

# **INTERIM REPORT**

## **Statements of Community Involvement in England: a baseline review and future opportunities**

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## Statements of Community Involvement in England: a baseline review and future opportunities

### 1. Introduction and context

#### 1.1 This Report

The work presented here is part of a study to better understand the form, use and potential of SCIs (Statements of Community Involvement), or similar structuring documents, as a means to frame meaningful community engagement in planning. The work is part of a research partnership between the University of Reading and Civic Voice. This document is the interim research report that presents the first stage of the research (baseline review).

By way of background it is worthwhile acknowledging that, in 2019 Civic Voice undertook their own review of SCIs. This work highlighted that, at that time, there were a significant number of out of date documents being used (30% in the Civic Voice research). This was surprising given that guidance stipulates that SCIs need to be updated at least every 5 years and recent legislative change had required SCIs to be amended<sup>1,2</sup>.

As a result of this work, Civic Voice wanted to understand the effectiveness of SCIs as the basis for involving communities in all aspects of planning. The Civic Voice manifesto, published in 2020 said: "*We must Strengthen Statements of Community Involvement (SCIs) so that they set out how the local authority and developers will be expected to meaningfully engage with local communities on planning*".

This is part of a broader set of work being undertaken by the University of Reading research team funded by Research England, with that report being published in June 2021<sup>3</sup> as well as work on the operation of Neighbourhood Planning<sup>4</sup> funded by MHCLG. This has been taking place just in advance of and during discussions around proposed planning reforms and the 'frontloading' of participation emphasised in the August 2020 Planning White Paper '*Planning for the Future*'.

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<sup>1</sup> In spring 2020 Covid-19 legislation required that LPAs revise their SCIs to reflect necessary Covid complaint arrangements, thus at the time of the research many SCIs were or just had been amended.

<sup>2</sup> In terms of Covid-19 amendments the NPPG states: 'Where any of the policies in the Statement of Community Involvement cannot be complied with due to current guidance to help combat the spread of coronavirus (Covid-19), the local planning authority is encouraged to undertake an immediate review and update the policies where necessary so that plan-making can continue' (Para: 077 Ref ID: 61-077-201200513) and see para 78.

<sup>3</sup> Parker, G., Dobson, M. and Lynn, T. (2021) *Community involvement opportunities for the reformed planning system*. Report, June 2021. University of Reading. Available from the authors.

<sup>4</sup> Parker, G., Wargent, M., Salter, K., Dobson, M., Lynn, T., Yuille, A. and Navigus (2020) *Impacts of Neighbourhood Planning in England*. Final report. Located at:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/929422/Impacts\\_of\\_Neighbourhood\\_Planning\\_in\\_England.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/929422/Impacts_of_Neighbourhood_Planning_in_England.pdf)

The future role of SCIs (or similar) is an important aspect of the PWP reforms, precisely because SCIs play an important role in informing all parties about how LPAs will involve the local community, including at early stages as well as throughout all aspects of planning:

*'Local planning authorities must set out in their Statement of Community Involvement how they will engage communities on the preliminary stages of plan-making' (NPPG, Para: 035 Ref ID: 61-035-20190723)*

The Planning White Paper references a desire to:

*'democratise the planning process by putting a new emphasis on engagement at the plan-making stage' and '...create great communities through world-class civic engagement and proactive plan-making' (MHCLG, PWP, 2020: p20-21).*

The broader context is also one of a renewed societal interest in forms of deliberative democracy to improve engagement; partly as an antidote to growing mistrust in public institutions, not least the relationship between local planning authorities (LPAs) and their communities (Raynsford, 2018; Grosvenor, 2019). It is indeed timely therefore to look at how any SCI element of a new suite of arrangements will be to improve on current arrangements. The recently published National Model Design Code also stresses the importance of consultation strategies and early engagement.

## 1.2 What are SCIs?

Statements of community involvement express how a local planning authority will engage with the public in the development of their local plan, neighbourhood plans and development management cases. The document forms part of the statutory array of documents constituting the development plan for a given Local Planning Authority (LPA). The need for such formal statements was introduced by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and more recently the requirements were modified by the 2017 Neighbourhood Planning Act. SCIs were bolstered by the 'duty to involve' introduced in 2007<sup>5</sup> but which was repealed in 2011 – and as a result the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) no longer had a requirement placed on them to examine draft SCIs. Instead a revised approach was pursued and local government were to 'encourage authorities and civil society to collaborate more, including greater involvement for voluntary groups' (DCLG, 2011: para 1) through the use of 'light touch' guidance<sup>6</sup>. Since 2017 each LPA is expected to review their SCI every 5 years - a requirement which is also set out in the NPPF (2019)<sup>7</sup> and the NPPG:

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<sup>5</sup> The 'duty to involve' (introduced under the Local Government and Public Health Act 2007) was a broad requirement on Local authorities 'to take those steps they consider appropriate to involve representatives of local persons in the exercise of any of their functions, where they consider that it is appropriate to do so' as part of the then labour government seeking continuous improvement in local authorities.

<sup>6</sup> See DCLG, 2011:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/5945/1976926.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5945/1976926.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Specified in the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2017

*'Local planning authorities must review their Statements of Community Involvement every 5 years from the adoption date. It is important that Statements of Community Involvement are kept up-to-date to ensure effective community involvement at all stages of the planning process. Therefore, a local planning authority should regularly review and update their Statement of Community Involvement to reflect any changes to engagement. A local planning authority may review and update their Statement of Community Involvement at the same time as reviewing and updating a plan to reflect what action is taken to involve the community in any change to the plan.'* (NPPG, Para: 071 Ref ID: 61-071-20190315).

However, the legislation is not explicit about how LPAs should involve communities in Local Plan-making, beyond iterating the minimum legal requirements to consult at key stages. Instead government provide their own guidance on consultation (latest version 2018 – see Annex), which is useful up to a point, but only broadly suggestive of 'good practice' across 11 aspects relating to consultation (noting that this guidance is internal and only used for national consultations). It is notable however that section 3 in the Neighbourhood planning Act 2017 states rather elliptically that:

*'The Secretary of State may by regulations prescribe matters to be addressed by a statement of community involvement in addition to the matters mentioned in subsection...'*

which provides scope for the design or scope of SCIs to be amended if implemented.

In terms of local plan making, national policy (NPPF, 2019: para 16) sets out that:

*'Plans should: a) be prepared with the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development; b) be prepared positively, in a way that is aspirational but deliverable; c) be shaped by early, proportionate and effective engagement between plan makers and communities, local organisations, businesses, infrastructure providers and operators and statutory consultees; d) contain policies that are clearly written and unambiguous, so it is evident how a decision maker should react to development proposals; e) be accessible through the use of digital tools to assist public involvement and policy presentation; and f) serve a clear purpose, avoiding unnecessary duplication of policies that apply to a particular area (including policies in this Framework, where relevant)'.*

Given the context of reform to planning, poor levels of trust and engagement and a stated aspiration to improve public participation in planning by government, the research assesses the role of SCIs with a view to suggesting how these documents, or alternative arrangements, may be more effective and to ensure that governmental aspirations are implemented locally.

### 1.3 Method

This overview report is a product of the baseline review of 50% of all 326 SCIs across England (n=164). This first tranche of work was undertaken in order to ascertain the coverage, age, length and usability of those documents and was carried in April-May 2021. The sample

included a selection from each of the English regions and also covered all of the SCIs in the SE region and the NE region to ensure representativeness (see Table 1).

*Table 1: SCI sample*

<b>Region / Type</b>	<b>SCIs reviewed</b>
South East	64
London	12
South West	10
East of England	17
East Midlands	9
West Midlands	8
North West	20
Yorkshire & Humberside	8
North East	12
National Park Authorities	4
<b>Total sample:</b>	<b>164</b>

The next step will be to explore the actual use and experience of community involvement under the span of the SCIs in a sample of LPA areas. The overall outcome will be to recommend how SCI and related tools can be improved. It is the intention of the research team to select a range of local authorities based on the profile of the SCI they operate with – informed by this first stage baseline findings - as well as providing a geographical spread.

## 2. Findings

The process of identifying and reading the SCIs has provided a good overview of the scope, content and user friendliness of these documents. It also provided some baseline statistics e.g. in terms of length and age of the SCIs. We also indicate how the first stage has informed our thinking for next steps in section four of this report. The final report should be completed by September 2021 - but we have outlined some interim conclusions and recommendations here to keep in step with the pace of national planning reform (with a new Planning Bill expected in Autumn 2021).

### *2.1 Age and accessibility of SCIs*

The first test was to check whether SCIs were readily available online for community members to view - given a key part of their use is ease of access by communities. It was found that almost all are quite readily available online through the LPA website, with only a small number less easily found (i.e. that require numerous 'clicks' to locate them). It was also found, however, that in a significant number of instances an online search identified multiple versions of SCIs, which could lead to confusion for local people regarding the local council's current approach to engagement. It should also be noted that these could be found if the user knows the correct term to search for (i.e. 'SCIs') and without this knowledge of the technical term the documents may remain hidden from view.

In terms of whether SCI documents were 'up to date' there was a very mixed picture. Most authorities have (re)iterated their SCI since 2006 at least once (although several SCIs were still in use dated 2005-2007 e.g. Exeter, Hillingdon, Sedgemoor, Lewisham, Amber Valley and Slough). Furthermore 25% of the SCIs in our sample (n=164) were more than 5 years old (and which is broadly in line with the 2019 Civic Voice findings). Substantively however there are still many that have not been updated within 5 years or to reflect the 2017 Neighbourhood Planning Act legal requirements<sup>8</sup>. In some cases the text accompanying the SCI appeared to indicate that some authorities updated their SCI when they were about to embark on a new local plan process - which is an option set out in national guidance.

Many LPAs have made minor amendments in the light of Covid-19 limitations for face-to-face participation and to reflect temporary legal changes in place during 2020-21<sup>9</sup> - but most of those revised SCIs did not make any other substantive changes.

### *2.2 SCI Length and content*

The next step was to check to see the extent of SCI documentation and the type of coverage involved. Many emphasised the link to local plan preparation, and others set out all the means that were legally available to citizens to input across local plans, neighbourhood plans, pre-

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<sup>8</sup> The Act required that LPAs set out their approach to discharging the duty to give advice or assistance to NP qualifying bodies to facilitate a neighbourhood development plan and importantly here to set out in their SCI their policies for involving interested parties in the preliminary stages of plan-making.

<sup>9</sup> See NPPG paras 77 (Ref ID: 61-077-201200513) and para 78 and footnotes 1 and 2 here.

apps and the development management decision-making element of the planning system. This meant that page counts did vary considerably.

The majority of SCIs are lengthy documents and are process focussed - the longest stretched to 57 pages (Enfield) with Bedford covering 56 pages – both excluding appendices, while very brief documents were found for Dorset County (6 pages), Tonbridge and Malling (7 pages), and Liverpool City and Hart District Council both with 9-page documents. Many documents were around 20-30 pages, excluding appendices, with the average mean page length being 25 pages (excluding appendices) in the south east region (n=64).

What became clear in terms of content was that few SCIs, if any, have measurable principles (i.e. they are not SMART) and the scope or detail of such principles (loosely termed) varied considerably - see annex 2 for indicative examples. Although it is recognised that achieving such measurables may prove challenging, this may be one aspect for further deliberation with LPAs. Certainly the concept of co-creating SCIs with communities and other key actors strikes us as one idea that is worth further deliberation given renewed policy focus on engagement.

While many SCIs explicitly recognise diversity within the community they serve, it is less clear how they actually engage, although a subset did list a range of different mechanisms to engage, examples in this regard include; Islington, Slough, Reigate and Banstead and Bolton. We found that a minority of cases indicated some degree of innovation - loosely defined as aiming to go beyond some minimum requirement. For example, some local authorities make mention of deliberative forms including panels, forums and focus groups. Some examples are cited in places such as Dudley and Bedford (both using a citizen panel) and Cornwall (PACE forum), Broadlands (focus groups), Arun District (youth council) and Fareham ('E-panel').

Quite a few SCIs explicitly mention the costs and resources and a need for them to be proportionate or be 'realistic' in the approach adopted. This sentiment appears to influence the undertakings made in the SCIs. Such sentiments may also stem from a legal principle regarding reasonableness in the sense that SCIs are typically framed by the legal principle of legitimate expectation. That is measured, but is undoubtedly difficult for communities to reckon, depending on the clarity of the undertaking and to ensure that decision-makers act fairly in a procedural sense. This means there may be a perverse incentive for LPAs to be vague or imprecise when outlining their community involvement strategy given the document is intended to hold the council accountable and to provide transparency.

Some LPAs have wider involvement policies or strategies which are important context here - but does not alter the fact that SCIs themselves are limited. Examples include: Oxford City, North East Lincolnshire and Craven District (and see annex 2). A small number of SCIs explicitly talk of 'monitoring' and ongoing improvement to the engagement approach of the LPA (examples include: North Tyneside, Birmingham, Redcar, Thurrock, Broadland and Exeter). It is difficult to determine the degree to which such aspirations are carried through however, with the concern that such documents add limited value if they are not acted on or reviewed. This may be one aspect that is pursued at the next stage of the research i.e. to look more closely at monitoring and how changes have been made to improve involvement (i.e. aspirations becoming actions).

### 3. Conclusions, Reflections and Interim Recommendations

On reviewing over 160 SCIs we were struck by how many SCIs read as though they are written to fulfil an obligation to central government (legal requirement) rather than to enable meaningful dialogue with communities. This links to questions (criticisms) of audience, style and tractability of the SCI. In terms of the principles - see Annex 2 examples which indicate a range of practice - some might be regarded quite positively as they try and be quite specific, although others much less so. However they all fall short of SMART principles.

Civic Voice has praised some SCIs, for example Middlesbrough, which 'sets out a good plain English leaflet to explain what the SCI actually means and does' (Civic voice communication). The Test Valley example quoted seems to have some specific details in it, which seem to be a good thing. Yet it appears the problem is that they say they 'may do' things not 'will do' them i.e. there are few guarantees to which a member of the public could hold the LPA to through the SCI. This dynamic will be covered in the next stage of the research.

#### 3.1 Interim conclusions

Whilst some of the wider reforms for community engagement appear positive, we set out the following interim conclusions:

- **Cautiousness** - LPAs appear to be cautious about making promises they cannot keep and 'SCI conservatism' may be shaped by conditions of resource limits as well as longer run planning culture.
- The idea of facilitating a wider **culture shift** recognising communities as a useful local resource appears necessary. Many LPAs don't consult on the SCI to ask communities how they would like to be engaged in the process and what methods work - and instead replicate the comment on the draft approach that pervades the wider local plan system.
- **Accountability** - Very few if any Authorities have an SCI where communities can really hold the LPA to account – the nature of these documents is such that numerous qualifications or other caveats appear (see annex 2 for some indicative examples).
- While we consider it important that there are **principles** and clear responsibilities set out in SCIs to improve them - how this is done requires careful consideration.
- The SCI should be **locally specific** to an area and should not just repeat the national statutory (minimum) requirements.
- We also think there may be merit in a *two part SCI*; keeping a **principle-based document** 'part 1' of the SCI in place and a follow-on **operational-based document** 'part 2' document that expresses the approach for that cycle of plan-making (with basic statutory duties kept within clearly marked annexes to part 2). This approach has merit as the agreed principles can remain intact and clear (ideally through co-production with communities). While the process and 'offer' that the LPA then undertakes can be reviewed and indeed more positively co-designed with key actors. This could act to generate ownership and increase interest in the process overall.

- **More effective monitoring and review** of involvement seems appropriate - only a few SCIs indicated explicitly that this has formed a part of their strategy. The LPA's Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) could be the place for ongoing monitoring, reflection and accountability to be set out to close the feedback loop with communities.
- **Council wide SCIs** - this might be hard to achieve but is a sensible goal. There will be many 'consultations' going on at any one time within a local authority (e.g. highways improvements, parks & landscape changes etc) so it makes sense that they all follow the same principles and expectations. We suspect that good practice currently occurs because individual officers see the bigger picture and act, rather than wider corporate culture that makes such linkages possible.

Thus we see an opportunity to review and refine the approach towards SCIs and the basis for engagement between LPAs and partners. However, there are also some very straightforward actions that would be useful fixes, as well as the more substantive ones.

### 3.2 Simple fixes

Three very straightforward stop-gap changes include:

1. Clean up the SCI versions available online to ensure that only the most up to date applicable version of the SCI is open to view by the community on the LPA website (version control and web maintenance).
2. Keep the documents clearly located and labelled on the website (accessibility).
3. Ensure that the substance of the SCI is upfront and relegate basic statutory responsibilities to clearly cross-referenced annexes (readability for layperson).

### 3.3 Reflections

Such simple alterations are clearly not enough to address the deeper issues that have already emerged. The overall approach that we are formulating requires a wider culture shift for LPAs to view communities as a useful local 'resource' that can assist with effective plan and decision-making. It is necessary to have some upfront document such as SCIs so that there is some framework set up at the start of the planning process from which everything else then follows (i.e. to bookend the process) so that outcomes can be judged against the principles set out at the start of the process. This emphasises the need for some form of SMART principles that can be actioned and measured by the local authority and community over more loose (albeit well-intentioned) statements and aspirations that are hard to pin down.

We should also be aware that the majority of lay people will not understand the difference between the council functions and therefore the organisational and functional boundaries between land-use planning departments and other departments within local authorities. Therefore it may be best to emphasize the SCI as a 'council-wide' document (despite its origin in statutory planning policy) to ensure that such principles cut across the authority.

#### 4. Next steps for the Research

This report has been written at a time when the 2020 Planning White Paper has proposed a greater emphasis on effective community involvement in planning and in particular to ensure good quality frontloading of engagement. In relation to SCIs, or any similar future standalone community engagement strategies, a number of further aspects need a deeper consideration. Some of these we will explore in the next stage of this research.

The planned next steps of the research include interviewing user groups to understand what is useful or what could be improved with SCIs and LPA performance in relation to community involvement in planning. This is important to try and understand how LPAs and communities use SCIs as a basis for involvement and what might be done to improve the quality and understanding of involvement in planning.

##### 4.1 Further research

A number of questions and areas to be explored using qualitative methods emerge, including:

- *How have LPAs iterated their SCIs and why – asking what improvements have been effected;*
- *To take a selection of existing SCIs and annotate them to show how they might be improved;*
- *What impact the SCI has had on the extent and quality of engagement - derived from the community perspective;*
- *Examine the form and extent of SCI Monitoring activity;*
- *Discuss the practical issues in undertaking innovative activity;*
- *Explore the difficulties of expressing involvement principles in SMART terms;*
- *Concerns of LPAs in over promising or being subject to challenge.*
- *One possible output is to consider a model SCI as an outcome of the research overall.*

##### 4.2 Some emerging cases for next steps

From the work undertaken so far, a number of possible examples that could warrant further investigation emerge. Drawn from across the regions these include the twenty authorities depicted briefly here below:

- *Bristol* - the citizen's panel appears innovative, the SCI explains things clearly and is quite visual. [2015 SCI]
- *High Peak* – the SCI is written in plain English and has clear principles. [2019 SCI]
- *Adur* – highlight Hard to reach' groups and cite national consultation guidance 2018. [2018 SCI]
- *Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole* – emphasises use of new technology (e.g. virtual meetings, video conferencing, social media, etc.) and includes use of local 'walkabout tours' [2020 SCI]

- *Exeter* – use of community forums and ‘Wavelength’ panel of 1000 local citizens, plus SCI out of date. [2006 SCI]
- *Southwark* - seems to have quite innovative involvement with a wide/diverse range of community groups). It notable that the local authority is one of MHCLG's design code pilots announced Spring 2021. [2008 SCI]
- *Brent* - where their SCI is locally specific and clear and appears to go above statutory minimums. [2017 SCI]
- *Middlesbrough* - claim to want early participation. Statements of common ground used - very old version (2005) until Covid. [2020 SCI]
- *Gateshead* – monitoring used; claims to enable communities to put forward their own ideas. [SCI 2017/2020]
- *Sunderland* - claims use of digital technology to enhance process [2015 / 2020 SCI]
- *Manchester* – claims to support range of input forms and aspirational approaches via ‘Our Manchester’ policy 2016. [2018 SCI]
- *Bedford* – citizens panel and consultation strategy to support voluminous SCI of 56 pages. [ 2019 SCI]
- *Broadland* – monitors performance and uses workshops and focus groups. [2019 SCI]
- *Fareham* – promotes an E-panel and deploys a variety of engagement techniques. [2017 SCI]
- *Ashford* - uses bespoke workshops. [2020/2013 SCI]
- *Sevenoaks* - Community plan and vision cited as partner to SCI approach. [2020/2014 SCI]
- *East Hampshire* – cites principles of ‘inform, involve, consult, respond’ and deploys a development forum. [2018 SCI]
- *Tunbridge Wells* - claims to be committed to using new and innovative ways of involving the community in the planning system. [2020/2016 SCI]
- *Oxford* – appears progressive and is linked to a separate community engagement strategy. [2015 SCI]
- *Reigate and Banstead* - claim to focus on the ‘seldom heard’ and beyond statutory minimums. [2019 SCI]

From this long list of 20 LPA cases we would probably select no more than 8 areas for further exploration and interview. This would involve at least two parties (community + LPA) from each area selected and a more detailed exploration of SCI content and application as part of these case studies.

## Annex 1: National Consultation principles

Derived from ‘Consultation Principles 2018’ (issued by UK government) see [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/691383/Consultation\\_Principles\\_1\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/691383/Consultation_Principles_1_.pdf)

These are to be applied when government undertakes consultation – we think that as a minimum such model principles should be refined and applied to local government. Ultimately to provide consistency and legibility for local government more widely and specifically our focus here on SCIs.

**A. Consultations should be clear and concise.** Use plain English and avoid acronyms. 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. Avoid lengthy documents when possible and consider merging those on related topics. **CLARITY**

**B. Consultations should have a purpose.** Do not consult for the sake of it. Ask departmental lawyers whether you have a legal duty to consult. Take consultation responses into account when taking policy forward. Consult about policies or implementation plans when the development of the policies or plans is at a formative stage. Do not ask questions about issues on which you already have a final view. **PURPOSIVE**

**C. Consultations should be informative.** Give enough information to ensure that those consulted understand the issues and can give informed responses. Include validated impact assessments of the costs and benefits of the options being considered when possible; this might be required where proposals have an impact on business or the voluntary sector. **INFORMED**

**D. Consultations are only part of a process of engagement.** Consider whether informal iterative consultation is appropriate, using new digital tools and open, collaborative approaches. Consultation is not just about formal documents and responses. It is an on-going process. **TOOLS / APPROACH**

**E. Consultations should last for a proportionate amount of time.** Judge the length of the consultation on the basis of legal advice and taking into account the nature and impact of the proposal. Consulting for too long will unnecessarily delay policy development. Consulting too quickly will not give enough time for consideration and will reduce the quality of responses. **TIME**

**F. Consultations should be targeted.** Consider the full range of people, business and voluntary bodies affected by the policy, and whether representative groups exist. Consider targeting specific groups if appropriate. Ensure 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 or people with disabilities that may not respond to traditional consultation methods. **DIVERSITY**

**G. Consultations should take account of the groups being consulted.** Consult stakeholders in a way that suits them. Charities may need more time to respond than businesses, for example. When the consultation spans all or part of a holiday period, consider how this may affect consultation and take appropriate mitigating action, such as prior discussion with key interested parties or extension of the consultation deadline beyond the holiday period. **GROUPS**

**H. Consultations should be agreed before publication.** Seek collective agreement before publishing a written consultation, particularly when consulting on new policy proposals. Consultations should be published on gov.uk. **AGREED**

**I. Consultation should facilitate scrutiny.** Publish any response on the same page on gov.uk as the original consultation, and ensure it is clear when the government has responded to the consultation. Explain the responses that have been received from consultees and how these have informed the policy. State how many responses have been received. **TRANSPARENCY**

**J. Government responses to consultations should be published in a timely fashion.** Publish responses within 12 weeks of the consultation or provide an explanation why this is not possible. Where consultation concerns a statutory instrument publish responses before or at the same time as the instrument is laid, except in very exceptional circumstances (and even then publish responses as soon as possible). Allow appropriate time between closing the consultation and implementing policy or legislation. **FEEDBACK**

**K. Consultation exercises should not generally be launched during local or national election periods.** If exceptional circumstances make a consultation absolutely essential (for example, for safeguarding public health), departments should seek advice from the Propriety and Ethics team in the Cabinet Office. This document does not have legal force and is subject to statutory and other legal requirements. **TIMING**

## Annex 2: Example ‘principles’ found in SCIs

These SCI exemplars have been selected to highlight the types of ‘principles’ espoused in SCIs – and show a range of approaches.

### **Example 1: Haringey, London (from 2017 SCI)**

An example of extensive generic principles covering key dimensions (e.g. inclusivity, accountability).

#### *Ensure consultation is Effective*

- By being undertaken at the earliest possible stage in the decision-making process, when proposals are still at a formative stage and when there is scope to influence the outcome.
- By providing relevant information and sufficient reasons for any proposal to permit intelligent consideration and response by all affected parties.
- By targeting consultation to make sure that relevant stakeholders are involved.
- By ensuring the consultation methods used are appropriate in engaging affected parties.

#### *Ensure consultation is Transparent*

- By ensuring the aims, purpose and scope of the consultation, and the issues involved, are clearly expressed.
- By being clear about how the consultation will be run, where information can be accessed and, as far as is possible, what can be expected after the consultation has formally closed.
- By being up front about any potential conflicts of interest and how these are to be appropriately managed to meet public expectations of integrity.
- By requiring all those connected with any proposal, including those commenting, to identify themselves and who they represent when taking part in public consultations.

#### *Ensure consultation is Proportional*

- By ensuring the level of consultation undertaken and resources spent are proportionate to the scale and impact of the proposal.
- By ensuring affected parties have adequate time to consider and respond to the proposals.
- By promoting the use of electronic methods of communication to make participation easier and quicker.

#### *Ensure consultation is Inclusive*

- By involving representatives of a cross-section of stakeholders, ensuring the different needs and views of different sections or groups of the community are considered.
- By utilising a wide range of consultation methods, ensuring that the consultation as a whole is accessible to all including those who are ‘hard-to-reach’ or are seldom heard.

#### *Ensure consultation findings are Accountable*

- By publicising the responses and providing feedback to participants
- By explaining how the responses to consultation have been conscientiously taken into account in informing changes to policy or the determination of a planning application.
- By linking to decision-making to robust, consistent and sound grounds.

#### *Ensure consultation material is Coherent*

- By providing useful and clear summaries of the proposals and the main issues to be addressed.
- By ensuring consultation documents, including committee reports, are presented in an easy to read format and use plain English.

**Example 2: Cheshire East Borough Council (from 2018 SCI)**

Highlighted to show a very general set of 'principles'.

'Cheshire East Borough Council recognises and appreciates the positive contribution that community involvement can have in all aspects and areas of planning. The Statement of Community Involvement explains how the local and wider community (including stakeholders and specific, general and other consultation bodies such as statutory consultees) will be engaged and consulted on planning issues.

2.4 To avoid stakeholders suffering from "consultation fatigue", the Council will use joint consultations on the Local Plan and related documents with other strategies wherever possible.

2.5 It is important to consult a broad range of groups during the preparation of each planning policy document and at various stages thereafter. In general terms, key stakeholders include:

- General public – residents and people who undertake business, leisure activities or have a general interest in the area;
- Town and Parish Councils;
- Business interests and major landowners including developers and agents;
- Government departments and statutory bodies;
- Infrastructure providers;
- Interest groups - environmental, amenity, community and voluntary groups at a local, regional or national level.

2.6 In the production of planning policy documents, the Council will aim to achieve the following:

- Ask for views at an appropriate stage;
- Provide sufficient information to enable an effective response to any consultation;
- Provide details of how to respond to any consultation and in what time period;
- Avoid jargon and include a glossary of terms where required;
- All comments will be made publicly available and the Council will report on all consultation stages;
- Publicise any consultation events on the Council's website and hold them at appropriate locations in the Borough that are accessible with appropriate disabled access.

**Example 3: North East Lincolnshire (from 2013 SCI)**

Selected as the principles have been worked up thoughtfully with a partner organisation but are still very general. Wider set of undertakings developed with the NHS centring on 'talking, listening and working together', see: <http://www.nelincs.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/TWLT-FINAL-Digital-A11y.pdf>

### *Talking*

We will be clear and honest about

- how you can get involved
- what we are doing with what you've told us

### *Listening*

We will

- hear your voice and what you have to say
- use what you tell us to bring about change
- be open to be challenged on the way we do things

### *Working Together*

We will

- encourage all of our communities to take part
- come to the places where you are
- work together with you and others to make the best use of time and money

## **Example 4: Craven District, Yorks & Humberside (from 2018 SCI)**

Craven District endorse and apply a wider North Yorkshire partnership set of consultation principles:

### *Be inclusive*

- Engaging with communities as a mainstream activity and not as an afterthought
- Involving people in a way which meets their needs rather than ours
- Ensuring that engagement and consultation is accessible to everyone who is affected
- Engaging at the most local level that is appropriate for the specific purpose
- Engaging with voluntary and community organisations, in particular those that can facilitate the involvement of groups and individuals who are seldom heard
- Making effective use of community representatives including councillors and community champions
- Supporting communities to become stronger, to get their views heard and to actively contribute to achieving outcomes

### *Be open*

- Being clear about why, what, when, where and how
- Being honest and accountable
- Feeding back to those we have consulted on the results of consultations and what we are going to do as a result - 'You said, we did'
- Not sharing personal information without asking you, unless required by law.

### *Be effective*

- Only carrying out engagement activities if the information we need is not already available
- Allowing sufficient time
- Targeting engagement activities and avoiding duplication
- Planning our engagement in the light of available resources and explaining any constraints
- Using a range of appropriate media to reach our target audience
- Evaluating the effectiveness of our engagement and making the necessary changes

- Making sure staff carrying out engagement have the skills, capacity and knowledge about communities to achieve high quality engagement

*Be co-ordinated*

- Contributing to and making use of shared engagement structures, where these are in place
- Sharing profiling, mapping, information and analysis allowing evidence-based deployment of resources
- Sharing feedback and communicating effectively, both within our organisations and externally with partners □ Using joint problem solving where appropriate.
- Providing nominated officers in each organisation to act as contact points for joint action
- Providing strong local and thematic leadership at strategic level to support this work
- Committing resources contributed by all partners, where possible and appropriate, to support shared outcomes.

**Example 5: Middlesbrough (from 2020 SCI)**

Generic and possibly defensive principles.

*Our principles for community involvement*

- In making planning decisions in accordance with our planning policies it is often necessary to balance differing views and make judgements in the interests of all our communities. Getting local opinions will help us make decisions in the most informed way possible.
- To achieve this, we will apply some general principles to our planning consultations and community involvement.

*What you can expect from us*

- We will ensure that consultations have a clear purpose and that information will be written in plain English as far as possible, and if technical words have to be used, their meaning will be explained.
- We will seek views from the local community, stakeholders and other affected parties as early as possible and throughout the process.
- To ensure that community involvement is inclusive we will give the local community the opportunity to express their views, and take into consideration all views submitted.
- We will aim to arrange engagement events at a range of times and places, to make it convenient for as many people as possible to attend these events.
- We will use a variety of engagement methods, as appropriate that relate to the stage of the planning process, issues being discussed, communities involved, resources available and time constraints. Additionally, we will make use of electronic and modern media techniques to make consultation easier, quicker and more cost effective.

### **Example 6: Test Valley, Hants (from 2017 SCI)**

Selected as the ‘principles’ expressed here are very broad and largely iterate basic consultation actions.

#### **Consultation Principles – Planning Policy**

##### *To Inform:*

5.13 Planning Policy will inform people of the planning process and to provide people with the information they need to get involved at the earliest opportunity possible.

The following approaches, where relevant, will be used to inform people:

##### Statutory Requirements:

- Electronic version of the consultation document will be made publicly available on the Council’s website
- Hard copies for reference use will be made available at Libraries
- Statutory Notice in local newspapers –Andover Advertiser, Romsey Advertiser and Hampshire Independent via email / post

5.14 Additional notification methods may be used to advertise consultation:

- Test Valley Borough Council Consultation Portal: <http://www.testvalley.gov.uk/aboutyourcouncil/consultationportal/>
- Advertised on the front page of the Council’s website within the News section <http://www.testvalley.gov.uk/news>
- Consultations will be publicised via social media – Twitter / Facebook
- Test Valley News which is circulated to all residents in the Borough twice a year in March and November .

5.15 Planning Policy will use plain English wherever possible and for those whose first language is not English the Council uses a professional translation service.

##### *To Involve:*

5.16 Planning Policy will encourage the active participation of individuals, groups, landowners and developers in the planning process through a variety of techniques such as:

- Public exhibitions
- Council meetings
- Workshops

Planning Policy, wherever possible, undertake these consultation exercises in locations which are accessible to the local community, for example at village halls / local community halls and at a variety of times.