

Our consultation approach & consultation plan 2018 – 2020

Approved:	April 2018
Team:	Policy & performance
Review:	Late 2019

We are committed to delivering excellent services to local residents, businesses and service users. We see consultation as a vital part of this - whether that's consulting on our future plans, our budget, planned service changes or about how well we are performing. We see local people's views as vital to improving our services, our thinking and our approach. **This document sets out our approach to consulting with you and understanding your views.**

What is consultation?

Consultation is a process through which the views of residents, businesses, customers and stakeholders are sought about a particular issue/theme, with the aim that those views should inform and influence decisions, policies, or programmes of action.

Why we consult

In order to provide services that are best suited to our customer needs, we work to gather the views of and listen to our citizens and stakeholders.

Consultation around an issue helps us to tailor services, and meet the needs of our community. It also helps us to understand views, identify possible unintended consequences of a policy, decision or service change. Above all, consultation ensures our decisions and policies are made from a strong evidence base.

Like councils nationwide, we are experiencing a period of significant change as we face increasing pressure on our resources and services. We are tackling these issues through a programme called Fit for the Future, which includes a focus on commercialisation, digitisation and service transformation. As we develop new and enhanced service models it is important that we consult with our residents, businesses and other service users.

Our underlying principles

Whilst each consultation project is unique, we adopt the following principles, based on the Cabinet Office consultation principles 2016¹, to make sure our consultations are appropriate, open, transparent and inclusive.

1. Our consultations are clear and concise
2. Our consultations always have a purpose
3. Our consultations are informative
4. Our consultations are well timed
5. Our consultations are targeted
6. We will adopt tailored approaches
7. Our consultations will facilitate scrutiny
8. Responses to our consultations are timely

These principles are explained in more detail in the following section.

Our underlying principles explained

1. Our consultations are clear and concise

We will always use plain English and avoid technical jargon. We make sure questions easy to understand and easy to answer. We will limit the number of questions to only those that are necessary. We will avoid lengthy documents where possible.

2. Our consultations always have a purpose

Where an activity (e.g. policy, service procedure or potential decision) will have a direct impact on members of the public or stakeholders we will always consider undertaking a consultation exercise. We will not consult for the sake of it. Consultation will only happen when there is a real scope for change, and decisions have not already been made or a course of action is unchangeable.

3. Our consultations are informative

We will provide enough information to ensure everyone who takes part can understand the issues and can give informed responses. We will include details of the costs, benefits and impact of the options being considered when possible.

Our consultations will also clearly state:

- The start and end dates of the consultation
- The ways in which people can take part (e.g. online, meeting etc)
- The scope of the consultation
- How and when decisions will be made, and how the consultation will inform any decisions
- How respondents and the wider public will receive feedback/updates on resulting decisions
- The appeals process (if appropriate).

¹ Cabinet Office Consultation Principles 2016

4. Our consultations are well timed

Consulting for too long can delay policy development. Consulting for too short a timeframe can limit the amount of people who can take part and can reduce the quality of responses.

We will always judge the length of a consultation on the basis of legal/statutory frameworks (where appropriate) and/or by taking into account the nature and impact of the proposal and the time of year.

We will also consider the nature of key stakeholders – charities, small businesses and voluntary groups may need more time to respond for example, or young people/students may not be readily available during the summer months.

5. Our consultations are targeted

A decision, policy or programme of action can affect a diverse range of people and organisations and it is our duty to identify them. Identifying who needs to be consulted is central to understanding how we approach a project.

Many of the consultations we run are general, and are available to all local residents and people/groups who have an interest in the area. Other consultations may be more focused, and only certain groups will be targeted.

We adopt a process called stakeholder mapping to determine all those that may have an interest in the subject, and how best they can be engaged. When we identify stakeholders we think widely around the issue, and not simply approach 'the usual suspects'.

We target specific groups if appropriate and ensure they are aware of the consultation and can comment. Special attention will be paid to the different protected equality groups covered by the Equality Act.

If appropriate we will carry out informal dialogue with key stakeholders about an upcoming consultation (sometimes called pre-consultation). The advantages are that the stakeholders may have a good idea about the methods of dialogue and the questions that should be asked, and can help us gauge the volume and type of responses that will be received.

6. We will adopt tailored approaches

Different communities and stakeholders have different consultation needs. We recognise that some methods may not be appropriate for all, and we always aim to consult stakeholders in a way that suits them.

Where appropriate we will tailor consultations to the needs of particular groups, such as older people, younger people or people with disabilities that may not respond to traditional consultation methods. For example, young people may not respond well to a postal survey, but may be more receptive to social media or a workshop.

Our Strategic Plan and our Digital Strategy set out our ambition to do more and more online, whilst ensuring all members of our community can be heard. As such, the methods we use will depend on many factors such as the scope of the project, who we are consulting with, their needs, and the time and budget available.

Methods we use include:

- Surveys (online, paper, face to face, telephone)
- Focus groups
- Documentary (putting a document to the public for comment)
- Interactive online surveys
- Email bulletins
- Public meetings / stakeholder meetings
- Polls
- Exhibitions
- Social media (Twitter/Facebook)

Measures we will take include making documents available in large print and ensuring venues are accessible to people with disabilities. Providing information in other languages will also be considered.

7. Our consultations will facilitate scrutiny

We publish responses to consultations on the same page on www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/voicedit as the original consultation. In our response we aim to explain the responses that have been received, how many we received, and how these have been used.

8. Responses to our consultations are timely

We aim to publish responses to consultations within 12 weeks, or provide an explanation why this is not possible.

Our annual programme

Every year we conduct the following consultations as standard:

- Annual Your View budget consultation - online. We generally carry this out in the autumn. We ask residents to let us know what they think about our services, what they view as priorities, and their views on any council tax increases. The feedback from this survey is provided to councillors and our management teams to help them plan our services, and to our finance team to help influence the budget setting process which concludes in April every year.
- Annual residents focus group – face-to-face. We invite a small group of people from our residents’ focus group to attend a session to help shape our Delivery Plan – this is the plan that sets out the actions we will carry out to deliver the ambitions set out in our Strategic Plan. We generally carry this out in the autumn, and participants are also asked to give their views on our budget setting process.
- Strategic Plan consultation – face-to-face. We prepare a Strategic Plan every four years. In the autumn before the Strategic Plan is prepared we invite a small group of people from our residents’ focus group to help us scope out our priorities and direction of travel. Feedback from this workshop is fed into the Strategic Plan drafting process. Participants are asked to comment again when the first draft of the plan is completed.
- Service specific consultations. We carry out service specific consultations to find out local views on service changes, plans and decisions. We use a variety of consultation methods.
- User acceptance testing. As part of our digital transformation journey we are putting more and more services online. As part of this we invite residents to take part in user acceptance testing on a form by form basis, to ensure our online experience is as good as it can be.

View our current consultation plan at Appendix A (www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/consultationplan) which is updated every year.

To see how our consultation plan supports our performance and strategic planning process at Appendix B (www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/consultationframework) and Appendix C (www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/strategicplanningframework)

Be part of our residents’ focus group

Local residents with an interest in our services and the decisions we make are invited to join our residents’ focus group. As part of the group you will be regularly notified about consultations we run, as well as invited in to take part in resident focus groups on specific issues. Those taking part are often provided with expenses and the chance to win vouchers or prizes as a thank you for their efforts.

To express your interest in joining our focus group visit www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/focusgroup and fill in the online form. We work to ensure our focus group is representative of our district – and if your age or demographic is already adequately represented, we will place you on a waiting list.

The equality act

The Equality Act 2010 addresses discrimination and inequalities and protects all individuals from unfair treatment. We have a number of statutory duties arising from the act to better advance equality into our business planning and decision-making processes.

We must consider how the decisions we make, and the services we deliver, affect people from different equality groups who share a 'protected characteristic'. The Equality Act 2010 also requires that consultation is carried out with people who have protected characteristics where they may be adversely affected by a service change.

The key way we demonstrate compliance with this is by conducting equality impact assessments (EIAs) on key decisions we make.

An EIA is an evidence led process that involves using relevant information to understand and make judgements about the impact of a council service/decision/proposal on equality. Information from our consultation projects can form a key part of the evidence used in an

Balancing the costs

It is important that consultation projects represent value for money. We will, wherever possible, explore the possibility of joining up consultations to reduce costs and the burden on consultees. Where possible we will:

- Encourage online participation
- Use email instead of the postal service
- Hire council owned facilities rather than privately owned ones
- Print in black and white or on lower grade paper.

Analysing your views

We strongly believe the views of our citizens can help to inform and improve our decision making processes, and ensure that the decisions we make reflect the needs and aspirations of our local community and stakeholders.

Consultation is not however a substitute for the democratic process and rarely results in a single opinion. In considering views given, we will often have to make a judgement about the weight to be given to one opinion, or another.

In making final decisions we will always weigh views and opinions gathered through consultation against a range of other factors, including financial cost and environmental or social impact.

For a consultation to play a meaningful role in the decision-making process, we ensure enough time is allowed to analyse, interpret, and consider the data.

Promoting our consultations

Good publicity is one of the best ways to encourage people to take part in a consultation². Our communications and performance team always ensure that consultations are promoted in a consistent and efficient manner.

As standard this includes:

- Issuing a press release
- Promotion on our social media feeds (Facebook - /Lichfield_DC & Twitter /Lichfield_DC)
- Notifying partners and councillors (via our Headlines newsletter)
- Inclusion in www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/voicedit
- Emails to our residents focus group

Other methods we will adopt on a case-by-case basis include newspaper adverts, notifying city, town and parish councils, and notify stakeholder groups directly.

Feedback

Feedback is a vital part of good consultation, and consideration will be given at the outset as to how people are to be informed of the results of the consultation, as well as any decisions made.

As standard, our feedback includes:

- Publishing the report on www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/voicedit
- Promotion on our social media feeds (Facebook - /Lichfield_DC & Twitter /Lichfield_DC)
- Emails to our resident focus group

In addition, we will consider press releases, notifying partners and councillors (via our Headlines newsletter) and recontacting all participants on a case-by-case basis.

In providing feedback we will explain what has changed as a result of the consultation and (where appropriate) the factors, other than the consultation responses, that informed the decision made. Respondents will be made aware of how they will receive feedback.

If you would like a large print copy or information about us and our services, please email us at consultation@lichfielddc.gov.uk or call 01543 308000.

² This does not include planning applications, licensing applications or any other regulated services that are controlled by separate consultation laws/guidance.

Appendix A Our proposed consultation timeline 2018 – 2020

2018

April – August	Establish a residents' panel (see residents' panel paper)
May	2018 – 2020 Delivery Plan approved by Cabinet
September	Employee survey
October/ November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents' panel focus group – invited to outline aspirations for 2019 – 2020 Delivery Plan, next Strategic Plan and give views in line with Your View budget questionnaire Your View budget questionnaire (web/email)
November/ December:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paper provided to HOS/LT on residents' panel feedback - to be used to assist with service planning for following year Strategic Plan 2020 – 2024 drafting plan starts – utilises residents' panel feedback

Ongoing: User acceptance testing / Service led consultations

2019

January – April	Service planning takes place and draft Delivery Plan 2019 – 2020 developed
April	Request to comment on draft 2019 – 2020 Delivery Plan (before it goes to Cabinet for approval) emailed to residents' panel members who participated in 2018 focus group
May	2019 – 2020 Delivery Plan approved by Cabinet
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents' panel focus group – invited to comment on draft Strategic Plan and 2020 – 2024 Delivery Plan Paper provided to LT on residents' panel feedback – to feed into final paper to Cabinet accompanying Strategic Plan Paper provided to HOS/LT on residents' panel feedback - to be used to assist with service planning for following year
September	Strategic Plan 2020 – 2024 approved by Cabinet
October/ November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your View budget questionnaire (web/email)

Ongoing: User acceptance testing / Service led consultations

2020

January – April	Service planning takes place and draft Delivery Plan 2020 – 2024 developed
April	Request to comment on draft 2020 – 2024 Delivery Plan (before it goes to Cabinet for approval) sent to residents' panel members who participated in 2019 focus group
May	2020 – 2024 Delivery Plan approved by Cabinet
September	Employee survey
October/ November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents' panel focus group – invited to outline aspirations for 2021 – 2024 Delivery Plan and give views in line with Your View budget questionnaire Your View budget questionnaire (web/email)
November/ December	Paper provided to HOS/LT on residents' panel feedback - to be used to assist with service planning for following year

Ongoing: User acceptance testing / Service led consultations

Colour key

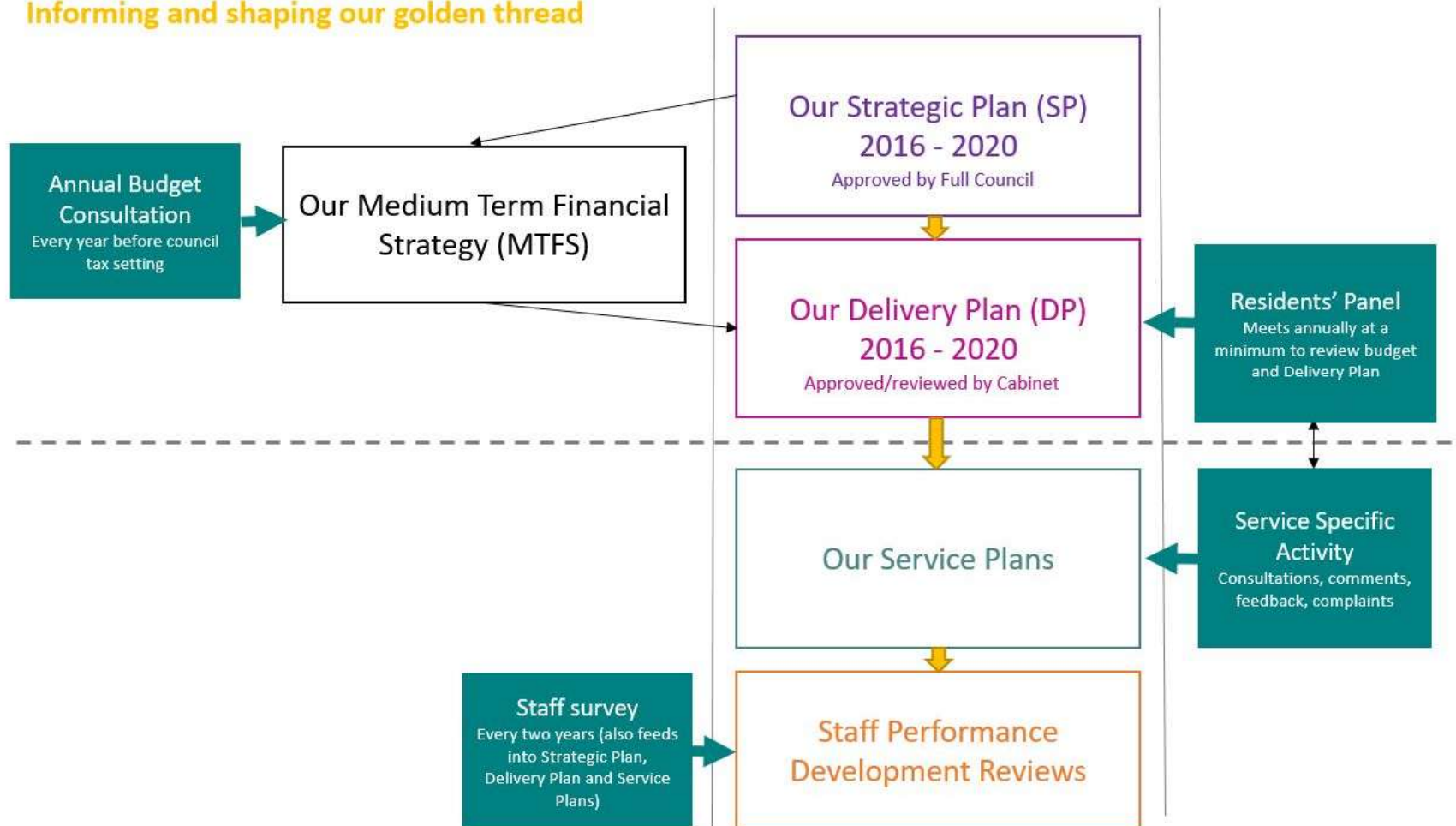
Bold - supports development of Strategic Plan
 Grey - approvals/ feedback

Purple - focus groups
 Red - email /online consultation

Appendix B Our consultation framework

Our consultation framework

Informing and shaping our golden thread



Appendix C Our strategic planning performance management framework

How our performance is managed

Our golden thread

