**Public Consultation and Community Engagement**
Prepared by Beata Rieu 03/07/2026

**Purpose**
To seek Members' views on developing a more consistent approach to public consultation and community engagement and whether a Public Consultation Strategy should be developed.

**Recommendation**
Members are asked to discuss:

1. Whether the Council should adopt a more strategic approach to public consultation and engagement.
2. Whether a Public Consultation Strategy / Policy should be prepared for consideration by Council and if so, by whom
3. Whether future consultation exercises should follow a consistent set of principles and reporting standards.

**Background**
Public consultation is an important part of good local governance. It helps the Council understand community priorities, supports evidence-based decision making and can strengthen priority setting and funding allocation.

Consultation also provides an opportunity to explain the reasons behind Council decisions, demonstrate transparency and build confidence in local decision making.

Not every Council decision requires consultation. Routine operational matters, statutory responsibilities and delegated decisions should continue to be managed through existing governance arrangements.

**Discussion**
The Council currently undertakes consultation for a variety of purposes, including:

- statutory consultation;
- Preference for footpath projects;
- Adventure playground renovations;
- Devolution priorities;
- Questionnaires and engagement exercises regarding the Rec and the Pavilion.

These different approaches are not always clearly distinguished and there may be benefit in developing a more consistent framework that explains:

- why consultation is being undertaken;
- what influence it will have on decision making;
- how responses will be analysed; and
- how outcomes will be reported back to residents.

Good engagement should be proportionate, inclusive and transparent. It should encourage participation from a broad cross-section of the community and seek to reach residents who may not normally engage with the Council.

The Council may also wish to consider whether consultation could play a greater role in informing longer-term strategic planning, alongside existing evidence such as correspondence from residents, public participation at meetings, Youth Forum feedback and previous consultation exercises.

**Principles for Future Consultation**
Should Members agree, future consultation exercises could be guided by the following principles:

- clear purpose and scope;
- proportionate to the significance of the issue;
- accessible and inclusive;
- transparent about how responses will be used;
- representative of different parts of the community where reasonably practicable;
- feedback provided to participants following Council decisions.

**Possible Next Steps**
Should Members support the principle, a draft Public Consultation and Community Engagement Strategy could be prepared setting out:

- when consultation is appropriate;
- consultation methods;
- reporting standards;
- accessibility requirements;
- evaluation and review arrangements;
- guidance for consultations supporting grant applications.

**Resource and Financial Implications**
Officer time would be required to prepare and manage consultation exercises. The extent of future consultation would need to remain proportionate to available resources.

**Conclusion**
Developing a consistent approach to consultation would help ensure that public engagement is meaningful, transparent and proportionate, while supporting informed decision making and strengthening the Council's relationship with residents.