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# Consultation and Engagement Framework (DRAFT)

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**November 2019**

*Inform*

*Consult*

*Belfast City Council*

*Listen*

*Involve*



**Belfast  
City Council**

## Purpose of the Framework

**Belfast City Council is committed to listening to what people have to say about the services we provide or what they want to see happen in the city and their local area. We recognise that to effectively shape and improve our city, neighbourhoods and services, then meaningful consultation and engagement is crucial. We believe that listening to and involving people will lead to better, more responsive services and improved quality of life for all.**

We have developed a consultation and engagement framework to guide how we listen, consult and involve people. The framework outlines our approach to consultation and engagement by setting out a clear vision with underlying principles and standards. It is supported by an action plan and other measures to ensure that we consistently meet these principles.

Through this framework, we aim to improve the quality, value and effectiveness of our consultation and engagement. It represents a further step towards embedding meaningful consultation into the council's planning and decision-making processes and supplements the commitments in our Equality Scheme and our responsibilities to consult under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

### *Why the Framework is needed*

Publication of the framework is essential to provide a clear policy framework and process and to drive improvements in the quality, effectiveness and consistency of our consultation and engagement. This will secure better value for money and improve organisational reputation and trust.

Ultimately, however, the purpose of the framework is to ensure that our residents and partners are more involved in the decisions or services that affect them. Effective community engagement brings about many positive benefits, improving the quality and focus of the work undertaken by the council and enabling individuals and communities to make a difference in their own lives and communities.

#### **Legal Requirements and Best Practice**

The framework has been developed based on current legal requirements and best practice. Where there is a defined statutory process for consultation, then the statutory process will take precedence. For example, requirements to consult on spatial planning issues will be undertaken in line with the Planning Act (NI) 2011 legislation and associated statutory guidance

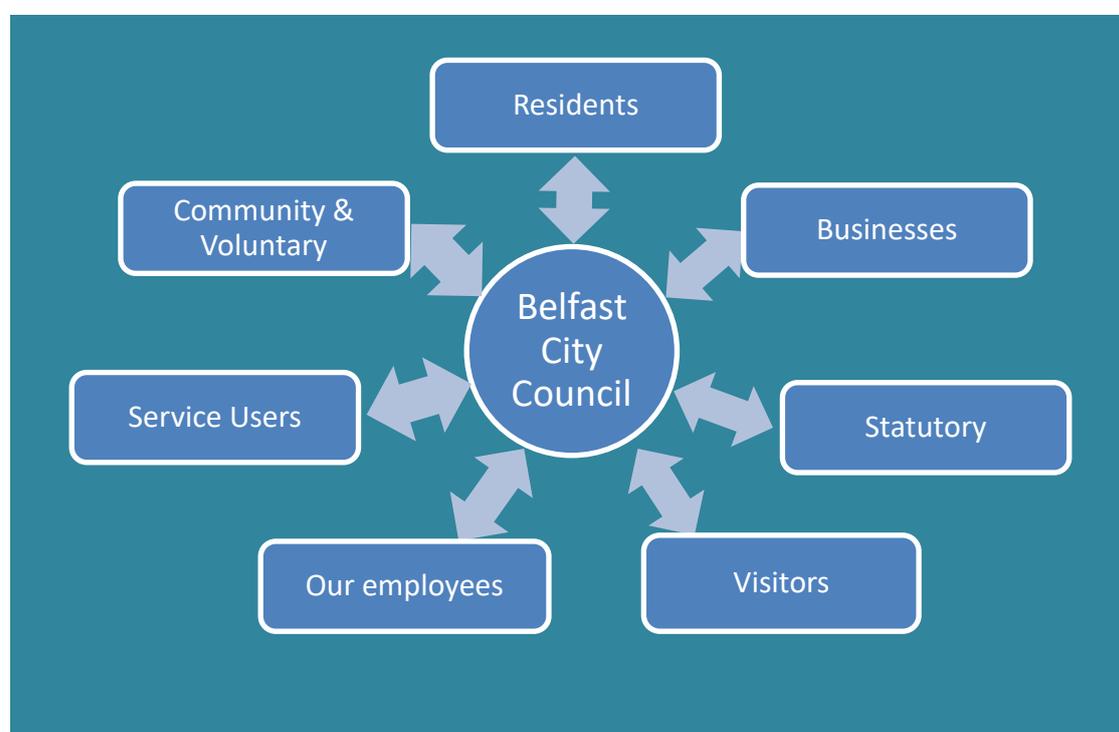
## Our Vision for Consultation & Engagement

**Belfast City Council is committed to listening to and involving people– we want people to know and feel that they can make a difference.**

In Belfast we consult and engage so that people and partners can influence:

- **Council Services and Priorities** – so that they better reflect local need and provide best value for money
- **Decisions and Outcomes affecting Local Quality of Life** – enabling people and partners to be involved in actions or decisions aimed at improving the quality of life for Belfast and its neighbourhoods, now and for the future.

By our people and partners we mean:



Underpinning this vision is our commitment to ensure that all voices have an opportunity to be heard, particularly those who may find it more difficult to participate because of disability, age, language, caring responsibilities or any other circumstance.

We are committed to carrying out consultation in accordance with the principles contained in the Equality Commissions guidance “Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 – A Guide for Public Authorities (April 2010)” and our Equality Scheme - chapter 3, ‘Our arrangements for consulting’.

## Aims and Aspirations

The framework is intended to help us to deliver our vision for consultation and engagement and ensure that all our consultation and engagement meets legal standards and good practice commitments. More specifically the framework aims to:

- Make our consultation and engagement processes **Meaningful and Fit for Purpose**
- Ensure our consultation and engagement is **Inclusive** and gives all people **Equal Opportunity** to contribute, enabling greater access and participation
- Build trust and confidence in council through **Fair, Open and Transparent** consultation and engagement
- Provide **Value for Money**, reducing costs and avoiding duplication
- Strengthen strategic planning through a consistent and continually improving use of consultation and engagement - **A 'One-Council' Coordinated Approach**

Our aspiration is to ensure all our consultation and engagement:

1. **Respects people** and acts fairly – it has a meaningful purpose and values people's time and contributions
2. Gives people **equal opportunity** to contribute – is clear, accessible and inclusive
3. Uses **fit for purpose** methods that are commensurate to need, visible, well designed and provide value for money
4. **Keeps people informed** throughout – including feeding back on results and decisions

**Through this framework, we will endeavour to embed a culture of engagement so that it genuinely becomes part of what we do.**

## Definition - What do we mean by Consultation and Engagement?

The terms consultation and engagement are sometimes used interchangeably. But, whilst both processes seek the views, knowledge or guidance of others, there is a difference between them.

The Consultation Institute defines **consultation** as:

*“the dynamic process of dialogue between individuals or groups, based upon a genuine exchange of views, with the objective of influencing decisions, policies or programmes of action”*

In this framework, we define **engagement** as an activity or process that:

*“brings people together to help to understand and solve local problems, to influence and shape council policy or council services, or to address issues of common importance and to achieve positive change”*

Consultation is specific and time bound, with decisions made by the organisation initiating the consultation, in this case Belfast City Council. Engagement, on the other hand, describes the wider and longer term or ongoing process of **involving** people - in discussions, deliberations and action planning – on issues that affect them or which they care about. Effective engagement requires respectful dialogue between everyone involved and is aimed at improving understanding and, where appropriate, joint working so as to achieve more positive outcomes for all.

### **Our Definitions:**

**Consultation** - a process of dialogue - asking for and listening to the views of people and partners in order to inform or influence a specific council decision, policy, strategy or action.

**Engagement** - the processes we use to develop ongoing, mutually beneficial working relationships with our people and partners. For the purposes of this framework the term engagement means the purposeful and participative process which enables people to influence and shape council policy and local services or to improve local outcomes. It is the cornerstone of partnership working.

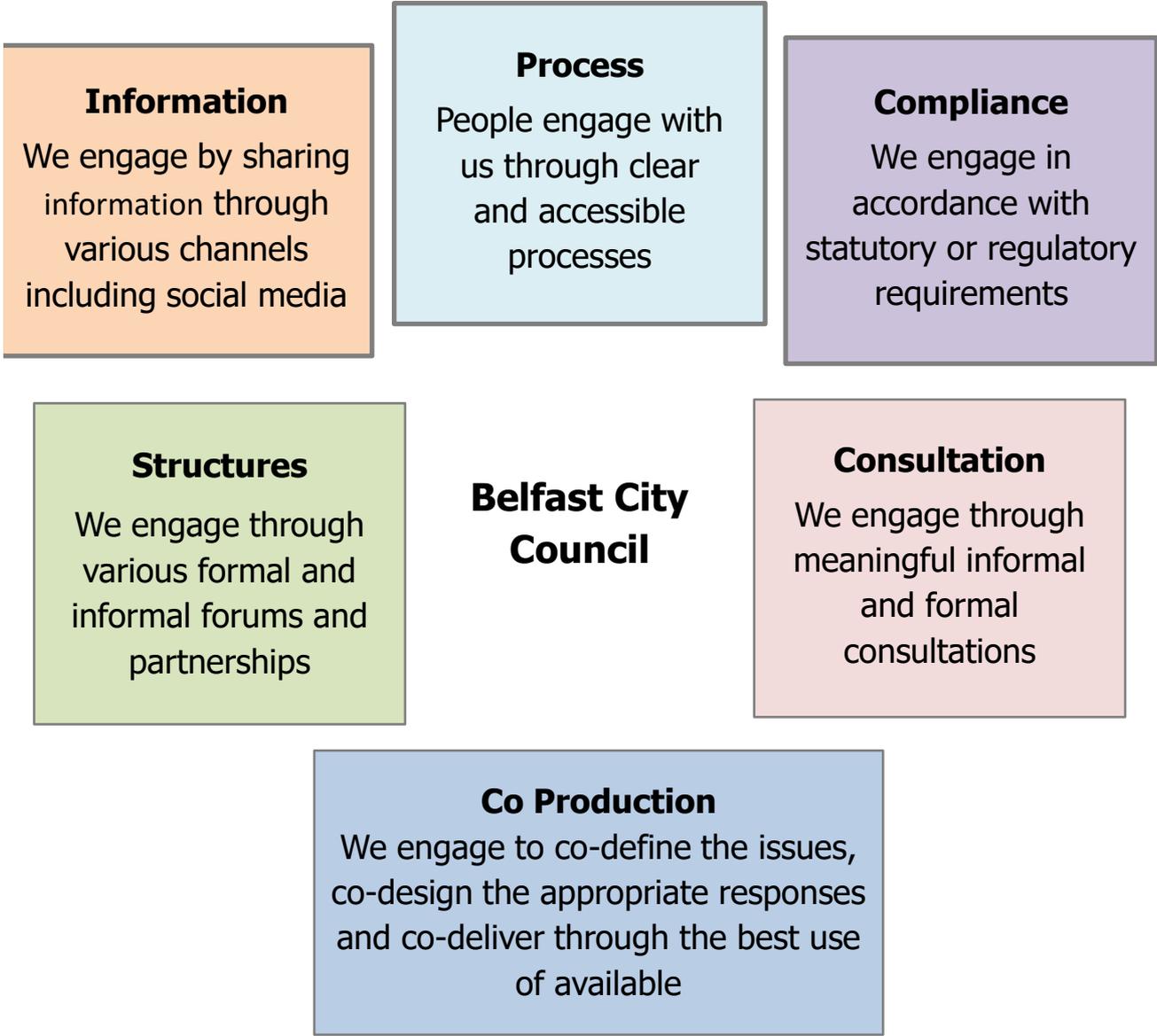
**Involvement** - People actively participating in and being involved with council and other local service providers in policy development, service planning and review or improving outcomes. Depending on the nature of the issue, decisions may be taken solely by council or may be shared.

The level of involvement will vary depending on the nature of each consultation or engagement. There is no fixed approach. To help explain the potential different levels of involvement, public bodies have adapted the 'ladder of public engagement' concept as illustrated below. Within this spectrum, there are many different methods available, and we must choose what is the most appropriate based on each individual case.

Level of Involvement		What's involved	Examples	
<b>Empower</b>	High / Most involved	You do it; we stand back – enabling others to deliver programmes and services	Shaftsbury and Grosvenor community & recreation centres	
<b>Collaborate</b>		We do it jointly – sharing decisions and working together to improve, design or services and programmes	District Policing & Community Safety Partnership Connswater Community Greenway	
<b>Involve</b>		Involving people – working directly with people to understand needs and aspirations and/or to improve or design services and programmes	Forums and user groups such as 'friends of' groups and our youth, seniors and migrant forums. Engagement as part of our physical programme	
<b>Consultation</b>		We want to know what you think in order to help us make a better decision – asking people for their views	Formal consultations and focus groups such as those undertaken as part of our Waste Collection Arrangements and Cultural Strategy	
<b>Information-giving</b>		Low / Least involved	This is knowledge we want you to have - giving people information and telling them about our services	Council Website City Matters

## Our Consultation and Engagement Framework

Belfast City Council engages and involves people in a number of different ways.



Inherent within each of these approaches, is a commitment to equality and our duties under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

## Our Standards for Consultation

We recognise that there is no fixed approach or one right way to consult. Instead, we will adapt each consultation to suit its own each unique situation. To help us make the right decisions about how and when we consult, we have adopted five consultation standards. These underpin our vision and guide all our consultation activity.

### ***Belfast City Council – Our Consultation Commitments***

Our consultation standard set out what you can expect from Belfast City Council consultations. These are our commitments to you. In any consultation exercise we will:

**Explain** why we're consulting and how we're going to take people's views into account. When we have to make significant decisions, we will consult openly and with integrity. We will consult at a formative stage and when there is scope for people to influence decisions.

**Involve** the widest spectrum of the community. We will strive to give all people who will be affected by or who interested in the matter an opportunity to get involved. We will strive to give all people an equal opportunity to contribute especially under-represented, marginalised and 'seldom heard groups. Above all we will respect people and act fairly, valuing people's time and contributions.

**Organise** consultation and engagement in ways which are convenient and accessible to the people whose views we are seeking and use the most appropriate and cost-effective mechanisms – fit for purpose consultation that is commensurate to need.

**Report** back on what people told us and what we've decided to do as a result of it. We will keep people informed throughout the process – this includes feedback on the decisions that have been made and any actions that will be taken.

**Use** the findings to make informed decisions - consultation for a purpose and with an honest intention. We will interpret the findings fairly and make decisions or take actions that ultimately help to improve services, programmes or quality of life for local people.

A toolkit, which includes comprehensive advice on planning a consultation, is being developed to help officers apply these standards.

## Our Standards for Engagement

**Engagement brings people together to help to solve local problems, to influence and shape policy or council services or to address issues of common importance and bring about positive change.**

Whilst our consultation standards are equally applicable to engagement activity, we feel that additional guidance and support is needed to build and drive meaningful community engagement. We want communities to feel that they can influence and be part of the decisions that affect them. This means working with communities to help them deal with the issues they experience, involving them in the design and delivery of actions and interventions, and supporting them so they can lead on the issues that effect them. Good community engagement is a process which provides the foundation for:

- Shared understanding
- Improved decision-making
- Collaboration

Engagement good practice is continually evolving and we are committed to learning and maintaining good standards that work for our local communities. In the first instance, we will apply the National Standards for Community Engagement as developed by the Scottish Government and the Scottish Community Development Centre. The standards, which build on the OECD principles designed to strengthen government-citizen relations, are about being open and inclusive, with a focus on collaborative change, continuous improvement and relationship building. They comprise seven good-practice principles, supported by detailed performance statements that act as a checklist or reference point for best practice. The standards focus on:

- ❖ Inclusion
- ❖ Support
- ❖ Planning
- ❖ Working Together
- ❖ Methods
- ❖ Communication
- ❖ Impact

By applying these standards to our own community engagement, we aim to ensure that our engagement is meaningful and effective - where everyone feels respected and empowered and which delivers a positive outcome for all.

## The Belfast Agenda

We are responsible for leading and facilitating the community planning process for the Belfast district area. At its heart, community planning is about working in collaboration to deliver better outcomes for local people. Working with our community planning partners, we will ensure that effective community engagement is embedded in the Belfast Agenda and our community planning processes. The Belfast Community Planning Partnership is committed to strengthening how it engages and has plans to develop a Partnership Community Engagement Strategy to underpin how it will enhance civic voice through meaningful participation of communities, including the community, voluntary and social enterprise sectors.

We will continue to work with our partners to test and develop innovative engagement approaches and to develop case studies to guide and build good practice, both through our own consultation and engagement activity in relation to Council services, and through our partnership working.

### *Learning from best practice: Scottish National Standards*



Scottish Government funded, SCDC developed  
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## Keeping you informed

**Our framework commits us to keeping you informed. This means letting you know what is happening and telling you about the decisions that affect you and how you can have a say in those decisions. It also means we will let you know how people's views were taken into account and what has happened as a result.**

We use a range of mechanisms to keep you informed. This includes, for example tools like City Matters, our website and social media. Depending on the issue or matter, we may also produce specific leaflets or summary documents to help raise awareness and understanding. These will always be available on our dedicated consultation platform or through the homepage on the council website.

### Our Consultation Platform

We have a dedicated on-line platform "Your Say. Belfast City" that contains all our public council consultations including those that are now closed. From January 2020, all our completed consultations will include a brief update to let you know what people have said and what has happened as a result. These are summarised under the "We Asked, You Said, We Did" feature. For more complex consultations, updates reports will be added to the overview page of each consultation where appropriate. It can be accessed at: <https://yoursay.belfastcity.gov.uk/>

## Developing effective process

**Our framework is about giving all people a voice through clear, meaningful and inclusive processes. Whilst much of the framework deals with how we initiate, plan and deliver our consultation and engagement, we also want to make sure that we have sound processes in place that enables communities and individuals to initiate discussions and raise concerns.**

Our Elected Members play an important role in representing their constituents, including raising issues of concern with services and senior management team. However, in addition to this, we will also develop clear and open processes that enable people to contact council directly, such as through petitions or other mechanisms. We will explain clearly what the process is so that people understand how they can make their voice heard and what happens next.

## Meeting our commitments

To enable us to meet the commitments set out in this framework, we have developed a number of supporting mechanisms, including an action plan and officer toolkits and guidance and best practice examples [currently in draft form].

### Toolkits and Guidance

A consultation and engagement toolkit and our guidance for physical projects [will be] available on the councils internal intranet and is available on request. This guidance and associated checklists will be reviewed regularly to ensure it reflects best practice and changing legislative guidance such as the recent GDPR.

In addition, our Equality and Diversity Unit has developed an Equality and Diversity Toolkit, which provides detailed guidance for officers on our equality and diversity responsibilities. The unit also facilitates a number of equality and disability forums. These are reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure we continue to be open and inclusive. To find out more about these forums or to get involved please contact [equality@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:equality@belfastcity.gov.uk)

### Consultation and Engagement Action Plan

During the coming year, we have prioritised a number of actions, designed to help us improve our practice and deliver the aspirations within this framework:

Consultation & Engagement Framework	Timeframe
Formal adoption of the framework following the public consultation	April 2020
<b>Consultation</b>	
Develop and introduce mechanisms for feeding back the results and impact of consultations to participants	Jan - April 2020
<b>Engagement and Civic Voice</b>	
Identify and assess options for supporting online civic engagement and implement a digital based civic voice programme	Jan - Sept 2020
Align to the digital inclusion work of the BRCD to ensure fullest participation and to build capacity	2020-2021
Research best practice community engagement and participation of young people	Jan 2020 - Dec 2020
Undertake at least 3 innovative pilots to test good practice	2020 - 2021
Consider processes for enabling residents to initiate issues	2020 - 2021
<b>Building Capacity</b>	
Develop a mechanism for sharing current good practice and support ongoing training and development	May 2020
Develop a Consultation and Engagement Toolkit and incorporate community engagement standards	May 2020
<b>Continuous Improvement</b>	
Align to Belfast Agenda - initial focus on community engagement and participation of the community and voluntary sectors	2020
Research and make recommendations for ongoing innovation in areas such as area based engagement and participatory budgeting	2020 - 2021

## Measures of Success

We want this framework to make a difference. We want people get involved in the decisions that affect them and we want it to have a positive impact on how people view the council. To help us assess whether it is making a difference, we will monitor the following:

How much did we do?	How well did we do it
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Number of public consultations per annum</li> <li>❖ Number of responses to our consultation per annum</li> <li>❖ Number of focus groups or engagement panel exercises per annum (face-to face or online)</li> <li>❖ Numbers involved in focus groups and panels per annum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ % of consultation exercises where results are fed back to participants</li> <li>❖ Satisfaction with engagement processes*</li> <li>❖ Number of FOIs / complaints relating to consultation and engagement process*</li> <li>❖ Officers holding Consultation Institute CPD or Advanced Practitioners</li> </ul>
Is anyone better off?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ % of residents who agree that the council consults with and listens to views of local residents</li> <li>✓ % of residents who agree that they are able to have a say in how services are run in their local area</li> <li>✓ % of residents who rate council highly in terms of (a) reputation and (b) trustworthiness</li> <li>✓ % of residents who agree that the council provides good customer service</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;">Source: BCC Resident Survey</p>	

\* The purpose is to measure the robustness of process, not satisfaction with the outcome

In addition to monitoring the impact of our consultation and engagement, regular updates on the delivery of the action plan will be brought to the Corporate Management Team.

## Tell us what you think

We have put a lot of thought into this framework, but we are very much open to ideas and suggestions for improvement. Before we finalise and formally adopt this framework, we want to hear from you.

This framework is about making sure that people have a voice on the issues that affect them and can influence the services we deliver. Please tell us what you think by completing our online consultation at <https://yoursay.belfastcity.gov.uk/> or by getting in touch with us using the contact details below.



Have your  
say

*Does this make sense?*

*Are we on the right track?*

*What do we need to do to  
make it easier for people to get involved and have their say?*

**Please tell us what you think**

<https://yoursay.belfastcity.gov.uk/chief-executives/draft-engagement-framework>

### Contact us:

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