Influencing Decisions in Bournemouth's Public Services

Consultation and Engagement Strategy 2010 - 2013

HAVE YOUR SAY
INFLUENCING LOCAL DECISIONS

BOURNEMOUTH 2026
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Document Control

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Date	Version	Summary of Changes	Section(s) Changed
27/5/10	2.0	Delete objective 1.6 (actions merged into 1.1). Renumbering of objectives under Outcome 1.	4
27/5/10	2.0	Changed wording to 3.7 to broaden scope.	4

Equalities Impact Assessment

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1 Introduction

This Strategy sets out the commitment of Bournemouth's public services to improving the way that we consult and engage people so that their views can influence our decisions.

The Bournemouth 2026 partnership's vision is 'to be a town that values and listens to residents'. Listening to people and giving them influence over local decisions is important because it helps improve services and increases satisfaction with the public services. Public service organisations also have a legal duty to consult and engage where appropriate.

Through the 2009 Comprehensive Area Assessment, the Audit Commission found that:

"Bournemouth Council and its partners such as the police, fire and the voluntary sector talk to local people and organisations and listen to their views. The community strategy that is shaping Bournemouth's future was developed following discussions with local people, businesses and the voluntary sectors. There are well established ways to ask partners and local people what they want and for showing what has been done as a result."

As this suggests, Bournemouth's public services are already involved in a lot of positive consultation and engagement activity. However despite this, the 2008 Place Survey revealed that only 28% of residents in the town believe they can influence decisions that affect their local area.

2 What is Consultation and Engagement?

The Consultation Institute's definition of consultation is 'the dynamic process of dialogue between individuals or groups, based upon a genuine exchange of views, with the objective of influencing decisions, policies or programmes of action.'

Community Engagement is an umbrella term for the actions that public services take to enable them to consult, involve, listen and respond to people through ongoing relationships and dialogue.

3 How was the Strategy developed?

Bournemouth Council's Consultation and Engagement team conducted and commissioned a range of research and consultation with partners and local people, in order to assess existing consultation and engagement practice and to identify priorities for improvement. The programme of research and consultation included:

Residents:
Place Survey Oct - Dec 2008
Measuring Up telephone survey Apr – Aug 2009
Focus group with disabled people May 2009
Focus group / interviews with people from black and ethnic minority communities June 2009
Face to face interviews with residents June 2009
Area Forums Chairs meeting Dec 2009

Third Sector
Third Sector Strategy Group Mar 2009
Face to face interviews with representatives from third sector organisations Sep – Oct 2009

Public sector agencies
Consultation and Involvement Survey Nov 2008
Influencing Decisions project kick-start meeting May 2009
Face to face interviews with project managers Sep - Oct 2009
Bournemouth Council Leadership team meeting Nov 2009
Practitioners workshop Jan 2010
Directors workshop Feb 2010

Councillors
Members Influencing Decisions workshop Sep 2009
Overview and Scrutiny Panel Jan 2010

Bournemouth 2026 Partnership (incl. public sector, private sector, business, community and third sector representatives)

Vision Board Mar 2009
Investing in People Forum Apr 2009
Bournemouth 2026 Survey June 2009
Bournemouth 2026 Conference Nov 2009
Safer and Stronger Communities Forum Jan 2010

4 What will the Strategy achieve?

From our research and consultation, we have identified three key outcomes to be achieved by this Strategy. Under each outcome, we have also identified a number of objectives to help achieve it:

Outcome 1: Local people feel informed and motivated to influence decisions.

Why? Our research and consultation revealed that many local people are not motivated to want to influence decisions because they do not see evidence that it

makes a real difference. Others are simply unaware of the opportunities to have their say. Providing appropriate information using a variety of communication channels and in a way that is easy to understand, is key to supporting people to influence decisions.

Keeping people informed also extends to good customer service. Besides actual service delivery, being given the right information and being kept informed of progress is a key driver of satisfaction with a service. People need to feel listened to when they make direct personal contact with the public services, if they are to trust that that they can have any influence over wider issues.

Objectives:

1.1 The public services' communications explain the rationale behind decisions including how local people's views / needs fed into the decision.

1.2 Increase awareness of the ways in which local people can influence decisions.

1.3 Ensure reports and publications use plain language and are comprehensible to the majority of the Bournemouth population.

1.4 Make greater use of social media as a means of engaging with new and wider audiences.

1.5 Improve websites to enable more public interaction and feedback.

1.6 All public services to inform and/ or involve ward Councillors in area based issues so that they can communicate with their constituents.

1.7 All public services to inform and/ or involve area forums / residents associations and area action groups in area based issues.

1.8 Ensure people are kept informed of progress following the reporting of a problem or making a complaint.

Outcome 2: All sections of the community have opportunities to influence decisions.

Why? The public services have a legal duty to promote fairness between people. Some communities are 'harder to hear' simply because they are small in number and need more carefully targeted engagement activity in order to identify their particular views and needs. For others there are barriers to engagement. For example, self-esteem, confidence, education and personal income are all known to have a big impact on whether or not people feel able to influence decisions. Some people e.g. disabled people or people for whom

English is not their first language, may have difficulties accessing information or events.

Objectives:

2.1 Increase participation of seldom heard community groups in Bournemouth 2026 Forums and other partnership events.

2.2 Identify opportunities for engaging lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual communities to compensate for lack of existing mechanisms to engage with this community.

2.3 Develop a common approach to payments and reimbursements for volunteers and / or payments to third sector organisations to respond to consultations.

2.4 Promote and support individuals to develop their confidence and skills in order to enable greater engagement with public services.

2.5 Promote methods of involvement in public life to groups currently under represented.

2.6 Ensure Officers assess potential equality impacts before deciding on consultation and engagement methodologies.

2.7 Improve Officers' understanding of when and when not to consult as part of the Equality Impact Assessment process.

Outcome 3: The public services co-ordinate their consultation and engagement activities and make best use of existing resources.

Why? The public sector is expected to experience a squeeze on budgets in the years ahead. We need to be increasingly resourceful to ensure that the quality of our consultation and engagement activity does not suffer as a result. Many Officers already see time and resources as one of the biggest barriers to effective consultation and engagement.

Developing our skills and raising awareness of good practice in consultation and engagement, is also key to improving the quality of response from local people and achieving best value from our consultation and engagement activities.

Objectives:

3.1 Make better use of and share existing information and research across departments and other public services.

3.2 Share and co-ordinate communications resources across the public services where possible

3.3 Co-ordinate the Local Development Framework with the Sustainable Community Strategy.

3.4 Public services use the e-panel for residents surveys.

3.5 Put in place the appropriate data protection statements and / or protocols to enable sharing of customer contacts for consultation purposes.

3.6 Further develop the online Consultation Tracker to seamlessly share and update records across Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole.

3.7 Public services share their consultation plans and findings

3.8 Develop Officers' skills and knowledge of consultation and engagement.

3.9 Develop elected Members in their roles as community champions.

3.10 Commit to a consultation charter of good practice and monitor adherence to it.

3.11 Public services use the online Consultation Handbook as a source of good practice advice

3.12 Regularly review compliments and complaints to look for common successes and problems.

5 How will the Strategy be implemented and monitored?

Overall progress will be monitored against National Indicator 4, which measures the extent to which people 'feel able to influence decisions in their local area'. This indicator is collected via the Place Survey, a residents survey carried out every two years by all local authorities in England and Wales. Bournemouth's performance is currently in the third quartile for unitary authorities. Our ambition is to be in the top quartile.

Each individual objective has a named project lead and champion, responsible for putting together an action plan and proposing suitable performance measures for measuring progress towards that objective.

Action plans will be approved by the Neighbourhood Working Strategic Delivery Partnership and progress on actions will also be reported to this group on a

quarterly basis. The Chair of the Neighbourhood Working Strategic Delivery Partnership will in turn report back to the Bournemouth 2026 Vision Board.

6 Further information

Information about the opportunities available to local people to influence decisions can be found at www.bournemouth2026.org/haveyoursay or by calling 01202 454869 for an information leaflet.

For further information about this strategy, please contact:

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