

## Engagement and Consultation Strategy early engagement

**Project:** Help us shape how we engage

**Period:** 22 October 2025 - 30 November 2025

### Introduction - Shaping our strategy

We're committed to getting residents more involved in decision-making, so everyone's views are carefully considered. This is why we are creating a new Engagement and Consultation Strategy. The strategy will ensure everyone's voice is heard when decisions are made that affect their lives.

Alongside a public survey, we have attended community events and hubs to reach out to people who are less likely to respond to traditional online consultations, as well as targeting key groups, ensuring the strategy reflects the opinions of a broad and diverse cross-section of the borough.

Resident's views will be used to guide our draft of the strategy. They will be able to give their views again in early 2026, before the strategy is finalised.

### Hearing from diverse groups in the borough

We know we haven't always been the best at reaching those affected by our decisions. This is why we are creating a new Engagement and Consultation Strategy.

We know from experience that particular groups are less likely to take a survey we create and share with them and subsequently are under-represented in responses we receive.

In that light, we identified that we needed to speak to six key target groups. We used targeted communication to capture their views. This included hearing from:

- People with disabilities: session with CLASP
- Young people aged between 11 and 18: 272 responses
- People aged between 18 and 40: 51 responses
- People who are financial struggling: 13 responses
- People who are ethnically diverse: session with VINE (Voice of Inclusion and Equality)
- Representatives of businesses, organisations and community groups: session with Wokingham Positive Difference

Although the number of people who we spoke to for some of these groups was low, we believe it's important to single out their responses and as far as possible, amplify their voices. If we placed them within our wider group of 800+ responses, we believe they would, to a large extent, be lost and not properly heard. Below are summaries of what each group said.

## **Hearing from people with learning disabilities – Summary**

People with learning disabilities valued being informed about what is happening in their local area and having clear, easy-to-understand information. They highlighted the importance of being able to get out and about safely, access green spaces and maintain social connections. Transport links and feeling safe in the community were seen as essential for leading a happy and healthy life.

Their preferred communication was face-to-face engagement during CLASP sessions, supported by Easy Read documents and surveys. Many participants said they appreciate having time to discuss and process information and some need support to complete online surveys. While social media and email newsletters were mentioned as useful, not everyone uses these channels regularly, so printed materials and in-person updates remain important.

They usually learn about things happening in the community through CLASP sessions, word of mouth, posters and local newspapers. Social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram were common sources for some, alongside websites and email newsletters. A few also mentioned radio and TV as an information channel.

Participants expressed that closing the feedback loop is very important. They want to know the outcomes of consultations and feel reassured that their views have been considered. Accessibility and clarity were recurring themes, with a strong preference for plain English and avoiding jargon.

## **Hearing from young people aged 11 to 18 – Summary**

Fewer than half of respondents knew that the council engages with residents before making decisions. Most agreed involvement is important, with 40 per cent saying it is 'somewhat important' and 4 per cent saying 'not important'. Less than 20 per cent had previously shared their views with the council.

Those who had engaged gave an average satisfaction rating of 3.5/5. Positive feedback included feeling heard and enjoying group discussion, while others said surveys were quick and easy.

More than 80 per cent prefer to share their views through online surveys, though some favour small group discussions or drop-in sessions. Students also suggested using social media and school talks to reach them. Many young people are unaware of consultations, and some said they lack time or interest in the topics.

The most common themes were the need for better communication and awareness of opportunities, with schools helping to spread the word. Respondents wanted activities to be more engaging and relevant, suggesting games, competitions, prizes and informal formats. They also called for easier and more accessible participation through shorter surveys, clearer questions, online options and opportunities during school hours or in local settings. Several emphasised the importance of genuine involvement, such as having their opinions listened to, influencing decisions and seeing real change. A few asked for clearer explanations of topics, particularly for younger participants.

Young people stressed the need to be listened to, respected and taken seriously, with their views considered equally to adults. They highlighted the importance of patience and open-mindedness when engaging with them. Practical suggestions included using schools as contact points, creating safe spaces or youth clubs, offering quick and incentivised surveys and providing anonymous or online options to ensure comfort and inclusion. Respondents also called for accessible language, avoiding talking down to them and recognising diversity by including all voices, especially those less likely to speak up.

## **Hearing from people aged 18 to 40 – Summary**

Three in five people aged 18 to 40 were aware that the council consults residents and all agree it's important, though 75 per cent had never taken part before. Those who have given an average satisfaction rating of 3.8/5.

Preferred engagement methods include online surveys, drop-in events and public meetings, with some favouring more intimate events like gazebos or focus groups. Individuals also suggested posting surveys and sharing them on social media.

Nearly 60 per cent said lack of awareness is the main barrier to taking part, followed by lack of time and doubts their views will be heard. One person noted the council uses too much jargon.

To improve engagement, respondents want better communication and advance notice, ideally by email, plus regular updates via newsletters or bulletins. Online options are preferred for convenience. For in-person events, flexibility in timing and format is important, with requests for activities outside working hours or over longer periods.

Advertising through social media, leaflets and community spaces was highlighted. Respondents also want feedback on outcomes, simpler surveys and clear information.

In-person engagement continues to be considered important. Several stressed older residents should not be excluded, suggesting physical paperwork alongside digital options.

Incentives and reassurance that views matter were also suggested.

## **Hearing from people who are financially struggling – Summary**

Less than half of respondents were aware that the council engages with residents before making decisions and 92 per cent had never taken part in a consultation. All agreed that involvement is important.

Drop-in events at community centres were the most popular way to share views, followed by public meetings. Only 23 per cent preferred online surveys and one individual suggested direct communication such as text messages.

The majority (84 per cent) said they do not take part because they are unaware consultations are happening. Respondents emphasised the need for better communication and proactive outreach. They also highlighted the importance of child-friendly environments and local venues with parking.

## **Hearing from businesses – Summary**

Businesses unanimously said that being involved in decision-making is very important to them. However, less than half had taken part in a council consultation or engagement on behalf of their business. The majority prefer to have their say by attending focus groups. Online surveys, public meetings and drop-in events were also mentioned as forms of engagement they would like.

When asked what prevents business representatives from taking part in consultations and engagements, lack of time was the main reason. Others highlighted that they were not aware of these opportunities and expressed concern that their views might not be listened to.

Attending events like Wokingham Positive Difference early in the morning was suggested as a way to better interact with the business community, along with invitations to share their views.

Looking to the future, businesses would like to be consulted on issues impacting them, including development, parking, transport, town events and environmental initiatives.

## **Hearing from community groups and organisations – Summary**

Although we aimed to engage with a wide range of groups across Wokingham Borough during this early stage, we were unable to reach many within the community. However, we did successfully engage with the Voluntary Sector Action Group (VSAG) and the Voice of Inclusion and Equality (VINE). Their feedback is summarised below.

### **Voluntary Sector Action Group (VSAG)**

Members emphasised the importance of targeted outreach to engage with key groups. Several participants noted that face-to-face communication is often more effective, while one individual suggested that surveys may feel outdated.

There was a strong view that more resources should be allocated to improving how the council communicates and engages with residents, including consideration of a higher budget. Suggestions included making information available in Easy Read formats and other languages, as well as exploring online tools. One member proposed using alternative feedback methods such as Google or Microsoft Forms.

In terms of groups that require more focused communication, members highlighted the Gypsy/Roma and LGBT communities. There were also calls to ensure engagement reached individuals with visual impairments and those who are deaf.

One participant stressed the need for representative and unbiased surveys. Another noted that while surveys are not referendums, the link between responses and outcomes can sometimes feel unclear.

A concern was raised about engagement fatigue, with the individual warning that repeated consultations risk becoming 'white noise'. They recommended strategic planning for engagement activities, including selecting the right time, identifying stakeholders for each consultation and targeting appropriate groups. Closing the feedback loop was seen as essential to show how contributions have influenced decisions.

It was also suggested that the council check whether similar consultations have recently taken place to avoid duplication.

Members recommended regular communication with the voluntary sector and using its networks to reach key groups during consultations. For example, sharing surveys directly with Age Concern UK could help older people who are not IT literate to participate.

Finally, one member proposed allowing organisational representatives to respond on behalf of their groups, as they often have valuable insider knowledge.

## **Voice of Inclusion and Equality (VINE)**

Members of VINE highlighted the importance of providing paper copies of surveys to ensure they are accessible and inclusive.

They recommended that the council use census data to gain a clear understanding of the borough's population and avoid a scattergun approach.

VINE members also offered to help share surveys, believing that engagement would improve if residents were contacted by trusted sources.

It was suggested that the council increase communication with the resettlement group as a priority.

Finally, members noted the council's consultation newsletter and encouraged sign-up to receive updates on open consultations and surveys.

## **Common themes**

As well as targeting key groups we often don't hear from, we also ran an online survey, with over 800 responses. The analysis of this data can be found below. During the process we were able to find several repeated themes throughout. These were:

**Trust and impact:** People want clear evidence of how their input has been considered and where it has influenced decisions.

**Transparency:** Regular updates and explanations of decisions are essential.

**Early engagement:** Residents want to be involved when their views can make a difference in the decision-making process.

**Communication:** Consultations need better promotion and direct notifications.

**Clear information:** People called for information to be shared in clear language avoiding jargon.

**Inclusivity:** Engagement must reflect those most affected by decisions, not just vocal groups.

**Accessibility:** Barriers for people with disabilities or limited / no digital access must be addressed.

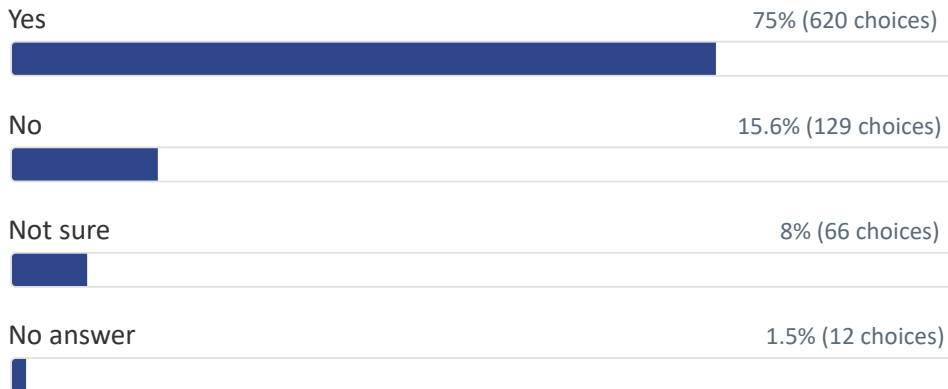
**Quality:** Consultations should be open, unbiased and allow free-form feedback.

**Time:** Residents want short, simple and focused surveys.

# Engagement and Consultation online survey

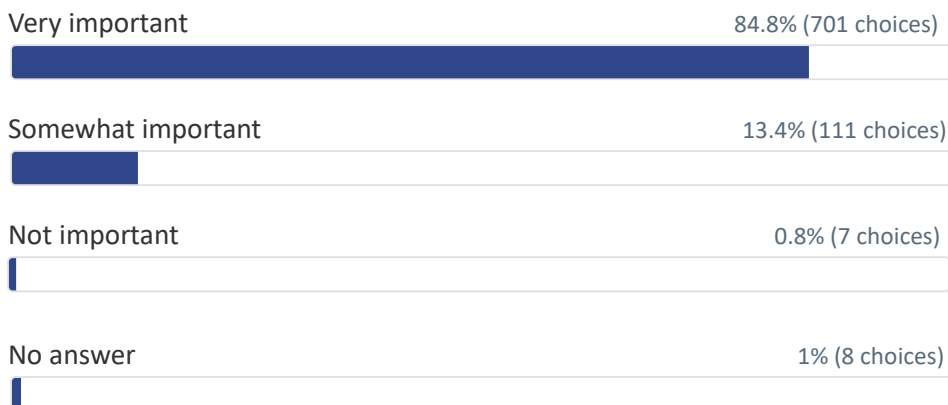
## Question 1

Before today, were you aware that the council consults and engages with residents on decisions?



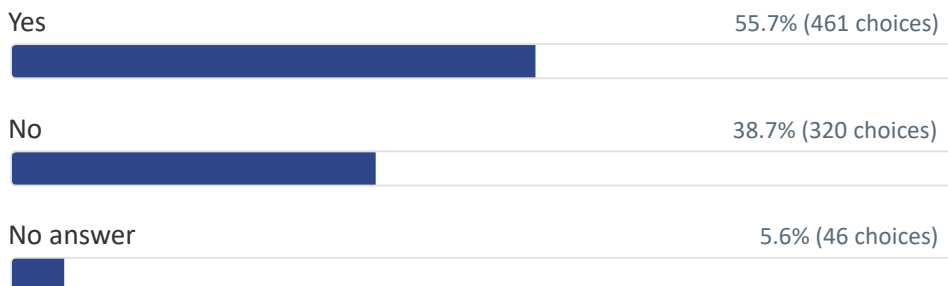
## Question 2

How important is it to you that we involve residents in decision-making?



## Question 3

Have you ever taken part in a council consultation or engagement activity?



## Question 4

**How did you find the experience?**

487/827

297 comments

3 / 5



Survey design was a common concern: questions were often seen as leading, biased or too restrictive, limiting open or dissenting views. Some people requested simpler, shorter surveys and clearer language. A few respondents also highlighted the need for more free text questions to convey their views, while a couple of individuals said the text boxes were poorly formatted.

The process itself was frequently described as cumbersome, with too much information, too many questions and login requirements that deterred participation, especially among less IT-savvy or disabled residents. Technical issues and difficulties accessing surveys were also noted.

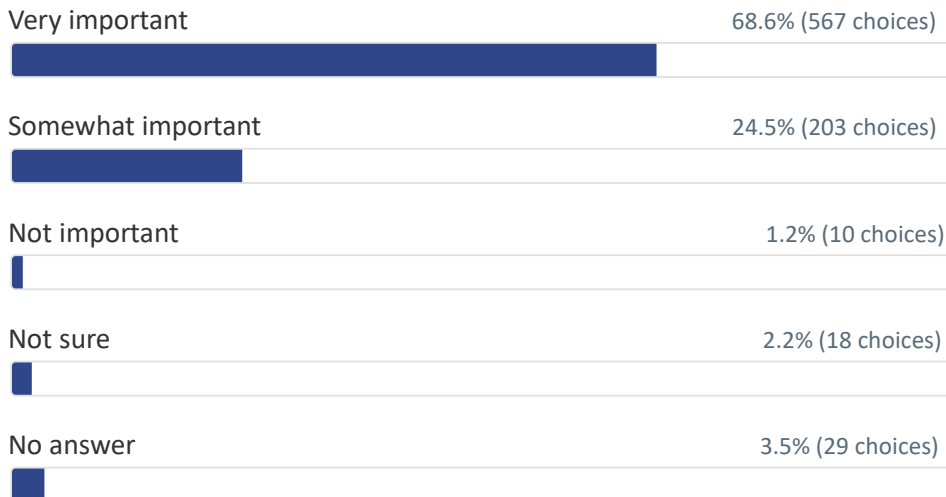
Positive feedback highlighted the simplicity and accessibility of the online format. Many valued the opportunity to express views and feel involved in shaping decisions. Surveys were often described as well-structured, concise and easy to complete, with clear wording and helpful context. Seeing evidence that input influenced outcomes increased trust and engagement.

**Below are the principles we think we should follow when we engage and consult.**

### Question 5

**How important is it that consultation and engagement: Be flexible, proportionate and use a mix of informal and formal opportunities for involvement?**

We know people will engage with us in different ways and on different topics and so will try to find the best way to involve them. We will always target our engagement at those most affected by the issue under discussion.



### Question 6

**Is there anything you'd like to tell us about this proposed principle?**

222/827 responded

Accessibility and inclusivity were key concerns. Respondents said online-only methods and complex forms exclude those without digital skills, including older people. They called for multiple channels to ensure everyone can participate.

Clarity and simplicity were also highlighted. People want plain English, clear definitions and straightforward ways to take part. There were several calls to outline what targeted engagement to those "most affected" meant and how this will be decided.

Views differed on who should be consulted. Some favour focusing on those most affected, while others warn this could exclude important perspectives or give undue weight to vocal minorities. Several suggested all residents should have a say if decisions have wider impacts.

On formal versus informal approaches, some prefer formal processes for accountability, while others believe informal or mixed methods reach a broader cross-section and feel less intimidating.

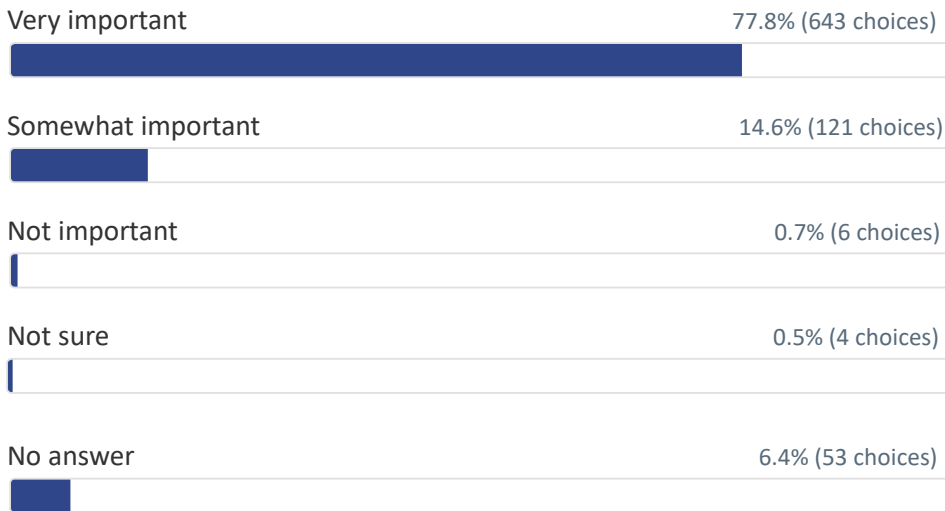
Other points raised:

- Concerns about over-consultation and consultation fatigue.
- Calls for open-ended questions and opportunities for people to use their own words.
- Importance of reaching a representative cross-section, not just the loudest voices.
- Several described the principle as "sensible" or "reasonable", though a minority found terms like "formal and informal" unclear.

## Question 7

### How important is it that consultation and engagement: Take place at appropriate times in decision-making?

We will engage with people when they can have real influence. This may mean engaging informally at the start of decision-making as well as carrying out formal consultation.



## Question 8

### Is there anything you'd like to tell us about this proposed principle?

191/827 responded

Respondents overwhelmingly stressed that consultation and engagement must take place early in the decision-making process, before key decisions are made or plans are finalised. Early engagement allows residents time to consider proposals and provide meaningful feedback that can shape outcomes. Late consultations were widely criticised as tick box exercises.

Practical benefits of early engagement were noted, including avoiding costly rework and delays. Respondents also called for clear, ongoing communication—informing residents at the earliest opportunity and again when consultations open—along with publishing results and explaining how feedback influenced decisions.

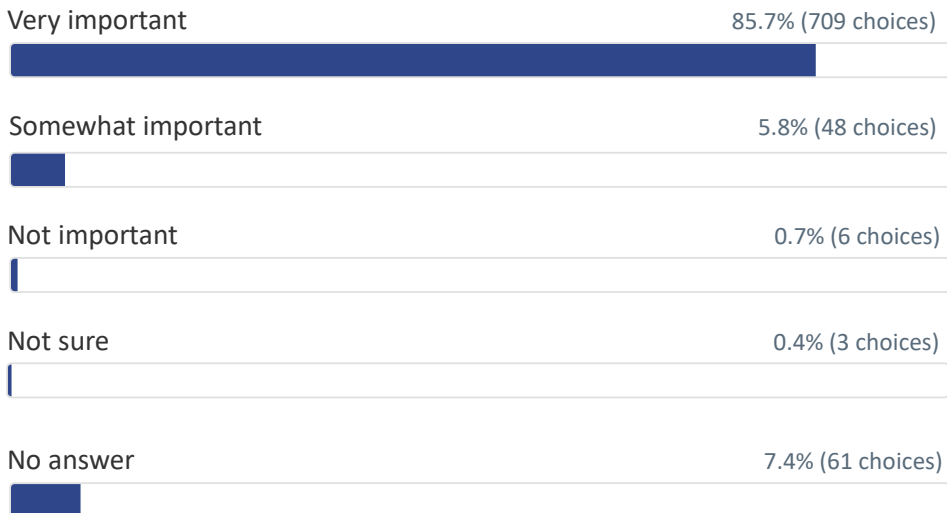
Accessibility was another major theme. People want consultations scheduled outside standard working hours and not during holiday periods, with clear, simple information provided well in advance. Inclusivity was highlighted, ensuring engagement reaches those without IT access and considers diverse needs.

A few respondents questioned how “appropriate timing” is defined and who decides it, suggesting the need for clearer criteria and transparency.

## Question 9

### How important is it that consultation and engagement: Be honest and accessible with enough information provided for residents to input?

We will make sure all communities are supported and encouraged to participate effectively. This will include providing enough information for them to understand issues and options available.



## Question 10

### Is there anything you'd like to tell us about this proposed principle?

155/827 responded

Respondents emphasised the need for honesty, transparency and full, accurate information in consultations. Many expressed scepticisms about whether these principles are upheld, citing past experiences of incomplete or misleading information. Several noted that without full disclosure, consultation feels meaningless.

There was a clear call for all relevant data to be made public, not just council summaries and for clear, factual and accessible information so residents can make informed contributions. Some wanted clarity on what can and cannot be influenced and better communication of reasons behind decisions, especially when changes are unpopular.

Clarity and accessibility were recurring themes. Respondents asked for information in plain English, avoiding jargon and overly complex language, while cautioning against oversimplification. They wanted content available in multiple formats and channels, not just digital, to ensure inclusivity for all residents.

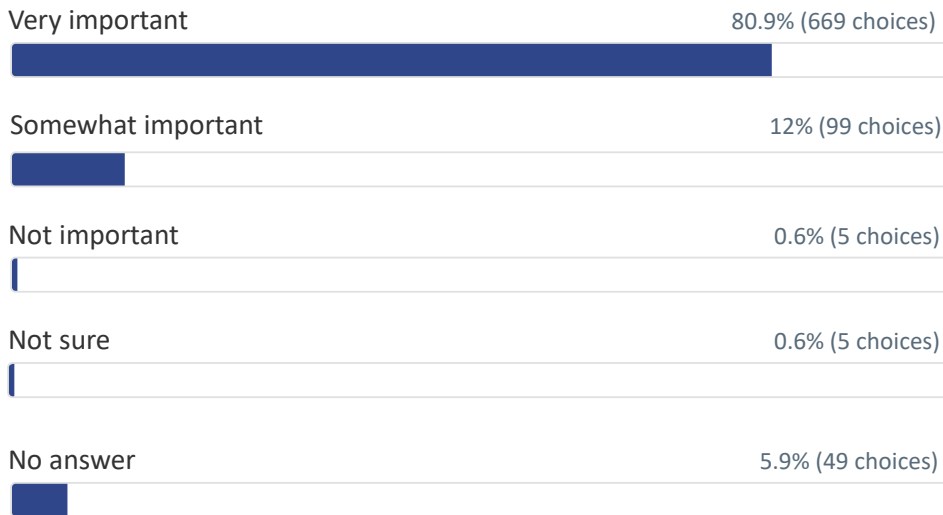
Frustration was expressed with lengthy, poorly written reports and hard-to-navigate websites. Many suggested layered information—simple summaries with links to more detail—and genuine opportunities to discuss options rather than being informed after decisions are made. There were concerns that current engagement methods exclude some groups.

They also wanted timely engagement and more notice of consultations. Some stressed the need to consider local concerns and community impact and for the council to be clear about constraints such as budget or policy.

## Question 11

### How important is it that consultation and engagement: Be easy to understand and take part in?

We will use simple, plain English and provide alternative versions as necessary. Our primary method of engagement and consultation will be online but will use appropriate alternative methods to reach those unable or unwilling to access digital engagement.



## Question 12

### Is there anything you'd like to tell us about this proposed principle?

161/827 responded

Respondents emphasised the need for simplicity and clarity in engagement materials. The most common themes were calls for plain English, avoiding jargon and making information easy to understand and digest. Many noted that these are significant barriers to participation and can discourage valuable feedback. Several respondents suggested using summaries, bullet points, diagrams, maps and multimedia explanations to make complex topics more accessible. There were also requests for jargon busters or glossaries where technical terms are unavoidable.

A few respondents cautioned against oversimplification, noting that some topics are inherently complex and require detail for informed responses. However, the consensus was that initial engagement should be as straightforward as possible, with options to access more detail if desired.

Other barriers mentioned included the need to log in to multiple systems and the use of language that does not reflect how residents actually talk about issues.

Language was divisive: some advocated for English-only engagement, while others stressed the importance of providing materials in multiple languages and using interpreters to support multicultural communities. There were also comments about not wasting resources on translation, with the suggestion that people can use online tools if needed.

Many respondents highlighted that relying solely on digital engagement excludes significant groups, particularly older residents, those without internet access and people who are not computer literate. There was a strong call for multiple communication channels, including print versions, letters, phone-in options and face-to-face meetings or presentations in community venues.

Accessibility was raised by several individuals, with requests for easy-read formats, screen reader compatibility, audio facilities and support for those with disabilities.

Concerns were raised about the complexity and discoverability of online platforms, with calls for simpler processes and proactive outreach rather than expecting residents to find information themselves. Some respondents suggested using community partners (such as schools, churches and libraries) to reach wider audiences and recommended varying engagement activities and times to suit different needs.

## Question 13

### How important is it that consultation and engagement: Be meaningful with findings used in decision-making and implementation?

We will use the findings from engagement and consultation in our decision-making, strategy production and service delivery.



## Question 14

### Is there anything you'd like to tell us about this proposed principle?

172/827 responded

A strong theme across responses is a lack of trust that public input is genuinely considered or has any real impact on decisions. Many feel engagement is often window-dressing and that feedback is only valued if it supports pre-existing proposals. When people's responses are ignored, it erodes trust, leads to cynicism, disengagement and discourages future participation.

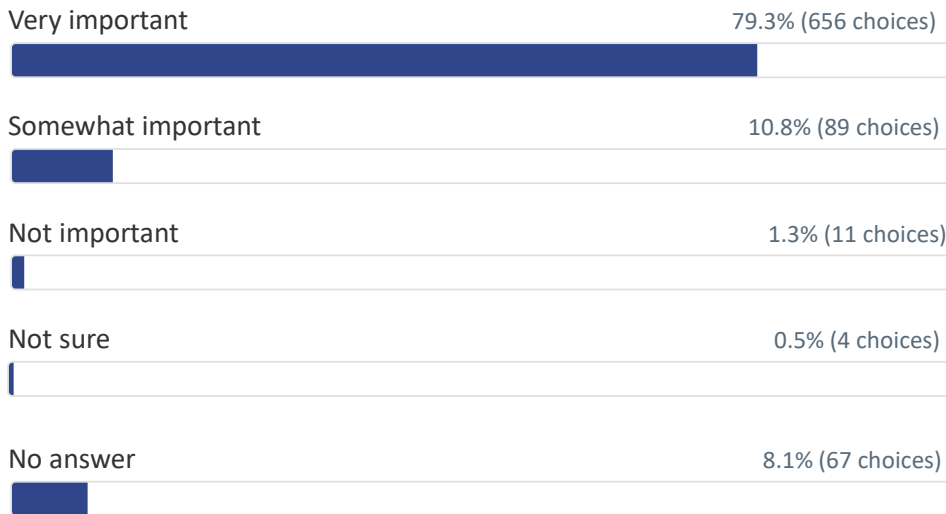
Transparency and clear communication are seen as essential. Respondents want to see how their feedback has influenced decisions, with explanations provided when suggestions are not adopted. Calls for open reporting, publishing minutes and making findings public were frequent, with some suggesting direct feedback to participants rather than only general publication. Honesty and openness were strongly emphasised, with suggestions that these principles should be stated explicitly rather than using vague terms like "meaningful".

There were requests for clear roadmaps, explanations of decision factors and clarity on how responses are processed. Other points included the need for evidence-based decision making using both quantitative and qualitative data and for showing how engagement influenced outcomes.

## Question 15

### How important is it that consultation and engagement: Conclude with fair and accessible feedback?

Crucially, we are committed to using residents' feedback to inform decisions. We will publish the findings and provide clear, fair and accessible updates on how that feedback has been used.



## Question 16

### Is there anything you'd like to tell us about this proposed principle?

151/827 responded

Respondents strongly emphasised the need for transparent, honest and clear communication following consultations. Many expressed frustration at the lack of visible feedback or updates, stating they rarely see results or understand how their input influenced outcomes. There is a clear call for regular updates, summaries of feedback and explanations of why decisions were made, particularly when proposals are approved or rejected. Respondents want evidence that their views matter, with several suggesting a “you said, we did” style summary and publication of consultation results alongside decisions.

Feedback should be accessible, jargon-free and available through channels residents can easily find, such as direct emails, public forums and notice boards in libraries or schools. Accessibility was a recurring theme, with calls to ensure participation and feedback are open to everyone, including those with health problems or limited digital access.

Several requested clear communication of the rationale behind decisions, especially when resident views differ. There were also calls for statistical breakdowns of engagement, including numbers and demographics, to demonstrate representativeness.

Respondents stressed that feedback should be honest, objective and show how all views— including negative ones and alternatives—have been considered. Some highlighted the importance of treating all input as valuable and providing individual responses where possible. Others noted that without clear, timely feedback, people are less likely to engage in future consultations. Suggestions included interim updates if final feedback will take time.

## Question 17

Now that you've gone through the principles individually, we'd like to know what you think of them overall.

### **Do you have any suggestions for improving these principles? Have we missed anything?**

262/827 responded

Most respondents agreed that the principles are appropriate, sensible, comprehensive and democratic.

There was a strong call for authenticity, transparency and honesty throughout the process. Respondents want clear communication about how feedback is used, the rationale behind decisions and any constraints such as legal or financial limitations. Suggestions included:

- Providing feedback to participants on how input was used and the outcomes of consultations
- Formal processes for informing residents, such as a register of consultations, opt-in updates and contact with affected communities
- Sharing raw consultation data, timelines and milestones

Many stressed the need for visible follow-through: evidence that principles are implemented and that feedback leads to tangible changes or at least clear explanations when it does not.

Accountability was also highlighted, with calls for councillors and officers to be held responsible for following the principles.

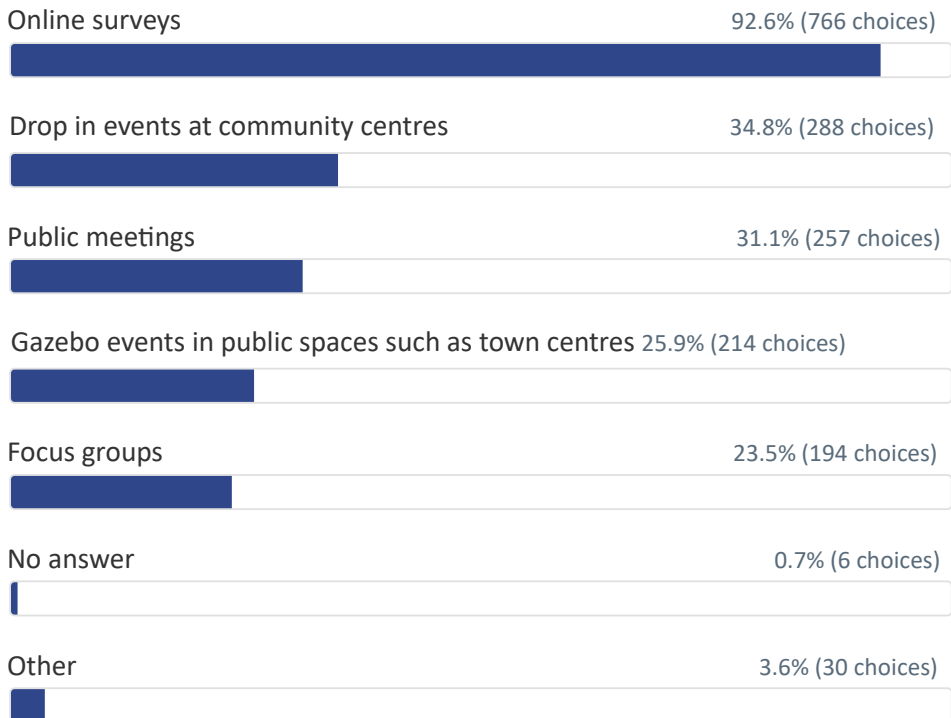
They emphasised the importance of simplicity, clarity and brevity to prevent consultation fatigue, urging the council to consult only when necessary and keep processes timely so decision-making is not delayed.

Inclusivity and accessibility were recurring concerns. Current methods (mainly online surveys and emails) were seen as excluding those without internet access, with disabilities or outside community groups. Suggestions included:

- Using post, leaflets and face-to-face meetings
- Working with a wider range of community partners
- Reaching underrepresented groups and the “silent majority”
- Involving affected groups in designing consultations

## Question 18

### What types of engagement do you prefer? Select all that apply

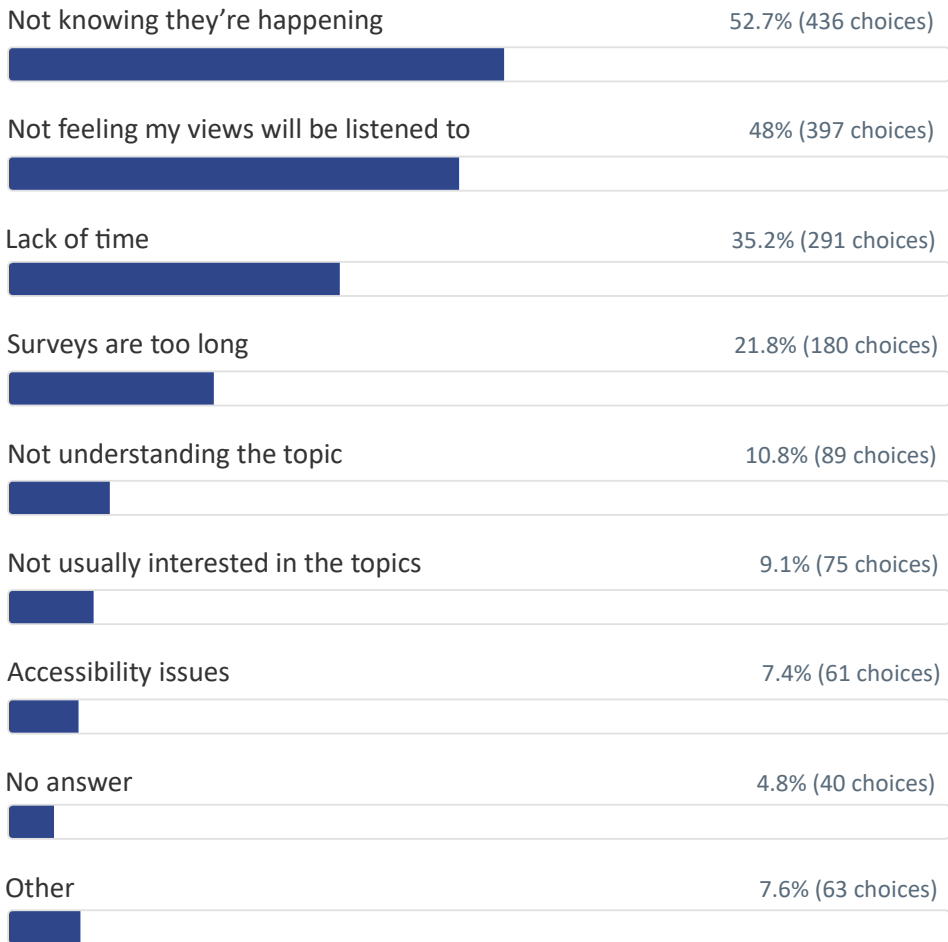


Of those who responded 'other' many said they wanted more personal and accessible engagement methods. Common suggestions included:

- Direct contact and personal interaction: Face-to-face meetings, door-to-door visits and opportunities to speak directly with council officers.
- Printed and postal communication: Leaflets through doors, letters and paper surveys for those without internet access.
- Digital options: Online meetings via Zoom or Teams, online feedback forms and social media updates. Some suggested WhatsApp channels or forums for open discussion.
- Events and local presence: Holding engagement sessions in villages and smaller communities and using "Planning for Real" exercises with video recordings for wider access.
- Better use of existing channels: More effective use of the council's news magazine to highlight upcoming issues.
- Flexible timing: Meetings scheduled outside working hours to allow broader participation.
- Inclusive approaches: Telephone surveys, email responses and statistically representative panels to ensure diverse voices are heard.

## Question 19

### What stops you from taking part in consultations or engagement activities?



Of those who responded 'other' many said they feel consultations make little or no difference, with some describing them as a tick box exercise or surveys being designed to get certain answers. A lack of trust and scepticism about whether feedback influences decisions was a recurring theme.

Others mentioned practical barriers such as work or family commitments, age, health issues and difficulty attending meetings due to timing, travel or accessibility. Several said consultations are often not relevant to their area, or that the process feels lengthy, technical or confusing. Some highlighted problems with online systems, such as having to register, limited question options and an assumption that everyone can engage digitally. A few expressed discomfort with large meetings, preferring more personal approaches or long-term focus groups. There were also concerns about poor advertising of events and lack of feedback.

## Question 20

### What would make it easier for you to take part in future engagement activities?

279/827 responded

Respondents consistently called for better communication and publicity about engagement activities. Many said they often do not know when consultations or events are happening and want clear, advance notice with enough time to prepare. Wider advertising through multiple channels was strongly recommended. People also want simple, jargon-free information, easy access to supporting details and multiple ways to participate. Feeling listened to and seeing evidence that feedback is considered were also important.

Online engagement is the preferred method, with strong support for email notifications and hybrid options that allow both online and in-person participation. In-person events should be local, accessible and scheduled outside standard working hours. Respondents also suggested paper or telephone surveys for those less comfortable online.

Online participation is valued but should not be the only option. Ease of use matters, with requests for user-friendly forms, clear navigation and visible survey length. Other suggestions included having council officers present at events.

Surveys should be short, simple and focused—with a couple of people saying they would ideally taking 5–15 minutes. Respondents dislike lengthy, jargon-heavy documents and want clear summaries, upfront clarity about time required and better explanations of proposals.

Relevance is key. People are more likely to engage if topics directly affect them and suggested limiting consultations to significant issues. Many want to specify areas of interest to receive only relevant updates.

Finally, removing the need to log in or create an account would make participation easier and personal questions should be optional.

## Question 21

### Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about how you think we should engage with residents and others?

141/827 responded

Many respondents feel strongly that engagement must be more inclusive, accessible and genuinely acted upon. There are calls for clear, honest communication about why decisions are made, how feedback is used and for regular updates and transparent follow-ups.

A major theme is the need to reach beyond the “usual suspects” and ensure engagement is representative of the whole community. Suggestions include providing paper copies, sending emails, using local newspapers, visiting people, for example in care homes, and holding face-to-face events in accessible locations.

There is a clear call for better targeting of communications—residents want to hear about issues relevant to their area or demographic, not be overwhelmed with irrelevant information. Several respondents also highlight the importance of using a mix of engagement methods to suit different topics and audiences.

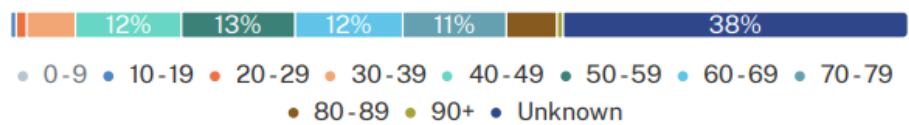
Many respondents are critical of the design and accessibility of current surveys, finding them too long, complicated, or requiring account creation. There are also concerns about consultation fatigue and the need to strike a balance between too much and too little engagement.

There were also demands for the council to admit when things go wrong or when decisions are unpopular.

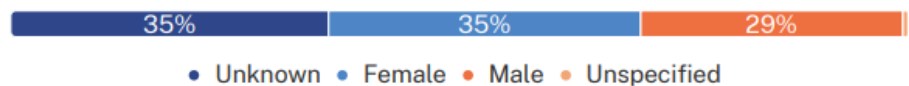
Some also want more accountability from councillors and local representatives.

## Demographics

### Age



### Gender



### Place of residence

