

ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

2024-2026



CONTENTS

03 Overview and Vision

04 Key Objectives

05 Monitoring and Evaluation

06 Feedback

07 Context

08 Strategic Approach

09 Types of Engagement

10 Stakeholders

12 Engagement Principles

13 Factors for success

OVERVIEW AND VISION

The Engagement Strategy sets out how the council will engage and work with residents, stakeholders and communities to ensure their needs and views are placed at the heart of decision-making.

We are committed to giving communities and stakeholders a voice and this document provides the strategic framework to enable this as an important factor of the way we work.

This has long been an underpinning principle to the delivery of the council's priorities and services, and this document provides a commitment to renew, strengthen and embed engagement as a long-term and central value of the council. This principle is an important contributing factor to formulating, deciding and meeting our corporate priorities.

This strategy will direct how we will work to provide all people in our area, from all backgrounds, with a range of opportunities to contribute, influence and shape the priorities and projects we undertake in the locations in which they live, work and visit.

This aims to build resilient and empowered communities who are effectively informed, engaged and involved in defining and designing local priorities, front-line services and informing council decision-making in areas that impact their lives.

KEY OBJECTIVES

In order to realise the ambitions set out in the 'Overview and Vision' section, the council will seek to achieve the following key objectives:

- Establish strong and robust channels for two-way engagement with our communities and stakeholders
- Grow and widen the council's audience reach using digital technology alongside more traditional methods of engagement
- Ensure engagement is as inclusive as possible when seeking the views of residents, with particular focus on seldom-heard from communities such as young people, vulnerable adults and those who are digitally excluded
- Demonstrate clearly where the council has taken the views of consultees into account in its decision-making
- Staff feel guided and enabled to involve communities and stakeholders effectively in the setting of priorities and formal decision-making

The council will seek to achieve these aspirations through a variety of engagement projects and channels.

In addition to our objectives, all consultation and engagement exercises will seek to adhere to the key values set out by case law using The Gunning Principles, which state:

1. Consultation must be conducted at a time when proposals are still at a formative stage. A final decision has not yet been made, or predetermined, by decision makers.
2. There is sufficient information provided, including the reasons for proposals, to allow for intelligent consideration and response. The information provided must relate to the consultation and must be available, accessible and easily interpretable for consultees to provide an informed response.
3. There is adequate time for people to consider a proposal, participate and respond. The length of time given for consultees to respond can vary depending on the subject and extent of impact of the consultation.
4. Conscientious consideration must be given to the consultation responses before a decision is made. Decision makers should be able to provide evidence that they took consultation responses into account.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The measures of success in this strategy will be through the monitoring and evaluation of the key objectives as below:

OBJECTIVE	TO MONITOR AND EVALUATE
<p>Establish strong and robust channels for two-way engagement with our communities and stakeholders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Channels used• Response rate• Engagement rates on online promotion• Attendance at events• Input into formal decision-making process and corporate priorities• Quality of responses received
<p>Grow and widen the council's audience reach using digital technology alongside more traditional methods of engagement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Channels used• Response rate• Engagement rates on online tools• Engagement rates on online engagement• Attendance at events• Quality of responses received
<p>Strive to ensure engagement is as inclusive as possible when seeking the views of residents, with particular focus on seldom-heard from communities such as young people, vulnerable adults and those who are digitally excluded</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evidence of seldom-heard from communities taking part through response rates / online tools• Offline response rates through methods such as paper survey returns and event attendance• Quality of responses received

OBJECTIVE

Demonstrate clearly where the council has taken the views of consultees into account in its decision-making

Staff feel guided and enabled to involve communities effectively in the setting of priorities and formal decision-making

TO MONITOR AND EVALUATE

- Clear reference to consultation and engagement in formal reporting
- Input into formal decision-making process and corporate priorities
- Quality of responses received

- Improved levels of awareness within authority
- More effective engagement activities

A wider outcome that can be used to measure the success of this strategy is the council's reputation, which can be monitored via satisfaction rates or the level of complaints.

FEEDBACK

A critical part of this strategy is to establish and embed mechanisms by which we collect feedback about the ways in which we engage and consult with our stakeholders and communities.

It is essential to establish these mechanisms when conducting engagement, as it allows us to assess if the activity was successful and respondents felt that they were able to meaningfully contribute and have their views heard on the relevant topic(s). This process also helps establish longer-lasting, stronger and more constructive stakeholder relationships and connections.

All consultation and engagement activities will be designed with feedback mechanisms considered from the outset and these can be achieved in a number of ways, with a focus on post-engagement interaction to ensure residents, businesses and stakeholders are kept updated on the progress of decision-making for projects they have contributed towards and are able to engage with the council's democratic processes.

Furthermore, in appropriate cases this may lead to further instances of collaborative and partnership working with our stakeholders to establish consistent methods of interaction and engagement, as well as achieve the aims of the corporate objectives in an effective manner.

CONTEXT

Havant Borough Council has been through a period of significant change in the years prior to this strategy. Alongside the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the authority withdrew from its joint management agreement with East Hampshire District Council in early 2021 and established a new management team in 2022. During this time, the authority and its residents have also been faced with financial challenges as part of the 'cost of living crisis', with rises in inflation and energy costs affecting all in the area.

Against this backdrop, Havant has a number of local challenges and barriers that it must work with. The local population is growing older, with just under a third of residents projected to be aged 65 and over by 2040 (29.6%, up from 24.3% in 2021), while there are areas of severe deprivation within the borough. Havant is an area with differing place characteristics, with coastal, urban and countryside areas within our borders that present distinct and diverse issues and concerns. There are challenges in meeting housing needs and in regenerating main urban locations in our borough, while areas in Havant are also subject to coastal flooding.

Within this context, it has never been more important for us to engage with our local communities. With limited resources, it is crucial that we understand the changing needs, priorities and challenges that our communities and stakeholders face so that this informs and shapes the decisions we make and the services we deliver.

This reflects a central theme present throughout the council's corporate priorities, which foreground a commitment to working with partners in the public, private and charity sectors to achieve the aim of making Havant a better place to live, work and visit. Engagement is essential to this process, both in maintaining strong relationships with our partners and in developing these aspirations via connections with our communities to achieve an economically and socially vibrant Havant that residents can feel proud to be part of.

STRATEGIC APPROACH

The term 'engagement' can mean different things to different people and can include a number of approaches.

For this strategy, engagement is how we interact, involve and work together with residents, businesses and other relevant stakeholders. The nature of these interactions can vary and be flexible to the needs of each individual, group or community. In the context of this strategy, engagement is best understood as the process through which the council seeks to work with identified groups of people to encourage them to actively take part in making decisions about their community.

Part of this engagement may include statutory consultation. Established in law for specific projects (for example, planning applications or Traffic Regulation Orders), in these instances there are statutory guidelines that must be followed.

In a number of cases however, while the council may not have a duty to consult with local communities, we will choose to do so to enable resident input to influence and shape decisions.

TYPES OF ENGAGEMENT

The council engages on a variety of topics and through a number of channels. The nature of this engagement comes in different forms and there are a number of ways in which we currently involve our stakeholders in decision-making.

INFORMING



Making our communities aware by providing information that explains issues, opportunities and solutions as well as keeping these groups up-to-date on the work of the council.

CONSULTING



Gathering feedback from communities and stakeholders to inform decision making and service delivery. Via these methods, we listen to the views of our communities and their input influences the decisions we make. This includes both statutory and non-statutory consultation exercises.

INVOLVING



Working with communities to understand issues, consider solutions and work to implement improvements in our area. This approach draws on the expertise and views of communities to ensure decisions incorporate these. (e.g. forums, network meetings.)

COLLABORATING



Working with the community through the decision-making process. These methods necessitate seeking advice and solutions from the community that are designed in close co-operation with the council (otherwise known as co-design.)

EMPOWERING



Giving ultimate decision-making power to our communities. The council will facilitate, support and help but the final responsibility for the design and delivery of the service or design lies with the community (e.g. community asset transfer, delegated budgeting.)

STAKEHOLDERS

There are a wide range of individual bodies, groups, organisations and associations that the council engages with, at local, regional and national levels. These groups are referred to as stakeholders, and this strategy addresses those individuals or organisations who may have an interest or be impacted by a council decision, activity or policy.

Within this, there are different types of stakeholders which include the following – note some may cross in to more than one category.

INDIVIDUALS



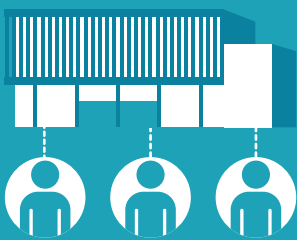
Interactions with individuals, such as a resident or business owner, may largely focus upon the delivery of a service or encouraging that individual to take part in decision-making processes as part of a consultation or engagement.

ORGANISED GROUP



This is defined as a group of individuals or organisations that come together for a common purpose or goal such as a residents' association, civic society, or special interest groups. These groups are independently organised and may or may not currently engage with the council.

COUNCIL ORGANISED GROUP



This is a group of individuals or organisations brought together by the council to lead or advise collaboratively on a common purpose or goal, that aligns with a council priority or strategy.

STATUTORY



This group consists of stakeholders that services must work or engage with to deliver their statutory duties.

PARTNERS



This group consists of stakeholders that services currently work or engage with to deliver their service in partnership, through contractual or financial arrangements.

STRATEGIC STAKEHOLDERS



These key stakeholders will often provide the national or regional direction, guidance or lead on a number of issues that form part of our strategic priorities, and we will look to build and maintain important relationships to facilitate the delivery of our key objectives.

RESIDENTS OF OUR BOROUGH



One key stakeholder that we routinely engage with on a variety of topics are the residents of our borough – residents will clearly have an interest in many of the decisions or activities we make as their local authority. We also have a duty to ensure that we are doing everything we can in order to engage with our seldom heard-from communities

SELDOM-HEARD FROM COMMUNITIES



One of the key objectives focuses on reaching our seldom-heard from communities as much as possible, as we will work to ensure we are providing these groups with the means and the opportunities to engage with us in ways that best suit their needs. These groups include but are not limited to:

- Young people
- Vulnerable adults (including the elderly)
- Those who are digitally excluded
- Residents with health conditions that may impact on their ability to contribute to engagement exercises (e.g. hearing or visual impairments)
- Residents with low literacy levels
- Ethnic minority groups
- Faith groups
- Those living in areas of acute deprivation
- Those disinterested or disenfranchised in their local council

COUNCILLORS



As elected representatives of their communities, are important in establishing these links with our residents also.

Certain corporate projects – such as the Local Plan or Corporate Strategy – will engage with multiple stakeholder groups, whereas more targeted projects may only engage with certain relevant groups.

Each engagement activity will conduct a stakeholder mapping exercise at the outset, to ensure all stakeholders who need to be involved are identified and the engagement is conducted in the most suitable manner to reach these audiences.

ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

To engage effectively, there are core principles and standards which all engagement activity should adhere to. In order to meaningfully engage with stakeholders and maintain constructive and robust relationships with these groups, these principles should be strongly observed and held. These are:

PROACTIVE



We contact stakeholders when needed and take a leading role in instigating and maintaining this contact.

HONEST



We ensure messaging is easy to understand and accessible. We communicate in a consistent way that meets the needs of the stakeholder and we are honest in what we are saying.

EFFECTIVE



We will seek to engage at the most appropriate timescales to ensure stakeholders can contribute. We will communicate issues promptly so stakeholders are aware of delays, working in an empathetic manner to address them.

RESPONSIVE



It is inevitable that there will be areas of disagreement with stakeholders, but a constructive relationship can be maintained if we are responsive to these areas, by compromising where possible and explaining our reasoning where this is not possible.

INCLUSIVE



No group or individuals will be excluded from our engagement and consultation activities. Proactive effort will be made to ensure our engagement exercises are as inclusive as possible, with focus on seldom-heard from communities.

LISTENING



An integral part of our approach to engagement is being open to feedback and continuing dialogue, and being responsive to this by considering and redesigning activities to ensure stakeholders and communities are able to contribute effectively.

RESPECTFUL



By treating all of our stakeholders with integrity and respect, even when there may be areas of disagreement, we encourage these values in return from our stakeholders.

FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

There are a number of reasons why engaging in a positive, constructive, timely and meaningful way is important and beneficial to both the council and our communities:

BENEFITS FOR OUR STAKEHOLDERS

BENEFITS FOR THE COUNCIL

Council priorities and the delivery of services are shaped and influenced by informed stakeholders

By engaging with your local council, you can ensure that we are aware of the views and issues you feel that we should take into account when making our decisions. The mechanisms of engagement allow you to shape and influence local priorities, giving our stakeholders the ability to directly input into the thinking behind important decisions and shape them so that they respond to your needs. Through engaging, you will learn more about how the council operates and what it is seeking to achieve, as well as gain a deeper understanding of the constraints and opportunities that define how the council can provide local services, allowing you to provide meaningful feedback and input into our decisions.

Engagement and consultation are key mechanisms that allow the council to fully appreciate the views and issues facing our local residents, businesses and stakeholders by the gathering of views and establishing mechanisms to interact with communities in a dialogue on key issues. These in turn ensure that our priorities and the delivery of our services understand and respond to the needs of our communities. In turn, we can ensure our stakeholders are better informed about the constraints, challenges and opportunities that we are working with, allowing them to meaningfully contribute to our decision-making.

More effective and efficient dialogue between stakeholders and their council

Engagement activities will relate to key council priorities and by interacting with the council through these mechanisms, they will allow you to directly speak to a particular topic at the most appropriate time (i.e. when key strategic decisions are being made). These mechanisms are designed in a way that seeks for optimum accessibility for a wide audience, including those who are digitally excluded or part of seldom-heard from groups.

By establishing strong and robust mechanisms for feedback and input, the council is able to understand and factor in stakeholder views more efficiently. Projects and priorities across the organisation can benefit from proven channels of engagement with different groups in a more holistic and organised manner, achieving efficiency for all involved. The council also benefits from a wider base of stakeholders, including those who are digitally excluded or part of seldom-heard from groups.

Strengthening community wellbeing and resilience

The local community benefits from a council that is better informed and able to ensure interventions and policies support the needs of our residents and stakeholders. By engaging, we can better understand what these needs are and work to resolve issues to create a more resilient local population, with the aim of reducing inequalities as all stakeholders are able to contribute. This will impact both on an individual and wider level as priorities seek to meet some of the challenges our local population face. In turn, this process allows for the development of community leaders to take an active role in connecting us with our residents and businesses, utilising local knowledge, expertise and passion.

By understanding our communities, we can work to ensure our interventions and policies support wellbeing amongst our residents, workers and visitors, which will in turn lead to a more resilient local population. This increased understanding also helps reduce inequalities within our communities. We will seek to build cohesive links with our communities and to empower those with local knowledge, expertise and passion as community leaders to take an active role in connecting us with our residents and businesses. Good engagement will seek to build wider community cohesion but will also deliver improvements at an individual level through better understanding.

Build democratic participation and boosting trust in the council

Engagement gives our residents, businesses and stakeholder the opportunity to shape and influence key decisions. All major decisions undertaken according to our democratic processes that include any form of consultation and engagement will be accompanied by a full report that details the feedback and findings from this exercise. This report is published alongside the meeting papers and used as evidence in decision-making in a transparent and visible manner. Anyone can attend and ask questions of your elected members at these meetings. This can then evidence how we have taken your views into consideration, building trust with us that we will conduct meaningful engagement with you.

Through engagement and collaboration, we aim to build stronger trust between residents, stakeholders and the council. Using this more effective relationship will, we hope, help enhance participation from our communities in our democratic processes, as it places stakeholders at the heart of decision-making. In turn, by building trust in our community and designing interventions to meet the needs of our stakeholders, we aim to continually enhance and protect the reputation and profile of Havant Borough Council and become a local authority that our communities feel support them in their lives. A better understanding of our residents is crucial to this.

Embedding partnership working, prevention and early intervention in public services

Through engaging with the council, we can better understand the needs and concerns of you, and in turn the needs of our communities. We can then tailor services that seek to resolve these issues earlier and in a more effective manner. This feedback enables us to establish early intervention mechanisms and service delivery in a way that suits the need of our area. In some cases, these interventions may be best realised through working with our partner organisations, and through effective engagement we can understand and capitalise on these opportunities.

To continue delivering services within the wider local government context, it is essential that we fully understand the barriers and challenges our residents face. Through this engagement, we can use our understanding to design interventions to prevent issues at an early stage and reduce the strain on public services. These outcomes are not possible if services work and engage in isolation. There are opportunities to achieve powerful outcomes through collaboration and co-ordination across council services.

Generate financial savings

Engagement allows us to tailor services and set priorities that are effective and efficient to meet the needs of you and our wider local population. Engaging and working with partners further allows us to ensure we are achieving best value for residents.

We must continue to seek best value for our residents in delivering our services, and by engaging we can understand where the needs of our community are and ensure that we are seeking to meet this need cost-effectively.

Working in a collaborative way to achieve common goals

In some cases, this may represent a shift from the traditional process of local government decision-making to a more collaborative and inclusive method of decision-making. This reflects a more modern approach to service delivery and is essential in ensuring that both the council understands the current needs and residents are able to take an active role in shaping and influencing our key priorities and policies. This more joint and shared way of working can be powerful in empowering both parties in seeking to achieve common goals.

This is a subtle but crucial shift in how we work with and support our communities. By engaging and collaborating with our stakeholders, we can harness and empower these groups to work with us to deliver our key priorities and policies. This has clear value to the authority in gaining the input and feedback of stakeholders in seeking to achieve projects and meet priorities that benefit both the authority and its area.