

## **BCP Council code of good practice for consultation**

Whenever BCP Council proposes to improve or change its services, we want to understand people's views before making any final decisions. In our [Shared Vision for Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole](#) we make a commitment to use engagement, consultation, co-production and lived experience to help inform the decisions we make.

In developing this code, we have considered feedback from various consultations and suggestions on how we can improve public consultation in the future.

While we understand that not everyone will always agree with every proposal or policy change, this code is designed to enhance the way we conduct public consultations, involve people in decision-making, and respond to their views.

It is also an opportunity for us to be clear about what consultation is and what it is not.

### **Aim of this code**

The aim of this code is to:

- set out what you can expect from a BCP Council consultation; this could include if you are a resident, business, visitor, partner or other interested party
- set out the consultation principles that the council will follow
- improve residents' trust in council consultations

### **Definition of consultation**

For the purpose of this code of practice we will define consultation as follows:

***Consultation is a two-way process where we ask for people's views on an idea(s) the council is considering. Consultation has a defined start and end date. The views we receive from consultation are not the only thing we consider when making a decision. We will also consider other information such as data on performance, research, equality, legal advice, financial and sustainability.***

Ongoing engagement work carried out by the council, such as service user forums, co-production groups, and ongoing community engagement, is not covered by this code.

### **Consultation and the democratic process**

Councillors and council officers must always balance the views expressed through consultation with a variety of other factors, such as legislation and government guidance, performance and other data, financial costs, and environmental impacts. Councillors and officers need to apply their professional judgement when considering the relative significance of different views expressed through consultation. They must also carefully consider whether the aspirations and needs of future generations, who may be most affected by any changes but may not take part in the consultation, might differ significantly from those of today's population.

In essence, the results of consultation are not a substitute for the democratic process and do not replace the role of elected representatives in decision-making. However, effective and consistent consultation can inform responsible decision-making and ensure that, as far as possible, councillors and officers have an accurate understanding of residents' views and potential impacts before they make any final decisions.

## **How we will consult**

We use a variety of methods for council consultations. For each consultation we discuss which methods are best to use and consider the following:

- who is affected by the proposal
- the complexities of the proposal
- the budget available for the consultation

We regularly use the following:

- Online open survey – where people can log in to any consultation and take part
- Paper surveys (available in libraries and other places depending on the consultation) – where anyone with a view / interest can take part
- Email responses – we accept emails from respondents who would rather use this method than complete a survey
- Sample surveys – a representative sample of residents are randomly selected and asked their views
- Digital maps – using our engagement platform, we can display 'place' information on a map that residents can comment on
- Idea walls – we can ask residents for ideas both online and offline
- Drop in events / exhibitions – we may run events so residents can come and speak to council officers face to face about proposals
- In person / online meetings – we may hold formal consultation meetings these can be done in person or online

There are other methods we use on a less regular basis and others we may want to choose to use in the future depending on the type of consultation and budget available. This includes but is not limited to:

- Focus groups – a small group of residents are asked to discuss a proposal or topic
- Qualitative interviews – a person takes part in an interview and asked open questions about their views and experiences
- Citizens' assemblies – a group of people are randomly selected to discuss and make recommendations on a specific policy issue
- Citizens' panels – a large demographically representative group of residents is regularly consulted on various issues, participants are usually selected through random sampling and engage in surveys, focus groups and workshops
- Participatory budgeting – the council lets community members influence how to allocate part of the council's budget.

## **Our consultation principles**

As a public body we will always follow the legal principles of consultation known as the Gunning Principles. These are:

1. Consultations must occur while proposals are still at a formative stage
2. Sufficient information needs to be provided for the public to give the consultation 'intelligent consideration'
3. There needs to be an adequate time for consultees to consider the proposal and respond
4. Conscientious consideration must be given to the consultation responses before decisions are made

We want to expand on these and our commitment to our residents and stakeholders is that our consultations will be:

- 1.) **Fair:** Consultation activity will be undertaken with honest intention
- 2.) **Timely:** Consultations will allow a reasonable amount of time for people to take part and results will be available in a timely manner
- 3.) **Accessible:** Information will be presented clearly and accessibly and encourage people to take part
- 4.) **Visible:** We will publicise consultations widely to make sure people know it's happening and how to get involved
- 5.) **Targeted:** Consultations will be targeted ensuring those most affected by a proposal can share their views
- 6.) **Thorough:** We will provide enough information for people to give their opinions, ask for feedback on proposals and impacts and allow space for alternative ideas and comments.

We will aim to use these principles whenever we run public consultations:

### **1.) Fair: Consultation activity will be undertaken with honest intention**

- Consultations will be timed to allow the results to be taken into consideration during policy / proposal development
- We will be honest about what can be influenced as well as what can't be
- We will be open about what decision the consultation is going to influence
- We will ask people to sign in to take part in digital consultation and continue to explore options for online and offline engagement to make sure our processes are robust

### **2.) Timely: Consultations will allow a reasonable amount of time for people to take part and results will be available in a timely manner**

- Consultation timeframes will vary depending on the proposal and those impacted, but all consultations will run for a minimum of four weeks, and reasonable notice (minimum two weeks) will be given for relevant events
- We will try to avoid key holiday periods or offer a longer consultation period if a consultation falls around the holiday period (e.g. Christmas, Easter)
- We will keep respondents informed of the next steps after a consultation, such as an estimate of when the consultation analysis will be available and following decision-making process.
- We will make sure results will be available in a timely manner; this will vary depending on the complexities of the consultation analysis.

### **3.) Accessible: Information will be presented clearly, accessibly and encourage people to take part**

- The consultation information will clearly state our proposal, why we are consulting and how the findings will be used
- Consultation will include enough information to help residents give an informed opinion
- The information will be written in plain language
- We will offer alternative formats for those who need them
- All consultations will be available in our libraries in printed format or support will be given if the consultation is suited to a digital format

**4.) Visible: We will publicise consultations widely to make sure people know they are happening and how to get involved.**

- Consultations will be listed on our consultation website
- Major consultations that affect the whole area or a large number of people will be publicised by press release, as well as on the council's website, social media channels and newsletters
- We will post consultation analysis on our consultation website
- Once a decision has been made, we will update the consultation web page, explaining what decision has been made and provide feedback on the consultation
- We will communicate the results and outcome of all consultations directly with those people we have contact details for and will promote the outcome of consultations on the 'have your say' boards in libraries.

**5.) Targeted: Consultations will be targeted ensuring those most affected by a proposal can share their views.**

- The views of those people / areas most affected by the proposal will be sought using the most effective methods available to us
- We recognise that some people find it harder to take part in consultations than others for a variety of reasons (e.g. English not as a first language, lack of free time to get involved, digital inclusion etc) and we will take this into account when planning our consultations and try to ensure everyone who is affected by a proposal has a way of giving their views that's appropriate for them

**6.) Thorough: We will provide enough information for people to give their opinions, ask for feedback on proposals and impacts and allow space for alternative ideas and comments.**

- There will be enough information about the proposal so that people are able to respond
- We will choose the most appropriate consultation methods
- Surveys and questions will be written in an objective way allowing people to express their views
- There will always be at least one open text box to allow consultees to make comments and suggestions
- We will use data collection methods that are designed to only capture information that is relevant to the consultation including equalities data
- We will ensure personal information is kept confidential and stored securely in line with the Data Protection Act 2018 and our [Privacy Policy](#)
- We will analyse responses to consultation in a professional manner,
- We may use AI technology to assist with analysing our results, this will always be verified by a council officer
- We will report the findings of the consultation in an objective and transparent manner that accurately represents respondents' views

**How we use this code**

We hope this code shows our commitment to delivering open, fair and robust BCP Council consultations and provides transparency of our consultation process.

While we will always aim to follow the code, there may be unavoidable exceptions. For example, if the council needs to complete a project within a specific timeframe due to a government grant, the consultation period may be shortened. In these instances, the council will explain the deviation from the code and provide a realistic response time. This code is not legally binding and cannot override statutory or mandatory requirements.

## **Feedback**

If you would like to give us feedback on the way we are running our consultations or if you think we have run a consultation and haven't followed one of our own principles, please email [researchandconsultation@bcpcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:researchandconsultation@bcpcouncil.gov.uk) and let us know your suggestions and/or state the consultation and which principle you feel has not been followed.