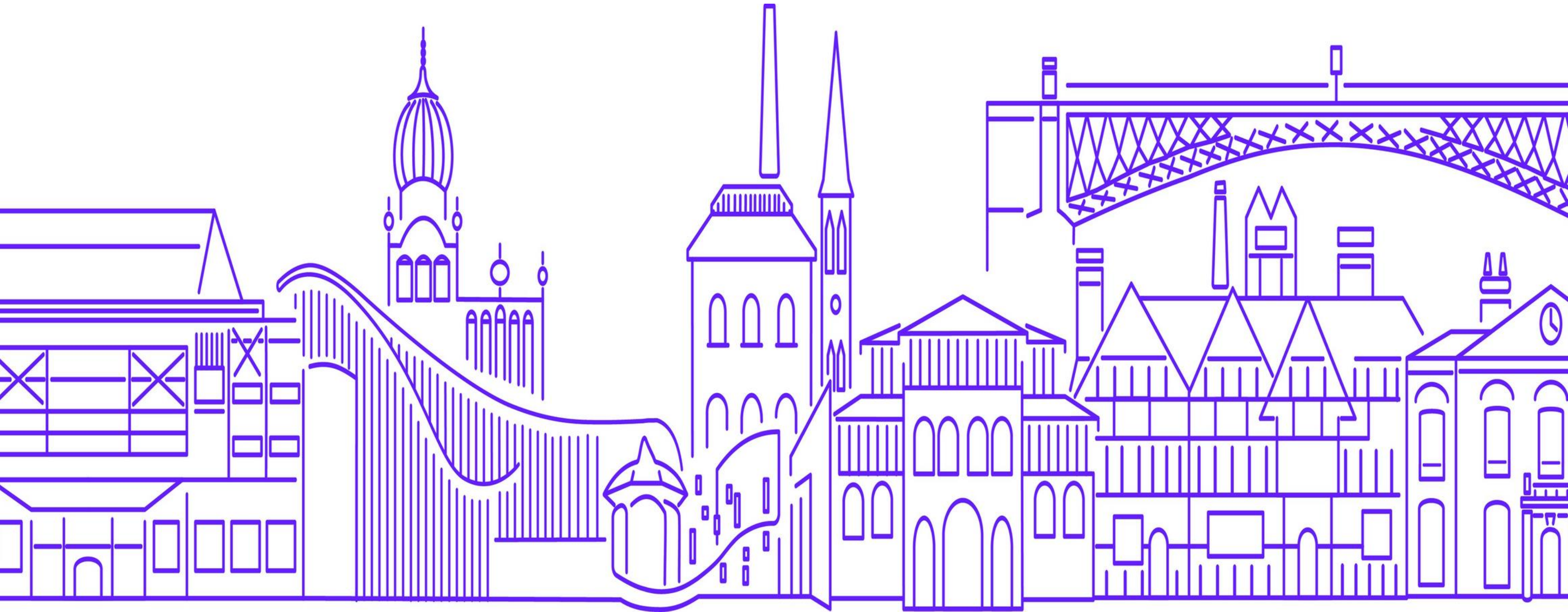


Corporate Consultation & Engagement Principles and Standards

Sandwell Council



"Consultation is any activity that gives local people a voice and an opportunity to influence important decisions. It involves listening to and learning from local people before decisions are made or priorities are set"

Local Government Association

Introduction

We are committed to creating an open and accessible local government in Sandwell.

Local people expect and deserve good quality services and decisions – consultation can help us to:

- achieve better services that give users what they want and expect;
- prioritise services and make better use of limited resources;
- improve service take up
- improve satisfaction measured over time;
- ensure that potential problems over changes are identified;
- foster a working partnership between service users and the Council, so that they
- understand any problems involved and how they can help;

Ref: Government Consultation principles GOV.UK

Sandwell Council Consultation Framework

We understand that every project is different, and any consultation may be a part of a larger discussion using co-design or co-production:-

- All services should consult on relevant issues that affect stakeholders.
- This is to enable the Council to undertake a strategic approach to consultation, this framework ensures consultation programs are coordinated to make the best use of resources and the public's capacity for consultation.
- All consultation undertaken by the Council should be recorded on the Sandwell Consultation Hub - the Council's online consultation platform (<https://consultationhub.sandwell.gov.uk/>) unless there is a statutory requirement for consultation to be undertaken in a different way.
- For training on the use of the consultation hub email consultationhub@sandwell.gov.uk

Our Consultation Principles



Consultation lies at the heart of effective public policy development and service to the public. It should be a first thought and not an afterthought.

Consultation should never be used to communicate decisions already taken, and the outcome of consultation should never be pre-determined.

Consultation should be inclusive. Whenever possible, it should involve all parties/groups, including our children and young people, who can contribute to or are affected by the outcome of the consultation.

Consultation Standards

Make sure the consultation is necessary:

Before starting any consultation exercise, it is vital to make sure that it is necessary. Make sure that you check with Sandwell Consultation Hub – the council’s online consultation platform and with colleagues across Sandwell Council to ensure that the information you need isn’t already available.

Making sure your activity is necessary and valuable will also help to reduce consultation fatigue and encourage residents to engage with the process.

Set clear objectives:

Be clear about what you are trying to achieve. What do you want to find out? What information is already available (check the council’s consultation information on Sandwell Consultation Hub and national/regional data). Make sure that the process is transparent and has integrity and ensure the process is tailored to the circumstances.

Differentiate between consultation and feedback

Are you consulting on the site of new play facilities to inform proposals or are you seeking feedback on how something has gone? For example, have residents seen an improvement in street cleanliness following implementation of a new cleaning cycle?

For more examples and consultation tips visit our intranet resource page:
https://intranet.sandwell.gov.uk/info/20167/chief_executive/3763/sandwell_consultation_hub

Co-ordinate the exercise:

Work in a joined-up way within the council to avoid duplication and overlapping activities. Gain the necessary approvals from senior management, cabinet member (if needed) and relevant boards.

Document the costs:

Anticipate how much the consultation will cost, how much capacity is needed, and the resources needed to implement any changes following the outcomes of the exercise.

Allow sufficient time:

Allow adequate time for consultees to respond and for their views to be fully considered before any action or decision is made, Government guidelines on consultation suggest a consultation should be live for a minimum of six weeks.

Consultation should be conducted at the formative stage and beginning of the process.

Select & Recruit Participants:

Identify the people or groups who are likely to be affected by, or have an interest in, the focus of the consultation, remembering that the views of children and young people should be considered too. They will need to know what the consultation is about, what is being asked of them and the potential outcomes.

Where necessary in large scale general quantitative surveys you may wish to ensure that the respondents reflect the demographic make-up of Sandwell. More qualitative exercises, less so.

Make sure you reach out to those who would otherwise not get a voice – go beyond those who may be easy to reach.

The Sandwell Compact states that the council will work with the VCS to develop policies and design services from the earliest stages of development, ensuring those likely to have a view are involved from the beginning. There is also specific advice on engaging with children and young people in the CYP Engagement Strategy <https://www.justyouth.org.uk/sandwell-activities/children-and-young-people-engagement-strategy/>

Make sure the process involves the right number and types of people. Participants in the consultation exercise should have clear mandates and influence but not control over the outcome. Some participants may not have the resources or expertise required to participate, so financial assistance or other support may be needed for their representation to be assured.

Consulting with Hard to Reach Groups:

You must consider our [Public Sector Equality Duty](#) when engaging with our hard-to-reach groups, these are usually people with [protected characteristics](#). Although there is no specific requirement in the Public Sector Equality Duty to engage with those possessing protected characteristics, we do have to demonstrate that there is an adequate evidence-base for our [decision-making](#) and we have given 'due regard' to the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Lack of, or inadequate, consultation from an equalities perspective has been a feature of successful legal challenges relating to public sector decisions.

Hard-to-reach groups tend to be those that are underrepresented, that use public services but encounter barriers when engaging in public discussion, so their needs are not heard or considered. They are often minority groups who find it harder to access services and for whom services may not be suitable, such as people with disabilities, people from non-white ethnic backgrounds, the elderly, and those on lower incomes. As well as 'traditional' under-represented groups, gaps have widened further because of the digital divide.

Select an appropriate research method:

Choose the most appropriate way to consult depending on the type of questions you want answered – and the subject matter at hand.

Methods of consultation can include: quantitative surveys either online, face to face, telephone or postal (see intranet resource - Research Methodology Technical Note on Citizenspace); focus groups; public meetings; citizen's panels; individual interviews; workshops; user groups; drop-in sessions. It can include a mixture of methods depending on the circumstances.

Promote the exercise:

Advise the Communications Team of your exercise in good time, communications to promote your activity will need to be planned to increase awareness of the consultation. To request support from communications email: Press_Office@sandwell.gov.uk

Respect:

Make sure the process treats participants with respect.

Gather and input data:

Record the views of participants in a transparent and accessible way. This may be easier for text-based methods such as surveys, than face-to-face methods, for instance.

Monitor the responses:

Keep track of the number of responses you receive so action can be taken to improve response rates if necessary. Check the responses being submitted to get an indication of the issues arising.

Analyse the results:

Consider what story the data are telling and what this means in terms of the questions asked.

Calculate how many people gave certain answers and look for any variations. You should also seek to identify any patterns, trends or themes to help identify key issues.

Allow adequate time for consultees to respond and for their views to be fully considered before any action or decision is made.

Determine your outcomes:

The council should decide what it is going to do as a result of the consultation and why. You should explain how consultees' contributions have informed the decision-making process.

Feedback to relevant parties:

Ensure that the results and subsequent actions are communicated to participants and other relevant parties. The results of the consultation must be recorded on the council's consultation platform - Citizenspace

Evaluate your consultation:

Consider if your consultation has achieved its objectives. How have consultees' views affected the council's decision? What has changed as a result of the consultation? What lessons that can be learned?

There are tools on the Sandwell Consultation Hub to help you analyse and report on your findings.

Contact for Advice on Consultation and Engagement:

If you require advice or guidance on engagement and consultation, research methodologies, equalities or Sandwell Consultation Hub please email consultationhub@sandwell.gov.uk