



Consultation Toolkit

Bolton Council is committed to listening to local people and enabling residents, partners, visitors and businesses to shape their area and the services they receive. We're genuinely interested in what people think because we want people to shape what we do.

It is important that consultation is carried out in a coordinated and robust manner. This toolkit has been put together to help ensure that the processes we follow within Bolton Council are consistent, fair and thorough. Please note that the toolkit does not replace any procedures that are currently in place for statutory consultations e.g. planning applications.

Is it a consultation or something else?

A consultation is a three-stage process

- 1 Informing people of proposals
- 2 Asking for their views
- 3 Considering those views before making a final decision

Can people influence a final decision with the views you're asking for?

- Yes – it is likely to be a consultation
- No – if you're simply sharing information or gathering market intelligence, it is likely not to be a consultation exercise

Why consult?

- Inform decision making
- Identify priorities
- Test out an idea
- Identify service improvements
- Seek information on the impact of decisions



Do I need to consult?

An 'express' duty to consult is likely to be when:

- The law says we must consult ahead of a particular decision or action
- The law gives councils 'statutory guidance' to consult on something
- We have our own policy of consulting on something

Our duty to consult may also be 'implied' as part of our general duty to act fairly.

- Fairness depends on the particular circumstances of any case so there are no hard and fast rules, but there could be an implied duty when:
 - We've promised to consult before making a specific decision
 - We've consulted on this decision in the past
 - The impact of the decision on affected individuals is serious therefore it is important that those affected have their views considered in the final decision
 - A decision alters the existing position and individuals legitimately expect that they will continue to enjoy some right, protection or benefit.

- Where the impact of a decision is not severe or where we have cushioned the blow of a decision with alternative arrangements we're less likely to have a duty to consult.

If you're unsure about a duty to consult or if you're planning a consultation, it's important get advice from the Corporate Consultation Team before you begin to plan. Contact the Consultation Team on consultation@bolton.gov.uk

Bolton Council's commitment

We will:

- Consult when proposals are still at a formative stage
- Give sufficient reasons for any proposal to allow intelligent consideration and response
- Give adequate time for consideration and response
- Take responses into account when finalising decisions





What should my consultation look like?

To ensure we comply legally and guarantee consistency, we need to follow some principles. The following bullet points provide a useful checklist to support this.

- Consultations should be clear, simple, concise and transparent
- A clear introduction must explain
 - What the proposals are
 - What you expect comments on
 - What will happen as a result
- Be clear what questions you are asking and limit the number of questions to those that are necessary.
- Make them easy to understand and easy to answer.
- All communication online or in print must use open, plain language to reflect the council's tone of voice and to make your consultation effective

Consultations should have a purpose

- Do not consult for the sake of it, ask the Corporate Consultation team whether you have a duty to consult.
- Consult about policies or implementation plans when the development of policies or plans is at a formative stage.

Consultations should be informative

- Give enough information to ensure that those consulted understand the issues and can give informed responses. If necessary summarise the information to make it easier for people to understand but also give people the option of reading the full report should they wish to do so.

Consultations are only part of a process of engagement

- Consider whether more informal iterative engagement is appropriate using both digital tools and open, collaborative approaches like co-design.

Consultations should last for a proportionate amount of time

- There is no minimum or maximum period. It depends on the proposals, the impact any decision may have and the number of people you are consulting. Consulting for too long will unnecessarily delay plans or policy development. Consulting too quickly will not give enough time for consideration and will reduce the quality of responses. Typically, depending on the type of consultation, it will be open for between 4 and 12 weeks. Avoid holiday periods and local or national election periods (purdah).

Consultations should be targeted

- Consider a full range of stakeholders when deciding who should be consulted. This may include residents, businesses, visitors, partner organisations, faith, voluntary and community groups, representative groups.
- Consider targeting specific groups if appropriate. Ensure that they are aware of the consultation and can access it.
- Consider how to tailor consultation to the needs and preferences of particular groups, such as older people, younger people, people with disabilities and those that may not respond to traditional consultation methods.
- Consult stakeholders in a way that suits them.

Consultation results / outcomes should be published

- The outcome of consultations should be published on the consultation portal www.bolton.gov.uk/consultations and you should provide feedback to those who have been involved. We need to tell people what, if anything, has happened as a result of the consultation. Feeding back results and outcomes will help establish relationships and trust, will enable residents, partners and stakeholders to see how we value their views and should also encourage further participation.



Equality Impact Assessments

Bolton Council is committed to considering equalities in the consultations we undertake. We will consider whether we need to gather information against any of the protected characteristics listed in the Equality Act 2010.

The nine protected characteristics are

- Age
- Sexual orientation
- Disability
- Religion or belief
- Sex/gender
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Race (including ethnic or national origins; colour; nationality)

In addition to the protected characteristics set out by the Act, Bolton Council believes it is also important to consider socio-economic conditions, caring status and gender identity as part of its work around equality.

GDPR

The council is subject to General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 and as such, all consultation will be conducted in accordance with this legislation.



How do I undertake a consultation?

Helpful tips:

- Allow enough time to plan and run your consultation
- Develop a consultation plan
- Decide the most suitable method for consultation
- Undertake a stakeholder mapping exercise to decide who to consult
- Work out how you will promote your consultation (press releases, social media, emails)
- Encourage people to give frank, honest views
- Monitor the level of responses and promote / target as necessary
- Ensure analysis and reporting effectively summarises the responses to the consultation
- Decide how the data will be fed back to participants
- Update the consultation database
- Contact the Corporate Consultation Team for advice and guidance (consultation@bolton.gov.uk 01204 332012)





Consultation methods

- Surveys - online, telephone, paper, face to face
- Focus groups
- Workshops
- Interviews
- Public meetings
- Exhibitions
- Polls on website / social media
- Text responses
- Interactive methods to consult with different groups (e.g. youth groups)

Use more than one method if appropriate

The Corporate Consultation Team will advise on the most appropriate method

Useful contacts

For more advice or guidance go to:

Cabinet office

www.gov.uk/government/publications/consultation-principles-guidance

The Consultation Institute

www.consultationinstitute.org

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