



Consultation and Engagement Policy

WTC will endeavor to seek residents' views before making a decision on large projects and strategic direction. Please note, that we will not consult before every single decision the council makes.

The council cannot consult on decisions where there is confidential/commercially sensitive information or where this conflicts with our legal duties. It is also challenging to consult on issues of technical complexity as it is unfair to expect the public to read large volumes of data when their elected representatives have been put in place to make decisions on their behalf.

All consultation is non-binding on the council, but, where available, Councillors will consider residents' views before important decisions.

Types of consultation:

WTC should endeavor to clearly state the type of engagement and purpose for the engagement. This may be:

- “Idea gathering” to get public suggestions, generally without many limitations.

Then we shortlist ideas and check feasibility

- Shortlist ranking – to get public approval for a range of potential ideas

“Consulting” after decisions have been made or shortlist options discounted can cause feelings that the council isn't listening and should be avoided. After consultation, the final decision will be published, and where possible any objections raised will be answered in the accompanying text.

Methods

Any consultation should provide a mechanism for on-line and off-line responses. Ways WTC might get responses include:

- On-line surveys/polls
- Paper surveys at the council offices/community buildings
- Public roadshow/marketplace meeting
- Highstreet pop-up exhibitions

Notice of the consultation should be made by more than one of the following:

- On the WTC website
- On-line using the council's social media
- Press Releases
- Leaflet drops / Posters in the community

Consultations to gather ideas should be transparent as to the scope of any potential answers, and if any ideas have already been ruled out for practical/financial reasons.

Question Design:

- Questions should not presume the answer and should be phrased using neutral language. Plain English should be used where possible.
- Consultation should avoid banding loosely-related things together and each subject should be able to be addresses separately to allow for focused comments and feedback.
- Consultation with residents should not contradict the Councils agreed priorities, or previous decisions.
- Questions design should encourage respondents to consider all the impacts of choices, answering questions shouldn't be "consequence free".

Yes/No Questions

Consultations should avoid Yes/No questions, so rather than:

- Do you agree with "X" Yes or No?

We should instead ask:

- How much do you agree with "X" (1 not at all – 6 completely)

The aim to have an even number of steps to avoid centre-bias. Possibly with a follow up question: "If you voted below 2, what could we change about X to improve it."

Ranked Choices

Ranking choices is another useful way to get resident's priorities:

Please rank the following ideas from 1-5 in order of importance to your family:

Weighted Choices:

Choose between six possible projects, you can spend the whole amount on one, or divide the money between as many or as few as you wish.

This encourages participants to consider the financial impact of council decisions.

Text answers

When text responses are required for a consultation, these will normally be "coded" into grouped responses. The raw (GDPR redacted) responses should be available in report appendices.

Even a short text response, may contain multiple ideas, and be coded to more than one response code.

Design Process:

- Consultation may be initiated by a Committee, Full Council or an agreed working group of the Council.
- Officers will draft a consultation and consult on that draft with the Chair of the nominating group.
- No consultation will go out until both Officers and Councillors are happy that it addressed the goals of the consultation and conforms to best practice and this policy.

Date agreed: 12.01.22

Date for review: - January 2024