



**PLYMOUTH**  
CITY COUNCIL

# Staff guide to

# Better community engagement and consultation

**Community Empowerment  
Programme**

**Version: September 2025**





# Contents

<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2 The value of engagment</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3 What is good engagement?</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>4 Engagement and consultation charter</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>5 Things to consider when engaging</b>	<b>14</b>





**Engagement** is the active, inclusive, and ongoing involvement of people in shaping decisions that affect them. It's about building relationships, fostering trust and creating space for meaningful, two-way dialogue that evolves over time.

**Consultation**, while part of engagement, is typically a one-off moment in time – where we ask for views or feedback on a specific issue. It's more transactional, offering a snapshot of opinion rather than a sustained conversation.

The difference lies in depth and continuity: consultation gathers input but engagement builds understanding.

At its most powerful, engagement leads to **empowerment** - where people feel heard, valued and able to influence outcomes.

<b>6 Who are you engaging with?</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>7 What methodology do I use?</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>8 How to engage sensitively</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>9 Analysis and feedback</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>10 Evaluation</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>11 Glossary</b>	<b>44</b>



**At Plymouth City Council, we believe that strong communities are built on trust, inclusion and meaningful dialogue. In a time when public expectations are rising and resources are under pressure, working in partnership with our residents is more important than ever.**

Not every decision we make requires engagement – but where it does, we're committed to doing it well. We believe that good engagement builds trust, strengthens relationships and helps create a city where everyone feels welcome, heard and empowered to play their part.

Some engagement is required by legislation but our commitment aspires to go beyond compliance wherever possible. We want to foster a culture where people feel confident contributing to the decisions that affect them.

There's no one-size-fits-all approach. Different communities have different needs and different services call for different methods. That's why our approach is flexible, inclusive and rooted in the belief that everyone should have the opportunity to shape the places in which they live.

This framework sets out our commitment to open, honest, and accessible conversations. By listening well and acting together, we can strengthen trust, improve services and build a more connected, resilient Plymouth.

This guide aims to provide you with a framework and links to a range of resources that you can use to help you choose the right approach. Throughout the guide, we use the word stakeholder as an all-encompassing term to describe the diverse groups of people that the Council engages with. This includes community groups, businesses, partners and residents amongst others. If you are commissioning an external agency or company to deliver your engagement activity, please pass on this guide, along with the Charter, as part of your procurement, to outline the expected Plymouth City Council standards required.



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damaging small and temporary  
reasons, changing



Throughout this document, the word 'engagement' is used to cover the many different ways of involving and listening to residents, communities and businesses.

## Why engagement matters

Effective engagement is at the heart of how Plymouth City Council works with its residents, communities and partners. It plays a vital role in shaping a city that is inclusive, resilient, and responsive to the needs of its people. Through meaningful engagement, we can:

- **Give residents, communities and stakeholders a voice** in shaping the decisions that affect their lives and neighbourhoods.
- **Empower people and communities** to take an active role in public life, helping to build confidence, capacity and local pride.
- **Strengthen trust and relationships** between the Council and the city by fostering transparency, openness and mutual respect.
- **Improve our understanding of local needs and priorities**, ensuring that the lived experiences of residents inform the way we design and deliver services.
- **Build a robust evidence base** that supports better decision-making, policy development and service improvement.
- **Enable greater accountability and scrutiny**, helping to ensure that decisions are fair, inclusive and in the public interest.

Engagement is not a one-off activity or a tick-box exercise – it's a continuous process that helps us build a better Plymouth, together.





Whilst engagement activities will look different across the Council, conversations and activity should always start from the position of mutual respect and aim to create meaningful interactions where possible.

Effective engagement should provide people with an opportunity to share their opinions to help inform a decision, shape a service or influence a project. If participants are not able to shape the outcome of the decision that you are taking, there is a risk that the engagement activity becomes tokenistic and ineffective.

It is important to recognise that truly inclusive and meaningful engagement can be difficult. We must be mindful of loud voices dominating the conversation and ensure that we engage with as representative cohort of people as possible to ensure we meet and exceed our statutory requirements.

While the tools we use across the Council to deliver our activity may be different, our approach to engagement should always be shaped by the **Council's Engagement and Consultation Charter (see page 8)** to help ensure that you follow best engagement practice.

Make sure you are realistic about the appropriate level of engagement for your project: distinct levels of engagement, and therefore different engagement activities, will be required depending on the decision being taken. The 'Spectrum of Public Participation' framework (see table 1) can guide your thinking about the choices to make. There are five levels in the engagement table; these are 'inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower.'

Each level differs in terms of:

- Stakeholder involvement in the decision-making process
- Stakeholder influence over shaping a decision
- Expectations from stakeholders in the process of shaping decisions



## Our Engagement and Consultation Charter

We believe the best decisions are made with people, not just for them. While engagement is a vital part of how we shape our city, we recognise that decisions are informed by a wide range of factors – including legal duties, financial considerations, contractual obligations, land ownership and national policy – alongside the views and experiences of residents, communities and partners.

Not every decision the Council makes will require engagement or consultation. This Charter focuses on the decisions where we do engage, setting out our commitment to do so openly, respectfully, and meaningfully. When we ask for views, we do it with purpose, and we listen with intent.

We are committed to listening to all voices, but decisions will be based on a range of factors. We recognise that louder voices may not always represent broader community views, and we will strive for balanced, inclusive analysis that reflects the diversity of perspectives shared. Engagement and consultation are not the same as a referendum or vote - they are about gathering insight, understanding experiences, and informing decisions, not necessarily determining them by majority. .

We also understand that engagement won't always lead to consensus. When views differ, we will be transparent – clearly explaining what feedback was received, how it was considered and how it influenced the outcome.

This Charter is our commitment to building trust, fostering a culture of reflection and learning, strengthening relationships and ensuring every voice helps shape our city's future. It's not a static document – it will grow with us. We'll review it every two years, together with residents and stakeholders, to keep it relevant, ambitious and meaningful.

### A scaled approach

We know that engagement isn't one-size-fits-all. Our approach will be rooted in The Gunning Principles:

- Proportionate to the scale and impact of the decision.
- Flexible to suit different communities and contexts.
- Legally compliant, meeting all statutory requirements.
- Transparent, with clear communication about the purpose and use of feedback.

We'll use a range of engagement methods – from informing to empowering – and always be clear about where each activity sits on that spectrum and why.



## Our engagement and consultation values

Our approach to engagement will be guided by our corporate values and the following five principles. These are not just words – they shape how we work, how we listen and how we respond.



### 1. Respect

- We treat everyone with dignity and fairness.
- We listen without judgment and value all contributions, not just those with the loudest voices.
- We recognise and celebrate the diversity of our communities.



### 2. Transparency

- We are open about what we're doing, why we're doing it and how decisions are made.
- We share information in clear, accessible formats.
- We explain how feedback has influenced outcomes – or why it hasn't.



### 3. Inclusion

- We will work hard to remove barriers to participation.
- We reach out to underrepresented voices and seldom-heard groups.
- We design engagement that is culturally sensitive, accessible and equitable.



### 4. Responsiveness

- We listen carefully and act meaningfully.
- We adapt our approach based on what we hear.
- We provide timely feedback and close the loop with participants.



### 5. Partnership

- We will work collaboratively with residents, community groups and stakeholders.
- We will strive to co-design solutions and share power where possible.
- We will build long-term relationships, not one-off transactions – grounded in mutual respect, curiosity and a belief in the strengths and potential of every community.

## **Our commitments to residents:**

We will:


- **engage early** – before decisions are made.
- **be honest** – about what can and can't change.
- **speak clearly** – using plain language, with technical detail only where needed.
- **offer choice** – online, in person, and/or through trusted community partners.
- **be inclusive** – removing barriers and reaching those often left out.
- **feedback** – the engagement/consultation shaped the outcome.
- **keep learning** – improving how we engage and sharing insights across teams.

## **Our expectations of our staff**

We expect all staff involved in engagement to:

- **be approachable** – creating safe, respectful spaces for conversation.
- **be open** – welcoming challenge and new ideas.
- **be inclusive** – recognising and respecting diverse perspectives.
- **be accountable** – following through and being transparent.
- **be collaborative** – working with communities and across teams.
- **be prepared** – to manage difficult conversations with confidence.

We'll support our staff with the training, tools and time they need to do engagement well.



## Table 1

### Spectrum of Public Participation framework

Each engagement step within the Spectrum of Public Participation builds upon the aims of the last, progressively increasing the level of involvement and influence that local people have on the decisions being made.

Good engagement will consider and apply the appropriate level of participation at each stage of the process.

For example, in developing the Local Plan, the Council used:

**Level 3** Involve during early visioning workshops to gather ideas and priorities from the community,

**Level 2** Consult during statutory consultation to seek feedback on proposed policies

**Level 1** Inform when publishing the final version to ensure transparency and accessibility of the outcome.

This approach is set out in legislation and ensures that engagement is meaningful, responsive, and tailored to the decision-making context.

	Level 1: Inform	Level 2: Consult
Engagement aim	To provide the public with balanced and objective information that assists helps them understand the rationale for a decision, its impact and any opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on proposals and/or decisions.
Promise to stakeholders	<p>To keep our stakeholders informed.</p> <p>We will listen to and acknowledge their concerns and aspirations.</p>	<p>To work with our stakeholders to ensure that their views, feedback and aspirations are captured. Where possible we will reflect this in the decision being taken.</p> <p>We will provide feedback on how our stakeholders input influenced the decision.</p>
For more case studies, please see Staff Room	<p><b>Level 1 inform:</b></p> <p>An example is where we are feeding back the results of a consultation or we have to close a facility/property or land for urgent repairs due to a urgent health and safety risk.</p>	<p><b>Level 2 consult:</b></p> <p>An example is the legal requirement to carry out a public consultation on a planning application or proposals to make small changes to a service or provision.</p>



Level 3: Involve	Level 4: Collaborate	Level 5: Empower
<p>To involve those people who may be affected by a decision throughout the decision-making process.</p>	<p>To partner with those people the decision may affect in each aspect of the decision-making process. This includes the development of the proposal and any alternatives and, the identification of the preferred solution.</p>	<p>To place final decision making in the hands of the public.</p>
<p>To work with our stakeholders throughout the process to shape decisions. Findings from any engagement activities will be truly reflected in any decisions taken and this will be communicated once the decision has been taken.</p>	<p>To seek advice from our stakeholders in formulating solutions and incorporate their advice and recommendations into the decision to the maximum possible extent.</p> <p>We will provide feedback on how they influenced the decision.</p>	<p>To implement what our stakeholders decide. We will work with our stakeholders to communicate how and where our their input influenced the decision.</p> <p>It is important to remember that as a statutory body this step is likely to be limited and it may not always be possible to do as people wish. At times, the Council will need to take unpopular decisions.</p>
<p><b>Level 3 involve:</b></p> <p>An example is where we are making significant changes to a particular service, for example adult social care, where specific users will be concerned about the outcome of the decision.</p>	<p><b>Level 4 collaborate:</b></p> <p>An example of this includes the Changing Futures programme, where people with lived experience of disadvantage help design services, leading to more inclusive, trauma-informed approaches. Similarly, the SEND Service works closely with Parent Carer Forums and young people through a structured calendar of engagement, with young representatives actively contributing to service design and decision-making via the SEND Improvement Board.</p>	<p><b>Level 5 empower:</b></p> <p>An example is where communities make the final decision – for example, where we ensure that a specific percentage of an impacted community are in favour of a controlled parking zone, before the Council implements the proposal.</p>



To ensure that any engagement is meaningful, start by building in engagement time upfront. Engagement activity should never be a last minute ‘add on’.

Think strategically about your engagement activity – carefully and realistically consider where and how stakeholders will be able to influence the decision that is being taken.

A communications and engagement plan will help ensure that your engagement is well coordinated, stakeholder analysis is completed and that any messages are clearly communicated. We recommend that you seek the advice of the Communications Team early in this process.

Templates to aid your planning are available on Staff Room. However, you may want to consider the following:

- Why are you engaging with people?
- When are you going to carry out your engagement activities?  
For example: what time of year; stage of process.
- Who do you plan/need to engage with? For example which group of people?
- How much influence will the people you are engaging with have over the decision ie: Where are the red lines? The elements that are fixed and cannot be changed?
- What are you going to be asking people?
- Are you asking people about things that they care about?
- What supporting communications or material will you need and is it presented in a way that is easy to understand?
- What resource/budget do you have? If you are carrying out a significant engagement project, do you need to consider additional resource to help?
- How will you collect views and feedback?
- Will your engagement be carried out digitally, in person or a mix of both?

## 5.1 Statutory requirements

### *Is your engagement statutory including consultation?*

Some engagement and consultation activities are required by law and must follow specific processes, timeframes, and methods. For example, in Planning, the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) sets out how and when the Council must consult.

If your engagement is statutory, you must ensure you understand and follow the relevant legal requirements. These may include who you need to consult, how long the consultation must run and how feedback should be considered.

If your engagement is not statutory, this guide will guide you in designing an inclusive, proportionate and effective approach that reflects the needs of your audience and the purpose of the engagement.

Always check whether your activity has any legal obligations before you begin and use this framework to support best practice alongside any statutory requirements.

## 5.2 Scope

### ***What is the aim of your engagement activity?***

Be clear about the aim of any engagement activity early in the process. For example, is your engagement gathering views on a broad spectrum of issues or is it more specific?

### ***What is the decision being taken?***

Be clear with those you are engaging with about what it is that they can and cannot influence. You may wish to think about which aspects of a decision have already been made ie: which are fixed due to legal, financial, policy or other constraints.

## 5.3 Stakeholders

### ***Have you identified your stakeholders?***

A simple stakeholder analysis can help to identify who you need to engage with and the levels of influence and interest they may have in your proposed activity.

### ***Do you need to liaise with other internal services or departments?***

Before carrying out any engagement activities, ensure you have considered any other Council departments that should be consulted, in advance of you going live.

### ***Do you have approval/sign-off from your Head of Service/Manager to engage and are the relevant portfolio holder/s and the ward councillors aware of your engagement plans?***

Before carrying out any engagement activities you need to have consulted with the relevant internal stakeholders e.g. other teams or departments. Remember to get sign-off on any engagement plans from the relevant manager or Head of Service. Once approved, you must ensure that the appropriate portfolio holder(s) are informed. After the Cabinet Member is aware, depending on the engagement it may also be advisable to engage with ward councillors.

## 5.4 Timing

### ***Are there any other engagement activities happening at the same time as your engagement activity?***

Coordinate with other departments to avoid engagement overload. Use the internal engagement calendar (launching late 2025) and consider joint engagement activities where possible. This helps avoid overlap with other major activities and ensures your engagement doesn't get lost among multiple competing messages – especially if your topic is politically sensitive or likely to have a significant impact.

You should also be mindful of a pre-election period, a time of heightened political sensitivity when certain types of engagement and communication may be restricted. Always seek advice if your engagement is scheduled close to an election.

Even when engaging informally with smaller communities or organisations, timing matters. Be mindful of engagement fatigue, which can occur when the same individuals or groups – particularly those representing protected characteristics – are repeatedly asked for input without seeing clear outcomes. While their insights are vital, it's important not to rely on the same voices every time. Instead, we should broaden our reach, engaging a wider range of communities and perspectives.

Coordinating across services, spacing out engagement activities and being clear about how feedback will be used can help maintain trust, reduce pressure on over-engaged groups and support more inclusive participation.

By planning ahead you can maximise the reach and impact of your engagement while respecting the time and capacity of the communities you're working with.

### ***Will your planned engagement activity coincide with any major religious or cultural festivals or significant community days?***

To find out if there are any other engagements taking place have a look at the Council's [Equality and Diversity Calendar](#).

### ***When does a decision need to be made?***

To ensure engagement meaningfully informs decisions, plan early by working backwards from the decision-making timeline. Allow a good period of time between the close of engagement and drafting the final report. This provides enough time for thorough analysis and conscientious consideration of the findings, ensuring they are properly reflected in the final recommendations. Rushing this stage risks overlooking valuable insights, weakening the impact of the engagement and potentially risking legal challenge. It is also important to remember other key milestones before a decision can be made, for example DMT discussions, CMT consideration, Capital Planning Oversight Group, and/or Cabinet Planning.



## ***What is your timescale for engagement activities?***

Plan your engagement timescales early, ensuring people have enough time to respond meaningfully. Check for any statutory requirements, as some consultations have legally defined timeframes. The scale and complexity of your engagement will influence how long it should run. If it overlaps with holidays or targets groups with limited availability, consider extending the period. Build in lead-in time to raise awareness and prepare your audience – early communication is key. The Corporate Communications Team can support you with this. Well-timed, well-promoted engagement leads to better participation and more valuable insights.

## **5.5 Resources**



### ***What resources are available to support your engagement?***

The availability of resources (for example, budget, time and people.) will influence the type of engagement methodology that you decide to use. If you are working on a project that will have major engagement implications e.g. a Capital project, make sure that you allocate resource as part of any early financial grant applications. For example, where resources are limited, you could create a simple survey with closed questions to aid quick analysis. Where there are more resources available you could include more open text questions to your survey, organise a focus group or hold a workshop. However, it is important that the methodology is appropriate and proportionate and aligns with the aims of your engagement. If you have limited resources, please seek advice and support from the Community Empowerment Team.

### ***Who else has good relationships with the community that can support your engagement?***

It is important to think about which local community groups and organisations exist in the area (or community) you are hoping to engage with. If these groups know the community well, they may be able to help you build relationships quickly and provide advice on how best to engage with that community. They may also help provide venues and staffing to support you.

If your service does not have this information, consider speaking to other services such as the Community Empowerment Team, Corporate Communications or Planning.



**Who you will engage with will depend on the topic you wish to gather feedback on.**

## 6.1 What is a community?

The word community means different things to different people but in the context of engagement 'community' is accepted to be groups of people who have something in common. This could be a similar interest, location or a shared characteristic.

Remember that different people may be a member of more than one community; communities are not homogeneous and within different communities will have unique needs and views.

**There are typically three main types of communities:**

### Communities of place

- Communities of place centre on a location. They tend to focus on where people identify with a defined geographical area, for example a local neighbourhood, a local park, council ward or housing development etc. The shared interest in a specific geography is what creates the community.

### Communities of identity

- Communities of interest and communities of identity are sometimes used interchangeably. They focus on a shared experience or characteristic amongst a group of people. This could include people with a shared protected characteristic or those with a shared concern due to their previous and current experience. Examples could include a young people or older people, faith groups, migrant groups, or disabled groups.

### A community of interest

- A community of interest is a group of people who share a common policy concern or interest in a particular topic. Examples could include friends of park groups.

We publish information about the different communities in our city each year to meet our Public Sector Equality Duty. To help you identify which stakeholders you need to engage with, see the profiles here:

[www.plymouth.gov.uk/understanding-our-communities](http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/understanding-our-communities)

## 6.2 Inclusive engagement

We have a legal duty to give 'due regard' to equality and as a public sector equality organisation we must proactively promote equality amongst people with a protected characteristic and those who do not share a protected characteristic.

In practice, this means that your engagement activities need to be as inclusive as possible. This is not only to ensure that any findings are representative of the local community, but also to ensure that we are encouraging and facilitating participation in public life for all our residents.

While it is important to be mindful of intersectionality and to recognise that some people have complex needs or a variety of characteristics (including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, which can sometimes be tricky to navigate), the sections below have been separated to highlight the different considerations required for different groups of people.

Although information on supporting inclusive engagement for all the protected characteristics is not included in this section, it is important to remember that there will be considerations required for the broad range of people who might participate in your engagement or consultation. For example, if you are engaging with families about services for children you might need to consider holding an event in a breastfeeding friendly space, or avoid engaging during religious or cultural festivals or you might want to consider the needs of the LGB and Trans communities when booking an engagement event to ensure there is space for sensitive conversations.

Completing an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) on your engagement plan will support your thinking about inclusive engagement and help to mitigate any adverse impacts arising from your planned activity. If your engagement or consultation is with a specific community or group of people with a similar protected characteristic, then co-designing the engagement with someone from that community should be considered. Our staff networks might also be able to assist.

## 6.3 People with disabilities or health conditions

Disabled people are overrepresented amongst the people who use public services. Yet, disabled people tend to be less likely to participate in public life due to the numerous barriers they face.

It is important that we remove as many of these barriers as possible in our engagement activities including:

- Following the corporate branding guidelines to ensure that your documents are written in plain English and are easy to understand. The Communications Team can review materials and provide guidance. Colleagues in Digital Services can work with you to ensure that any information you put on the Council's website is accessible.

- 1. You should provide any information in an 'easy read' format or, at the very least, offer it as an option.  
This may mean providing documents with fewer words and more pictures or even just pictures and/or symbols.
- 2. Please remember that PDFs are not always readable by screen readers and information should be presented directly on screen.
- 3. You also need to check if people need large print or information printed on coloured paper to support accessibility.
- 4. The Communications Team can provide guidance on providers able to create documents in easy read formats.
- Providing relevant contact details should anyone require additional support to participate in your engagement activity. It is vital that you respond promptly to any questions and meet the request where reasonable to ensure compliance with the Equality Act.

### **6.3.1 Top tips for accessible engagement:**

- Publish your engagement activities in advance and avoid arranging things at last minute as this will often exclude disabled people if they need to arrange additional support, for example personal assistants or support workers.
- Ensure that you engage with local partner organisations early in the process, for example **PADAN**.
- Plan for the information to be made available in other formats, for example large print/web accessible.
- Consider if the use of interpreters may be required for discussions or sessions. These could include British Sign Language or Makaton signing. The **Deafblind UK website** has a useful list of various forms of accessible communication. Contact the SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) Team for more information.
- Any venue should be wheelchair accessible. You should also consider how a person with a disability will access the building. For example, if wheelchair access is at the back of a dimly lit building this will not be a positive first experience of the engagement activity.
- Confirm if the venue has a hearing loop for people who may have hearing difficulties. If the venue does not, please consider the implications on your target audience.
- Provide clear contact details. Remember that the Council has a legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments.
- Depending on the type of engagement, allow for longer comfort breaks due to the additional needs of disabled people.



## 6.4 People from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds

People who identify as Black, Asian or minority ethnic tend to be less likely to participate in engagement activities for a multitude of reasons. It is important that we make every effort to remove barriers to our engagement activities.

### 6.4.1 Top tips for encouraging involvement from different ethnic communities:

#### ● Identify community leaders

Identify the key community figures in the community you wish to engage with and contact them early in your engagement planning. While community leaders can be useful to access to communities, it is important that you do not rely solely on them to ensure your engagement results are representative. The Community Empowerment Team can help with this.

#### ● Identify community meetings/events to attend

As part of your early engagement planning identify events/meetings with the community you wish to engage with and attend these in advance of the engagement activity. This will help you to understand any community dynamics and will help you to build relationships. It may be during these meetings/events that you start to identify community leaders/connectors.

#### ● Identify community groups

Identify groups that are already established and who are working with the communities you wish to engage with if this has not already been done.

#### ● Accessible information

If you are communicating with people who may speak English as a second language, ensure you are using plain English and that your written and spoken communication is jargon free. Consider if you will need to translate information and if so, ensure you leave plenty of time to request translation services.

#### ● Consider your language carefully

Be thoughtful and respectful in your use of language when describing people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds. Terminology matters, and preferences can vary – some individuals and communities may identify with terms like global majority or other descriptors. To avoid causing offence and to ensure your language is inclusive and appropriate, always work with relevant local groups or organisations to sense-check your phrasing and approach.

#### ● Culturally competent engagement

Remember that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups are not homogenous. Prior to any engagement activity, try to understand the different cultures within the communities you will be engaging. You may wish to try to understand things like cultural behaviours, community languages and gender norms (if relevant).

While it is important to listen to as many different groups as possible, be mindful of overwhelming some of the smaller groups with multiple requests. Remember that if a group is unable to participate it may be that they have limited capacity. Ensuring a long lead-in time for any engagement activities can help to minimise this.

If serving food ensure that it is culturally appropriate food such as halal, kosher, and vegetarian. If you are not sure of the dietary preferences of the group that you are engaging with, serving food that does not contain animal products is recommended. Hold events at well-used community locations / venues to ensure people feel comfortable. Engagement needs to be mutually beneficial – to encourage future engagement you could for example, support organisations working with Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities to make wider links with funding opportunities, existing contacts/networks and Council colleagues.

### ● **Working with faith groups**

Ensure you have contacts of the key organisations that represent the key faith groups in the city and remember that faith groups are not homogenous. Prior to any engagement activity, try to understand the different beliefs and values within the communities you will be engaging.

## **6.5 Engaging with businesses**



Plymouth is a place where businesses are welcome and encouraged to grow. Engaging with businesses to help create a positive business environment is key to the city's economic success. When engaging with businesses you should:

- Draw on existing business networks such as the Devon and Plymouth Chamber of Commerce, the Federation of Small Businesses, BIDs, Destination Plymouth, the Plymouth Area Business Council, and the Plymouth Social Enterprise Network.
- Reduce the burden on businesses by joining up engagement activities.
- Be mindful of timing. Avoid school holidays, the end of the financial year, and peak periods such as the run-up to Christmas for retail or summer holidays for hospitality. Consider offering two options for engagement times to accommodate different business needs.
- Share information well in advance of any meetings or events.
- Engage with colleagues in our Economic Development Marketing Team, who have established relationships with many local businesses. Use business-specific channels such as the Economic Development newsletter, LinkedIn, or the Invest Plymouth web page.
- Use clear and concise language. Highlight areas of direct relevance to businesses, such as cost-saving opportunities, reaching new audiences, or accessing additional support.

## 6.6 Engaging with young people

Young people are a vital part of Plymouth's community and future. Their voices, experiences and ideas bring fresh perspectives to decision-making and help shape services that are inclusive, relevant and impactful. Involving young people meaningfully in planning and policy development is not only a matter of fairness – it's essential for creating a city that works for everyone.

### Why youth engagement matters

Involving young people in decision-making:

- builds confidence and leadership skills.
- ensures services are designed with real insight into young people's needs.
- promotes civic responsibility and active citizenship.
- helps organisations make better, more inclusive decisions.
- young people are experts in their own lives. When we listen to them, we create policies and services that are more effective, equitable, and future-focused.
- the decisions we make today not only affect young people now, but also shape the future Plymouth – where they will be the residents, leaders, and changemakers living with the outcomes of those decisions

### Professionals Participation Group

Plans are in place to develop a collaborative network of professionals from various organisations who lead and support youth engagement activities across the city. This group work will aim to work together to improve youth participation, co-production and share best practice.

### Youth participation groups and forums

Across Plymouth, there are several well-established groups and networks that represent the diverse voices of young people:

- **Youth Ascends:** A dynamic group representing young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), ensuring their views are heard and considered in SEND service design and delivery.
- **Listen and Care Councils:** A number of safe spaces for care experienced and children in care (aged eight to 25) and to share their experiences and influence the systems that support them.
- **Young Safeguarders Group:** A young people's reference group for the Plymouth Safeguarding Children's Partnership. They raise issues of safeguarding and wellbeing and get involved in quality assurance work.
- **Young Persons' Patient Council:** run by University Hospital Plymouth to hear the voices of children accessing services at Derriford Hospital and related services.
- **Young Climate Ambassadors:** A group of young people who work with the Council to ensure that young people's voices are heard as the city tackles its Net Zero challenges.

There are other special interest groups that we seek views of young people from in areas that affect them which include groups that support LGBTQ+ young people and Young Carers. For more information, please contact the Youth Participation Team.

### **Plymouth Youth Parliament**

The Plymouth Youth Parliament is a city-wide initiative that empowers young people aged 11 to 18 to campaign on issues that matter to them. Members are elected annually through city-wide school and college elections. They meet weekly to discuss topics young people have voted on such as homework, mental health, transport, cost of living and violence against women and girls and they actively engage with local councillors and decision-makers to advocate for change.

### **How can you reach these groups?**

If you're working on plans, policies or projects and want to include the views of young people, reach out to the Youth Participation Team. They can guide you on the best approach – whether that's connecting with existing youth groups, commissioning the Youth Parliament to conduct research or partnering with them to co-design solutions.



## 6.7 Engaging with strategic stakeholders

Strategic stakeholders – such as statutory agencies, formal partners and key city organisations – are often essential to successful engagement. In many cases, there is a statutory requirement to involve specific partners so it's important to check any legal obligations early.

Even where not required by law, engaging with the right stakeholders can improve outcomes, align your work with wider city priorities, and strengthen trust. When engaging with stakeholders, you should:

- check for any statutory requirements to engage specific partners.
- identify relevant citywide stakeholders who may be affected or have influence.
- speak to internal council teams with existing relationships for advice and coordination.
- engage early to allow time for meaningful input.
- be clear about the purpose of the engagement and how their input will be used.

## 7

## WHAT METHODOLOGY DO I USE?

### 7.1 Community/public events

**This section looks at some the methodologies you might employ as part of your engagement or consultation. You might use a range of different methodologies to meet the needs of different audiences and at different stages in your engagement process.**

Community and public events can be a valuable way of sharing information. The face-to-face nature of these events provides an opportunity to demonstrate openness and transparency to stakeholders.

However, it's important to consider what will make your event engaging and accessible, as attendance can sometimes be low or limited to a small group of people whose views may not reflect the wider community.

Public meetings may be appropriate in limited circumstances but they are often ineffective for inclusive engagement. Consider alternative formats such as pop-up stalls, sofa discussions or 'Planning for Real' exercises, which can create more informal, welcoming spaces and help reach a broader and more representative audience.



Event type	Definition
Public meeting	Open gathering where officials present information and take feedback from the public in a Q and A style.
Town Hall event	Informal public meeting where political representatives answer questions from the audience.
Information session	Event focused on delivering key information to the public, often with presentations or handouts.
Exhibition/ Open house	Drop-in style event with displays, posters, and staff available to answer questions.
Facilitated discussion	A structured event where information is presented to the audience followed by a guided discussion led by a facilitator.
Creative events	Creative engagement methods like sofa discussions, pop-up stalls at existing community or stakeholder events, and 'Planning for Real' exercises can offer more inclusive and engaging alternatives to traditional formats.

### Top tips for successful community meetings:

- Define clear objectives – only focus on one or two areas. Share the purpose of the event with attendees in advance.
- Choose the right format. Match the format to your goals and audience.
- Select an appropriate and accessible venue, based on your target audience. Choose a venue that is a well known community building or asset, easy to find, physically accessible and has necessary facilities (for example parking, toilets, AV equipment).
- Don't forget refreshments.
- Consider asking people to book in advance, using a system like Eventbrite.
- Promote widely, giving people as much notice as possible (the Communications Team can help).
- Prepare materials in advance – make sure they are clear from jargon. Remember things like sign-in sheets and any print-outs.
- Provide 'house rules' to promote a safe and welcoming environment.

	Pros	Cons
	Encourages transparency Allows for direct interaction Builds community trust	Can be dominated by vocal individuals May not represent all views
	Promotes dialogue Builds rapport with community Efficient for clarifying specific issues	Can become confrontational May lack structure or focus Limited depth May not allow for broader discussion
	Clear and structured Good for awareness-raising	One-way communication – no questions Limited engagement or feedback
	Flexible attendance Visual and interactive Encourages informal conversations	Less structured feedback May not attract a wide audience
	Combines clarity of presentation with interactive dialogue Encourages informed feedback Helps manage group dynamics	Requires skilled facilitation May limit spontaneous input Time constraints can affect depth of discussion

## 7.2 Online engagement

**Online engagement refers to the use of digital platforms and tools to involve communities in consultation, dialogue, and decision-making – it is a whole lot more than just having an online survey. It can include interactive mapping tools (like Commonplace or Bang the Table), virtual town halls, social media polls, discussion forums and digital reading groups. These tools allow people to participate at their convenience, making engagement more inclusive and far-reaching.**

### Strengths:

- Provides a wider reach and can engage people who might not attend in-person events, for example younger audiences or busy professionals.
- Can offer convenience and flexibility – enabling people to engage at a time and place that suits them.
- Many platforms offer real-time data analysis, including AI-powered tools that identify key themes, trends, and sentiments, helping you to quickly understand public opinion.
- It can be cost effective, reducing the need for venue hire, printed materials and travel.

## Weaknesses:

- Not everyone has access to or is comfortable using digital tools, which can exclude some groups.
- Comments on social media or open platforms may come from unverified users, making it difficult to assess the representativeness of feedback.
- Online input can sometimes be brief, reactive or lack depth compared to in-person discussions.
- Online spaces will require active moderation to manage misinformation or inappropriate content.

## Top Tips

- Be transparent about how online input will be used, especially if you're not collecting feedback from social media platforms.
- Use social media primarily for promotion, directing people to structured engagement platforms where feedback can be properly captured and analysed.
- Choose the right platform for your audience – tools like Commonplace, CitizenLab, or Bang the Table offer tailored features for community consultation.
- Ensure accessibility by offering mobile-friendly formats and considering language or accessibility needs.
- Monitor and moderate online spaces to maintain respectful and constructive dialogue.
- Be clear about data protection – where and how data will be used and stored.
- Leverage built-in analytics and AI tools to identify key themes, trends and sentiments efficiently.

## 7.3 Surveys

Surveys and questionnaires are commonly used to gather stakeholder opinions, often through yes/no or scaled questions. Online surveys are particularly popular due to their ease of design, cost-effectiveness, and user-friendly interfaces. However, to ensure a more comprehensive and inclusive range of responses, it's important to consider complementing surveys with other engagement methods that allow for deeper, more qualitative input.

## Data protection and privacy

When collecting personal data during engagement activities, it is essential to be transparent and compliant with data protection legislation such as the UK GDPR.

## Strengths:

- Useful to collect and collate substantial amounts of quantitative data.
- Everyone can receive the same information and complete the survey in private, which will lower the chance of the results being influenced by external factors.
- If comparable questions are used in subsequent surveys, trends can be identified over time and between groups.
- It is a quick and cost-effective way to gather feedback from large groups of people.

## Weaknesses:

- Surveys are not usually useful to identify reasons behind stakeholder opinions unless there are several 'open' text (qualitative) questions.
- Qualitative responses make analysis more time consuming.
- They are not as effective in establishing community relationships or developing dialogue.
- Response rates may be limited, as response rates for surveys can be less than 20 per cent (a good response rate is typically between 30% - 35%. If several surveys are circulated at the same time the response rate may be lower due to 'survey fatigue.'
- Not all surveys are statistically representative. When interpreting results, consider sample size, response rate, and methodology. For statistically robust surveys, seek advice from the Policy Team.

## Top tips for successful surveys

- Ensure that your questions are easy to read, clear about what they are asking, kept short and concise and not biased or leading.
- Use a consistent response scale when asking questions to minimise confusion amongst respondents.
- Ensure the response options are consistent with the question being asked – include a neutral and 'do not know' option where possible.
- Do not mandate that respondents answer specific questions – unless necessary.
- Unless participants have been randomly selected and an adequate response received, recognise that survey responses may not be representative of all groups and interests.
- Surveys can be online, postal and/or face-to-face. Remember if they are online only, they may exclude people who do not have access to the internet. Hard copies should always be made available.
- Use a survey in conjunction with another engagement method to allow more detailed responses. Be clear if your survey is an informal 'pulse check' or a formal consultation.
- In statutory contexts (for example planning), formal representation forms may be required. Ensure these are clearly explained and accessible.

## Hosting an online survey

The Council uses an online consultation portal to create and host its surveys and or gather feedback from stakeholders. These surveys can be set as 'open' to any stakeholder or 'closed' so only selected stakeholders can respond.

### Key points:

- All public facing/stakeholder surveys should be carried out using the consultation portal and included in the consultation hub.
- Only registered users can access and use the consultation portal to create their surveys. If you or your team carry out consultations or conduct surveys on a regular basis, then please contact the Policy Team to get access and receive training.
- You will need to develop your questions set, know your start, and close date, write your survey instructions and the introduction and background to the survey, and provide contact details before creating your survey online (our Policy Team can assist if necessary).
- MS Forms is another online survey tool that can be used for internal or small group consultations.

## 7.4 Please remember

Participants must be informed about how their data will be used, stored and shared. This includes specifying the purpose of data collection, who will have access to the data and how long it will be retained.

A clear and accessible privacy statement should be provided at the point of data collection, whether online, in paper or in person.

This statement should outline the lawful basis for processing data and provide contact details for further information or to withdraw consent.

More information is available here: [www.plymouth.gov.uk/data-protection](http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/data-protection) and [www.plymouth.gov.uk/privacy-policy](http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/privacy-policy) Please see Staff Room for example templates.

### Collecting equalities data

Gathering equalities data, such as age, gender, ethnicity, disability status and other protected characteristics (including care experience and armed forces serving/veterans/spouse) is a vital part of inclusive engagement. This information helps assess whether engagement activities are reaching a broad and representative audience and supports the completion of equality impact assessments.

Collecting this data enables organisations to identify gaps in participation and take steps to address them. It's important to explain why this information is being collected, that it is optional, and how it will be used and protected.

For more information about what to ask, contact the Policy Team.





27<sup>th</sup> Act 1  
1-19 A/m/a  
40-52 A/a/L  
Act 2  
53-56 A/m  
78-94<sup>+</sup> ALL

SANGUINE  
Optimist, leader,  
high self-esteem,  
gregarious, loud  
talker, upward,  
big, outward,  
MELANCHOLIC  
pessimist, loner,  
hypochondriac,  
few words, down,  
small, inward,  
defensive, wary



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## 7.5 Focus groups

Focus groups encourage discussion and work well when reaching out to smaller groups. Focus groups are useful when dealing with a sensitive topic that may be difficult to unpick by using just a survey.

### Strengths:

- A small group setting is an efficient way to use resources and identify critical issues.
- Focus groups can be planned and organised to reach a specific group of people or developed around a particular topic.
- If there is conflict it can be handled more easily in a small group.
- Dialogue between participants provides opportunity for networking and prevents silo working.

### Weaknesses:

- Must involve an experienced facilitator to ensure the process runs smoothly.
- Focus groups are not an effective method to ensure all stakeholders and perspectives are represented.
- Focus groups can be resource intensive as they require at least two people to be run effectively.
- Analysis of the findings can be time-consuming.
- Venue needs to be near to public transport, welcoming and fully accessible.

### Top tips for successful focus groups:

- Focus groups work well when participants feel comfortable and are in a safe environment. Setting ground rules at the start of the session is an effective way to create a space where people feel comfortable to share their opinions.
- Ensure the facilitator is mindful of the need to encourage 'quieter voices' to be heard. Splitting larger groups into smaller groups is recommended to encourage people to contribute.
- If you have a limited number of focus groups/space, it is recommended that you limit groups to one or two representatives from the same organisation – this will help you to hear as many different voices as possible.

## 7.6 Service user reference groups

User reference groups (URGs), also sometimes known as community panels, or service user panels are groups of people with a lived experience or interest in the delivery of services. They are a useful way of gathering feedback from people who tend to be passionate about the way a service is delivered. The groups can be set up for specific project and you should ensure you engage with any existing groups.

### Strengths:

- Once established URGs are an effective way of gathering insight into service delivery at short notice
- They can facilitate targeted communications to a specific group of people
- They can be an effective informal method of gathering feedback on anything from draft documents to gauge accessibility of policy proposals
- They are effective in exploring view and ideas or delving deeper in higher level survey results
- A smaller group may be able to provide a sample of the views of the wider community. This is especially true if the group is reflective of the demographics of the community.

### Weaknesses:

- Small groups of people will not be representative of the whole community
- The 'loudest voice' in the group may dominate
- The groups need to be engaged with regularly to keep the group active
- If engaging on a major decision it is recommended that URGs are used to complement other engagement tools to ensure that a range of voices are heard
- Groups can become integrated into the 'system' and so it is important that they are refreshed regularly.

## 7.7 Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry is a tool or technique to help understand and facilitate change in complex systems. Appreciative Inquiry starts with understanding people's experiences and the context in which they experience things and aims to understand how systems work and the impacts that these have on individuals.

AI is a cycle in which you are constantly learning. Discovering how your system works, dreaming of a better system, designing that system and delivering it to see the changes you want.

While Appreciative Inquiry can be an effective and meaningful engagement tool, it can also be resource intensive - both during the engagement activity and during the analysis period. If you are interested in exploring further, speak to the Community Empowerment team (details at end of document) who have access to a community of trained practitioners.

## 7.8 Other things to consider so that your engagement is accessible

- Consider the time of your engagement and try to pick a time that will not exclude a substantial proportion of people. For example, face-to-face engagement activities during school pick-up/drop-off times (8am to 10am and 2pm to 4pm) may make it harder for parents (and especially for women) to attend engagement activities. You should avoid these times if possible or, if in the winter, consider the timing of evening events.
- It is important to ensure we are not just hearing from the 'usual' people. Any engagement should ensure that as many different voices are heard as possible, this means that you may need to consider the needs of more than one community when holding an event.
- If you are engaging with children and young people, activities need to be age appropriate and, where possible, fun and creative and provide refreshments to help to create a welcoming atmosphere. Working with artists or other local organisations could help to deliver the activity in an engaging and interesting way (if relevant and budget permitting). We recommend contacting colleagues in Children's Services for their advice on how to engage successfully and address issues around consent, and any requirements for DBS checks.
- If relevant, ensure that the venue where you host your engagement activity is inclusive in its widest sense. For example, a community centre may be preferable to a pub as a pub would not be suitable for people under 18 and some faith groups.

Visit the Plymouth [Online Directory](#) to find lists of different community groups and voluntary organisations in the city. Plymouth Octopus Project have links to contacts at a range of voluntary and community sector organisations, you can also engage with Family and Wellbeing Hubs, Community Economic Development Trusts and Community Builders.

## 7.9 Digital inclusion

While the Council relies heavily on digital communication to communicate with its stakeholders, it is important to remember that not everyone has access to the internet or digital technology. Digital exclusion is complex and there can be more than one reason why people may be digitally excluded. This includes barriers such as lack of devices, digital skills, disability, motivation, poverty, and limited access / **weak signal** to home broadband or Wi-Fi. Some groups face significantly lower access to digital technologies compared to the wider population, which can affect their ability to participate in online engagement. Recognising and addressing these barriers is essential to ensuring inclusive and equitable involvement.

To support digital inclusion, you could promote courses available for people to learn digital skills, inform people where they have free access to Wi-Fi and devices within their communities, such as libraries and centres providing adult education courses. The Community Digital Volunteer Scheme, accessed through the Central Library and Council Contact Centre allows you to book volunteers to help those people who require digital assistance.

But most importantly, you need to be aware that by only engaging using digital channels means you will be excluding people. Therefore, when you are carrying out engagement activities it is important that you put in place mechanisms for those people who may be digitally excluded to have their voice heard.







## 8.1 Engaging with people with a lived experience

People with lived experience is a broad phrase used to encompass people who have experience of the services or topic which are they are being asked about as part of an engagement activity. Individuals with a lived experience bring their own experiences of using services/not using services, engaging and working with professionals and navigating organisations/systems.

This experience allows people to bring useful insights and often innovative ideas to improve or change services and identify what matters most to them.

There is no one size fits all to engaging with people with a lived experience, however sensitivity, compassion and patience is recommended.

### Strengths:

- Opportunities for first-hand experience of services/topic
- Feedback is often detailed and specific
- Methods can be tailored to the needs of individuals e.g. phone calls, group session

### Weaknesses:

- Small groups will not be representative of all views
- Can be resource and time intensive

### Trauma informed approach

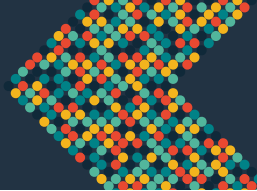
It is vital that a trauma informed approach is used when engaging with people with lived experiences to minimise the likelihood of re-traumatisation. Trauma is and, where possible, fun is best explained as the emotional and psychological impact and legacy of an individual's experiences and will manifest and present differently in different people. Be mindful that engaging with people with a lived experience can be triggering and emotional for both the individual and the professional.

**Trauma Informed Plymouth Network can provide further guidance on ensuring that your work is trauma informed.**

## 8.2 Top tips for engaging people with a lived experience:

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- Create a list of local services to share with participants in advance of the engagement activity should attendees or participants feel that they require additional support following the engagement activities.
- Be clear in your engagement communications that the engagement will be dealing with sensitive and/or potentially triggering content. For example, you may wish to include a statement at the start of a survey or focus group that participants will be asked about their own experiences.
- Be clear about which topics will be included in any engagement activities and at what stage – who is sharing, what they are sharing and why and how any information will be used. This will give people the ability to opt out should they wish.
- Consider that some people may need support during the event too and provide a quiet space for someone to move to should they need a break during the session
- Identify a facilitator (separate from the person taking notes) for any group work – this will allow the individual to focus on the needs of the group.
- Identify a neutral space for your engagement activity (if happening in person). Doctor's surgeries, police stations and rooms used for service delivery should be avoided.
- Develop a set of ground rules for any group consultation to encourage respectful behaviour.
- If you have resources, offer participants the opportunity to follow any group consultation with one-to-one interviews or conversations. This will allow you to dive deeper into any issues and allow the participant the opportunity to speak more freely.
- Be as flexible as possible to accommodate the needs (if required) of people. This may include changing the time or date of a session at short notice using different methods for engaging for example telephone, MS Teams etc.
- Provide support to participants before, during and after any engagement activity has concluded. Be clear with participants about what the outcome of any conversations or engagement activity has been.



## 9.1 Analysis and feedback

Analysing engagement feedback is a crucial step in the consultation process. It transforms public input into meaningful insights that inform decisions. Done well, analysis builds trust, identifies key themes and supports transparent, evidence-based choices. Poor analysis risks overlooking important views, misrepresenting feedback, or undermining the legitimacy of decisions. It also risks the Council being subject to legal challenge.

### What good analysis looks like

- Goes beyond counting responses – focuses on understanding depth, diversity, and nuance.
- Begins with a clear purpose: What were you trying to learn, and from whom?
- Identifies key themes, areas of agreement/disagreement, and differences between groups.
- Is proportionate to the scale and complexity of the consultation.
- Is transparent – clearly shows how conclusions were reached and how feedback was used.

### Approaches to analysis

- **Quantitative analysis:** Use for closed survey questions – calculate percentages, trends, and group comparisons.
- **Qualitative analysis:** Use for open comments, focus groups, or interviews – group responses into themes (manually or with digital tools).
- **Demographic analysis:** Compare responses across different groups to ensure inclusivity.
- **Longitudinal analysis:** Track changes in opinion over time where relevant.

## 9.2 Using AI to support analysis

AI tools can be a powerful aid in analysing large volumes of qualitative data. Natural language processing can help identify recurring themes, keywords, and sentiment in open-text responses, saving time and surfacing patterns that might otherwise be missed. However, AI should enhance – not replace – human judgment.

### Top tips:

- Use AI to support manual analysis, not as a substitute.
- Always review AI-generated insights in context.
- Be transparent with participants about the use of AI tools.
- Regularly review your approach as technology and best practice evolve.
- Invite feedback from staff, residents, and stakeholders on the role of AI.

### Ethical Considerations

Ethical engagement means being transparent, fair, and respectful of people's data and experiences. Responses must be fully anonymised before use—removing names, places, and any identifying details – especially when working with AI, which lacks context and nuance. Participants should be made aware that their input may be used by developers, and care must be taken when handling sensitive or personal stories to ensure they cannot be traced back to individuals.

### Remember:

- Fully anonymise all responses, especially when using AI tools.
- Avoid uploading personal data into AI platforms.
- Clearly explain how data will be used and offer opt-out options.
- Don't overgeneralise from small or skewed samples.
- Reflect the full range of views, including those that challenge your position.

## 9.3 Reporting and feeding back

Providing feedback after engagement activities is essential. It shows participants that their time and input were valued, helps build ongoing relationships with stakeholders and demonstrates how their contributions influenced decisions. Feedback should be proportionate to the scale and impact of the decision being made and should be shared in a clear, accessible and timely way.

### Top tips:

- Show appreciation by thanking participants – consider sending a follow-up email to those who took part.
- Summarise key findings from the engagement clearly and concisely.
- Explain the decision – share the rationale and evidence behind it, especially if it differs from what some participants hoped for.
- Tailor your feedback to the scale of the decision – more detailed reporting may be needed for high-impact or controversial issues.
- Work with your communications team for decisions with wide-reaching implications or where broader public awareness is important.
- Use plain English and accessible formats to ensure everyone can understand the outcomes.



Consider how you measure the success of your engagement activity and include this in your engagement plan. You may wish to consider the following:

- How many people responded to your survey?
- Who did you engage with? Did you engage with a wide and diverse range of people or groups?
- Were people contributing to discussions in meetings/focus groups?
- Did your findings from your engagement activity help to influence a decision or have a broader impact?





# REFERENCES AND FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION



## Plymouth City Council Community Empowerment Team

**This team can help with training and support for your engagement through:**

- Working with our Community Builders team. Embedded within particular geographic and identity/interest communities across the city, the team has good relationships with a wide range of stakeholders, organisations, resources and contacts that can help you engage.  
Find out more at [www.plymouth.gov.uk/community-builders](http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/community-builders)
- Links to the wider voluntary and community sector organisations, networks such as Wellbeing and Family Hubs or Plymouth and Devon Racial Equality Council, who can support and promote your activities and may already have user groups you can engage with directly.
- Access to training and resources including asset based community development (ABCD), an approach that supports communities, professionals and institutions to make better use of the resources that exist in people, places and networks and seeks to identify, connect and mobilise existing strengths within communities and institutions that lead to greater citizen-led action.
- Engaging with or seeking advice from our staff community of practice – a support network that meets quarterly to share experiences, challenges and learning.

**Local Government Association (LGA) guide for effective engagement. The guide goes into further detail on many of the topics covered in this toolkit.**

[New Conversations 2.0 LGA \(Local Government Association\) guide to engagement](#)

## Key contacts

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### **Community Empowerment team:**

[communityempowerment@plymouth.gov.uk](mailto:communityempowerment@plymouth.gov.uk)

### **Corporate Communications team:**

[commun@plymouth.gov.uk](mailto:commun@plymouth.gov.uk)

### **Youth Participation team:**

[Participation.Youth@plymouth.gov.uk](mailto:Participation.Youth@plymouth.gov.uk)

### **Economic Development marketing team:**

[invest@plymouth.gov.uk](mailto:invest@plymouth.gov.uk)

### **Changing Futures Programme:**

[The Plymouth Alliance in Plymouth, England](#)

### **Staff networks:**

[Staff Networks](#)

### **Digital Services:**

[Digital services](#)

**To see a list of external groups and organisations that can help you with your engagement, please see Staff Room.**

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Term	Definition
<b>Engagement</b>	The ongoing process of involving people in decisions that affect them, through open, inclusive and meaningful dialogue.
<b>Inform</b>	A level of public involvement where information is provided to the public, but there is no opportunity for feedback, influence, or decision-making. The goal is to educate or notify stakeholders about decisions that have already been made or are being made.
<b>Consultation</b>	A specific moment where feedback is sought on a proposal or issue, often as part of a legal or formal process.
<b>Collaborate / co-design</b>	A collaborative process where stakeholders and service users help design policies, services, or solutions.
<b>Inclusive engagement</b>	Ensuring that all voices, especially those from underrepresented or marginalised groups, are heard and considered.
<b>Empowerment</b>	Enabling people to influence decisions and take action on issues that matter to them. The difference between empowerment and consultation/engagement is that the power sits with the people, rather than the organisation.
<b>Public participation</b>	The process by which individuals and groups influence decisions that affect their lives through a range of engagement activity.
<b>Co-production</b>	A collaborative approach where professionals and communities work together as equal partners to design and deliver services.

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Engagement plan</b>	A structured outline of how, when and with whom engagement activities will take place, including goals, methods, and resources.
<b>Communications plan</b>	A structured outline of how, when and with whom the publicity for an engagement activity will take place.
<b>Stakeholder</b>	Any individual, group or organisation with an interest in or affected by a decision, policy, or service.
<b>Community of place</b>	A group of people connected by a shared geographic location, such as a neighbourhood or ward.
<b>Community of identity</b>	A group of people who share a common characteristic or experience, such as age, ethnicity or disability.
<b>Community of interest</b>	A group united by a shared concern or passion, such as environmental issues or local heritage.
<b>Spectrum of Public Participation</b>	A framework outlining five levels of engagement: Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate and Empower.
<b>Statutory requirement</b>	A legal obligation that must be followed, such as public consultation in planning processes.
<b>Equality impact assessment (EIA)</b>	A tool used to assess how a policy or activity may affect different groups, especially those with protected characteristics. Engagement activity with a particular group or community may be needed as a mitigating factor to any adverse impact.
<b>Protected characteristics</b>	Traits protected by law under the Equality Act 2010, including age, disability, race, religion, sex and others. Plymouth City Council also considers those with care experience as a protected characteristic.

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Focus group</b>	A small, facilitated discussion group is a method of engagement that is used to explore views on a specific topic in depth.
<b>Service user reference group (URG)</b>	A group of people with lived experience of a service who provide feedback and insights to improve it.
<b>Appreciative Inquiry (AI)</b>	A method of engagement that focuses on strengths and positive experiences to drive change.
<b>Digital inclusion</b>	Ensuring everyone has access to and can use digital tools and services, regardless of income, ability or background.
<b>Trauma-informed approach</b>	A way of working that recognises the impact of trauma and seeks to avoid re-traumatisation during engagement.
<b>Community builders</b>	Staff who work directly with communities to build relationships and support local engagement.
<b>Asset-based community development (abcd)</b>	An approach that focuses on the strengths and resources already present in communities. This is sometimes known as taking a 'strengths based approach'.
<b>Quantitative data</b>	Information that can be measured and expressed numerically.
<b>Qualitative data</b>	Descriptive written information, such as opinions or experiences, often gathered through interviews or open-ended questions.
<b>Demographic analysis</b>	Examining data by characteristics like age, sex, postcode, location or ethnicity ethnicity to understand who is participating.



<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Feedback loop</b>	The process of informing participants how their input was used and what decisions were made as a result.
<b>Survey fatigue</b>	A decline in response rates or engagement due to participants being asked to complete too many surveys in a short time.
<b>Inclusive language</b>	Language that avoids bias, slang, or jargon and respects all individuals, making communication accessible and respectful.
<b>Safe space</b>	An environment where participants feel comfortable expressing their views without fear of judgment or harm.
<b>Plain English</b>	Clear, straightforward language that avoids jargon and is easy for everyone to understand.
<b>Engagement fatigue</b>	When communities or individuals become less responsive due to repeated engagement requests without seeing meaningful outcomes.
<b>Multiple disadvantage</b>	Where people facing multiple disadvantage experience a combination of problems and for many, their current circumstances are shaped by long-term experiences of poverty, deprivation, trauma, abuse and neglect.

