

Audit and Governance Committee



Date of meeting:	16 September 2025
Title of Report:	New Engagement and Consultation Framework
Lead Member:	Councillor Chris Penberthy (Cabinet Member for Housing, Cooperative Development, and Communities)
Lead Strategic Director:	Professor Steve Maddern (Director of Public Health)
Author:	Elinor Firth
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Your Reference:	N/A
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

In March 2023, the Council commissioned an independent learning review into the events surrounding the felling of trees on Armada Way. The review, led by a panel of experts, examined how decisions were made, how the project was managed, and how the Council engaged with residents.

As part of the review, the panel made a number of recommendations regarding how the Council consults and engages with residents around decision making. Specifically:

- 1. Promote the capacity and influence of the in-house Communications Team to advise and oversee other professions on engagement and consultation.*
- 2. Introduce corporate standards for consultation and engagement that set out how engaging with and listening to residents will be put into practice, such as "You said: We Did" to enable residents and stakeholders to see what changes their input has made.*
- 3. Ensure that capital programmes and projects allocate enough (c10% is recommended by National Lottery for projects they fund) from the overall budget to consultation and engagement.*
- 4. Introduce a protocol for officers and members, with associated training, regarding the use of social media.*

In response, the Council acknowledged that while there are pockets of excellent engagement practice across the organisation, a more consistent and strategic approach is needed. Alongside the Independent Learning Review report, the Council's Action Plan was presented to and agreed by Council on the 2 June 2025. As part of the Action Plan, it was agreed that we would build on the learning from the Armada Way project and strengthen our relationship with residents, communities, and partners, by taking the following steps:

- **New Engagement Framework** - A revised corporate framework for engagement and consultation will be presented to the Audit and Governance Committee in September 2025.

This framework will set out clear standards and expectations for how we engage with the public and stakeholders.

- **Improved Community Engagement** - We will enhance our approach to community engagement by introducing new mechanisms for inclusive and meaningful dialogue. These will help build stronger, more positive relationships between the Council and local communities.
- **Resourcing for Delivery** - To support this enhanced approach, we will assess the resources and capacity required and ensure that the Council is equipped to deliver high-quality engagement consistently across all services and projects.
- **Modern Engagement Tools** - We will review the tools currently used for consultation and engagement and identify a modern platform that enables us to:
 - Reach a broader range of communities of geography, identity and interest
 - Facilitate two-way conversations
 - Analyse feedback effectively
 - Collaborate with residents on future ideas.
- **Training and Best Practice** - We will roll out training across the organisation to ensure that all staff involved in engagement and consultation are working in line with best practice and the new corporate standards.

Whilst not all decisions the Council makes require engagement activity, where it does, it should be proportional to the issue and delivered to a high standard. The Council's existing Engagement and Consultation Framework was last updated in 2014. While it provided a foundation for involving communities in decision-making, it no longer reflects current best practice, digital engagement methods, or public expectations. This report introduces a new corporate framework for engagement and consultation, co-designed with experienced practitioners from across the Council who are recognised for their leadership in this field. It draws directly on their expertise in delivering inclusive, meaningful engagement and reflects the best of current practice across the organisation.

The framework draws on national guidance, including the Local Government Association's *New Conversations 2.0*, and is aligned with the Council's Community Empowerment Programme and Corporate Plan.

The new framework includes:

- A public-facing Engagement and Consultation Charter
- A staff toolkit and training programme
- An internal corporate engagement calendar and new public online hub
- Internal quarterly engagement reporting to improve information sharing
- A revitalised Community of Practice and Engagement Champions network

It sets out a clear, consistent, and inclusive approach to engagement and consultation, ensuring that residents are not only informed but actively involved in shaping the future of the city.

Recommendations and Reasons

It is recommended that the Audit and Governance Committee:

1. Endorse the Engagement and Consultation Charter and Framework as the Council's corporate approach to engaging with residents, partners, and stakeholders.
Reasons: The Charter and Framework demonstrates the Council's commitment to a consistent, transparent, and inclusive approach to engagement. It directly addresses the Independent Learning Review's findings by embedding meaningful consultation at key stages of decision-making and setting out clear principles for how we work with our communities.
2. Support the introduction of a supporting toolkit and training programme to aid implementation of the Framework and Charter.
Reasons: These resources provide practical guidance and capacity-building for staff, ensuring that engagement activity meets legal requirements and reflects the Council's values of openness, inclusion, and responsiveness.
3. Note and support that the framework will be embedded across all Council departments, with oversight from an Engagement and Consultation Lead and the Community of Practice.
Reasons: Embedding the framework corporately will help raise standards, reduce inconsistency, and ensure that engagement is not siloed but supported by shared learning and expert guidance.
4. Work with officers to develop a similar framework and training for elected members.
Reasons: Members play a key role in community engagement and public trust. A tailored approach will support them to engage effectively and ethically, including through social media, as recommended by the Independent Learning Review.

Alternative options considered and rejected

1. Maintaining the existing 2014 Engagement and Consultation Framework was considered but rejected due to its outdated nature and lack of alignment with current best practice, digital tools, and public expectations.
2. Developing service-specific engagement strategies without a corporate framework was also considered but rejected, as this would risk continued inconsistency, duplication, and lack of organisational learning.
3. Delaying the introduction of a new strategy until after Local Government Reorganisation was considered but rejected, as the need for improved engagement is immediate and foundational to future governance models.

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

The new Engagement and Consultation Framework directly supports the Council's Corporate Plan, adopted in 2023, which commits the organisation to "listening more actively, engaging more meaningfully, and trusting our communities to be partners in decision-making." By embedding consistent standards and inclusive practices across all services, the framework provides a practical mechanism for delivering on these commitments. It ensures that engagement is not only a communications function but a core part of how the Council designs services, allocates resources, and

builds trust with residents—helping to realise the Corporate Plan’s vision of a more open, responsive, and community-led local authority.

Implications for the Medium-Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

No implication from the MTFP from this paper. The resource implications will be contained within existing officer capacity, with additional capacity provided through an engagement officer role which would equate to approximately £50k

Financial Risks

No impacts directly arising from this report.

Legal Implications

(Provided by Liz Bryant)

The Engagement and Consultation Framework does not replace any statutory duty to consult under function specific legislation. The council will continue to meet its statutory duty to consult as per relevant legislation where required. The Engagement and Consultation Framework is complimentary to any existing duty which prescribes the content, form or length of formal consultations required by law.

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

No impacts directly arising from this report.

Other Implications: e.g. Health and Safety, Risk Management, Child Poverty:

** When considering these proposals members have a responsibility to ensure they give due regard to the Council’s duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not.*

[Click here to enter text.](#)

Appendices

**Add rows as required to box below*

Ref.	Title of Appendix	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Engagement and Consultation Framework							
2	Engagement and consultation charter							
3	Staff guide to engagement and consultation							
4	Training plan for staff							

Background papers:

**Add rows as required to box below*

Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.

Title of any background paper(s)	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable)
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	If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Sign off: LS/00003609/41/LB/28/08/25

Fin	OW.25 26.078	Leg	LS/0000 3609/4 1/ LB/28/0 8/25	Mon Off	Click here to enter text.	HR	Click here to enter text.	Asset s	Click here to enter text.	Strat Proc	Click here to enter text.
Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Elinor Firth											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes											
Date agreed: 12 August 2025											
Cabinet Member approval: Councillor Chris Penberthy approved by email											
Date approved: 14 August 2025											