

COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR



**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION
POLICY**

2020

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Introduction

Community engagement is vital to make sure that the Western Isles is the best it can be. The Comhairle faces financial challenges, but by working on a joined-up, inclusive approach, we can work towards agreeing what the communities' priorities are and have these reflected in budget setting.

Consultation is critical to inform policy development and performance data and gives valuable insight into perceptions of the Comhairle and its services and policies. Consultation and engagement happen on a day to day basis across the Comhairle in an informal sense, through day to day contact with customers and listening to feedback provided through the Complaints, Criticism and Compliments process. However, to really involve the public we need consistent, good quality and coordinated engagement by all the organisations that influence and provide services in the islands.

This includes the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership (OHCPP), which brings together many organisations and groups involved in making decisions that affect the future well-being of the islands. The voluntary, community, business and public sectors are all represented in the Partnership and will follow the commitments set out in this strategy.

This strategy outlines how we will work together to inform, consult and involve local people in decision making and the next phase in the budgetary process. It is for everybody who has a role to play or who wants to get involved in influencing the future and enhancing the quality of life for people across the islands within the financial constraints which we face.

Background

The environment in which the Comhairle works is constantly changing. This means that both the organisation and employees need to be agile to take on the challenges ahead and this has been brought home with the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown in spring 2020. The Comhairle continues to operate with public sector funding constraints and the budget for 2020/21 is £110 million compared to £117 million in 2012/13.

The extremely tight budgets represent a significant challenge for the Comhairle which has very limited options when compared to other Councils for raising revenue. Lockdown in 2020 has further reduced revenue raising potential. The Comhairle has an established programme of transformation for service delivery underway, which focuses on service delivery, quality and efficiency.

For change to be effective the Scottish Government's vision for an empowered community is key – a community where local democratic participation is boosted, where there is increased confidence and skills among local people, where there are higher numbers of people volunteering in communities, and where there is greater satisfaction with quality of life in a local neighbourhood. This is a vision shared by the Comhairle.

To manage change and to enable services to meet the budget challenge, the Comhairle must understand customer requirements and provide a dynamic learning environment for employees that enable them to develop the required skills.

Bearing in mind the factors above, this document outlines how the Comhairle will approach consultation and engagement activity over the next five years.

Vision and Values

A key objective is that sustainable, integrated communities are empowered and engaged. The Comhairle aims to be responsive to the needs of the community and to be involved in decision-making and shaping services. To achieve this, consultation and involvement must be provided on the right issues targeted at the right people at the right time in an accessible way. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar is committed to involving and empowering residents and communities.

Who is the Strategy for?

This strategy is for anyone who is interested in playing a part in improving the future of the Western Isles. This includes public and private organisations, voluntary and community groups, residents, workers, students and any individual with an interest in how their environment and community evolves.

This also includes the Comhairle and staff, and the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership

Equality Considerations

The Comhairle will consider equality, diversity and accessibility in all aspects of community engagement. The Equality Act 2010 protects individuals and groups from discrimination on the basis of the following 'protected characteristics':

- Age
- Disability
- Sex
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sexual orientation

Section 149 of the Act places a 'public sector equality duty' on local authorities to have due regard to the need to:

- a) eliminate discrimination;
- b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
- c) foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Community Consultation

The strategy sets out a framework for communications by the Comhairle and it covers:

- local communications;
- community engagement; and
- community consultation.

The Comhairle will ensure that communities are fully engaged in any proposed changes to services provided by the Comhairle as a result of budgetary processes. The Comhairle uses a variety of

engagement methods to ensure that the community can influence the development of policies and help inform service delivery.

The aim is that the communications will raise awareness and understanding of the vision, purpose and ambitions of the functions and the future direction of the Comhairle as it enters another phase of budget restraints including, where required, the transformation of services.

The Comhairle publicises how it has utilised the feedback from consultations, through the 'We Asked, You Said, We Did' consultation area on the website including any elements which are not adopted.

What is Effective Community Engagement?

A community is a group of people who have things in common. Communities can be defined by location (such as a street or a neighbourhood), race, ethnicity, age, occupation, a shared interest (such as local businesses or hobbies) or affinity (such as religion, faith or belief) or other common bonds.

Essentially, community engagement within this context is about making sure that people are given the opportunity to be involved and take part - in a range of ways - in the decision making process, especially regarding budget efficiencies. It goes further than informing and consulting local people by seeking to enable communities to take an active part in influencing decision-making and service delivery.

The National Standards for Community Engagement

The National Standards for Community Engagement are good-practice principles designed to support and inform the process of community engagement, and improve what happens as a result. During 2015/2016, the National Standards for Community Engagement were reviewed and updated to reflect the developing policy and legislation relating to community empowerment in Scotland, and to build on the growing range of practice.

The Comhairle will follow the principles of the National Standards for Community Engagement which are available to view on the [Voice Scotland website](#). The seven standards are:

- Inclusion
- Support
- Planning
- Working together
- Methods
- Communication
- Impact

How and when will we undertake the Community Engagement?

The Comhairle has undertaken community engagements over the past three years and will continue to do so as required. The communication engagement methods, including advertising of community meetings and other important news items, will be:

- press releases
- information direct to community partners
- contact with community councils/forums
- contact with recognised youth councils

- contact with recognised older people’s groups
- use of social media
- virtual or face to face community consultation meetings
- information and surveys on the Comhairle’s We Asked, You Said, We Did, consultation webpages
- communication with employees – a separate section deals with employee engagement

Supporting Elected Members

The Comhairle is committed to supporting Elected Members and will provide support for Members throughout the process to ensure health and wellbeing is a priority; and

Elected Members will have a senior member of staff, a member of the Finance and Corporate Resources Department and a member of democratic services with them to manage the community consultation meetings.

Table 1: Effective Public Engagement

<p>Effective public engagement is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rooted in democracy - with elected Members at its heart • Adequately resourced – so that it is appropriate and effective • Conducted with integrity – it is a genuine dialogue • Empowering – people can make choices and shape decisions • Timely – when people can make a real difference • Understandable – easy process to follow, plain language • Informative – helps people to form a considered view • Inclusive – recognising the need for different approaches • Rewarding – people should feel listened to and feel that their opinions matter • Co-ordinated – so it does not waste people’s time • Responsive – giving reasoned feedback • Evaluated – it shows what we do differently as a result

Key Actions

Engage with people in the places where they live

The things that matter most to people are usually about everyday life where they live. We will therefore:

- Strengthen support for the role of elected ward councillors, especially liaison with local groups and advocacy;
- Seek joint approaches with community councils in relation to community engagement on local issues at a local level;
- Encourage local groups to get involved in consultation exercises; and
- Focus in particular on engaging with key community groups within each of the wards within the Western Isles.

Engage with people through their interests

Most people are interested in shaping policy on issues that matter to them. We will therefore:

- As a Comhairle, engage with relevant interest groups at an early stage in the process and in timely and transparent ways when shaping and choosing policy options;
- Talk with people about the whole range of quality of life issues from their perspective, e.g. as young people, older people, commuters, disabled people; and
- Develop communications networks to reach a wider range of interested people.

Engage with people as service users

People who look at public services from the user's perspective can often see ways of improving them. We will therefore:

- Talk with service users and, where appropriate, their relatives, friends and carers, about their views on both policy and service delivery issues;
- Talk with businesses about their experience as service users;
- Explore the views of people who have ceased to use services or who have chosen not to use them;
- Routinely invite views on relevant policy issues from people who contact us to make enquiries or service transactions; and
- Encourage and support service user groups and advocacy schemes for service users.

Reach out to those who feel unable to influence our services

Some people will be reluctant to engage with us or feel alienated. We will therefore:

- Ensure a wide range of ways of engaging with people, so that citizens know how to influence decisions and have a choice of methods to provide feedback, including online consultation;
- Work to make effective contact with people or communities who may face particular obstacles; and
- Consider equality and diversity aspects and respond to any needs that citizens may have in terms of equality.

Provide effective information about issues facing the Western Isles

Effective engagement requires reliable information about the issues. We will therefore:

- Produce a document so that people have relevant information in an easily accessible form incorporating all the information in relation to the process;
- Use on-line and e-mail based methods of communicating about key issues; and
- Use the media, local community councils and established voluntary and community sector networks to share information about the wards and their needs.

Act on what people tell us and tell people what we have done

People will only talk to us if they think we will listen to what they say and respond to it. We will therefore:

- Provide a publicly accessible way of engaging with consultation information on the Comhairle's website;

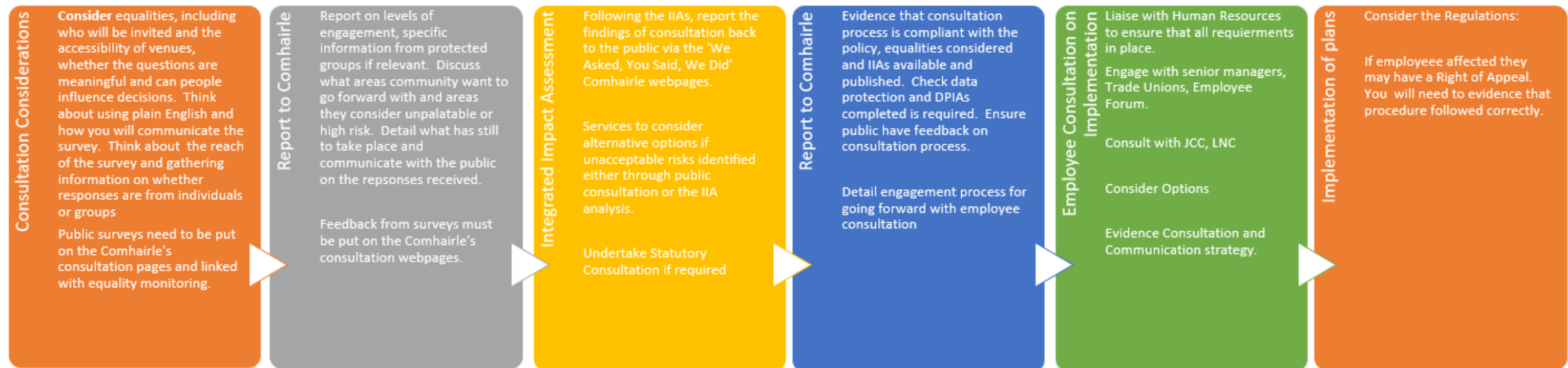
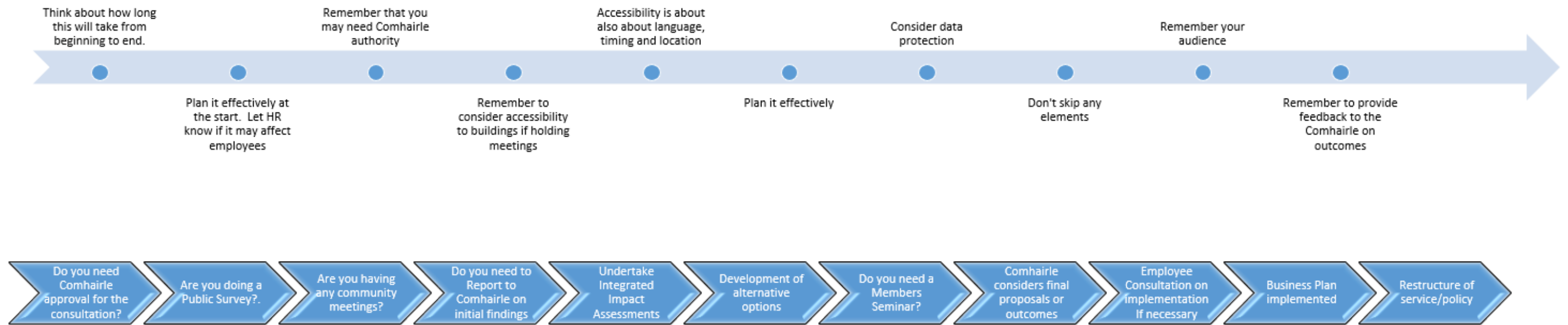
- Actively circulate news of consultation and engagement activity internally, among our partner organisations and in the media;
- Ensure that relevant findings are made available to ward councillors and senior managers;
- Emphasise the importance of political judgement by Elected Members in choosing among or reconciling different views; and
- When we cannot act on some views, explain why not through the We Asked, You Said, We Did, consultation framework.

Review

This policy will be subject to review every two years.

The Budget Strategy information appended to this policy will be removed once complete.

Consultation Planning Framework



Appendix 1 - Plan for 2020 Budget Board consultation

Introduction

The Comhairle's Budget Board was established to oversee the implementation of the Comhairle's Budget Strategy and has a wide ranging membership with representation from all 9 wards in the Western Isles

The three clear and transparent levels of community engagement on the budget are:

Budget Board Members > Elected Ward Members > Community stakeholders

The feedback should then be filtered back up the structure - from the Community Stakeholders to the Elected Members for each of the 9 wards to the Budget Board.

How and when will we undertake the Community Engagement?

The Comhairle will undertake community engagement and consultation in 2020 to consider the budget strategy for 2021/22 onward. The communication engagement methods will be:

- press releases
- information direct to community partners
- contact with community councils/forums
- contact with recognised youth councils
- contact with recognised older people's groups
- use of social media
- virtual or face to face community consultation meetings
- information and survey on the Comhairle's We Asked, You Said, We Did, consultation webpages

The timeline for consultation and engagement will be:

August 2020 – the Budget Board consultation papers will be considered by the Comhairle. If agreed in principle, preparations will be put in place to inform employees of proposals so they are not learning information from the local press.

September and October 2020 - a survey will be developed and it will be placed on the Comhairle's consultation webpages and there will be a press release and social media information about the start of consultation. Information will also be sent to the groups detailed above.

October and early November 2020– there will be virtual or face to face meetings (covid-19 dependent) in each of the ward areas with Elected Members, the Director of Assets, Finance and Resources and other relevant Service Directors as required.

November 2020 – the consultation will close and time will be taken to analyse responses.

December 2020 - Papers prepared for the Budget Board and the December series of Comhairle meetings. Findings from the consultation will be reported on the Comhairle's consultation webpages.

COMHAIRLE BUSINESS PLANNING TIMELINE

