

# OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD



<b>RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CONSULTATION FRAMEWORK WORKING GROUP</b>	
Meeting date	23 February 2026
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>At its meeting on 18 November 2024 the Overview and Scrutiny Board agreed to establish a working group to consider the BCP Council developing Consultation Framework in response to report brought to the Board on Consultation methods and responses The group met three times during April and May 2025. Subsequently, the Board requested the working group to broaden its original remit to include an examination of recent consultations and examples of previous consultations, with a view to identifying any lessons that could be applied to future practice. The working group met a further 4 times from September to December to undertake this task and formulate recommendations to improve issues around consultations. The findings of the working group and detail explaining the rationale behind the recommendations which the Working Group have formulated are summarised in the appendix to this report.</p>
Recommendations	<p><b>The Working Group RECOMMENDED that:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>a. The Overview and Scrutiny Board consider and note the appendix which outlines the areas of consideration and findings of the working group.</b></li><li><b>b. The Overview and Scrutiny Board recommend to Cabinet the recommendations outlined by the working group contained within the appendix and outlined below:</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>i. That the Overview and Scrutiny Board recommend to Cabinet that it adopts the Code of Good Practice (Attached at Appendix 2)</b></li><li><b>ii. That the Overview and Scrutiny Board recommend that the Chief Executive bring the Consultation Forward Plan to Group Leaders Meetings on a quarterly basis in order to raise awareness with members. As well as informing of forthcoming consultations the update should provide guidance on confidentiality and expectations for member engagement.</b></li></ul></li></ul>

	<p>iii. That the Overview and Scrutiny Board recommend to Cabinet that all members should be notified of consultations at least 1 week in advance of going live, providing summary detail of the topic for consultation.</p> <p>iv. That the Overview and Scrutiny Board endorse the ongoing work to produce an internal consultation toolkit, which should provide clear guidance on confidentiality.</p> <p>v. That the Overview and Scrutiny Board recommend to officers that greater clarity be provided around why particular consultation methods were chosen and also clarity on the reason why a consultation is taking place and how the results of the consultation will be used.</p> <p>vi. That the Overview and Scrutiny Board recommend to Cabinet that it endorses an approach to every consultation which clearly outlines that it is not a referendum.</p> <p>vii. That the Overview and Scrutiny Board recommend to Cabinet that funding for the establishment of a citizens panel is built into future budgets for Consultations.</p> <p>viii. That the Overview and Scrutiny Board recommend that officers give consideration to the most robust consultation process available, recognising that sample surveys tend to be more robust and consider the additional costs involved with this.</p>
Reason for recommendations	To ensure that the recommendations and views of the working group are taken into consideration in the approval of the Consultation Code of Best Practice and to ensure that the consultation process provides valuable and useful information for BCP Council. Further information on the reasons for the recommendations is contained within the appendix to the report.
Portfolio Holder(s):	Cabinet Member for Customer, Communications and Culture - Cllr A Martin
Corporate Director	Chief Executive
Report Authors	Claire Johnston, Senior Democratic and Overview & Scrutiny Officer
Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Recommendation/Decision

## Background

1. The Overview and Scrutiny Board considered a report at its meeting in November 2024 which provided an overview of the consultation methods and approach used by BCP Council to consult on various decisions and issues.
2. It was noted at this meeting that the consultation framework was due to be refreshed, and that this provided an opportunity to receive feedback from the Board ahead of that work
3. At this meeting the Board agreed that a working group be established to contribute to the development of the consultation framework within the appropriate timescales.
4. Nominations for the group were sought from across O&S Board Members and an invite extended to all non-executive members. Final membership was agreed by the Chair of the Board in consultation with the Vice-Chair.

The group members were:

- Cllr S Aitkenhead (Lead Member)
- Cllr F Rice
- Cllr K Salmon
- Cllr G Wright

5. The Working Group made data requests based on lines of enquiry established by the O&S committee. These data requests are set out in the background paper to this report 'Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) – Consultation Framework.' The Group focused on the first enquiry lines outlined at its initial meeting. There were a number of pieces of information which were considered by the Group both in advance of and during its first meeting. These are set out in the appendix to this report.
6. At its second meeting the Group focused on a review of the draft consultation 'Code of Practice' which had been developed following the framework and key points suggested by the group at its first meeting. The Group also considered the proposed timeline for the approval of the framework/code. It was agreed that the final draft framework and Code would be circulated for review to both the Overview and Scrutiny Board and Cabinet.
7. Following this, the Board directed the working group to broaden its original remit to incorporate review of a number of recent consultations which had attracted public interest. The group reviewed these consultations along with other previous consultations to determine what improvements, if any, could be implemented to strengthen the transparency, effectiveness, and integrity of BCP Council's consultation processes, focussing on how the draft code would have impacted the processes. It was acknowledged that several issues arising from recent consultations had already been addressed through the development of the Code of Best Practice. However, in line with the group's commitment to continuous improvement, the code was subsequently reviewed and updated to reflect the findings from this additional consideration.
8. This report brings to the Board the recommendations of the working group alongside the Consultation Code of Best Practice. The Board is asked to consider and discuss the findings of the working group and make recommendations as it considers appropriate.

## Options Appraisal

9. Findings have been set out by the Working Group. The Board is asked to consider these and agree whether to forward these to Cabinet. The Board may choose to make any further recommendations if required.

## **Summary of financial implications**

10. There are no direct financial implications associated with this report. The financial costs of developing the Consultation Code of Good Practice were contained within existing budgets. There may be financial implications arising from some of the recommendations from the working group, particularly the proposed expansion of representative sample surveys and the establishment of a Citizens' Panel. If the recommendation were accepted restoring or increasing consultation-related budgets may be necessary to ensure that more robust methods can be undertaken without impacting other service areas.

## **Summary of legal implications**

11. The recommendations aim to strengthen compliance with established consultation standards and the Gunning Principles by promoting early engagement, clearer information, and more transparent processes. If the Board choose not to make these recommendations, there may be subsequent impacts and potential risk of challenge. Adoption of the Code of Good Practice will support more robust decision-making and reduce the likelihood of procedural unfairness.

## **Summary of human resources implications**

12. There are no human resources implications associated with this report.

## **Summary of sustainability impact**

13. There are no sustainability impact implications associated with this report.

## **Summary of public health implications**

There are no public health implications associated with this report.

## **Summary of equality implications**

14. Should the Board recommend adoption of the Code of Good Practice and other recommendations which are put forward to support more inclusive engagement by promoting clearer language, better-structured surveys, and more accessible information for residents. A more consistent and transparent approach is likely to improve participation across diverse groups, particularly when alternative methods, such as representative sampling or targeted engagement, are used to reach communities that may be under-represented in open surveys.

## **Summary of risk assessment**

15. Should the Board choose not to put forward the recommendations there may be an increased risk in future consultation and reputational harm arising from processes that do not adequately reflect best practice or the Gunning Principles. Recommendations may require additional resources which would need to be identified if accepted.

## **Background papers**

- Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board – 18 November 2024
- Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) – Consultation Framework.
- Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board – 15 July 2025

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Consultation Framework Working Group Findings

Appendix 2 – Draft Code of Good Practice