

Moving Forwards Together: Empowering Community Voices





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As we embark on this journey to empower our communities through meaningful consultation and engagement, we are delighted to introduce our three pledges which mark a step forward in our approach. This will create more accessible ways for people to engage with the council as we build stronger connections and deepen trust.

Members and officers are listening to our communities' needs and have worked together to develop a strategy that embodies our commitment to fostering inclusive engagement and enhancing community cohesion.

We should like to thank New Local, and the Institute of Local Government Studies at The University of Birmingham for their insight during the development phase, as we have been able to embed 'community empowerment' at the heart of our thinking.

It is more than just a concept; it is a movement that recognises the inherent knowledge, skills, and assets within our neighbourhoods and networks. It empowers individuals and communities to have the opportunity to be heard, ultimately helping to shape the future of our district.

We have outlined our pledges that underscore the importance of community empowerment, inclusivity, and transparency. By enabling residents to actively participate in decision-making processes, embracing diverse voices, and fostering open communication, we commit to creating more responsive and accountable local decision-making.

Finally, our approach emphasises the role of community empowerment in strengthening and enhancing democratic participation. These outcomes underscore the benefit of empowering communities to drive positive change.

As we move forward together, we invite all stakeholders – residents, community organisations, public sector partners, and elected representatives – to join us in this collective effort.

Together, we can harness the power of community to create a more inclusive, resilient, and thriving West Lindsey.

We are excited about the possibilities that lie ahead and look forward to seeing the positive impact of community empowerment unfold in our district.



Cllr Trevor Young, Leader of
West Lindsey District Council

We believe that consultation, engagement and communication is more than just obtaining feedback, it is about co-creation and involves continuous, proactive and collaborative practices which focus on enabling active participation in decision-making for all, in a way that meets their needs.

When it comes to decision-making, we recognise the importance of bridging the gap between the council and the communities we serve, ensuring their voices are heard and their views are used to help shape council services and programmes. Our approach is centred on community empowerment to support positive outcomes for the district which is aligned to our Corporate Plan and its three key strands: 'Our People, Our Place and Our Council'.

This cements our commitment to community involvement, inclusivity and collaboration to achieve shared goals. The overarching vision in our Corporate Plan is that:

“West Lindsey is a great place to be where people, businesses and communities can thrive and reach their full potential.”

We will support the delivery of our vision by building on our existing approach to consultation and community engagement. We believe it is important that decisions reflect the voice of our communities to ensure every member of the community regardless of their background or circumstance has the opportunity to be heard.

We will ensure community empowerment is at the heart of our decision-making, by encouraging participation in engagement and consultation activities that affect their lives. We know some communities will need more support than others and the confidence to engage.

West Lindsey is home to a mix of both affluent and deprived neighbourhoods, reflecting a diverse community landscape with varying needs and challenges. Amidst this diversity, it is essential to ensure that all residents, particularly those that are seldom heard, are actively engaged in decision-making processes that directly impact their lives.

Therefore our approach is a long-term goal of building relationships and trust and is led by our Councillors. We will help to build capacity by providing communities with the information they need to get involved and give them access to resources and support services.

The council also has a leadership role in nurturing community leaders to guide and support community members.

In doing this, we make the following pledges to you, our communities:

1. Community Empowerment - Encourage and enable residents to actively shape, influence and participate in decision-making processes.
2. Inclusivity and Diversity - Provide a platform for all voices to be heard and considered.
3. Transparency and Accountability - Foster open and honest communication throughout.

To achieve our pledges we will work collaboratively with services and our communities to cultivate trust, and build a stronger, more connected West Lindsey that reflects the diverse aspirations and needs of all our residents.

We know this approach is an ongoing, dynamic process that requires continuous effort and adaptation to changing circumstances but it is something we are passionate about achieving.



National

Consultation and engagement is recognised and supported by numerous pieces of legislation such as the Local Government Act 1999, the Equality Act 2010 and the Localism Act 2011.

The Local Government Act 1999 places a duty on local authorities to inform, consult or involve the public whilst the Localism Act 2011 gives communities new rights and powers to have a greater freedom to be involved in the way local decisions are made and more influence over the future of where they live. Under the public sector Equality Duty in the Equality Act 2010 councils must recognise the need to encourage people to take part in public life.

These pieces of legislation encourage greater community involvement leading to the idea that this supports better decision-making and builds trust between the council and the communities.

Local

Consultation and engagement with our customers, residents, communities and businesses will drive how we design and deliver our services now and, in the future, to ensure we continue to deliver a modern, high quality and accessible customer experience. It will be aligned to our Corporate Plan and our approach will be tailored to maximise engagement taking into account the unique needs and characteristics of our areas.

Legal

It is crucial that when carrying out consultation and engagement activities, the council ensures that personal data collected is protected. Individuals will be informed about how their data will be used, and their consent must be obtained before collecting any personal data. This transparency builds trust and ensures ethical handling of information as laid out in the Data Protection Act 2018.

To reduce risks of data breaches and misuse of information, only personal

data which is relevant to the purpose of the consultation and engagement will be collected by the Council. If third parties are involved in the consultation process (e.g. external survey platforms or data analysts), the council will ensure they comply with Data Protection. Non-compliance with Data Protection can result in significant fines and legal action. Ensuring adherence to Data Protection during consultations and engagement activities mitigates the risk of legal repercussions.



Equality Act 2010

The council has a responsibility to meet the Equality Duty which is set by law as part of the Equality Act 2010. The duty gives protection for all persons who might be discriminated against.

There are 9 protected characteristics. They are: race, maternity/pregnancy, disability, religion/belief, sexual orientation, sex, gender reassignment, marriage/civil partnership and age.

The duty requires us to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The specific duties placed on public bodies are to:

- Publish information to show our compliance with the Equality Duty – including information relating to employees who share protected characteristics and information relating to our service users.
- Set and publish equality objectives, at least every four years.

A copy of our latest Equality Statement can be found at: <https://www.west-lindsey.gov.uk/equalities>

Localism Act 2011

Community Rights as contained within the Localism Act 2011 and are a set of powers which give communities more control over their community,

helping them to save local amenities, decide what is built and how the area should develop.

Community Rights gives the community the opportunity to deliver local services and develop them into community enterprises.

There are four community rights:

- Community Right to Bid (Assets of Community Value)
- Community Right to Challenge
- Community Right to Build
- Neighbourhood Planning

Further details on all these community rights can be found at: <https://www.west-lindsey.gov.uk/communityrights>



What do we mean by community consultation and engagement?

Consultation is the cornerstone of democratic governance and community empowerment. The council uses consultation and engagement to leverage in advice, information and opinions from people to help make informed decisions, solve specific problems in the community, improve outcomes and enhance understanding.

We will continue to empower residents by providing opportunities for meaningful participation in decision-making. It is important that we ensure council decisions reflect diverse perspectives and address the needs of all community members including young people. We will continue to build trust and legitimacy in local governance through transparent and inclusive processes by educating the community on specific themes and issues, so they are better informed and confident to participate.

All consultations must abide by the four Gunning Principles which are applicable to all public consultations that take place in the UK and has legal standing in the courts.

1. **When proposals are still at a formative stage**

Public bodies need to have an open mind during a consultation and not already made the decision, but have some ideas about the proposals.

2. **Sufficient reasons for proposals to permit 'intelligent consideration'**

People involved in the consultation need to have enough information to make an intelligent choice and input in the process.

3. **Adequate time for consideration and response**

Timing is crucial – is it an appropriate time and environment, was enough time given for people to make an informed decision and then provide that feedback, and is there enough time to analyse those results and make the final decision?

4. **Must be conscientiously taken into account**

Think about how to prove decision-makers have taken consultation responses into account.

There are also a number of legal requirements the council needs to be aware of including:

- Best value duty when reviewing service provision
- General duty to act fairly in the exercise of council functions
- Common law 'legitimate expectation of consultation'
- Statutory requirements for specific actions

Each year the council publishes a plan for consultation activities, providing a clear framework to ensure all necessary stakeholders are involved at the right stages of the project. It also allows for better allocation and management of resources, including time, personnel, and budget. This can be viewed on the council's consultation website: <https://www.west-lindsey.gov.uk/consultations>.

Engagement is more than just obtaining feedback it involves a continuous, proactive approach that emphasises participation, collaboration, and incorporation of stakeholders' insights in the decision-making process. In comparison consultation is a one-off process for a specific project, policy or strategy.

The Consultation Institute, which the council is a member of, defines engagement as 'a dynamic interactive process aimed at fostering dialogue between individuals or groups'. This process is intended to facilitate a genuine exchange of views with the goal of influencing decisions policies or programmes.

To foster meaningful and sustained engagement - we will follow 'The Triangle of Engagement' process which revolves around three interconnected elements:

1. **Informing decisions** - providing opportunities for communities to contribute/influence the decision-making processes.
2. **Strengthening relationships** - building new relationships and/or improving relationships with the communities.

3. Building Capacity - to educate the communities on a specific themes or issues to increase knowledge or change behaviours.

Each element supports and enhances the others forming a robust framework for engaging with stakeholders in a meaningful and impactful way and will be used in our approach.

Consultation and engagement is about making that connection through two-way engagement between the council and the community. It is important because it gives people the opportunity to influence and inform the decision-making process and make them aware of the level of service they should expect to receive.

Our pledges underpin our approach, reflecting our commitment to fostering a vibrant and inclusive relationship with our community. They serve as guiding principles for our strategy, reflecting our dedication to empowering residents, embracing diversity, and fostering trust and transparency in our engagement efforts.

Each pledge is supported by a set of objectives that will help us to build a more connected and resilient West Lindsey, where every voice contributes to a shared vision of community prosperity and wellbeing.

Our aims and objectives are designed to deliver our overarching pledges and demonstrate our commitment to co-ordinated, meaningful, consultation and engagement. In delivering the objectives under these themes, we will achieve the following key outcomes:

Community Empowerment

- Provide accessible platforms for all residents to create a strong and influential community voice.
- Facilitate workshops and training sessions to build residents' capacity for meaningful engagement.
- Encourage collaboration and co-design initiatives to harness local expertise and creativity.
- Evaluation and surveys to gather community feedback on engagement experiences.
- Data-driven insights to refine strategies and adapt approaches to evolving community needs and preferences.

Inclusivity and Diversity

- Implement targeted outreach strategies to engage with seldom heard groups.
- Create inclusive communication materials in accessible formats to accommodate diverse needs and preferences.
- Cultivate partnerships with community organisations and leaders to amplify the voices of diverse communities.

Transparency and Accountability

- Communicate clear objectives, timelines, and outcomes of engagement activities to residents.
- Establish mechanisms for feedback and accountability, "you said - we did" promoting trust and confidence.
- Integrate consultation outcomes and engagement initiatives with key priorities of the council's Corporate Plan.
- Work closely with council services to ensure constructive collaboration and coherence in community engagement efforts.
- Leverage our resources and expertise to maximise impact and sustainability of engagement activities.

Positive communication is intrinsically linked to both consultation and engagement and is crucial in getting key information to our residents in a timely and effective manner. Communication is used to inform and engage residents on the work of the council, which is responsible for delivering services that can significantly impact the quality of life for all residents.

The council must demonstrate good value for money and seek two-way engagement where possible. Equally where improvements are required, the council must be open and accountable and convey messages of what the council is doing to improve where necessary.

We will strive to reach all our stakeholders through a variety of communication and consultation channels and we are committed to talking to people in their language, not council jargon, to encourage a flow of two-way communication by taking a 'what matters to you approach?'

In West Lindsey there are 95,667 residents of which the average age is 47. Out of this figure 56,600 people are of working age and 21,325 are between 66 and 84 and 2,795 are 85+. It is important that we tailor consultation and engagement to reach the right audiences at the right time.

We will actively engage with residents, businesses and partners to foster a collaborative, inclusive and well-informed community. This approach will lead to better decision making, stronger support for initiatives and more sustainable and effective outcomes.

Whilst we use our website and social media platforms to inform residents, we can do more to reach out to our communities through other platforms used by them to widen participation and to actively encourage more people to take part. This will help build awareness by educating the community about their rights and the importance of participation.

Parish Councils and Parish Meetings

Parish councils and parish meetings are at the grass-roots level of local government and in their role as democratically accountable bodies, they offer a means of shaping the decisions of certain services and supporting local communities. Our role as a council will be to enable and facilitate discussions to support the community and the parish councils are key to facilitate change in their areas. There are 97 parishes in West Lindsey, demonstrating the challenge for the council to reach each community and the importance of working closely with our parish councils to maximise consultation and engagement.

The council has a duty to support, train and offer guidance and Councillors will continue to be invited to regular training sessions, receive tailored communications to support them in their roles and keep them updated with the latest news and resources.

We will continue to promote consultation and engagement opportunities to stimulate meaningful conversations and work is underway to restart the parish forums.

The West Lindsey Parish Charter is another tool that we have, which sets out how the council, parish councils and parish meetings can work together to provide high quality and efficient public services for our residents and communities. The Charter is our commitment to work together and a statement of the principles in which all involved approach their work together includes:

Partnership working, Local Governance, Consultation, Information and Complaints, Standards and Governance Support, Planning, Finance and Budgets, Community Support and Practical Support.

A copy of West Lindsey DCs Parish Charter can be found at: www.west-lindsey.gov.uk/parishcharter

West Lindsey District Councillors

The council has a rolling member training and development plan, which will continue to be used to guide and support district councillors in their roles. To ensure open conversations are had before decisions are made, specialist communication and consultation officers will be brought into projects at an early stage to advise on options and support the development of engagement and consultation plans. This will help foster a culture of genuine participation to strengthen community/stakeholder relationships.

A toolkit will be created to support staff and members across the council on consultations and engagement matters. This will ensure we follow good practice through a consistent and co-ordinated approach.

It will help provide clarity, guidance, and support throughout the implementation process, aligning activities with objectives, optimising resource allocation, managing risks, promoting consistency, building capacity and facilitating continuous improvement.

The toolkit will include:

- Law of Consultation and principles
- Public Sector Equality Duty
- Stakeholder Mapping
- Channels of communication
- Support

We will also continue to work in partnership and collaborate with community organisations and leaders to amplify engagement efforts.

Meaningful public consultation and engagement is about listening with intent. It is not simply about broadcasting information that the council want to inform communities about. It is about having a genuine commitment to listen and incorporate public feedback in the council's decision-making process.

We believe it is equally important that once the feedback has been collected that any outcomes from consultations or engagements are publicised, following a 'you said - we did' process to complete the circle of engagement and demonstrate the council is listening.

Where a decision is required from members - this will follow our committee process including the evidence and the results. Feedback to other consultations will be updated to the website and through the council's communications channels, local media or through direct engagement for example the citizen panel.

To help improve the quality of the feedback received during the consultations we will use specialist communications and consultation officers to structure feedback forms and guide participants. Results will be fed back to the service carrying out the consultation.

We will enhance the accessibility of consultation materials and will engage with accessibility experts where necessary to review and improve material which is essential for inclusive engagement.

We will capture engagement on our digital platforms - implementing social media campaigns and targeted advertising where appropriate. We will track and report on engagement metrics through the number of surveys/ consultations completed, website and social media interactions for each consultation to understand the engagement taking place for each activity. This will be produced after the end of every consultation/survey.

We will track the overall number of consultation and engagement activities, taking place and this will feed into our Annual Engagement report: <https://www.west-lindsey.gov.uk/consultations>

If you would like a copy of this document in large, clear print, audio, Braille or in another language, please contact us via the details below.

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