworks, which may include specific requirements.

Scope

1. We will consult residents and other stakeholders whenever a decision will directly affect them and when they might have a reasonable expectation that they should be involved. Consultation subjects may extend beyond the remit of the council's responsibilities and any consultation can be proposed through the scrutiny process. Examples of consultations are:
 - Proposals to redevelop areas of the city e.g. South Street
 - Proposals for new facilities e.g. a leisure centre, or skate park
 - Proposals for new equipment e.g. play equipment or park furniture
 - Proposals for how we deal with our assets e.g. tree strategy
 - Proposals to change our services e.g. closure of toilets, opening hours, service levels
 - Proposals to change a policy e.g. taxi licensing
2. All consultations will follow the four 'Gunning Principles', which dictate that consultation:
 - i. must happen before the decision is made
 - ii. must give sufficient context and information
 - iii. should provide enough time for people to think things over
 - iv. should demonstrate real deliberation and thought over the results

Visibility

3. All our consultations will be published on the Council's website so that residents and stakeholders can easily see what is up for decision and how to participate. A schedule of proposed consultations will be published annually on the council's website on 1st April and updated throughout the year.

4. Major consultations (e.g. city-wide or affecting a large number of people) will be publicised by press release and we will use our publications and social media to promote them.
5. The views of those people, communities or areas most affected by a proposal, and those we would expect to contribute, will be sought. However all members of the public and other stakeholders are welcome to respond to a consultation whether or not they have been specifically invited to do so.

Accessibility

6. Surveys and questions and supporting information will be written in an objective, accessible to enable intelligent consideration and responses.
7. We will provide a named contact for each consultation so that residents and stakeholders know who they can speak to about proposals.
8. Taking into account the nature of the decision, a diverse range of respondents and their advocates, including the views of groups frequently excluded or overlooked, will be sought. The views of non-users, especially when service changes are being consulted on, will also be sought.
9. Consultation plans will consider how people with impaired sight or hearing or people whose first language is not English are able to participate fully.
10. Where groups of people with characteristics protected by the Equality Act 2010 may be particularly affected, the consultation plan will identify who they are and how they will be involved, and an Equality Impact Assessment will be included in the final report.
11. We will allow enough time for consultees to consider and respond to the consultation and the information we have provided. Wide scale public consultations, e.g. citywide or large parts of it, should run for a period of not less than six weeks.

Transparency and disclosure

12. Consultation plans will be produced for all consultations. They will include what we are consulting about, and why, who we are consulting, how we will consult them, the timetable for the consultation, who will make the final decision and how we will provide feedback. Consultation plans will follow guidance in 'New Conversations – the Local Government Guide to Engagement'¹
13. Whenever practical, the Council will involve key stakeholders or their representatives in shaping what we will consult on or how we will consult.
14. Where the Council has a preferred option, we will clearly state this in the consultation documents and explain how and why that preference was chosen. Where specific options have been rejected, we will explain why we do not consider them practical. Where options are offered, they should be realistic and deliverable.
15. Any complaints about the consultation will be published so that decision-makers can assess the effectiveness of the consultation before making their decision.
16. Consultations will be at a time when proposals are at a formative stage to allow the results to influence policy or proposal development.

¹ [New Conversations: LGA guide to engagement | Local Government Association](#)

Fair interpretation

17. We will carefully consider all responses to each consultation, analyse responses promptly and objectively and ensure that the product of consultation is conscientiously taken into account when finalising a decision.
18. We will review and evaluate the effectiveness of each consultation to ensure learning is fed into future consultations.

Publication

19. We will publish results detailing the responses received, and explaining how we have taken these into account in arriving at a decision.

