

<b>Meeting:</b>	Corporate Services, Climate Change and Scrutiny Management Committee
<b>Meeting date:</b>	25/09/2023
<b>Report of:</b>	Claire Foale Assistant Director Policy and Strategy
<b>Portfolio of:</b>	Leader, Portfolio Holder Corporate Services, Policy, Strategy and Partnerships

## **Scrutiny Report:** Resident Consultation and Engagement

### **Subject of Report**

1. To explore how the council engages residents, this report shares the approach taken to consult and engage residents in three different consultations - Our Big Conversation, Our Big Conversation Transport and the Blue Badge access consultation (August 2023).

### **Policy Basis**

2. The Council's Resident Engagement Strategy was approved by Executive in April 2021. It is based on good practice developed by the Local Government Association in consultation with local authorities "the New Conversation Guide" and the Local Government Authority engagement framework, "Continuum of Involvement" sometimes known as the Ladder of Engagement.
3. Although not all consultations are statutory, consultations are increasingly becoming grounds for successful judicial reviews as they can lead to "unlawful decisions"<sup>1</sup>. The LGA's New Conversation Guide provides a toolkit to support officers develop and deliver consultations with this in mind.

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<sup>1</sup> [Where others went wrong.pdf \(local.gov.uk\)](#)

4. The draft council plan considered by Council on 21 September 2023, has set out several actions that require officers to listen and learn to community groups and the lived experience of residents to help shape proposals and plans.

## Recommendations

5. Scrutiny are invited to:
  - a) Note the contents in this report.
  - b) Consider requirements to ensure the Local Transport Strategy Consultation and Engagement plan encourages the widest possible participation by being inclusive and accessible.
  - c) Consider the actions taken/proposed following the lessons learned as a result of the Blue Badge access consultation.
  - d) Make recommendations about how the council could deliver resident consultation and engagement going forward.

## Background

6. Failure to ensure we have 'resilient cohesive communities who are empowered and able to shape and deliver services' is recognised as a Key Corporate Risk (KCR9), The risk notes that the council needs to engage in meaningful consultation with communities to ensure decisions taken reflect the needs of residents whilst encouraging them to deliver services that the council is no longer able to.
7. The majority of community engagement is focused on engaging specific communities, rather than engaging all residents on city-wide issues. For example, the council has successfully worked with NESTA to work with parents and front line services to co-design and test different ways of delivering early-year services. [A fairer start local: York | Nesta](#)
8. A council-wide approach to engaging residents on city-wide issues was approved by Executive in April 2021. This, the Resident Engagement Strategy, aimed to better support delivery of the council plan, demonstrate how the council listens to residents to inform development of strategies and proposals. It drew on the 'my'

engagement programme that supported Castle Gateway and York Central.

9. Resident engagement to inform the 10-year strategies (climate, economy, health and wellbeing, and now transport) became a single resident engagement programme “Our Big Conversation”. It aimed to consolidate feedback, share principles and assumptions, learning from previous engagement activity, and making best use of available budget to ensure conversations join up and inform strategic direction.
10. By taking this approach, we were able to ensure greater inclusivity by actively engaging with target communities, including those with protected characteristics with the ambition of facilitating a discussion that everyone can be part of. In addition, the approach taken was to proactively gather and present to members a wide range of views and different perspectives.

## **Council consultations**

11. At any one time, the council can be consulting residents on up to 60 different decisions, policies or proposals, with hundreds more if you include statutory consultations such as traffic regulation orders or planning applications. The vast majority of council consultations operate as business as usual with residents engaging and results informing decision session. The process is well-tested and operating successfully. There are some notable exceptions, see below.
12. The council’s resident consultation and engagement strategy is summarised based on the Local Government Association’s Continuum of Involvement<sup>2i</sup> and draws on best practice and case studies in the LGA’s New Conversations Guide to Engagement<sup>3</sup>.
13. It describes how for engagement to be successful, both council and residents need to know exactly what it is for. The objectives below show the different levels of engagement:

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<sup>2</sup> [Working in partnership – how councils can work with the voluntary and community sector to increase civic participation | Local Government Association](#)

<sup>3</sup> [New conversations 2: LGA Guide to Engagement | Local Government Association](#)

<b>Information giving</b>	There is little scope to comment or influence the decisions that are being made. We do need to explain what is happening and be transparent
<b>Consultation</b>	There is little scope to influence the decisions that are being made but there is room to work with residents on what happens next.
<b>Co-production</b>	There is some scope to influence the decision that will be taken and we are open to alternatives.
<b>Citizen power</b>	There is a lot of room to shape the decision/service and what it is that we are deciding on. It is important that we have well-informed and involved sections of the community to help with this.
	The decision or service is up for grabs and there's potential to work in partnership with local people. We are offering long-term involvement.

14. Typically, the council will “consult” on proposals and invite residents to share feedback about proposals via an online survey. For larger projects, such as developing the Dementia Strategy, MyCastleGateway or Early-Year Services, the council facilitates opportunities for co-production with key community groups.
15. There is no central team responsible for leading the council’s full range of resident engagement and consultation, and instead roles are shared between:
  - Services who commission and develop the consultation and engagement approach, facilitate discussions with partners or community groups (such as in workshops) and analyse survey results. Some services also engage specific communities, such as the Youth Council, York Access Forum or Age Friendly York.
  - Corporate Services who run electronic consultation surveys, summarise feedback and provide expertise about questions and survey tools. These are surveys for both internal and resident audiences and approximately 60+ are live at any one point; and provide expertise about reaching different audiences and the accessibility aspects to consider; and provides expertise about how to reach audiences and promote consultations and engagement activities.
  - Some Corporate Services teams are externally funded to engage residents on Major Capital projects and the Local Transport Strategy for example.
16. The vast majority of consultations are run internally with the cost to officer time only. This leads to a mixed economy of consultations with some high quality and funded and some delivered as part of business as usual. The cost to run consultations varies significantly, for

example: Our Big Conversation June 2022-August 2023 cost £100k whereas the budget consultation (including focus groups) cost £25k. Typically, the council does not fund consultations although external funders might, for example the Department of Transport is funding the Local Transport Strategy consultation.

## Our Big Conversation

17. The Our Big Conversation consultation and engagement programme iteratively explored different aspects of transport issues and opportunities in York since 2021, specifically in the context of the economy, climate change and health and wellbeing, but also exploring how people access and engage in the city centre.
18. It included an attitudinal survey in Summer 2021 which informed the Climate Change, Health and Wellbeing and Economic strategy development process, the 10-year strategies consultation in Summer 2022, and focus groups commissioned to hear from groups that typically did not engage and were identified through analysis of the representation of Our Big Conversation participants.

<b>Our Big Conversation consultations</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>Publication</b>
Resident engagement strategy and transport consultation approved	April / May			<a href="#">Agenda for Executive on Thursday, 22 April 2021, 5.30 pm (york.gov.uk)</a> item 123  <a href="#">Agenda for Decision Session - Executive Member for Transport on Tuesday, 11 May 2021, 10.00 am (york.gov.uk)</a> – item 84
My City Centre	March - June			<a href="#">My City Centre Summer Consultation 2021 - My City Centre Results Final Report - York Open Data</a>
Attitudinal survey	June - August			<a href="#">Our Big Conversation Summer 2021 - OBC Final Report - Residents Survey - York Open Data</a>
Targeted focus groups		July		<a href="#">Our Big Conversation 2022 - Datasets - York Open Data</a>

10 Year strategies consultation		June - August		
Budget 2023		November -	January	<a href="#">Agenda for Decision Session - Executive Member for Finance and Major Projects on Thursday, 12 January 2023, 10.00 am (york.gov.uk)</a> item 24
Transport – stage 1: build understanding			February+	<a href="#">Agenda for Executive on Tuesday, 14 February 2023, 2.30 pm (york.gov.uk)</a> item 93
Transport – stage 2 targeted engagement			October +	Report not yet published
Transport – stage 3-5			October +	Report not yet published

19. The Local Transport Strategy Consultation and Engagement Plan will be run under the banner and principles set out in Our Big Conversation, incorporating lessons learned throughout the process.
20. The Local Transport Strategy Consultation is funded by Department of Transport, with additional resource funded by the DfT specifically to run the consultation and engagement process.

### **Our Big Conversation Lessons Learned**

21. Residents shared feedback about the Our Big Conversation consultation process in the focus groups, the 10-year strategies consultation and the first phase of the Local Transport Strategy Consultation.
22. This feedback informed the approach proposed for the Local Transport Strategy Consultation. The lessons from resident feedback is summarised below (with links to the feedback in the background reports section of this report):

- a) Only consult or engage if the council is prepared to listen and change the approach
- b) Keep questions open - avoid questions that appear to already have set a course of action
- c) Keep information clear and simple, avoid technical jargon or assumptions about what residents know
- d) Show the benefit of the proposal being consulted on - for different groups - residents are keen to see no one is disadvantaged by a proposal
- e) Provide different ways to provide feedback - some people aren't online or don't like talking in meetings
- f) Ensure events and information is accessible - both for disabled people and for people who don't know the subject matter
- g) Make it relevant - different circumstances will mean different aspects of the proposal are of interest
- h) Promote the different ways to get involved early on - with events in different locations and times
- i) Show the difference feedback has made, ideally in a "we asked, you said, we did" summary

### **Our Big Conversation - Transport**

#### [Our Big Conversation – City of York Council](#)

- 23. The feedback above was used to inform the Local Transport Strategy Consultation and Engagement Plan which set out five stages of consultation with the first stage arranged to build understanding - both to ensure the consultation would be as inclusive and accessible as possible and to help participants understand the challenges.
- 24. During the first stage, face to face workshops and discussions were held with 8 community or representative groups. These included disabled people, young people, older people, community transport and Black, Asian or Racially Minoritised groups. The workshops shared an accessible version of the engagement plan with participants who were then invited to tell the council how to ensure the consultation would encourage as wide and representative participation as possible. Feedback from these workshops was summarised (**Annex A**) and shared with workshop attendees (as a 'we asked, you said'), with this feedback informing the revised plan and Equality Impact Assessment that will be published in October.
- 25. Four online webinars were held in March 2023 inviting residents to learn more about different aspects of the proposed strategy. The webinars were recorded and published on the council's website.

They took place at different times of the day (to appeal to different personal circumstances) and each of the webinars included a BSL interpreter.

26. As a result of the feedback from community groups in stage one, the Local Transport Strategy Consultation and Engagement plan has been updated to include significantly more opportunities for face to face discussion or workshops targeted at different community groups, highlighting different interests (eg. safe travel for school children)
27. The Local Transport Strategy Consultation and Engagement Plan will be presented to Executive in October 2023. Following phase one community group feedback it will include:
  - A range of accessible communications, including Easy Read, video with subtitles, BSL video, large print, braille and MP3 Audio
  - an online engagement platform to collate feedback, providing maps for residents to indicate transport issues or benefits. The online engagement platform is being assessed to sense check accessibility.
  - Workshop toolkits for schools, ward meetings, and community groups to facilitate discussions with different groups
  - Workshops at all the community groups met in phase one
  - Drop-ins or interactive displays at public spaces, for example Questions at Bus Stops, Display Boards in libraries
  - Focus groups based on an analysis of which groups are under-represented
28. There are several different related consultations taking place over the next few months. The co-benefits of joining these up is currently being explored. For example, the Air Quality Improvement Plan 4 consultation could be aligned and launched with the Local Transport Strategy consultation with opportunities to “cross-promote” the consultations through the different activities already planned to reach community groups involved in the Local Transport Strategy Consultation.
29. **Scrutiny are invited to consider what additional actions they would like the Local Transport Strategy Consultation and Engagement Plan to include to ensure the consultation is as representative and encourages as wide a participation as possible.**



## **Blue Badge Access Consultation (August 2023)**

### [Blue Badge access consultation – City of York Council](#)

30. In November 2021 the Council's Executive made the decision to permanently remove the exemption which had allowed blue badge holders vehicular access to Blake Street, Lendal, St. Helen's Square, Goodramgate (between Deangate and King's Square), Church Street, King' Square and Colliergate.
31. The engagement process to reach this decision followed lengthy consultation that effectively begun in November 2020 when the then Executive delegated the decision to consult on broad principles to the then Executive Member. In June 2021, the then Executive Member considered feedback from this consultation and determined to now advertise a permanent Traffic Regulation Order change, which was considered and determined in November 2021.
32. Following the election in May 2023, to support sound and robust decision making that will not be subject to future legal challenge, a consultation has begun to review, and ultimately aim to reverse the November 2021 decision.
33. The access consultation is in three stages which align to two objectives above (see 13). By introducing the more detailed engagement (stage 2 - involve the community), the aim is to better understand the lived-experience, perception and constraints of access and how to overcome these.
  - Stage 1 - Consult - this consultation begun in August and is a consultation on broad principles reflecting those based upon the new administration's manifesto commitments.
  - Stage 2 - Involve - a more detailed engagement is being planned, ideally through workshops and focus groups, to seek feedback from Blue Badge Holders on "how" to facilitate access whilst retaining the integrity of the Hostile Vehicle Measures.
  - Statutory Consultation - Following the detailed engagement to shape the proposals, a statutory consultation may need to take place as a result of the change to the Traffic Regulation Order.

34. The Consult phase of Blue Badge Holder City Centre Access launched on 7 August 2023. At its heart is a short survey, asking residents to consider five different principles. To date there have been over 3,000 online and 550 printed responses
35. To help ensure the consultation is inclusive, the below has/is taking place:
- A video with BSL interpretation explaining the purpose of the consultation has been shared
  - Easy Read is currently being produced
  - MySight York have produced Braille and Audio versions
  - The consultation was sent to all York resident Blue Badge Holders (via mail and email)
  - It was shared with different networks and community groups
  - Paper copies are in all Explore Libraries
  - Customer Services are able to support access enquiries over the phone or 'drop-in's for example, supporting users of BSL with completing the survey using an access terminal
36. On publication, concerns were raised with the disabled community identifying several issues. To understand these, Cllr Lomas met with representatives of the community to identify lessons learned. In tandem, an officer lessons-learned discussion was held to understand how the process could be improved. These are summarised below and, where possible, will be used to inform the next phase of the consultation:
- a) **Setting the standards:** The external funding of the Local Transport Strategy consultation has set a "gold standard" that the council is not funded to replicate - an engagement toolkit will be produced sharing best practice and officer training scheduled to standardise consultations as cost-effectively as possible. A consultation checklist will be introduced to support officers (draft in **Annex B**)
- Sharing feedback:** from the outset, it should be easy for participants to share feedback. The council will share how to get involved from the outset and explore additional opportunities with the York Disabled Residents Forum (YDRF) and the York Access Forum (YAF).
- b) **Sharing feedback with different services:** Survey results are generally published on the open data platform with results shared

or summarised at Directorate Management Team and/or Corporate Management Team meetings. To support this an internal policy network has been established to share key insights from different networks and community groups in advance of key policies, such as developing the Council Plan and informing the draft Local Transport Strategy.

- c) **Sharing feedback with participants:** it isn't always clear the difference feedback has made, or the different perspectives shared. We will explore how to share the feedback and difference it made with participants using the "we asked, you said, we did" approach.
- d) **Working in partnership:** the approach taken to invite different community groups to consult could lead to stronger partnerships with key groups invited to comment pre-launch.
- e) **Social Model of Disability:** The Model was unanimously agreed by council in October 2022 however has not been translated into policy to guide officer action, particularly around language and format. A policy paper will be co-produced with the disabled community and used to inform how consultations are communicated and set out going forward.
- f) **Accessible communications:** To encourage the widest participation, communications and participation should be accessible in a wide variety of formats. Healthwatch reported on Accessible Information<sup>4</sup> which identified several different actions for partners, including the council, to develop more accessible communications. The corporate style guide will be updated to ensure standards for accessible communications are clear, this includes standards for Easy Read, and how to support BSL interpretation.
- g) **Sharing purpose:** Different aspects of the consultation weren't understood - for example why the council was only consulting on principles instead of "getting on with it", with the policy and legislation that supports the consultation not specified. Clearly communicating the purpose of the consultation will be included in the toolkit, together with clarity about the intended audience and the analysis process (see checklist, Annex B).

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<sup>4</sup> [Accessible Information Survey Findings | Healthwatch](#)

- h) **Corporate oversight:** no single service is responsible for oversight or setting the standards for the wide range of engagement activities taking place. With a key aspect of the draft Council Plan focused on listening and learning from people with lived experience, officers will consider how best respond to the above lessons and whether there is a benefit in providing a stronger corporate service focused on setting the standard for engagement activities and sharing resident feedback.
- i) **Executive member involvement:** All city-wide consultations will be overseen by the relevant Executive Member. This includes early briefings about the purpose and proposed structure of the consultation, together with oversight of the consultation design itself. Additional guidance has been provided to support officers design the consultation (**Annex C**).

**37. Scrutiny are invited to consider the actions taken in response to the lesson learned (above)**

## Consultation Analysis

38. The lessons learned shared in this report were from multiple sources listed below:
- Our Big Conversation: Focus Groups
  - Our Big Conversation: 10-Year Strategies analysis of comments
  - Local Transport Strategy Consultation: Stage 1 - community engagement
  - Lessons Learned - Cllr Lomas discussion with York Disabled Resident Group
  - Lessons Learned - internal officer group

## Contact details

For further information please contact the authors of this Report.

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## Background papers

Executive April 2021: Resident engagement strategy

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=733&MId=12510&Ver=4> item 123

Executive November 2022: 10 Year strategies

[Agenda for Executive on Tuesday, 22 November 2022, 5.30 pm \(york.gov.uk\)](#)  
item 46

Climate Emergency and Policy Scrutiny Committee October 2022: item 12 -  
Climate Change Strategy (Our Big Conversation detailed feedback)

[Agenda for Climate Emergency Policy and Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday, 4 October 2022, 5.30 pm \(york.gov.uk\)](#)

Annex B [Annex B FINAL OBC Phase 2 Focus Group Discussions Findings Report 1.pdf \(york.gov.uk\)](#)

Annex D [PowerPoint Presentation \(york.gov.uk\)](#)

Executive February 2023: Local Transport Strategy engagement

[Agenda for Executive on Tuesday, 14 February 2023, 2.30 pm \(york.gov.uk\)](#) –  
item 93

The Local Transport Strategy Engagement Plan [Annex D.pdf \(york.gov.uk\)](#)

Audit and Governance March 2023 - Key Corporate Risks

[Agenda for Audit and Governance Committee on Wednesday, 15 March 2023, 5.30 pm \(york.gov.uk\)](#) item 47

## Annexes

- Annex A : Transport Workshops what you told us
  - Annex B : Draft consultation checklist
  - Annex C : Questionnaire design guidance 2023
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