

Hampshire County Council consultation policy

Our consultation principles

In Hampshire, residents' views on the services provided by the County Council are represented through locally elected Councillors, and decisions are made by Executive (Cabinet) Members, in accordance with the County Council's Constitution.

In the current public spending climate, the County Council faces extremely difficult decisions about the future of the services it provides, which must be taken with the widest public interest in mind. Before making these decisions, it is important for the County Council to seek information and views from the public.

The County Council therefore undertakes consultations so that people who live and work in Hampshire have a say in the County Council's decision-making processes and know that their views have been taken into account. Consultation is a process of dialogue with residents and stakeholders, which usually has a defined start and end date, and informs a decision about a proposal, policy, or service change.

The County Council will give due consideration to the views expressed in responses to consultations, but these views must be weighed against other relevant considerations in order to reach a balanced decision. This means that the County Council cannot necessarily commit to following the wishes expressed in response to a consultation.

While we do not undertake to hold a public consultation on all aspects of our work, we are committed to consulting on a proportionate and practical basis as appropriate for the potential impacts of proposed decisions. To help us get this right, we have adopted five consultation principles to inform when and how we will consult.

1. We will consult on key issues and proposals

Where it is proportionate to do so, we will consult on significant decisions, which meet one or more of the general criteria below (please note this list is not exhaustive):

- Decisions which are likely to have an impact of significance on a particular group of service users, residents or businesses, for example near a specific location
- There is or is likely to be widespread public interest
- We are required by law to conduct a prescribed form of public consultation or engagement.

2. We will consult in good time

In order to consult residents and interested parties in good time, we will:

- Consult (where practically possible) early in the policy development or decision-making process at a time when proposals are still at a formative stage
- Set a timeframe which is realistic and proportionate and allows enough time for consideration and response. This will be decided on a case-by-case basis, depending on the nature and impact of the proposal. Please note that in some cases consultation would not be appropriate or would have to be conducted in a condensed timeframe, for example in an emergency, when we would need to act quickly to respond to circumstances outside of the Council's control
- Be clear about the overall timetable for the decision-making process

- Give sufficient notice by publishing information on our website when and by whom key decisions are being made (see our [Notice of Key Decisions](#) and our schedules for [shaping services for the future](#))
- Take into consideration any impact that holiday periods may have on the proposed consultation
- Take into consideration any impact that national and local election periods may have on the proposed consultation
- Be clear that only responses received within given timescales will be taken into consideration.

3. We will be inclusive but within clear and appropriate limits

Hampshire residents and communities have different needs and views. We aim to ensure that everyone who wishes to have a say can do so. The form of the consultation will be proportionate and will depend on the issues under consideration, the scale of change and any required legal processes. In order to provide as good a service as possible, we will:

- Use a range of channels or ways to enable residents and stakeholders to be involved and provide feedback during a consultation period, for example: through our website, online surveys, and paper formats which are made available through a range of public venues across the county, e.g. Libraries and Discovery Centres
- Invite interested stakeholders to take part. This may involve consultation with individuals, a group or groups, or the public as a whole, depending on the nature of the proposed decision
- Avoid potential discrimination, including providing information in alternative formats upon request
- Not publish any personal information without expressed consent.

4. We will consult using clear, simple information

We will seek to publicise information which is clear and simple. We will:

- Provide sufficient information about the proposals and where appropriate their alternatives to allow residents to make an informed response
- Communicate in plain English and avoid jargon and acronyms
- Be clear about the purpose of the consultation, including the aspects of the decision which are open to change, and the decisions which have already been taken
- Be clear about the questions being asked but leave an opportunity for further comment where appropriate.

5. We will ensure responses are taken into account when decisions are made

In making a decision we will take into account the views expressed as part of a consultation, weighing those views alongside other relevant considerations, including operational, financial, policy and legal considerations. Where it is practical, we will publish information about the findings of consultations and how the decision was influenced by those findings. In these cases we will:

- Publish on our website, in good time after the consultation has closed, the number of responses received and summary information on the views collected. This may be as part of an Executive Member decision-making report
- Publish clear information about the decision once it has been made on our website www.hants.gov.uk/councilmeetings.