

# ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION STRATEGY 2026 - 2031

## INTRODUCTION

The decisions we make shape the future of Wokingham Borough – and they should be shaped by the people who live, study and work here. Our purpose is simple: to put the community at the heart of decision-making.

This strategy sets out how we will improve the way we engage and consult. We want every voice to be heard, every community to feel included and every decision to reflect the needs and aspirations of those it affects. That means listening more, being transparent about how feedback influences outcomes and making it easier for everyone to take part.

We know we have work to do, but we are ambitious and committed. By working with our partners and communities, we will build trust, improve accessibility and create a culture where engagement is not a one-off event, but a shared journey.

### **Susan Parsonage**

Chief Executive

### **Stephen Conway**

Leader of the Council

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*We want to put the community  
at the heart of decision-making.*

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## WHERE WE ARE NOW



During 2025, we took significant steps to improve how we engage, and many people noticed this progress. In a survey on how residents would like us to engage, there was overwhelming support for the principles we consulted on (which are set out below). This gives us confidence we're moving in the right direction. Now we need to put those principles into action consistently.

We've established a dedicated Engagement and Consultation Team to ensure the voices we gather reflect the full diversity of our borough. A new Community Panel, which will be a borough-wide representative group of residents, is being created to bring residents into the early stages of decision-making, alongside focus groups and targeted outreach to underrepresented communities.

In 2024, we launched a consultation newsletter that now reaches over 23,000 people every two weeks, sharing all current surveys and consultations. We also ran an online survey with more than 1,000 responses, which highlighted both challenges and opportunities.

What we heard:

- **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.

This feedback is shaping our next steps as we build a more transparent, inclusive and responsive approach to engagement.

## **RESIDENT SATISFACTION SURVEY**

In 2025, to find out how satisfied residents are with Wokingham Borough as a place to live and us as their local council, we commissioned an independent company to survey 1,100 randomly selected residents. The survey followed Local Government Association (LGA) standards to compare against other local authorities.

We will repeat this survey every two years, to track resident views.

## THE TOOLS WE WILL USE

The tools we will use to ensure we are following best practice and the principles set out in this strategy include our online engagement hub and an officer engagement board.

### **ENGAGE WOKINGHAM BOROUGH**

Engage Wokingham Borough is the council's online engagement hub. It will host all engagement and consultation activities, including those that are targeted at specific residents. This means everything is visible in one place. Residents can easily find out how to get involved and influence decisions.

Some engagement activities will be led by the central Engagement and Consultation team. Others will be managed by service areas, building on strong relationships with their residents. Examples include Social Care Future, Youth Council, Voluntary Sector Action Group, Communities Vision Steering Group and Housing Engagement forums.

Details on how to join these service-led activities will be published on Engage, giving residents one place to find all opportunities to get involved and influence decisions.

### **OFFICER ENGAGEMENT BOARD**

We will establish an officer engagement board. This group will make sure that all services involve residents and community stakeholders in shaping strategies, major decisions and designing services. The board will oversee engagement plans, promote consistent and inclusive approaches, support collaboration with community groups and share best practice.

## OUR ENGAGEMENT METHODS



We will use a range of methods depending on the topic and the level of engagement needed. While online surveys are popular, we know they are not enough on their own. We will combine online and in-person methods to make engagement accessible and meaningful, meeting people where they are while using resources effectively.

## Our methods will include:

- Online and paper surveys
- Drop-in events at community centres and libraries
- Public meetings
- Gazebo events in public spaces such as town centres
- Focus groups
- Community Panel (see below)
- Outreach to seldom heard communities and groups
- Sessions with groups and organisations representing people with specific interests or needs

We will continue to explore new ways of engaging with residents, balancing accessibility with available resources.

Consultation and engagement are not the only ways we put communities at the heart of our decision making. We also collaborate with residents in co-production in services across the council, where appropriate.

### *Surveys and consultations are to inform decisions*

Surveys and consultations are tools to gather feedback, opinions and ideas from residents and other stakeholders. Their purpose is to inform decision-making, not to determine outcomes by majority rule. Unlike votes or referendums, they:

- Do not have binding power – responses help shape decisions but do not directly decide them.
- Seek a range of views – they aim to understand perspectives, priorities and impacts rather than count “for” or “against”.
- Consider wider factors – final decisions also take into account legal duties, budgets, equality impacts and strategic objectives.

Councillors are democratically accountable for decision making, as well as being accountable through elections.

In short, consultations are about listening and learning, not voting.



## COMMUNITY PANEL

The Wokingham Borough Community Panel gives its members a regular opportunity to share their views on issues that matter. Its purpose is to provide a representative pool of local people who can help shape services and priorities.

Launched in Autumn 2025, the panel will grow to around 1,100 residents over the next few years. Members will take part in surveys, focus groups and online discussions throughout the year, helping us make informed decisions.

### *Panel recruitment*

To keep the panel representative of the borough, we are recruiting residents through random selection rather than open sign-up.

While this may be frustrating for some, it ensures fairness and is in line with best practice from other councils. The panel does not replace full public consultations on major decisions—everyone will still have the chance to share their views and input into decisions.

### *Panel activities*

Panel members will be invited to take part in surveys and be asked to join focus groups and online discussions. They may also be asked to take part in user testing of our website and customer services.

## WHAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE

### Community at the heart of our decision-making



This strategy sets out how we will work closely with residents and communities to shape decisions that truly matter. It provides a clear framework for engagement. This helps us understand local needs and ensures everyone has a genuine voice in shaping the future of Wokingham Borough.

We are committed to putting residents at the heart of decision-making so that, together, we can create a thriving Wokingham Borough for current and future generations.

Our vision is simple: to make Wokingham Borough a place where everyone can thrive by ensuring residents are central to every major decision.

## THE PRINCIPLES WE WILL USE TO ENGAGE AND CONSULT

We will use an Officer Engagement Board to quality control planned consultation and engagement, which will help us meet all of the principles below.

### **1. We will 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.

#### **To meet this principle, we will:**

- Carry out Equalities Impact Assessments (EqIA) at the start of decision-making and strategy development and use them to plan appropriate consultation and engagement
- Use a range of consultation and engagement techniques to target different audiences
- Categorise consultation and engagement projects to ensure appropriate resource

#### **What success will look like:**

- ✓ All services are producing EqIA at the start of decision-making processes, and they are being used to plan consultation and engagement
- ✓ All major consultation and engagement plans are being scrutinised and approved by the Officer Engagement Board

### **2. We will consult and engage 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.

#### **To meet this principle, we will:**

- Seek the community's input only when it can have influence
- Use both informal engagement and formal consultation to provide appropriate opportunities to get involved

#### **What success will look like:**

- ✓ Residents' trust that they can influence decisions is increasing
- ✓ Average levels of participation in consultation and engagement are increasing

### **3. We will provide the right information and time for meaningful input**

We will make sure all communities can participate in consultation and engagement in meaningful ways. This will include providing enough information and time for them to understand issues and options available.

#### **To meet this principle, we will:**

- Explain the background to issues being consulted and engaged on, including financial implications, opportunities and constraints.
- Be clear on what can and cannot be influenced when we consult and engage
- Provide the right level of details to allow informed participation
- Allow enough time for people to consider and respond during consultation and engagement

#### **What success will look like:**

- ✓ Consultation responses demonstrate clear understanding of issues
- ✓ Residents are reporting they find consultation and engagement clear

### **4. Our consultation and engagement will 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 we will use appropriate alternative methods to reach those unable or unwilling to access digital engagement.

#### **To meet this principle, we will:**

- Present consultation and engagement in clear and simple ways that are easily accessible
- Promote involvement opportunities widely, including to groups and organisations specifically affected
- Provide alternative formats whenever appropriate
- Define what a valid and representative response rate would be at the start of consultation and engagement processes

#### **What success will look like:**

- ✓ We set clear benchmarks for valid, representative response rates on every consultation and engagement project – and consistently achieve or exceed those targets

## **5. Our consultation and engagement will 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. We will also publish the findings and details on how they have been used.

### **To meet this principle, we will:**

- Publish summaries from all consultation and engagement activities and sign-post residents to the summaries via our consultation newsletter
- Demonstrate in public reports and agendas how consultation and engagement findings have been considered in decision-making
- Produce an annual report summarising consultation and engagement activity

### **What success will look like:**

- ✓ Decisions and strategies are demonstrably being influenced by engagement and consultation
- ✓ Public feedback (from Community Panel and Satisfaction Surveys) shows people believe consultation and engagement influences decision-making

## **6. Our consultation and engagement will be strategic and coordinated**

We will plan consultation and engagement to avoid duplication, provide value for money and share data effectively across council teams.

### **To meet this principle, we will:**

- Maintain a forward plan of major consultation and engagements
- Use the Officer Engagement Board to share best practice and findings across the council

### **What success will look like:**

- ✓ The council will have a forward plan of consultations and engagement projects
- ✓ Consultation and engagement projects are planned well in advance to avoid duplication and ensure adequate time
- ✓ Teams are sharing information gathered from consultation and engagement

## MEASURING PROGRESS

To ensure this strategy delivers real change, we will track progress using clear, measurable indicators. These measures focus on both the quality and impact of our engagement and consultation activities:

- Quantitative reviews – Regular checks (biannual or annual) on participation levels, Equality Impact Assessments and whether projects meet targets for valid and representative responses.
- Resident Satisfaction Survey – A biennial (every two years) survey to understand trust in our engagement processes and whether residents believe their input influences decisions.
- Ongoing monitoring – Continuous review of feedback, including complaints about the quality of information, so we can respond quickly to issues.
- Representation and inclusivity – Assessing whether engagement plans are informed by Equality Impact Assessments and whether responses reflect the diversity of our borough.

These measures will help us stay focused, identify areas for improvement and ensure that residents' voices genuinely shape decisions.

## MEASURING PROGRESS



**PARTICIPATION  
LEVELS**



**USE OF EQUALITY  
IMPACT  
ASSESSMENETS**



**RESIDENT TRUST  
IN CONSULTATIONS**



**CLARITY OF  
INFORMATION**



**WHETHER PROJECTS REACH REPRESENTATIVE RESPONSE TARGETS**

Measurement	Priorities assessed	How we will measure	Responsibility
<b>Percentage of consultation and engagement plans informed by EqIA</b>	1	Quantitative Six monthly review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heads of Service</li> <li>• Communications, Engagement and Marketing team</li> </ul>
<b>Percentage of people who trust that consultation and engagement can influence decisions</b>	1, 2, 5	Resident Satisfaction Survey Every two years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Executive Directors</li> <li>• Service Directors</li> <li>• Communications, Engagement and Marketing team</li> </ul>
<b>Average levels of community involvement</b>	2, 3, 4	Quantitative Annual review to allow for seasonal variations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communications, Engagement and Marketing team</li> </ul>
<b>Percentage of respondents unhappy about quality of information</b>	3	Quantitative Ongoing review to allow swift reaction to issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communications, Engagement and Marketing team</li> <li>• Heads of Service</li> </ul>
<b>Percentage of major consultation and engagement projects meeting targets for valid and representative responses</b>	1, 3, 4, 6	Quantitative Six monthly review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communications, Engagement and Marketing team</li> </ul>

## ACTION PLAN



Delivering meaningful engagement isn't just about listening – it's also about hearing from the right people and acting on what we hear. This action plan sets out the practical steps we'll take to make engagement and consultation more consistent, transparent and effective.

Every consultation will start with a clear engagement plan, setting out who we need to reach, how we'll measure success and the targets we aim to achieve. Targets will vary depending on the topic – for example, borough-wide changes like waste collections will require higher response rates than changes to a single library. All plans will include success measures so we can track progress.



To monitor our progress, we will produce consultation reports for every major project. These will show:



- Survey results and response rates
- How the consultation was promoted
- Whether targets were met
- How representative the responses were compared to the intended audience

Awareness is key. Our consultation newsletter already reaches over 23,000 subscribers. Engagement plans will detail promotion methods, and reports will show how effective these were.



Finally, these reports will support better decision-making by giving clear insight into resident views, helping us design services that reflect the needs of our communities.

Action	When	Responsibility
<p><b>Create a Consultation Protocol</b> An approach that sets out how the engagement and consultation team will manage consultations.</p>	February 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communications, Engagement and Marketing team</li> </ul>
<p><b>Create a Consultation Initiation Form</b> <b>Create a Consultation Agreement</b></p>	February 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communications, Engagement and Marketing team</li> </ul>
<p><b>Promote the approved Engagement and Consultation Strategy across the council</b></p>	April to August 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communications, Engagement and Marketing team</li> </ul>
<p><b>Establish an Officer Engagement Board</b></p>	February 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communications, Engagement and Marketing team</li> </ul>
<p><b>Percentage of major consultation and engagement projects meeting targets for valid and representative responses</b></p>	October 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communications, Engagement and Marketing team</li> </ul>