

# A Listening Council

East Herts Council's principles for  
information giving, engagement and consultation

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At East Herts Council, we are committed to fostering open and inclusive dialogue with our residents, businesses and partners. We believe that meaningful and transparent conversations are essential for informed decision-making and the development of effective solutions. ***While there will always be conflicting outcomes and some residents may feel dissatisfied with the result, the council will always endeavour to deliver honest and unbiased communication.*** Our principles for information giving, engagement and consultation will guide us in creating an environment where diverse perspectives are valued so that, we truly believe, collaboration will lead to better outcomes.

## Understanding the different approaches

There are lots of ways the council can and does work with and involve residents, businesses and other partners on the things we do. The main ways are as follows.

### 1) Information giving

- This is a one-way form of communication where we provide people with details about what we are doing or planning to do but are not seeking input into those things.
- Sometimes we will simply give information not because we don't want to hear from people but because we are just telling people about something we have already consulted or updating or reminding them about our day-to-day services.
- Examples of ways in which will give information include ***East Herts Council's website***, social media posts, newsletters and press releases to local media.

### 2) Engagement

- Engagement is a more interactive approach where we involve people and ask for their input, opinions and feedback.
- Engagement can be ongoing and tends to focus on ongoing matters rather than being specifically linked to a single decision or issue. The aim

is that through longer term engagement, people can help the council develop its overall priorities and how to address ongoing issues.

- Examples of the council enabling engagement include ongoing forums, community meetings and online discussion groups.

### 3) Consultation

- ***Consultation is a slightly different form of engagement as it focuses on a specific matter whereby the council actively seeks views, suggestions and preferences on this specific matter.***
- The goal of consultation is to give people a meaningful role in shaping new policies and a genuine opportunity to influence specific decisions facing the council.
- Examples of ways of consulting include surveys, interviews, expert panels and meetings convened to address a specific proposed policy or decision that needs to be taken.

### Building blocks of effective information giving, engagement and consultation

Here are the building blocks for effective information giving, engagement and consultation facilitated by the council:

- transparency
- straightforward, jargon-free messaging
- involvement methods tailored to the locality, community and topic
- a genuine desire to listen
- multi-channel involvement; not simply relying on online methods
- reaching out to those whose voices can sometimes go unheard
- ***allowing people to be able to get information from the council at the level of detail they prefer***
- ***councillors being fully involved***
- listening to feedback.

### Putting theory into practice

Our building blocks are not just theory, we will use them to ensure we are a ***Listening Council*** in the following ways.

## 1) Transparency

- We believe in clear, ***open and honest communication***.
- We will provide simple explanations of any involvement exercise's purpose, scope and potential impact, ensuring participants can see the context and importance of their contributions.

## 2) Straightforward, jargon-free messaging

- Our goal is to make sure as many people as possible understand what we are trying to say because we know that not everyone will be familiar with how the council works.
- We will share our ideas and information without special jargon or technical language that could be confusing.
- We believe that by using everyday language, what we want to say can be most easily grasped by a diverse audience.

## 3) Involvement methods tailored to the locality, community and topic

- We will seek the views of wards members and other local stakeholders on how best to reach local communities.
- We will use local printed media with the greatest readership in the locality where we are working with people.
- Whenever possible, we will use local examples and references in our consultation and engagement material to bring the issues to life for any particular community.

## 4) A genuine desire to listen

- We want to hear our residents', businesses' and other stakeholders' views.
- We will encourage thoughtful contributions, allowing participants to share their expertise, concerns and hopes.
- We will provide opportunities for in-depth discussions and encourage participants to provide well-informed feedback.
- We will treat everyone with respect and empathy, fostering an environment where diverse opinions are heard and valued. Above all, we

want to make sure that everyone feels comfortable sharing their thoughts.

## **5) Multi-channel involvement; not simply relying on online methods**

- We are dedicated to making our involvement processes accessible to all participants.
- We recognise that each exercise we run is unique and so we will tailor our approaches to suit the specific context and preferences of participants, adapting our methods to the circumstances.
- We will provide multiple channels for involvement, including, for example, online communication, public meetings, surveys and other methods to better match people's preferences and needs.

## **6) Reaching out to those whose voices can sometimes go unheard**

- We see inclusivity and diversity as essential to high quality, meaningful involvement with the council.
- We will embrace a wide range of perspectives, experiences and backgrounds.
- We will actively seek input from individuals and groups representing different demographics, cultures and viewpoints to ensure we have as full an understanding of the issues at hand as possible.

## **7) *Allowing people to be able to get information from the council at the level of detail they prefer***

- ***For any given issue on which we are seeking views, we will aim to produce (a) a clear, concise summary, (b) a more detailed document and (c) a detailed document with more in-depth background information.***
- ***We want to engage early and often. By involving people early and maintaining ongoing communication, we believe we can help make sure their insights shape the outcome.***
- ***As much as we possibly can, we will involve people at different stages of a project or decision-making process, from when we have our first ideas,***

***to the time to decide whether to put the idea into action and to evaluation of the project.***

## **8) Councillors being fully involved**

- As part of the day-to-day contact with the public and specifically during any engagement or consultation exercise, all **councillors** have the opportunity and indeed responsibility to hear and relay the interests, opinions and feedback of the residents they represent whether through the established Overview and Scrutiny process or in response to specific involvement exercises.
- In any exercise, **councillors** play a crucial role in ensuring that accurate and relevant information about the issues is communicated to the public.
- **Councillors** can help facilitate meaningful and productive dialogue and joint working between the community and decision-makers within all three tiers of local government in East Herts, that is Hertfordshire County Council, East Herts Council and the Town and Parish Councils.
- Given their insight into their local communities, **councillors** can raise important issues, propose amendments or suggest alternatives based on what they've picked up from the people, businesses and others in their area.
- We recognise that **councillors** may facilitate discussions aimed at finding common ground and achieving consensus.

## **9) Listening to feedback**

- We will take responsibility for acting on what we've learned from our engagement and consultation.
- We will provide feedback to participants on how their input has influenced decisions and outcomes, thus helping to demonstrate transparency in our actions.
- We will always try to improve our information giving, engagement and consultation processes based on feedback and lessons learned.
- ***We will include feedback and consultation responses in published reports when making decisions.***