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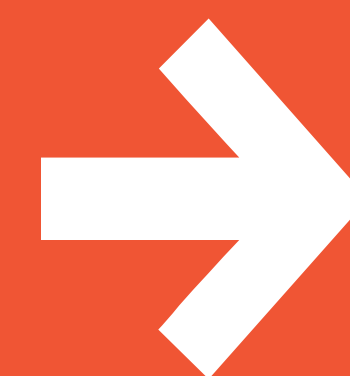
Great British
ENERGY

involve



Starting the Conversation

Public Engagement Guidance
for Local Authority Officers



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01 Introduction



Delivering the clean energy transition locally means working with residents and communities.

This guidance is for local authority officers who want to engage their communities effectively on net zero and community energy — whether you are just starting out or looking to strengthen what you already do.

The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) has recognised the importance of this work through [Energising Britain: Your Voice in the Clean Energy Transition](#), which sets out how the government will work with people and communities to ensure the benefits of the clean energy transition are shared by all.

The establishment of Great British Energy (GBE) and the publication of its Local Power Plan further emphasise the critical role of local communities, individuals and groups in bringing about a just transition to clean energy.

To support local authorities in developing clean energy solutions and engaging communities to make them succeed, DESNZ has funded Local Net Zero Hubs across England. The Hubs have produced a [baseline paper on climate communications and engagement](#) - a useful starting point for officers starting to think about engagement.

This guidance has been commissioned by DESNZ and the Hubs, and builds directly on the baseline paper, taking it further into the practical question of how to engage.

Our current moment: the clean energy transition and what it means for local areas

The UK Government's Clean Energy Superpower Mission aims to build a diverse low carbon energy system, making the most of our natural resources to protect consumers and future generations from the cost of climate breakdown.

It is this mission that is the driving force behind initiatives working to bring ownership of clean energy and net zero into local communities, through DESNZ and the newly established, publicly-owned Great British Energy (GBE).

GBE's mission is to power Britain with clean, secure, home-grown energy. To achieve this, it will invest in, develop, build and operate the infrastructure the UK needs to increase energy independence.

Crucially, it will give communities a direct stake in the clean energy revolution through the Local Power Plan (LPP). The LPP is a roadmap for large-scale public investment in community energy, with a specific focus on capacity-building within local authorities.

This is where this guidance comes in. →

How this Guidance was developed: the Energy Champions Programme

In early 2026, Involve recruited and trained a cohort of 45 local authority officers from across England in public engagement around local and community energy.

Besides gaining skills in public engagement, the Champions also identified areas within their local contexts where their skills could be applied, and helped identify barriers, challenges and opportunities for engaging with communities and individuals on local and community energy.

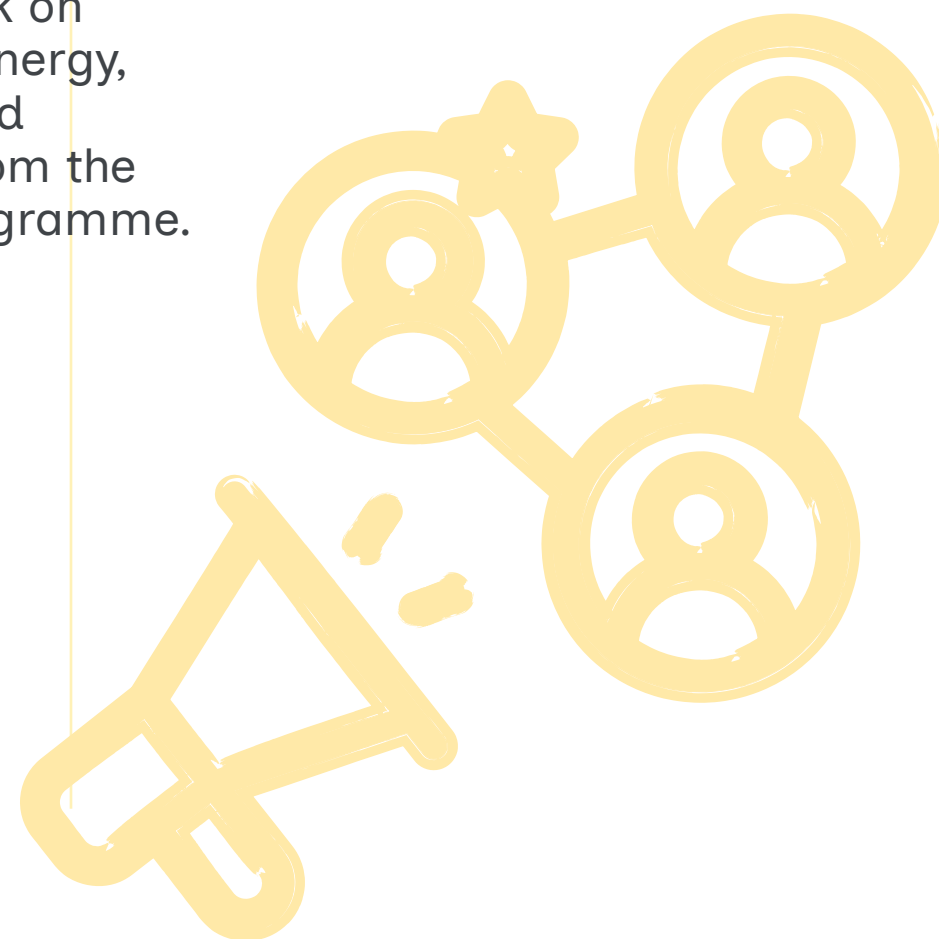
As part of this Programme, we were asked to develop something that officers could use as practical advice and guidance at any point in the engagement process.

Throughout, we refer to relevant research and past work on engagement in clean energy, and draw examples and suggestions directly from the Energy Champions programme.

The legacy of the Energy Champions

While the initial Energy Champions programme wrapped at the end of April 2026, parts of the project infrastructure remain open, and actively encouraging more local authority officers to get involved.

On [Net Zero Go](#), there is a dedicated space for Energy Champions and other local authority officers interested in local and community energy engagement to connect and discuss with each other, as well as engage with the resources from this Guidance - a mini-community beyond the lifetime of this particular cohort.



What this Guidance is and how to use it

This guidance is a resource for local authorities who want to engage more effectively with their communities on net zero and clean energy. It is organised into **11 sections**.

It begins by making the case for engagement and helping you understand your starting point.

It then guides you through setting a strategy, planning and delivering engagement, choosing your methods, working inclusively, and embedding evaluation and learning across your work.

Throughout, you will find practical tools, templates, and stories from practice.

Where are you starting from?

The guidance has been designed so you can pick it up at any point.

Whether you are new to this area or already running engagement programmes, you should be able to find what you need.

Use the three prompts below to find your most useful entry point. ↓

I'm new to public engagement on energy or net zero, and need to understand the basics and make the case internally.

Start with [Section 2](#) (the case for engagement) and [Section 3](#) (understanding your starting point).

These will give you the evidence and framing you need before you begin to plan.

I understand why engagement matters, but I need help planning and running a specific project.

Go to [Section 4](#) (setting your strategy) and [Section 5](#) (planning your engagement). You may also want to refer to [Section 6](#) (choosing your methods) and [Section 7](#) (ensuring your approach is inclusive and accessible).

I'm already doing engagement and want to improve quality, reach or impact.

Head to [Section 7](#) (ensuring your approach is inclusive and accessible), [Section 8](#) (the importance of evaluation), and [Section 10](#) (troubleshooting), which sets out common barriers and how to address them.

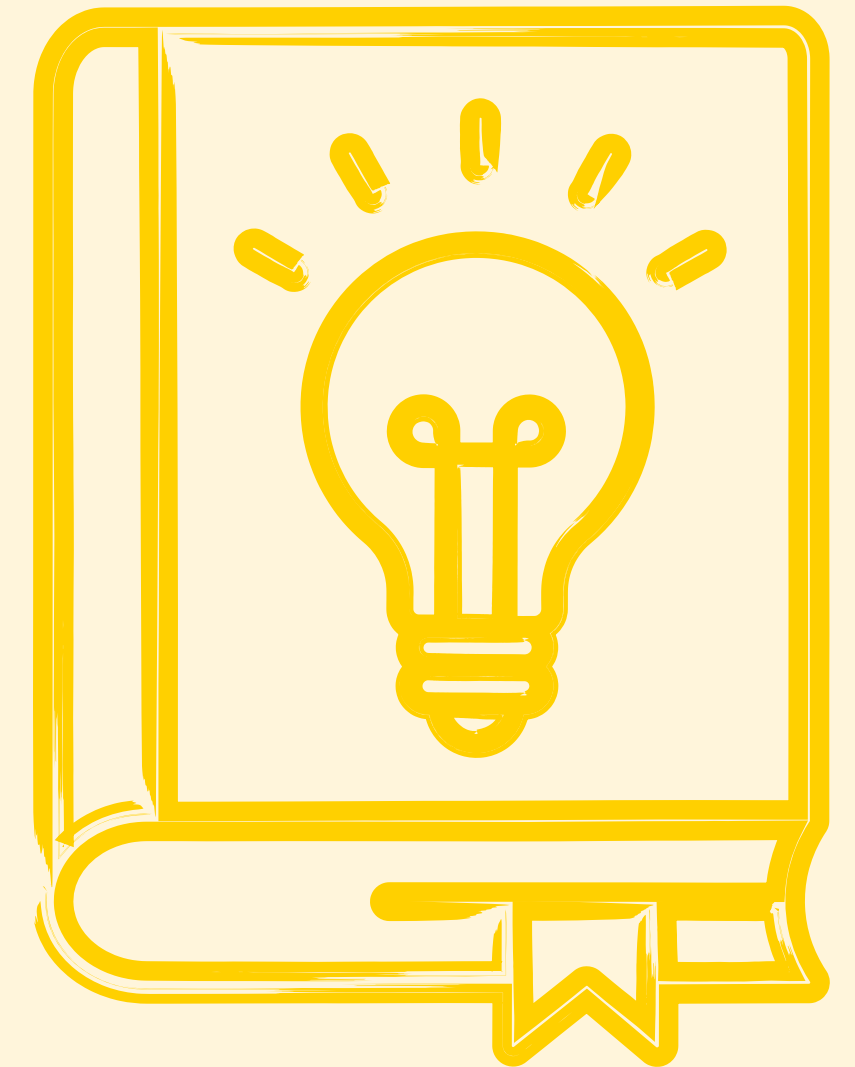
Not sure?

[Section 3](#) is a good place for anyone to start.

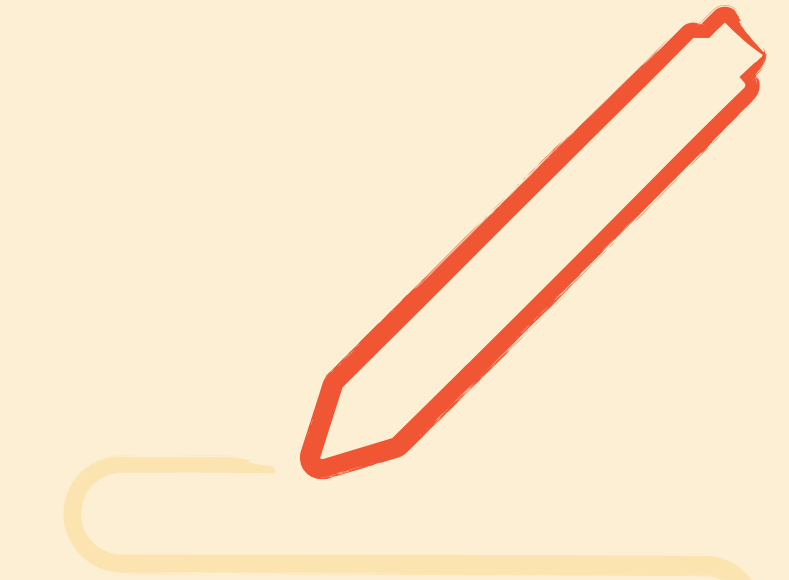
It sets out the landscape, the three core challenges of engagement in this space, and what good engagement looks like.

The sections that follow will help you understand why public engagement is essential, how to make the case for it within your organisation, how to navigate its challenges, and how to apply all of this to the local and community energy landscape.

[Section 2](#) begins with the case for engagement and, importantly, the cost of not engaging.



02 The case for engagement



The [Energising Britain: Your Voice in the Clean Energy Transition](#) sets out **five principles** for working with people, communities, organisations, businesses, trade unions and education settings to ensure the benefits of the transition area are accessible to all.

Five principles of DESNZ Participation Strategy

- **Communicate** the action being taken that is improving people's
- **Listen** to people and communities so their voices guide what we do
- **Enable** households to enjoy the benefits of climate and nature action
- **Grow** people's access to low carbon technologies and sustainable choices
- **Collaborate** to inform and inspire climate and nature action

Linking your engagement to these national policy principles helps make the internal case, demonstrating that there is already national buy-in and appetite for citizen involvement, and that your work connects to wider investment opportunities.

A common challenge for local authority officers is making the case for engagement internally, particularly when resources are tight and institutional buy-in is uncertain.

This section gives you arguments and evidence to do that.

Making the case

Net zero is complex and authorities face real challenges in trying to address it. Organisations and communities experience the climate crisis differently, good engagement requires collaboration, and competing priorities make that difficult.

This is happening against a background of low public trust in authorities and increased demand for citizen involvement in decision-making - a dynamic well documented in the Net Zero Hub's [baseline communications and engagement paper for public bodies](#).

There is growing acknowledgement of the power of public engagement, and a recognition that better engagement makes for better policy.

Engaging communities brings lived experience and local knowledge into the planning process. Residents can highlight practical barriers, local priorities, and social dynamics that technical modelling may overlook.

Community energy groups can contribute valuable grassroots innovation, helping ensure that plans reflect local aspirations and opportunities.

Without this input, local authorities risk creating plans with significant blind spots - policies and projects that prove difficult to implement because they fail to reflect how people actually live, travel, and use energy in a place.

Both the '[Energising Britain: Your Voice in the Clean Energy Transition](#)' and the [GBE Local Power Plan](#) recognise the essential need for local people and communities to be directly involved in developing clean energy solutions.

Securing internal buy-in

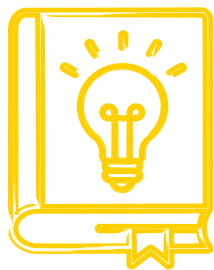
It is critical to secure institutional buy-in for meaningful public engagement on local energy. This is not simply about support for net zero or decarbonisation targets – it is about building commitment to how those plans will be developed and delivered through sustained, structured community engagement.

Without that commitment, engagement risks being marginalised, underfunded, or tokenised rather than treated as a core part of a local authorities work.

When leadership understands engagement as a tool for managing risk, improving decision-making, and strengthening public mandate, it is more likely to be embedded meaningfully and to genuinely influence outcomes.

This is true regardless of the size of your council, your resources or your context.

The following approaches can help you make that case internally →



Putting it into practice. You will find further tools on creating internal buy-in, and on handling common concerns and objections, in [Section 11](#) (tools and templates).

Communication, awareness and transparency approaches play a central role in building internal understanding. Plain-English explainers, internal briefings, and clear articulation of outcomes from engagement elsewhere (for example, “you said, we did” summaries from comparable authorities) help translate abstract concepts into tangible value.

These are particularly useful for aligning non-specialist colleagues and building confidence. You can find more examples from other areas on [Net Zero Go](#).

Cross-departmental working groups or steering groups help ensure engagement is not siloed within a single team, but embedded across planning, delivery and communications functions. This is critical for internal alignment.

Targeted and insight-driven approaches can help surface and address concerns before they become blockers. Targeted interviews or internal workshops with members and senior officers allow concerns around risk, cost, or anticipated public reaction to be raised and addressed proactively.

Deliberative-style internal processes can be useful where there are competing priorities or genuine concerns about risk. Structured, facilitated discussions with members and senior officers can build a shared understanding of trade-offs and the role of engagement in navigating them.



Summary of risks and benefits to support making the case

Risks of absent or poor engagement

- Project delays
- Resistance or backlash
- Failed uptake
- Low trust
- Poor project design
- Missed local knowledge
- Reputational damage

Benefits of early, well-designed engagement

- Improved project quality
- Social legitimacy
- Smoother delivery
- Stronger local alignment
- Reduced risk of costly rework
- Greater community ownership
- Opportunity to increase trust



Benefits of public engagement for local authorities

Local authority officers working on net zero and clean energy face a common set of pressures: sceptical senior leadership, stretched budgets, politically contested decisions, and communities that have sometimes been let down by engagement before.

Done well, public engagement directly addresses each of these.

Here is what it delivers:

Reduce the risk of decisions and projects being challenged or reversed.

Engagement builds public support for a decision before it is formally taken, making it harder to contest after the fact. It also strengthens the council’s position if decisions and projects are scrutinised – whether by the public, by elected members, or through formal review processes. This is particularly important for net zero decisions, which can attract political attention.

Make more viable decisions.

Engagement surfaces the needs, priorities and practical realities of local people early, producing decisions that are more likely to work first time and reducing the likelihood of having to redesign programmes or reverse course later.

Decisions informed by local knowledge are more likely to be implementable quickly because they reflect how people actually live and use energy – and that pace matters when the clean energy transition cannot afford to stall.

Build the mandate to act on difficult issues.

Net zero requires asking people to change how they heat their homes, travel and use energy. Public engagement gives local authorities the evidence and confidence that communities can support what is being proposed. This is often the difference between a plan that stalls and one that moves forward.

Navigate political polarisation and find common ground.

Climate and net zero have become contested in ways that make it harder for councils to act. Structured engagement creates space for people with different views to deliberate together, and consistently finds more common ground than political debate suggests exists. This can give officers and elected members the cover to move forward on issues that feel too contested to touch.

Reach the people your decisions are meant to help.

Policies and projects designed without input from the communities they are intended to support often miss the mark.

Engagement ensures that the people most affected – including those who are harder to reach – have shaped what is being delivered. This improves uptake, reduces friction, and strengthens the case that the council is acting in the public interest.

Respond to public expectations and rebuild trust.

Demand for meaningful involvement in decisions that affect people’s lives is growing, and trust in public institutions is low. Engagement that closes the feedback loop – showing people what changed as a result of their input – is one of the most effective tools available for rebuilding that trust over time.

Demonstrate fairness and leave no one behind.

A just transition means that the shift to clean energy does not deepen existing inequalities. Inclusive engagement brings marginalised groups into decision-making, ensures their needs shape policy, and provides the council with evidence that it has considered the impact of its decisions on different communities.

The cost of not engaging

Research and practice consistently show that the costs of poor or absent engagement emerge at different stages of the decision-making process.

They are often triggered when the public feels that a decision does not reflect their views. This might be because there was insufficient engagement, or because the engagement that did take place was not accessible to them.

Costs can also arise when people do not believe a programme or piece of infrastructure will benefit those it is intended to support, or when they do not accept a decision despite it having met the required statutory process.

The recent “[Cost of Not Engaging](#)’ report from Innovate UK examined a handful of case studies to identify commonalities in what could cause additional costs (largely related to public feeling or knowledge of a programme or decision), and the form these additional costs could take.

If the public:

- Thinks that a decision does not reflect their views because there was not enough engagement, or the engagement conducted was not accessible to them,
- Do not think programmes or infrastructure will benefit those they intend to support,
- Do not agree on a decision made, despite adequate statutory agreement,

This can trigger **additional costs**, through things like:

- Additional officer time needed, for example to re-design programmes or infrastructure, or defend decisions that have been made
- Money spent on delivery or consultation that cannot be recouped
- Direct costs, for example contractors, legal fees, repair or maintenance,
- Loss or reduced trust in the local authority and its decision making
- Legal or judicial review

Public engagement may be resource (time, money, capacity) intensive, but experience demonstrates that not engaging with publics before making a decision is often far costlier, both in monetary terms and in less tangible but just as important things like trust in local authorities.

The [Net Zero Hubs’ baseline paper](#) emphasises that Local Authorities should avoid publishing decisions and then defending them.

Trust, once lost or damaged, is much harder to recreate.

Useful statistics for
making the case

Increased understanding:

Citizen visioning processes in 14 Local Authorities through the Net Zero Living Programme resulted in a 20% increase in understanding of their net zero approach.

Increased trust:

After the [Westminster Climate Assembly](#) the percentage of assembly members that trusted Westminster Council to act on the recommendations from the assembly grew from 52% to 73%.

The number of people who felt listened to by their council grew from 27 to 63%.

Increased trust in policy:

Research for the [Citizens' White Paper](#) from Involve and Demos shows that when people know a policy has been made with “people like me” trust increases by 10% (35>45%).

Useful inputs:

[A KNOCA study of the first few national climate assemblies published in June 2025](#) shows that members are more willing to support ‘sufficiency’ policies that aim to reduce consumption and production of products and services. Citizens are also more willing to propose the regulation of individuals and businesses rather than relying on market incentives or voluntary action.

Increasing policy success:

[Research from Climate Citizens/ Lancaster University](#) shows that giving people a say in policies which affect them can increase the chance that policy will succeed.

Deliberative methods can improve policymaking by obtaining the input of people who are directly affected by policies, but who are not usually engaged in the policy design process.

Lasting impact of participation:

Research on Climate Assembly UK showed that two years after taking part, 91% of assembly members had made at least one climate-friendly change to their lives, and 49% had made ten or more.

The majority attributed these changes to taking part in the assembly.

Getting beyond the headlines:

Research from the [Institute for Public Policy Research \(IPPR\) and Persuasion UK](#) shows that 60% of the public support the UK's Net Zero by 2050 target, and that media coverage is more than two and a half times more negative than public sentiment.

Engagement can help surface this support and translate it into better decisions.

Harnessing latent support:

According to [Climate Barometer](#), support for solar or wind (69% support, 19% oppose) is relatively high, but MPs significantly overestimate the level of opposition (think 44% would oppose).

This makes the case for engaging people to understand and harness the strength of opinion more deeply.



Learning from Net Zero Living Programme (NZLP) engagement

The Innovate UK [Net Zero Living Programme](#) helped local and regional authorities accelerate the transition to net zero.

The cohort of 52 funded places across the UK to deliver projects to overcome the non technological barriers to delivering net zero in a place. Involve, Forum for the Future, Ipsos and Quantum Strategy & Technology supported 28 local authorities with their work on visioning and citizen engagement as Innovate UK see public support and engagement as a substantial non technical barrier.

Through direct engagement with 14 Councils, the NZLP demonstrated how powerful dedicated engagement on net zero can be in local communities, and the difference this can make in the drive towards net zero across the country.

Developing visions and recommendations with citizens, unlocked different actions in the Councils involved:

- **Increased understanding:**
In the 14 places where residents participated directly, Local Authorities saw an average of a 20% increase in understanding of their net zero approach.
- **Provided support and licence to act:**
The recommendations for action that citizens produced often reinforced or supported plans that were already taking place.

The fact they were generated by citizens through a rigorous process creates greater licence for the council to act, increases council confidence that plans will meet with public support, adds validity to current and planned actions and reduces internal opposition and inertia.

It also shows the council where people are not aware of actions underway, and how they can make sure people know what's going on, and get updated on more active communications plans.

- **Created viable solutions**
Councils including Gateshead, Blackpool and Three Rivers reviewed all their citizen recommendations systematically and are already implementing some of these, and have created 'trackers' to show progress.

Newham Council is actively building citizens' ideas into roll-out plans for retrofit and potential district heat networks. In the councils that have been reviewed, 60 - 90% of citizen recommendations have been planned or actioned for a year on.

- **Reinvigorated existing projects:**
Citizens in Gateshead came up with the idea for a local retrofit and energy advice 'one-stop shop', very similar to an existing Gateshead Green Room project idea.

The project had previously lost momentum and has now been given a boost as a result of the citizen visioning process.

- **Derisked investment and supporting funding bids:**
A number of councils have found that being able to demonstrate resident support for an idea can support investment and funding.
- **Increased knowledge and supported behaviour change.**
The programme found that latent citizen support for action on climate change is strong and engagement processes can activate it.

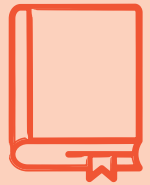
[Recent research from IPPR](#) shows that 'a strong progressive agenda on climate remains broadly popular with the public'.

But it has to start with where people are rather than asking them to 'change behaviour'.

Research on Climate Assembly UK showed that two years on, participants still thought and acted differently - with the majority attributing those changes to taking part in the assembly. When power is shared with people to make decisions, it can result in a level of intrinsic motivation that no carrot or stick can compare to.

- **Provided evidence for lobbying and delivery:**
In Wakefield the process has strengthened legitimacy for officers to pursue projects, plans and strategies, including lobbying the central government.

Advisory Group members see the outputs of citizen engagement processes as strong tools for advocacy, as recommendations written directly by citizens, from a group of people who reflect the wider district bring a level of legitimacy on issues that can often be politicised.



Case study: making the case

Southampton City Council ran a Climate Assembly focused on transport.

They made the case for this based on the need to develop a new transport strategy involving major investment decisions across the city.

They wanted to avoid expensive mistakes and also respond to citizen concerns. Transport was recognised as a source of frustration by residents. 29% of Southampton's emissions come from transport and there were upcoming decisions, such as on the Local Transport Plan, that the assembly aimed to influence.

They partnered with Southampton University who provided funding, expertise and resources.



Together with the university, officers found an '[anchor politician](#)' - someone who recognised the need and was able to make the case to others.

The final vision and recommendations were deliberated and agreed by assembly members. This includes the vision statement for walking, cycling and public transport to be the main way to move around Southampton in future.

Priority actions include a metro-style transport system, expanding the cycling network and introducing a park and ride. Informed public judgement has given transport officers the confidence to pursue these ambitious proposals through the three-year implementation plan of the Local Transport Plan, adopted in 2025.

The next section sets out the local authority and community energy landscape, the three core challenges of public engagement, and what good engagement looks like in practice.→

03

Understanding your starting point

Before you can plan effective engagement, it helps to understand the landscape you are working in.

The pressures on local authorities, the nature of the challenge, and what good engagement actually looks like in practice. →

This section sets out the current local authority and community energy context, introduces a framework for thinking about the three core challenges of public engagement, describes what good engagement looks like, and where it commonly goes wrong.

The landscape

Net Zero and adaptation cannot be achieved without communities. Decisions that matter happen at a local level - in homes, neighbourhoods, businesses and across local landscapes and economies. Community groups, individuals, businesses and other stakeholders all have a role to play.

The scale of what is needed is significant.

A third of emissions reductions required by the Climate Change Committee's Seventh Carbon Budget, by the late 2030s and into the 2040s, will depend on household decisions around heating, road travel, flying and diet.

Up to 80% of a local area's emissions are influenced, directly or indirectly, by local authorities. Yet local authorities have direct control over only 1-5% of local emissions. Their real leverage lies in procurement, place-shaping policies, partnerships, innovation and - critically - their role in engagement and communications.

This is what makes this guidance matter.

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Three challenges

A useful way to think about public engagement on climate and net zero is through three interconnected challenges:

→ **communication, intervention, and collaboration.**

This framework draws on research including the Centre for Public Impact's 2021 review of public engagement and climate behaviour change, and has been developed and evidenced through subsequent work including the Net Zero Living Programme.

Each challenge represents a distinct dimension of the problem and all three need to be addressed.

→ **Communication** tells people what is happening; **intervention** changes what is possible; and **collaboration** shapes what happens in the first place.

Public engagement as a challenge of communication

This addresses how you communicate about climate change, and what your local authority is doing about it, in a way that builds awareness and helps to create a mandate for change.

Communication around net zero is a particular challenge for public engagement. Findings from the Net Zero Living Programme indicate that the term 'net zero' has very little resonance for people, but talking about specific clean energy initiatives like solar, heat pumps, or retrofitting (updating or adding new parts to existing technology or infrastructure) can gain more traction locally.

The Net Zero Hubs' paper '[Establishing a climate communications and engagement baseline for public bodies](#)' (2025) also recommends focusing on things that connect more to everyday life, such as 'pollution reduction' or 'energy saving', emphasising stories of collective action and positive impact.

When speaking to stakeholders about projects, it is important to choose framing and language that lands well with the audience. This is not just about avoiding jargon, but about using phrases that help show how a project can support the needs and aims of a stakeholder. Depending on your audience, it may be more effective to talk about energy affordability or security, health impacts, or nature, rather than leading with climate or net zero framing.

However, you don't have to shy away from talking about climate. Depending on your local context, explicitly connecting your work to the climate emergency can help raise awareness and garner support for future projects and initiatives. The key is knowing your audience.

Done well, communication can support behaviour change by making people care more about climate change and relate more to calls for action.

Research in this area focuses on what sorts of messages, messengers and images work best for different audiences.

No one who specialises in this area thinks communication is sufficient on its own to create the scale of behaviour change needed — but most think it is an essential foundation.

In [Section 11, Tools, Templates and More Resources](#), you will find more information about this paper, as well as work from organisations like Stronger Stories and Climate Outreach that are working specifically on understanding the most effective ways to talk about net zero and climate change in ways that resonate with different audiences.



Public engagement as a challenge of intervention

This is about initiatives that try to incentivise behaviour change at an individual, social or systems level.

For example, this might be retrofit incentive schemes, EV charging infrastructure, support schemes to encourage switching from gas boilers to heat pumps, or changes to planning policy around new build energy standards.

There is broad agreement that interventions like these are necessary.

But on their own they are not enough, and there is increasing recognition that this approach has some significant problems.

These include →

Problems of public consent.

A lot of changes the UK made to date to reduce emissions have been in areas the public has not really noticed, such as changing where electricity comes from.

But the changes ahead will impact people's lives much more directly, including how they travel, what they buy, and how they heat their home.

There is a real risk of public backlash against some of these changes, for example requirements to replace gas boilers, changes to planning policy, or the siting of renewable energy infrastructure.

Problems of intervention design: How well or not are interventions working, including for different groups within the population, is not always clear. This is not a problem confined to climate change, but is important to the ability to reach net zero.

Problems around fairness and inequality:

Do initiatives help to reduce inequalities and inequities or do they exacerbate them or create new ones?

It is in addressing these problems of consent, design and fairness that the third challenge becomes essential.

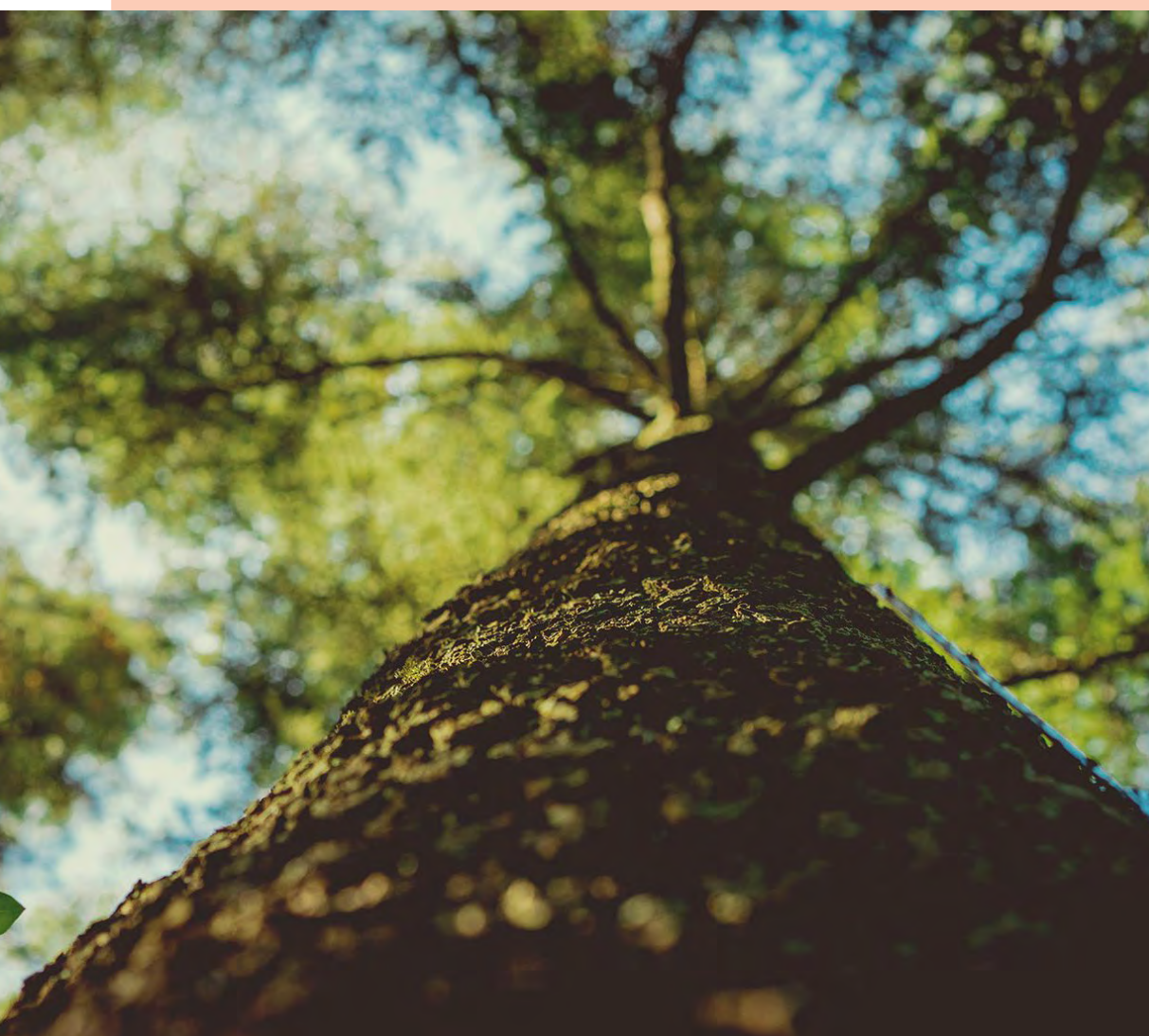
Public engagement as a challenge of collaboration

This is about how you open up your decision-making to allow people in your area to help shape your climate strategies, policies, services and interventions.

People who specialise in this area look at how decision-making can be opened up in ways that address the problems of public consent, intervention design and fairness, whilst also maximising other benefits – around community resilience, trust, and long-term ownership of change.

Unlike communication and intervention, which generally do things at or to people, collaboration is about working with people to shape what you are going to do.

It can involve working further with people to implement decisions, but the key point is that people have had a genuine chance to shape what is happening in their area, including what a net zero future for their community looks like.





Case study: responding to the challenge of collaboration

Gateshead Council was expanding its district heat network into residential areas and needed to understand how to get households to connect.

The council partnered with Northumbria University to research residents' barriers, ran a [citizen visioning](#) process, tested a pilot customer journey on 16 homes, and created a Green Alumni network of 22 resident advocates.

The pilot was highly successful, with 100% of the 16 target homes agreeing to connect.



The council used the insights to formalise a one-stop-shop communication strategy for the wider heat network roll-out.

The Green Alumni network proved particularly effective because residents rely heavily on trusted peers rather than technical data to make decisions.

By combining technical expertise with genuine collaboration with local people, the council delivered a project shaped by the needs and priorities of residents.

What good engagement looks like (and common pitfalls)

Engagement enables people to play a role in shaping projects, decisions and services.

It creates a two-way dialogue that benefits both participants and those commissioning the engagement. It can take place in many different ways.

Without engagement, a decision risks being decided, announced, and then defended – often at greater cost, and with less public support, than if people had been involved from the start. With engagement, a decision is shaped through dialogue, people participate in the process, and outcomes carry genuine public legitimacy.

[Involve has identified standards](#) for good participatory and deliberative engagement processes. These principles provide a framework for designing engagement that is transparent, inclusive and genuinely impactful – centring participant experience and ensuring people can meaningfully influence decisions.

- **Clear purpose:** The process has a defined goal; it occurs at a point where citizens can actually influence the outcome, and the decision is not yet predetermined.
- **Sufficient time and resource** Adequate funding and realistic timelines are provided to build relationships and allow for deep learning.
- **Reflective sample:** Participants are selected via random stratified sampling (sortition) to ensure they represent a “mini-

public” of the wider population, or using a tailored approach.

- **Inclusion and accessibility:** Barriers to entry are removed through honorariums (real living wage), childcare, transport, and accessibility support.
- **Independence:** Design and facilitation are led by impartial parties to prevent government bias or leading questions.
- **Transparency and accountability:** All materials are made public so the process can be scrutinised. This includes agendas, evidence, and recruitment methods.
- **Balanced inputs:** Participants receive accurate, comprehensive information from a range of experts and contributors representing multiple viewpoints.
- **Structured dialogue:** Professional facilitation ensures everyone is heard and the group can weigh trade-offs constructively.
- **Collective conclusions:** The group works toward shared recommendations, with the final report clearly outlining the rationale and any dissenting views..
- **Closing the loop:** A formal, public response to the recommendations is provided, explaining what will be implemented and why.



Case study: Successful engagement in Blackpool



Blackpool Council used a [community conversation](#) to develop a citizen-led vision for climate adaptation. Fifteen conversation starters were recruited, with a focus on three wards that had been less involved in the council's climate change work to date.

Through four in-person sessions, the group heard from a range of speakers on climate change, local impacts and the co-benefits of taking action.

Over three weeks between sessions, the conversation starters led more than 50 discussions with friends, family and neighbours about what would make Blackpool a better place to live in future.

These asset-based conversations valued the lived experience of the Blackpool community in equal measure to specialist expertise.

Conversation starters used what they had heard from speakers and from the wider community to explore ideas for a climate-resilient Blackpool in 2035.

They deliberated potential solutions before agreeing a vision and nine priority recommendations to feed into the council's Climate Adaptation Strategy. Crucially, the process also gave officers the mandate and confidence to act on plans that had previously stalled. The full account of how this was designed and delivered is in [Section 9](#).

Common pitfalls of public engagement in decision making

Knowing what good looks like also helps you recognise and plan for when things go wrong. Experience consistently surfaces six ways that engagement can falter. All of them can be identified and planned for before you begin:

- » You are asking for input on something on which a decision has already been made
- » You don't know what you will do with the outputs of your processes
- » There is not sufficient time or resource to allow for meaningful engagement
- » The outcomes of the process are not fed back to participants
- » You wait for a crisis to happen before you do public engagement
- » Lack of internal buy-in or organisational culture prevents outcomes from being implemented

The standards and pitfalls above are brought together in the Framework for Climate Engagement, developed with Innovate UK as part of the NZLP.

As the framework shows, the work of engagement falls into two phases: strategy and planning (covered in [Section 4](#) and [Section 5](#)) and delivering engagement (covered in [Section 6](#)).

A framework for climate engagement

Strategy and planning		Delivering engagement		
Setting overall strategy	Clarity of purpose and scope	Responsiveness, accountability and commitment to act	Transparency, equity and inclusion	Adequate time and resources
Is it clear as to how the engagement activities connect to the overarching Council strategy? Do any place-based visions exist? Is engagement designed to enable existing climate action plans and strategies?	Are the purpose, scope and boundaries of engagement clear and defined? Is there a mechanism in place to ensure independence?	Is there a commitment to do things differently based on public engagement? How will the Council be accountable for the results of the engagement?	Is it clear why you are doing things and is there openness and transparency throughout your approach? Are there clear quality standards in place to increase equity and inclusion? How are participants supported?	Have adequate time, and relevant resources been dedicated to ensure that the engagement processes can be meaningful and useful? Do you have resources to implement the recommendations?

Source: [Citizen engagement on Net Zero: Local Authority self-assessment framework](#)

In the next section, we look at how to develop an engagement strategy. This is the essential first step in turning this understanding into action and avoiding the pitfalls set out here. →

04 Setting your strategy

Before developing specific engagement activities, it is important to step back and think strategically.

This is the first phase of the Framework for Climate Engagement introduced in [Section 3](#).

A strategy does not have to be a lengthy document – it needs to set out your overall objectives for engagement, how these connect to the wider council strategy and priorities, and what that means for how you approach specific projects.

This joining-up enables engagement to be more than the sum of its parts: it avoids duplication, builds on existing community relationships, and makes the most of limited officer time and resources.

To do this, think through the following questions (there is a template in [Section 11](#)):

- » What are your objectives for climate change and net zero; what are the key decisions that need to be made; and where is engagement needed?
- » What do you want or need to achieve through engagement overall (engagement objectives)?
- » How does this connect to the Council's wider strategies and priorities?
- » What else is happening in the climate and clean energy space locally?
- » What else is the Council currently engaging residents on?
- » What is the portfolio of engagement that you need (see spectrum of participation below)? Where do you need to engage in depth? Where might you need other forms of engagement?

- » What do you need to do to prepare to use and respond to any engagement? Who might you need to partner with (see below)?
- » What can you learn from what has been done already?
- » What is your engagement journey? What's the long term plan to embed citizen engagement across your projects and decision making?
- » How will you know you have been successful?

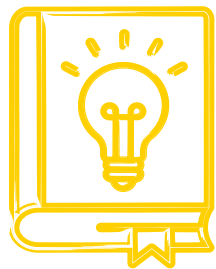
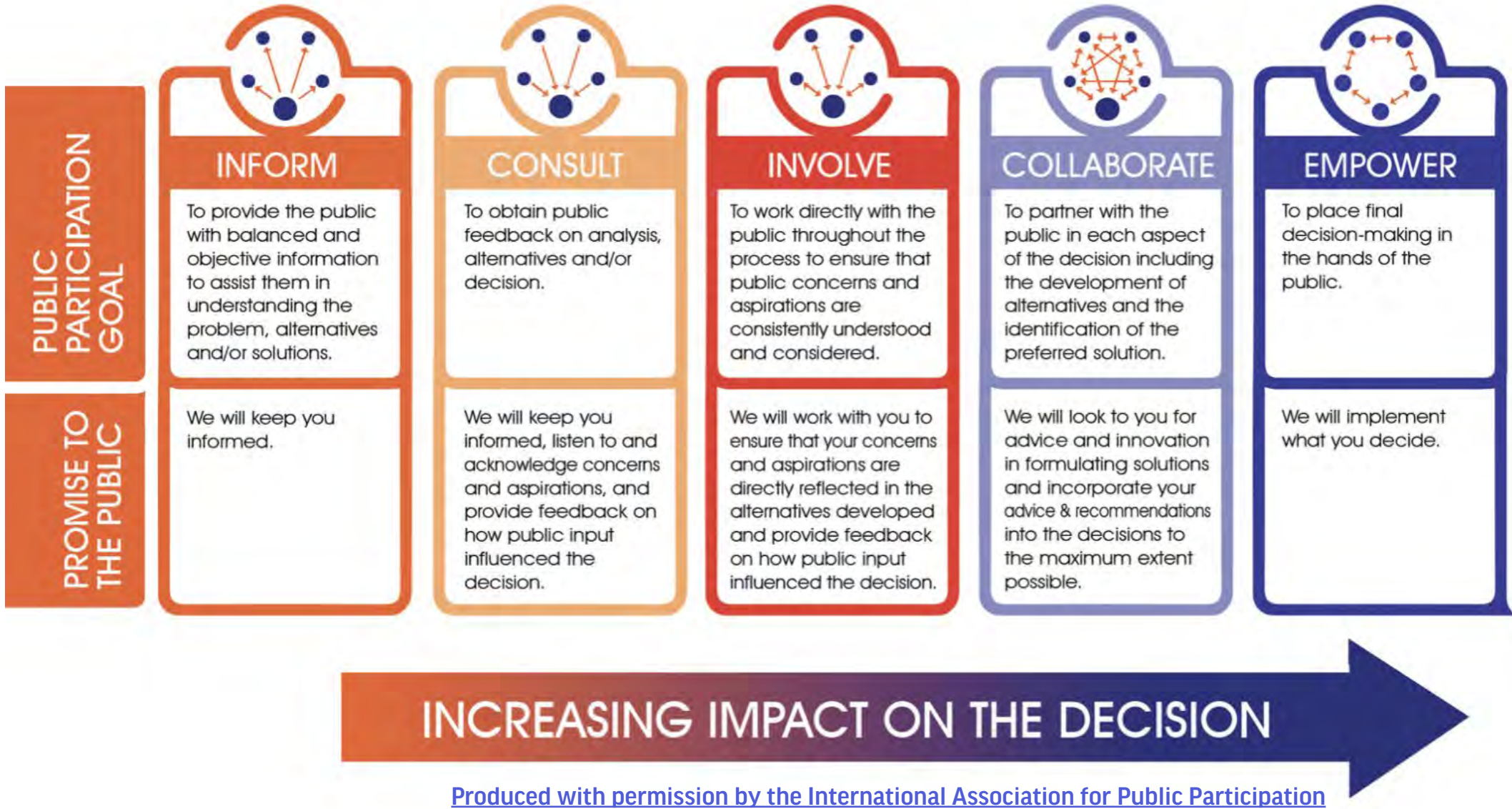
Spectrum of participation

There are different levels of participation, which are reflected in the International Association for Public Participation's Spectrum (*IAP2 Spectrum*, see right)

This is a useful way to think about participation, and about how and where you want to engage and with who. Relevant people may be engaged at each level of participation, but their involvement deepens as you move to the right of the spectrum. Each stage has its own participation goal and promise to the public.

At a strategic level you need to set out how you meet a range of objectives in different ways.

You will want to include a portfolio of approaches – some of which are about informing a wide range of people and some of which are about collaborating more deeply with a representative sample of your area, or a specific group. Ensure that this portfolio includes different phases of the spectrum.



When developing any strategy it is important to engage internally. You will have an idea of the best ways to do that. We recommend taking the following steps:

Internal Groundwork workshop: shared language, buy-in, existing work, risks	Cocreation of the strategy across the departments	Testing with external actors: community members, people with interest	Amending and updating: prototype	Capacity building and department action plans: community of practice
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Case study:
Developing a strategic approach to a city-scale retrofit programme in Cardiff

In 2025, Cardiff Council partnered with Involve to strengthen its approach to public engagement for its proposed retrofit programme, which primarily targeted households experiencing fuel poverty.

The retrofit programme aims to deliver warmer homes, lower bills, improved health outcomes and wider economic benefits, while supporting a just transition to net zero.

However, the Council recognised that technical planning and economic modelling alone would not guarantee success. Building trust, ensuring uptake, and supporting residents before, during and after installation are equally critical.

The underlying policy challenge was clear: while the Council had strong strategic evidence (including co-benefit analysis and health impact assessment), there remained significant uncertainty about the *how* of delivery, particularly around trust, uptake, contractor quality and reaching those most in need.

The project focused on designing an engagement framework that would reduce implementation risk, improve resident experience, strengthen cross-sector coordination, and embed learning for long-term climate action. It combined strategic workshops, internal capacity building through [public engagement training](#), and an Affordable Warmth Partnership Roundtable to build on rather than duplicate existing work.

The result was a set of outcomes highlighting the importance of trust, person-centred delivery and making a clear case for engagement as risk mitigation. This new strategic approach supported Cardiff Council to embed public engagement as a core part of their retrofit programme.

You can learn more about this project, how it was developed and its outcomes in [Section 9](#).



Working with partners

Partnerships are a strategic choice. Thinking about them early makes engagement more effective and sustainable.

» **Within your organisation,** cross-departmental working groups or steering groups help ensure engagement is embedded across planning, delivery and communications, rather than sitting with a single team.

This makes better use of limited resources, reduces the risk of a single point of failure, and means that when recommendations cut across council areas, the teams responsible for delivering on them are already bought in.

It gives communities confidence that their time and input is directly connected to real decisions.

» **Beyond your organisation,** external partners and independent advisors can provide specialist expertise, established community relationships, and a degree of independence that helps build public trust.

This is particularly valuable for recruitment and inclusivity – partners with existing community ties can reach people and places that councils often cannot.

An independent advisory group can also strengthen the credibility and perceived fairness of your process, while providing valuable contextual insight into your local area.

However, there are real risks in relying too heavily on external partners: uneven capacity, limited continuity if organisations change internally, and gaps in reach across diverse communities.

Before committing to a partnership approach, work through the following:

Why are these particular partners being used?

Who can they reach well?

Who may they not reach?

How will continuity be maintained if organisations change internally?

Are roles, responsibilities and expectations clearly defined?

What support will partners need to deliver effectively?

You may also want to consider **collaborating with the community energy sector.**

Community energy groups, fuel poverty charities and other local civil society organisations occupy a distinct and valuable position in the local energy landscape.

They often have established relationships with communities that local authorities do not, they can act as trusted messengers on issues where council communications may carry less weight, and they bring grassroots knowledge that can strengthen both engagement design and project delivery.

When developing your strategy, it is worth mapping which community energy organisations are active in your area and considering how they might be involved.

This might be as partners in delivering engagement, as advisers on community priorities, or as co-designers of solutions that could involve locally owned energy projects using council assets.

This kind of collaboration can extend your reach significantly, particularly to groups that are underrepresented in more formal engagement processes.



With a strategy in place, the next step is planning the specific engagement activity that will deliver it. **Section 5** guides you through that process, including how to get clear on your purpose, audience and resources before choosing your methods. →

05 Planning your engagement



With a strategy in place, this section helps you plan the specific engagement you want to deliver.

Before developing your approach in detail, three questions will help you get clear on what you are trying to do:

Who do you want to engage?

On what decision or question do you want them to feed in?

Why do you want to engage them?

The answers to these questions should drive every subsequent planning decision. This includes your timeline, your choice of methods, your recruitment approach, and how you will use and report back on what you hear.

Being clear on why you are engaging also means being clear on what difference that involvement will make – to the decision, to participants, and to your organisation.

If you cannot answer all three clearly, it is worth pausing before going further.

Creating your engagement plan

Good engagement doesn't happen by accident. Your engagement plan is where the answers to those three questions become a practical programme – with a realistic timeline, appropriate methods, and enough flexibility to respond to what you hear.

Recommendations and feedback from the public should inform decisions at every stage. This means engagement needs to happen early enough in the process to genuinely shape outcomes. Being clear from the outset about how engagement feeds into decision-making helps participants trust the process and helps your organisation act on what it hears. [Section 11](#) (tools and templates) contains a template to guide you through this.

To see how the three questions work in practice, it helps to look at a real example of how Energy Champions approached them before developing their engagement programmes.

In practice: engaging local businesses on net zero

Energy Champions recognised that businesses play a unique role in advocating for net zero within their communities. Several Champions identified engaging local small and medium enterprises as a priority. This might involve creating a space for businesses to share their perspectives, areas of confusion, and support needs around decarbonisation, energy and net zero. Businesses often face specific practical barriers that differ from those facing residents.

This is a good example of getting clear on the three planning questions before developing a programme:

Who: local small and medium enterprises

On what: specific support needs for businesses on decarbonisation, energy and net zero

Why: ensuring businesses have the support they need will increase trust in the local authority and create stronger collaborations between business and council to lead on net zero initiatives locally.

The goal of such an initiative is twofold: to demonstrate that local authorities can provide meaningful, practical support to businesses on net zero – building trust in that relationship – and to create the conditions for stronger local collaboration, where businesses become advocates for clean energy in their communities rather than passive recipients of policy.

» You can learn more and talk to Energy Champions and other local authorities officers engaged in this work on [Net Zero Go](#).

The framework introduced in [Section 3](#) helps you turn the answers to the questions into a deliverable engagement approach.

Funding and resources

Engagement should be treated as a core project cost, not an add-on.

This means building it into your budget from the outset rather than trying to find resources once a project is already underway. The costs of engagement are real, but so is the cost of not engaging (see [Section 2](#)).

Engagement on energy and net zero often involves technically complex material. This means budgeting not just for process facilitation but also for specialist and expert input to prepare the knowledge base for people to engage meaningfully.

A realistic engagement budget should account for:

Facilitation	Skilled process facilitation is central to quality engagement, particularly for deliberative processes. This is a distinct skill from subject matter expertise and should be budgeted for accordingly, whether delivered in-house or by an external organisation.
Staff time	Officers working on energy engagement are often managing this alongside other responsibilities. Time to coordinate across technical teams, housing, planning and communications is consistently underestimated. Build this in explicitly.
Expert input and speakers	Bringing in specialists on topics like retrofit, heat networks, renewable energy or fuel poverty gives participants the knowledge they need to engage substantively with the issues.

Partner support	Where community energy groups or fuel poverty charities are involved as partners, their time and capacity needs to be properly resourced rather than assumed to be available for free.
Participant support	Travel expenses, childcare costs, and payments for participants’ time. This is particularly important when trying to reach fuel-poor households and other groups who face the greatest barriers to participation but whose involvement is most critical to a just transition.
Venues and materials	You will need accessible venues in communities (which might not be council buildings) and materials that explain complex energy concepts in plain English or different formats
Translation and accessibility	Energy costs and retrofit decisions disproportionately affect certain communities, including those for whom English is not a first language. Translation and accessibility provision is not optional in this context.
Comms and outreach	Reaching residents who are sceptical of net zero framing, or have been let down by previous engagement, requires targeted outreach investment

The scale of these costs will vary significantly depending on the method you choose and the depth of engagement you are aiming for.

A large deliberative process such as a citizens’ jury will require substantially more resources than a targeted workshop or community conversation.

Being realistic about what can be delivered well within your available capacity is essential - it is better to do a smaller project well than a larger project poorly. The negative effects of poor engagement, including damaged trust and community scepticism, can take a long time to address.

Working with partners, as discussed in [Section 4](#), can help spread costs.

In-kind support from partner organisations, community anchors and volunteers can supplement budgets, and it is worth exploring this early - ideally as you are building the case for your engagement initiative - so that you have a realistic picture of what resources will be available and who will supply them.

Timing also matters. Resource planning needs to happen early enough in the development process for your engagement to genuinely shape decisions.

If engagement is planned as an afterthought, both the budget and the window to influence outcomes will be too limited to be meaningful.

Funding routes

Securing dedicated funding for engagement can be challenging, particularly when engagement budgets are expected to sit within wider project costs.

It is worth being explicit in any funding application, business case or project proposal that engagement is a core delivery cost, and setting out clearly what it will achieve.

[GBE’s Local Power Plan](#) sets out how it intends to fund local clean energy initiatives, and engagement is recognised as an essential component of that investment.

Your local Net Zero Hub is a good first port of call for advice on funding routes, support with applications, and connections to forthcoming schemes via GBE and DESNZ.

While Hubs may not always have dedicated resources to allocate directly, they can provide advice, connections and practical support that strengthens your position when applying for funding elsewhere.

» You can also find resources and support via [Net Zero Go](#).

[Section 6](#) sets out the full range of options, from light-touch communication through to deep deliberation, and guides you through how to choose the approach that fits your purpose, audience and resources.



06 Choosing your methods



This section talks about the different types of engagement, participation and deliberation methods, and provides guidance on when and how to use them.

It builds on having a portfolio of approaches in your engagement strategy across the IAP2 spectrum described in [Section 4](#).

Choosing your methods should come after you have worked through an engagement plan.

To navigate complex climate and energy decisions, deeper forms of participation—such as involving, collaborating with, or empowering communities allow residents to explore trade-offs, contribute to solutions, and shape outcomes and add much more value than traditional consultation.

These methods can be pivotal in bringing people together in areas that they can agree on and creating solutions where people and communities feel real ownership, allowing local authorities to implement policies and interventions that have a lasting impact, with confidence.

A choice of methods

The method that you chose will depend on the different aspects that you have already considered in your strategy and engagement plan. Take a ‘methods last’ approach.

Try and avoid choosing a method before you have answered these questions:

- » What question is the public being asked, and what is their level of influence?
- » Who is affected and has an interest in the decisions on the issue?
- » At what stage of the policy cycle is this public participation planned to happen? Is it upstream - ie: strategic or agenda setting, or downstream in policy development, implementation or scrutiny?
- » How much time is available to run the process, to ensure that results can have timely impact?

- » How complex or contested is the issue?
- » Who needs to be involved?
- » How much budget is available?

We recommend taking a strategic approach to this, rather than going project by project.

In that way you can save in depth methods at the right moments or the most complex strategies or projects and use simpler forms of engagement at other times.

While cost is one consideration when choosing a method, it is not the only one. As we’ve seen, under-investing in public engagement can create its own risks. It is always possible to find or develop an approach that you can use, that is both right for your project and works within your constraints.

Involve has developed a table outlining the different methods and guides what they are best for, a summary of which is presented [here](#).

It provides a comprehensive set of methods from across the [IAP2 Spectrum](#) to enable you to build your portfolio.

Think of it as your go-to tool for choosing the best method for your project, and something you can refer to across many different initiatives.

Keep in mind that public participation is iterative and bespoke, with different elements across projects, initiatives and contexts that can work together in different ways.

This table is one way of understanding and choosing methods, but don’t be afraid to adapt and combine approaches to best serve your project and your context.

We also offer some guidance on choosing which method is best for you, regardless of the size of your Council or your level of resources.

- » You can find the full table in [Section 11](#).



Case study: Taking a place based approach

The Forest of Dean: Developing a hyper local vision for the town of Coleford

The Forest of Dean District Council used a multi-method approach to deliver community engagement that worked within the context of a rural area and met their ambition to create community-led climate action plans. 20 members of the public worked together on the question, ‘How can we create a happy and fair future for Coleford while working together to respond to the challenges of climate change?’

This was preceded by wider community engagement to gather broad understandings of the things that people value most about Coleford.

It used [community conversations](#) to explore what people value most about the town and their hopes for its future.

Outputs from this wider engagement were directly taken to the [citizen visioning](#) in a ‘gallery’ to allow the 20 citizen visioning participants to consider wider views from across the town.

The citizen visioning group came together for five meetings in June and July 2025. Over these five sessions they developed an overarching vision for the town, and detailed action ideas to directly inform Council priorities.

All of the recommendations were fed into the revision process of the Council’s Nature and Climate Emergency Strategy and Action Plan and the process outputs have informed the workplan of the Climate Change Community Programme Advisor and the Climate Change Community Engagement Plan.

You can read more about this project in [Section 9](#).

You can find more guidance on how to deploy these methods in [Section 11](#) Tools and Templates here.

Now that you have a plan and a chosen method, you can focus on how to make your engagement more inclusive and accessible to everyone. The next section talks about how to do this. →

07 Ensuring your approach is inclusive and accessible



A just transition means no one is left behind.

For local authorities working on net zero and clean energy, that principle has to be built into engagement from the start.

This section sets out how to recruit inclusively, reduce barriers to participation, and design processes that are as accessible and inclusive as possible.

Inclusive engagement avoids:

- » Excluding people who want to take part but face barriers
- » Reinforcing existing inequalities or marginalising certain communities
- » Making decisions based only on partial perspectives
- » Missing out on the creativity and knowledge in diverse groups
- » Sending the message—intentional or not—that public engagement is only for some people

Recruitment approaches

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to recruitment. Deciding on your recruitment approach, just like deciding on your method, should be based on the purpose, aims and scope of your engagement.

It is important to select the right recruitment approach for the overall design of your engagement, and to carefully plan the process to ensure that your recruitment is equitable and fair and gives you participants who will help you meet the aims of your engagement.

Some things to consider when thinking about recruitment:

- » Who do you typically hear from? Who is absent?
- » What assumptions are built into your usual approach that might be excluding certain groups?
- » What has worked well in the past, and what has not? Do you know why?
- » Are there communities or groups who have specific reasons to distrust or disengage from net zero and energy conversations?
- » Who else in your organisation, or among your partners, has existing relationships with the people you want to reach?

Selecting your recruitment approach means thinking about who you want to hear from.

This is intrinsically linked to the decision you are asking people to input into, and who will be affected by it.

You can select just one approach, or consider a mixed recruitment approach.

Who do you want to hear from?

A reflective sample: Use this when you want to hear from a set of people who together closely reflect the local population. Approaches include recruitment by Sortition – a form of civic lottery.

A diverse group of people: Use this when you want to hear from a diverse range of people but it’s not important that they closely reflect the local population. Approaches include: recruitment by Market Research, recruitment by civil society groups, targeted recruitment.

A specific group of people: Use this when you want to hear from a specific group(s) of people. Approaches include: recruitment by Market Research, recruitment by civil society groups, targeted recruitment.

A self-selecting group of people: Use this when you want the opportunity to take part to be open to everyone, and you are willing to monitor representation and carry out additional engagement with groups that are underrepresented. Approaches include: recruitment by civil society groups, targeted recruitment and open recruitment.

Accessibility and supporting participants

To build trust and achieve meaningful public engagement, everyone must be able to take part. That means planning for accessibility and inclusion from the start. This should be a core design principle.

Inclusive engagement brings in the perspectives that are most often missing – those of people experiencing fuel poverty, sceptical of institutions, or who have been let down by previous engagement processes. In the context of net zero and clean energy, these are often the people whose lives will be most directly affected by the decisions being made.

People face different barriers to participation, which often intersect and compound. Understanding these barriers is the first step to addressing them:

» **Financial and resource barriers:** Engagement can exclude people on lower incomes. Reimbursing travel and childcare, providing meals, and paying participants for their time are practical ways to reduce this barrier.

» **Disability barriers:** Disability barriers extend well beyond venue accessibility. They include needs around format, pacing, print size, sensory environment and freedom to move. Ask participants directly what would help them take part fully.

» **Attitudinal barriers:** Some people will be sceptical of net zero and clean energy as topics, of local authorities as institutions, or of formal engagement processes.

Frame communications carefully for your audience and ensure differing viewpoints have genuine space in the process.

» **Methodological and time barriers:** Standard formats such as public meetings, online surveys and formal consultations can exclude people with caring responsibilities, irregular working hours, limited digital access, or negative experiences of formal processes. Offering multiple formats, flexible scheduling and varied routes into the process helps to reduce this.

» **Participation fatigue:** People who have engaged before but seen little change are often reluctant to give their time again. Acknowledge previous engagement explicitly, be honest about what is and is not open to change, and close the feedback loop before launching anything new.

Inclusive engagement is not about doing everything for everyone. It is about designing thoughtfully, flexibly and transparently, removing barriers where you can and adapting where you must.

Principles for accessible engagement

The following [principles](#) will help your processes be inclusive and accessible, from planning and recruitment through to delivery and implementation.

They are particularly important for reaching minoritised and marginalised communities.

Everybody is different:	While there are commonly suggested adjustments, every participant is different. Be prepared to adapt your approach to the specific needs of the people you are working with.
Ask people what they need:	Participants know their own needs best. Asking them directly ensures you meet the right requirements and gives them agency in how they take part.
Offer multiple ways to contribute:	People learn and communicate in different ways. Offer varied routes into the process as standard – forms available by post or phone as well as online, and activities designed to accommodate different communication styles and preferences. Be alert to form fatigue, which can be a barrier in itself.
Allow time in planning:	Putting accessibility support in place takes time. Factor extra time and money into planning and preparation.

Allow enough time at events:	Most people find it hard to sit still and stay focused for more than an hour. For some, even that’s too long—especially if they live with pain, fatigue, sensory overload, or struggle to follow fast-moving discussion. Build in plenty of breaks. Keep activities varied and engaging to help everyone take part comfortably.
Keep iterating:	Ask for feedback on how well your accessibility measures are working—and who they’re working for. If something is not helping people take part, change it. Even for one-off events, capture what worked and what didn’t so that future processes can improve.
Training:	Ensure all staff working with participants have basic accessibility training. Where specific access needs are involved, more specialist training should be in place before delivery begins.

Putting the time and effort into accessibility and inclusion from the start pays off. Participants feel supported and better able to contribute, which makes engagement richer and more impactful – and helps build the trust between communities and local authorities that a just transition depends on.



In practice: Energy Champions on reaching those most affected

Energy Champions consistently highlighted the challenge of reaching people who are struggling with the cost of living, who distrust institutions, or who have been affected by negative narratives around net zero.

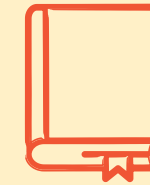
These are precisely the groups whose involvement matters most to a just transition.

Champions found that focusing on specific, tangible projects – energy efficiency, retrofitting, local renewable energy – rather than net zero as an abstract goal helped with initial engagement.

But inclusive recruitment and careful onboarding are equally important.

Most of the work that determines whether a sceptical participant will engage openly happens before they walk through the door.

» Connect with Energy Champions and other local authority officers doing similar work on [Net Zero Go](#).



Case study: Warrington youth engagement for a greener future

To address the limited involvement of young people in its response to the climate emergency, Warrington Council launched a youth-led Community Conversation in 2024.

17 young people were trained as ‘conversation starters’ to lead climate [conversations](#) across their communities, and develop a community-rooted vision and set of recommendations.

The process has led to renewed commitment from senior decision makers in the council, with plans to embed the youth-led vision into council strategies and to continue with youth participation.

A mixed-methods [recruitment](#) approach included local youth organisations, social media, posters, and specialist recruiters.

Care was taken to reach outlying wards and support participants who might otherwise be excluded. Some of the young people were recruited in pairs, to give them confidence to participate in the process.

Inclusive practices included a £405 gift of thanks for participating in all four sessions, and reimbursement for travel and other expenses, to ensure no one was excluded due to financial barriers. The recruitment approach successfully reached young people from outlying wards and those who might not typically engage with formal council processes.

Read more about this project in [Section 9](#).



[Section 8](#) looks at how to evaluate your engagement, assessing what worked, what did not, and how to demonstrate the difference your process made. →

08

Evaluating your engagement



Evaluation is a crucial part of doing high-quality public engagement.

It helps you understand what worked, what did not, and what difference the engagement made – to participants, to decisions, and to your organisation’s capacity to engage well in future.

When to plan evaluation

Start thinking about evaluation from the beginning, especially if you are considering commissioning an external evaluator. Build it into your planning and allocate time, budget and capacity from the outset.

Evaluation should run alongside your engagement, with opportunities for reflection and course correction throughout.

A final evaluation report should be produced after the engagement has ended. The framework below is designed to help you identify what to evaluate and at what level. Use it to shape your evaluation plan from the outset.

What evaluation supports

Accountability – to participants, partners, funders and the public. In the context of net zero and clean energy, demonstrating that community input genuinely shaped decisions is essential to maintaining trust.

Learning – helping you and your organisation improve future engagement. Given how new dedicated energy engagement is for many local authorities, capturing what works is particularly valuable.

Impact – showing how public input influenced decisions on clean energy, retrofit, heat networks or other local initiatives.

Value – providing evidence of what approaches are effective and worth investing in, which strengthens the case for future engagement budgets.

A strong evaluation **tells the story of your engagement**: whether it achieved its aims, how it was experienced, and what it changed.

A good evaluation process can also help address the concerns of senior decision makers.

This was a barrier consistently identified by Energy Champions. Demonstrating that you have plans to learn during and after the process, and to make changes where needed, can help secure buy-in from those who are uncertain about engagement activities and build support for future work.

You can read more about the barriers, challenges and opportunities identified by Energy Champions in [Section 10](#).

A framework for evaluating energy engagement

Good evaluation of energy engagement needs to go beyond counting attendees or measuring satisfaction.

It needs to assess whether the engagement contributed to the outcomes this guidance has been working towards throughout – community ownership of clean energy decisions, institutional confidence to act, stronger local alignment, and public input that genuinely shapes policy.

The framework below works across three levels, reflecting the different types of change that good energy engagement can achieve.

Not every engagement will address all three levels equally – a light-touch community conversation will be assessed differently from a full citizens' jury.

Use the questions that are most relevant to the scale and purpose of your engagement, set your indicators against those, and be honest about what you can realistically measure within your resources.

» Level 1: Did the process work well?

This assesses the quality of the engagement itself, regardless of outcomes.

Even where external factors prevent recommendations from being acted on, a well-run process builds trust and lays the groundwork for future engagement.

- Were the right people involved?
- Could participants shape the questions being explored?
- Was the process transparent about what was and was not open to change?
- Did participants feel informed, respected and supported throughout?
- Was the process accessible to people with different needs and circumstances?

» Level 2: Did it make a difference to decisions and action?

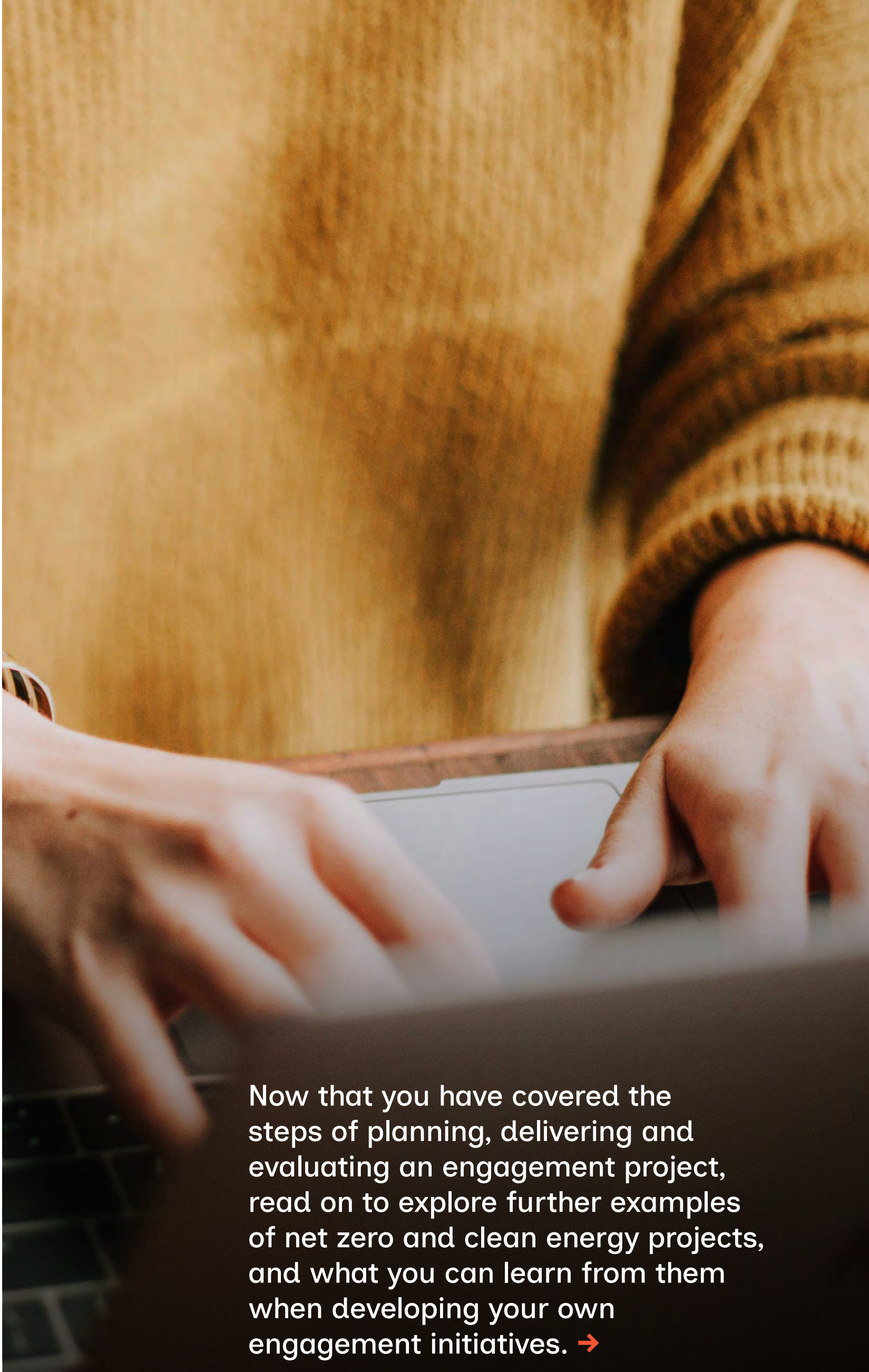
This assesses whether the engagement connected to real decisions and produced tangible outcomes. This is the core test of whether engagement was meaningful rather than tokenistic.

- Did community input shape the decision, plan or project it was designed to inform?
- Did the local authority respond formally to what participants said, and did participants know about it?
- Did the engagement give officers or elected members greater confidence or licence to act?
- Did it surface local knowledge, priorities or barriers that would otherwise have been missed?
- Did it derisk investment, support a funding bid, or strengthen the case for a specific initiative?

» Level 3: Did it contribute to a just transition? This assesses the longer-term, systemic outcomes that this guidance is ultimately working towards – a clean energy transition that is fair, locally owned, and leaves no one behind.

- Were the people most affected by clean energy decisions, including people experiencing fuel poverty and marginalised communities, genuinely involved?
- Did the engagement shift power in any way, giving communities greater ownership over local energy decisions?
- Did it build trust between the community and the local authority?
- Did it strengthen local capacity to engage on energy and net zero in future?
- Did participants leave with greater awareness, confidence or motivation to act on clean energy in their own lives or communities?

Some outcomes, particularly at Level 3, may not be visible immediately. Building in a light-touch follow-up six to twelve months after your engagement ends can help capture change that was not yet apparent at the point of reporting.



Now that you have covered the steps of planning, delivering and evaluating an engagement project, read on to explore further examples of net zero and clean energy projects, and what you can learn from them when developing your own engagement initiatives. →

09 Stories from practice



In this section, you can read more about the places and projects mentioned earlier in the Guidance that have been doing public engagement on net zero and climate change.

You can also find out more about all things net zero for local government on [Net Zero Go](#).

Understanding your starting point: what good engagement looks like

» What can Blackpool do to prepare for climate change and make the town a better place to live?

Like all coastal towns across the UK, Blackpool is already experiencing the impacts of climate change with rising sea levels, more frequent flooding and extreme heat events.

The council is developing a town-wide Climate Adaptation Strategy to outline how Blackpool can prepare for these impacts.

Objectives: Blackpool Council has a strong history of involving residents in decision making around climate change, including their Citizens' Climate Assembly in 2021.

Recognising that good engagement is an ongoing process, the council wanted to build on their assembly by developing a citizen-led vision and set of priority actions for Blackpool to achieve by 2035. This will ensure the Climate Adaptation Strategy responds to what is important to local people.

As part of the NZLP Involve, Forum for the Future, Ipsos and Quantum Strategy and Technology ran a Community Conversation.

The starting point was about building on local strengths and assets, rather than the framing of 'reaching net zero'.

The question put to the group was: *What can we all do to prepare for the impacts of climate change, whilst making our town a better place to live?*

Approach: The project began by recruiting 15 '[conversation starters](#)', a group of residents broadly reflective of the town across various demographics. Recruitment was focused on three wards in particular who had been less involved in the council's climate change work to date.

Through four in-person sessions, the group heard from a range of speakers on a number of topics, including climate change, local impacts and the co-benefits of taking action.

Over three weeks between sessions, the conversation starters led more than 50 discussions with friends, family and neighbours about what would make Blackpool an even better place to live in future.

These [asset-based conversations](#) were seen as another form of learning for participants, valuing the lived experience of the Blackpool community in equal measure to the specialist expertise from speakers.

Conversation starters used what they had heard from speakers, as well as the wider community, to explore ideas for a climate-resilient Blackpool in 2035. They deliberated potential solutions before working together to agree a vision and a set of nine priority recommendations to feed into the council's decision making as part of their Climate Adaptation Strategy.

The nine priority recommendations covered actions around housing, transport, greening public spaces, community engagement and decision making.

Some of these recommendations are directly related to adaptation and how the town can prepare for the impacts of climate change.

These include calls for more green spaces, street trees and ‘depaving’ of areas to provide a cooler environment. The group also recommended incentivising housing developers to build to higher standards of energy efficiency.

As this process intentionally started by building out from what matters to people about where they live, many of the group’s recommendations are not specific to climate adaptation and instead focus on the benefits of climate action.

They outline what a thriving Blackpool will look like in ten years’ time, in the context of climate change. These wider recommendations include ensuring public transport can be used by all by delivering accessibility training for drivers. The group also called for expanding climate education in schools and designing incentive schemes to support sustainable behaviours. There were also calls for residents to be more involved in the council’s decision making around environmental issues longer term.

This demonstrated that a **citizen-led approach** that starts with what matters to people can produce some unexpected yet impactful results which require coordination across institutions to deliver.

What was the impact?

The council prepared a formal response to the group’s recommendations, which were presented at the Climate Change and Environment Scrutiny Committee in March 2025.

In response, the council has agreed to progress action across all nine recommendations.

This includes some new activity and initiatives in direct response to the Blackpool Community Conversation, including:

- Liaising with Blackpool Transport to seek provision of further accessibility training and enforcement of policies around use of disabled bays on buses.
- Exploring ways of delivering incentive programmes with partners to ensure that the incentives deliver genuine behaviour change whilst avoiding costs to the authority.
- Re-establish the internal community engagement co-ordination group to ensure regular and effective engagement with the community.
- Developing a ‘Council Service Advisory Panel’, open to all, where residents can register their interest on key issues and be contacted for their input when relevant issues arise.

Participants expressed what impacts they hope to see from the Community Conversation. These included creating a better place to live, having further opportunities to get involved and transparency on the council’s climate and environmental plans.



Setting your strategy

» Embedding High-Quality Public Engagement in a City-Scale Retrofit Programme: Strategic Advice for Cardiff Council

In 2025, Cardiff Council partnered with Involve to strengthen its approach to public engagement for its proposed retrofit programme, which primarily targeted households experiencing fuel poverty.

The retrofit programme aims to deliver warmer homes, lower bills, improved health outcomes and wider economic benefits, while supporting a just transition to net zero.

However, the Council recognised that technical planning and economic modelling alone would not guarantee success. Building trust, ensuring uptake, and supporting residents before, during and after installation are equally critical.

Over a seven-month period, Involve provided:

- Strategic workshops with climate and housing teams
- [Public engagement training](#)
- A multi-agency roundtable with Cardiff's Affordable Warmth Partnership

This work surfaced a clear conclusion: engagement is not an add-on to retrofit delivery — it is core infrastructure. Done well, it reduces risk, improves outcomes, strengthens community trust, and increases the long-term effectiveness of public investment.

Objectives: The strategic advice project ran from May to December 2025 and had three core objectives:

- » Make the case for high-quality engagement as an essential component of a future retrofit programme, including for securing funding.
- » Start a structured conversation about contractor–resident relationships, recognising that installers are often the primary interface with households.
- » Prepare the ground for future engagement, should funding be secured.

The underlying policy challenge was clear: while the Council had strong strategic evidence (including co-benefit analysis and health impact assessment), there remained significant uncertainty about the “how” of delivery, particularly around trust, uptake, contractor quality and reaching those most in need.

The project therefore, focused on designing an engagement framework that would:

- Reduce implementation risk
- Improve resident experience
- Strengthen cross-sector coordination
- Embed learning for long-term climate action

Approach: The methodology combined internal capacity building with external pre-engagement.

1. **Strategic workshops** with climate and housing teams. These sessions ensured engagement planning was tied directly to decision-making, rather than operating in isolation.
2. **Public engagement training** to strengthen internal capability and ensure that engagement planning could adapt over time.
3. **Affordable Warmth Partnership roundtable** which surfaced frontline insights about trust, vulnerability, misinformation, workforce shortages and system coordination.

The project was built on substantial existing work, including:

One Planet Cardiff Strategy

Local Area Energy Plan

Health impact assessment with Public Health Wales

Co-benefit modelling showing potential 5:1 returns on retrofit investment

The engagement strategy was therefore designed to complement — not duplicate — technical and economic planning.

What was the impact?

The project produced key outcomes and recommendations that are now informing Cardiff Council's retrofit programme.

The project made a clear case for engagement as risk mitigation. Trusted, face-to-face, person-centred engagement builds momentum and creates ripple effects in communities.

It confirmed that mistrust of contractors, technology and public authorities is a major barrier to uptake, and that trust must be built before technical detail is introduced.

Many households in fuel poverty face compounding challenges, debt, health issues, language barriers, insecure tenancy and a one-size-fits-all model risks alienation.

Delivery must adapt to individual circumstances, integrate with health and social care, and include follow-up and aftercare.

Similar to trusted face-to-face person centred engagement, it acknowledged that installers are often the face of a programme, yet engagement expectations are rarely embedded in procurement.

The project identified the need for engagement requirements in contracts, dedicated engagement roles, codes of conduct, and training in resident interaction and vulnerability awareness.

Scams and misinformation were identified as a serious and growing barrier, creating reluctance to engage particularly among vulnerable groups. The project recommended proactive “pre-bunking” and coordinated anti-scam partnerships.

For policymakers, the key recommendations were to plan engagement across the full programme lifecycle.

It also included recommendations like embed engagement requirements in procurement, prioritise aftercare, invest in tailored approaches, strengthen partnerships through standing steering groups, and protect minimum engagement standards even under funding pressure.



Choosing the right method for your engagement

» Working across multiple tiers of local authorities to develop a hyper local vision for the town of Coleford: Citizen Visioning for The Forest of Dean District Council

In 2025, The Forest of Dean District Council partnered with Involve Foundation through this programme to develop a place-based citizens’ vision for a market town within the district.

The District Council wanted to deliver community engagement that worked within the context of a rural area and met their ambition to create community-led climate action plans.

They ran an expression of interest process with five town councils in the area and chose to work with Coleford Town Council, who were well placed to work together with the District Council to implement action recommendations.

Notably, the area is expected to transition to a unitary authority structure by 2028 and considerations for this were held during the project design and delivery.

20 members of the public worked together on the question:

‘How can we create a happy and fair future for Coleford while working together to respond to the challenges of climate change?’

- Over five deliberative sessions, they produced:
- A vision for a happy and fair future Coleford that responds to the challenges of climate change and that is grounded in the things participants value about Coleford now.
 - Nine co-developed action recommendations showing how residents, the District and Town Councils, businesses, and other local actors can work together to create the change needed towards the vision
- This work has demonstrated how citizen engagement at the level of a small town can bring the community together to generate impactful and useful recommendations whilst building community infrastructure that supports implementation.
- Objectives:** This community engagement set out to:
- » Engage with a cross-section of the community that reflects the diversity of the town
 - » Generate a vision and community action plan that can inform a range of climate, and well-being policies and processes including;
 - » The District Council’s climate change community engagement plan
 - » The refreshed District Council climate emergency strategy and action plan
 - » The Town Council’s refreshed neighbourhood development plan
 - » The Town Council’s climate adaptation plan

- » To work collaboratively between the District Council and Town Council bringing in other relevant local and regional partners to support the delivery and planning for implementation of action recommendations.
- Approach:** The project took a multi-method approach with initial wider community and youth engagement.
- The aim of the wider community engagement was to increase understanding of the citizen visioning opportunity and increase response rates to the Sortition Foundation invitations. It also gathered broad understandings of the things that people value most about Coleford.
- Community engagement was delivered in locations people visit frequently in the town; the local Co-op and at ‘The Main Place’ – a central community hub in the town,including the library. Targeted community engagement took place at exercise referral groups. Youth engagement was delivered at the local secondary school and youth group. Further engagement that was targeted to young people but reached all ages took place at the Coleford Festival of transport.
- The wider engagement took a pop up stand approach at the Co-op, The Main Place, and The Festival Of Transport. Using a large map and post it notes people were able to contribute what they liked best about Coleford in quick interactions. The stand also included further information on the citizen visioning and council officers were available to answer questions.

- A [community conversations approach](#) worked in the youth engagement and exercise referral groups. This meant a more structured session in conversation with each other and a facilitator.
- They explored what people value most about the place they call homethe town – and their hopes for the future of the town.
- The community and youth engagement helped the Councils to better understand the kinds of things that may be explored in citizen visioning which supported planning. Importantly, outputs from this wider engagement were directly taken to the [citizen visioning](#) in a ‘gallery’ to allow the 19 citizen visioning participants to consider wider views from across the town. Two of the young people also spoke at the citizen visioning workshops to explain what they wanted from their future Coleford.
- The [citizen visioning](#) group came together for five meetings in June and July 2025. All discussions were supported by a team of three facilitators and a participant support person who supported members to explore the issues and captured the outputs of each session.
- They learned about the citizen visioning process and what their ideas would feed into; heard from young people about their hopes for the future and brainstormed responses to the challenges of climate change; and developed an overarching vision statement and detailed action ideas for the Councils.

What was the impact?

- Community Reach:** 19 local residents attended citizen visioning sessions, recruited by sortition to reflect the local population across key demographic and attitudinal criteria with a deliberate focus on reaching beyond those who traditionally engage.
- Over 290 further local people were engaged through outreach, community conversations and youth engagement.

Policy Impact: All recommendations fed into the revision of the Council’s Nature and Climate Emergency Strategy and Action Plan, informing both the Climate Change Community Programme Advisor’s workplan and the Council’s wider Community Engagement Plan.

Through the Local Plan, the council has also strengthened new-build housing standards to support household renewable energy generation.

- Internal Impact:** The District Council reflected that the process gave them a resident mandate and the impetus to drive the climate change action plan forward.
- It also prompted honest reflection on communications initially defensive when residents said more was needed, they came to recognise this as genuine, and have since secured a local radio slot and launched Nature and Climate Action Stories.
- They are also reviewing noticeboard use. The Town Council, meanwhile, is creating a practical intergenerational skills space in the former St John’s Ambulance building a direct response to a participant recommendation.



Ensuring your engagement is inclusive and accessible

» Community Conversations: How Warrington Youth shaped a vision for a greener future

After declaring a climate emergency in 2019, Warrington formed a Climate Emergency Commission and launched a town-wide strategy on how to respond. This strategy was developed in consultation with key actors across the town, however the voices of young people were absent.

To address the limited involvement of young people in its response to the climate emergency, Warrington Council launched a youth-led [Community Conversation](#) in 2024. This community conversation sought to bring youth perspectives into the town's climate planning, asking:

'What can we all do to prepare for and reduce the impacts of climate change, whilst making our town a better place to live?'

17 young people were trained as 'conversation starters' to lead climate conversations across their communities, gathering input from over 70 peers, friends and family.

Through four in-person sessions, the 'conversation starters' developed a bold, community-rooted vision for Warrington in 2024 and a set of recommendations for how to get there. The process has led to renewed commitment from senior decision makers in the council, with plans to embed the youth-led vision into council strategies and to continue with youth participation.

Objectives:

The aims of the project were to:

- » Engage young people in Warrington's response to the climate emergency
- » Create a youth-led vision for Warrington in 2040
- » Identify actions needed to realise this vision
- » Lay the groundwork for future youth involvement in decision making

Approach: The project centred around four in-person sessions where young people learned about climate change, local impacts and the co-benefits of taking climate action. Between sessions, they acted as 'conversation starters', engaging their communities in over 70 informal discussions. The young people used insights from both the sessions and the wider conversations to develop a collective vision and set of actions for a climate-positive future for Warrington in 2040.

A mixed-methods [recruitment](#) approach included local youth organisations, social media, posters, and specialist recruiters. Care was taken to reach outlying wards and support participants who might otherwise be excluded. Some of the young people were recruited in pairs, to give them confidence to participate in the process.

Other inclusive practices included compensating participants with a £405 gift of thanks for participating in all sessions, and reimbursing them for travel and other expenses. This ensured no one was excluded due to financial barriers.

Recruitment prioritised geographical diversity, ensuring outlying wards were included, and enabling some participants to join in pairs helped build the confidence of young people to participate who otherwise might have self-excluded.

What was the impact?

By adapting recruitment methods, and considering how to be more inclusive to young people in particular, the project was able to draw in more young people than it would have with more traditional routes.

This meant the project was able to develop a youth-led vision for a greener future, and lay the foundation for future involvement of young people in this work.



Now that you have read about some of the different approaches to engagement and how they have worked, read on to the next section to learn more about the specific challenges and opportunities to public engagement that the Energy Champions have identified, and how they can be addressed using this Guidance. →

10 Learning from Energy Champions

This section draws on the learning gained through the Energy Champions programme which ran in the winter of 2025 and spring of 2026.

It focuses on the common barriers and challenges identified by Champions and how they can be addressed, and sets out the benefits that Champions saw from doing engagement in their local contexts.

Barriers, challenges and risks to public engagement on community energy, climate and net zero

The barriers, challenges and risks identified by the Champions are ones that often occur in net zero and climate engagement.

They are also common to engagement in other contexts. While some may be more nuanced within the energy and net zero space specifically, there are ways to address all of them - outlined in other sections of this guidance and signposted below.

In this section, each barrier or challenge is paired with a suggested approach and a signpost to where you can find more detail in this guidance.



[Net Zero Go](#), the primary knowledge-sharing resource for local authorities, is also a great place to learn more about the programme and connect with Energy Champions and others working in this area.

Barriers

Champions identified these as barriers that prevent engagement from happening at all, or that limit the depth, scale and innovation of what is possible.

Capacity and resources:

There is a lack of funding, time and resources for public engagement. There are often only one or two people responsible for engagement on climate, energy and net zero specifically.

What to try:

The tools and arguments in [Section 2](#) will help you make the case for engagement as a core part of projects.

Framing the issues so they connect with your stakeholders, emphasising the cost of not engaging, and drawing on the support available through your local Net Zero Hub can all strengthen requests for better resourcing.

No statutory role:

There is no statutory role for local authorities in delivering net zero, which means they are affected by changing political climates.

What to try:

This requires some creative thinking, as well as emphasising the cost of not engaging.

Focus on initiatives that enjoy broad cross-spectrum support – such as heat pumps, retrofitting, energy affordability – rather than leading with the language of ‘net zero’ or ‘climate change’. [Section 2](#) sets out the cost of not engaging, which can help make the case. [Section 3](#) also covers how to frame communication for different audiences.

Organisational understanding of engagement is generic:

This can lead to doing only what is required rather than what is most effective. Resistance from leadership or councillors can limit what is open to engagement and how it is done.

What to try:

The case studies throughout this guidance can help build confidence among decision-makers who are uncertain about public engagement.

Examples from the Net Zero Living Programme demonstrate the power of engaging with people and communities on these issues.

Organisational structure:

Silos prevent officers from working effectively across teams and areas of policy, alongside process constraints and limited budgets.

What to try:

Emphasising the cross-cutting nature of net zero and the benefits of engagement (set out in [Section 2](#)) can help make the case for working across teams and departments.

[Section 4](#) covers partnership and cross-departmental working in more detail.

Past experiences of engagement:

Past experiences of engagement. Previous experiences are shaping how engagement is approached now – including taking a defensive approach in expectation of pushback, repeating what has been done before rather than trying new approaches, and reduced trust in contractors after poor outreach to underrepresented groups.

What to try:

Past negative experiences understandably make decision-makers cautious.

The cost of not engaging, set out in [Section 2](#), can help reframe the risk. [Sections 3–8](#) offer practical steps and questions to help you think through your engagement carefully before setting out, which can build confidence internally.

Communicating complex issues:

Genuine engagement on community energy requires communicating about multifaceted topics that can be hard to frame within a traditional communications approach.

What to try:

A great deal of work is being done on how best to talk to people about net zero, climate change, and local and community energy.

The [Net Zero Hubs’ baseline paper on communications and engagement](#) gives useful insights and further reading, and the learnings from the Net Zero Living Programme are illustrated through case studies throughout this guidance.

Organisations like Stronger Stories specialise in this area and may be able to provide further support. There are also further resources in [Section 11](#).

Challenges and risks

These are challenges that arise when delivering engagement. They can affect the quality and effectiveness of the process and whether it is able to have an impact in a given political or local context.

Representation and Inclusivity:

Difficulty in being genuinely representative of diverse areas and inclusive of different languages or underrepresented groups like young people.

What to try:

Start by being clear on who you are trying to reach and why.

This will help you select the right recruitment approach for your engagement. [Section 6](#) covers method selection and [Section 7](#) covers inclusive approaches in detail.



Political polarisation:

Navigating net zero and climate change being politically contested, and managing polarisation between different people's views within an engagement process.

What to try:

Similar to the 'no statutory role' barrier above, this requires creative framing.

There have been several net zero and climate change-focused engagement projects at local authority level that have succeeded in navigating this.

The case studies in [Section 9](#) and the Further Resources in [Section 11](#) offer practical examples of how to approach this challenge.



Organisational decision making:

Effectively bringing in other teams and senior leadership so that they feel included is a challenge. Sign-off processes can also slow progress.

What to try:

This is a common challenge in public sector engagement. Bringing in senior leadership as early as possible in the process, so they feel a sense of ownership, can help, alongside emphasising the cost of not engaging.

Understand how your engagement connects to existing strategy and policy. [Section 2](#) sets out the arguments in detail.



Being strategic, not reactive:

It is challenging to be strategic about what engagement to do rather than simply responding to what is most urgent. It can feel as though different parts of the same organisation are starting, scaling up and reacting to problems simultaneously.

What to try:

[Section 3](#) and [Section 4](#) cover how to identify where you are in the engagement process and how to develop a strategic approach. This can help you plan ahead rather than react, and gives you tools to make the case for a more structured approach internally.



Managing complexity

Bringing together different groups of people is a challenge that requires facilitation and interpersonal skills that are not always present in local authorities already. More broadly, the process of organising engagement is complex and needs to be dynamic. This can be challenging within existing resources and timelines.

What to try:

Working through this guidance as a team, step by step, can help build shared understanding and confidence.

You can also connect with other officers doing similar work through the Energy Champions network on [Net Zero Go](#).

[Facilitation training is available through Involve](#), and further resources are listed in [Section 11](#).



Benefits for local authorities

Despite the challenges, Champions consistently saw real benefits from doing engagement, for their organisations and for themselves as officers.

Two stood out in particular. Champions consistently saw real benefits from doing engagement — for their organisations and for themselves as officers.

Greater public buy-in:

When communities are involved in decisions, there is more support for what follows. Fewer complaints, better uptake, and a stronger relationship between the council and its residents. Champions found this reduced the time spent defending decisions after the fact.

The evidence base for this is set out in [Section 2](#) and [Section 3](#), and the case studies in [Section 9](#) illustrate it in practice.

Richer knowledge and insights:

Engagement surfaces the lived experience, local priorities and practical barriers that technical planning alone cannot capture. Champions found it built a more robust evidence base for their work and gave them greater confidence in the decisions being made. [Section 7](#) sets out how inclusive recruitment ensures this insight reflects the full range of people affected.

Now that you have an understanding of how to approach the challenges in your local context, read on for the tools, templates and further resources in the following sections that will help you bring your ideas to life. →

11 Tools, Templates and More Resources

In this section you will find the tools and templates mentioned throughout the document for your use in developing and delivering your engagement.

- If it's a tool, it may be interactive and require you to click boxes to read more.
- If it's a template, we've designed for A4 printing and you'll see this reflected on screen.



Creating Internal buy-in checklist

» Build the business case internally for community involvement as a necessary component of delivery	
» Identify your key stakeholders and what is important to them	
» Tailor your arguments to different teams who may view engagement differently (use suggested framing and table of benefits)	
» Engage elected members and senior leadership on the role of engagement in reducing delivery risk and improving outcomes	
» Align engagement objectives with broader political priorities (e.g. fairness, cost of living, local economic benefit)	
» Secure agreement on the level of community influence (e.g. consult vs collaborate vs empower)	
» Identify resource requirements (budget, staffing, external support)	
» Establishing internal governance and accountability structures for engagement	
» Clarify roles across departments (e.g. climate, planning, communications, housing)	
» Position engagement within wider strategies (e.g. climate action plans, regeneration, inequality agendas)	

Dealing with common concerns and challenges

Concern or challenge	Possible responses	Evidence
It costs too much		
It will take too much time		
It is too complex for residents to understand or contribute to		
It is too risky to engage residents		
There is too much public opposition already and the process will get co-opted by the loudest voices		
It is interfering with the political system and this is the role of elected representatives		
There is engagement fatigue		
It is not for your department to do this		
We won't get any useful input		

Your Engagement Strategy

Questions to answer	Suggested approach
Climate objectives What are your objectives for climate change and net zero; what are the key decisions that need to be made; and where is engagement needed?	<i>Connect engagement to your goals</i>
Engagement objectives What do you want/ need to achieve through engagement overall?	<i>Set engagement objectives against a specific timeframe</i>
Strategic alignment How does this connect to the Council's wider strategies and priorities?	<i>List out how this can support or connect to wider strategies (as important in making the case)</i>
What else is happening in the climate and clean energy space locally?	<i>Ensuring your work is adding value to what is already happening</i>
What else is the Council currently engaging residents on?	<i>Map our relevant current activities and identify areas of alignment or duplication</i>
Engagement portfolio Where might you engage in depth and where might you use other methods (see choosing a method table)	<i>Map out what you need to engage on and what level of engagement you think is needed. For example on decisions that have not been made that are likely to be controversial. Prioritise the areas that are most important.</i>
Resources and buy-in What do you need to do to prepare to use and respond to any engagement?	<i>What resources do you need? Who do you need to create buy-in with? Do you have the capacity needed etc</i>
Building on experience What can you learn from what has been done already?	<i>Review your strategy against previous experiences and create success factors</i>
Longer term What is your engagement journey?	<i>What's the long term plan to embed citizen engagement across your projects and decision making?</i>
Success measures How will you know you have been successful?	<i>Add KPIs here</i>

Your Engagement Brief (for planning a specific engagement) (p1)

Questions to explore	Your response
What is the internal context? What's going on internally that will influence or impact this decision? Why do you want to involve the public now?	
What is the external context? Who else is interested or will be impacted by this decision? What other initiatives or engagement exercises are already going on?	
What is the scope? On 'what' – what is the decision you want to feed in to? Where are the hard boundaries or 'red lines'?	
What is the purpose?	
What type(s) of inputs would you like from participants?	
Who would you like to reach (the public)?	

Your Engagement Brief (for planning a specific engagement) (p2)

Questions to explore	Your response
Who would you like to reach (other interested parties)?	
What are your timescales? When do you need the results for them to have a genuine impact on decision-making?	
What is your budget and levels of staff capacity?	
How are you planning to communicate about the engagement and disseminate the outcomes? How will you alter your approach for different audiences to achieve maximum impact?	
How will the engagement feed into decision making? What is your impact plan?	
What are the risks and mitigations for this engagement?	
How will you monitor and evaluate the engagement?	

Choosing your methods

Involve Methods Table

The table on the next few pages displays a range of participatory and deliberative approaches. They can support different types of decisions within energy planning and decarbonisation programmes.

These categories aid understanding, but in practice many overlap and can be combined — for example, a deliberative process can incorporate representative sampling and co-design elements simultaneously.

While cost should be one consideration in choosing an engagement approach, not the primary driver.

Under-investing in engagement at key decision points can generate risk — including legal challenge, loss of community trust, and the need for costly re-engagement later.

The question to ask is not “*what is the cheapest option?*” but “*what level of engagement does this decision require, and what is the cost of getting it wrong?*”

What is ‘IAP2’?

We have used the [International Association of Public Participation’s](#) spectrum of public participation to explore the methods in the table.

The spectrum outlines the different types of role that members of the public can take in a public engagement process and the impact on the decision.

Public engagement in decision is either consult, involve, collaborate or empower.

Is there a minimum standard?

While every decision is different, this guidance will help officers working with limited time or resource to make clearer choices.

Essential (minimum standard for any programme)

- Communication, awareness and transparency: always required regardless of scale
- Light-touch and broad-reach: basic reach and accessibility
- Stakeholder and partnership-based engagement: needed for delivery feasibility
- Some targeted/insight-driven engagement: to understand affected groups

Best practice (aim for when capacity allows)

- Deliberative and representative processes: for high-stakes or contested decisions
- Co-design and co-production: where solutions are still genuinely open
- Community-led and peer-based: where trust is low or groups are hard to reach
- Governance and accountability: for long-lifecycle programmes

Context-dependent (essential in some situations, optional in others)

- Spatial and visual methods: essential for planning/infrastructure, less so elsewhere
- Participatory decision-making: essential where resource allocation is community-facing
- Participatory delivery: only where genuine shared ownership is intended

Questions to consider...



If yes, also consider...

Seldom heard groups? →
Targeted and insight-driven
Multi-year programme? →
Governance and oversight

Share decision-making? →
Community-led approaches
Multi-year programme? →
Governance and oversight

Share delivery and ownership? →
Participatory delivery
Reach specific groups? →
Targeted and insight-driven

Lived experience insight? →
Targeted and insight-driven
Open to co-design? →
Co-design and co-production

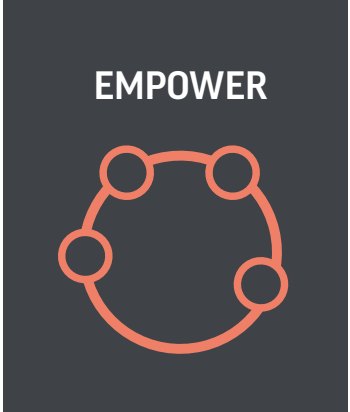
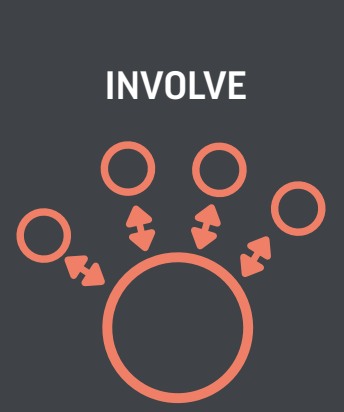
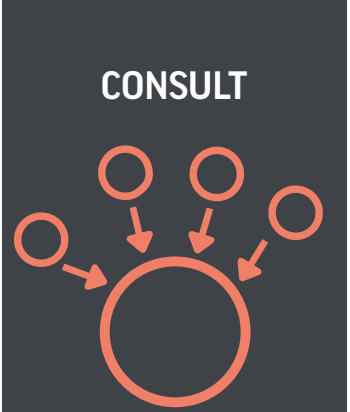
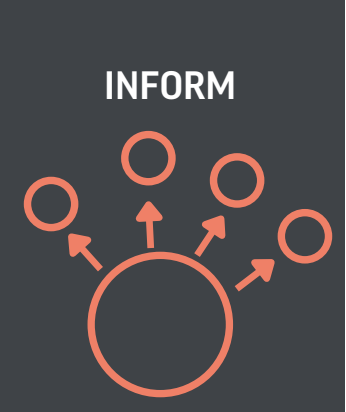
Wider public involvement? →
Place-based conversations
Seldom heard groups? →
Targeted and insight-driven

Wider audience needed? →
Light-touch and broad-reach
Multi-year programme? →
Governance and oversight

Need more depth? →
Targeted and insight-driven
Place-based relationships? →
Place-based conversations

Always required: **Communication and transparency** applies to every project regardless of approach chosen

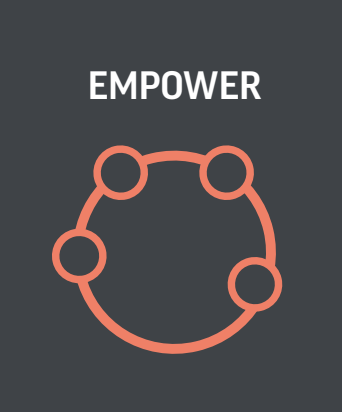
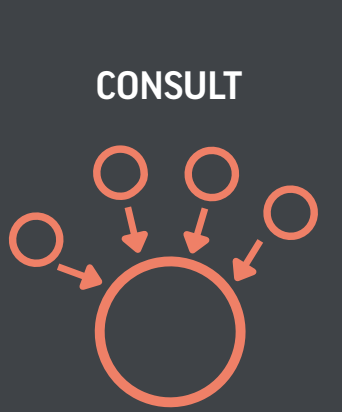
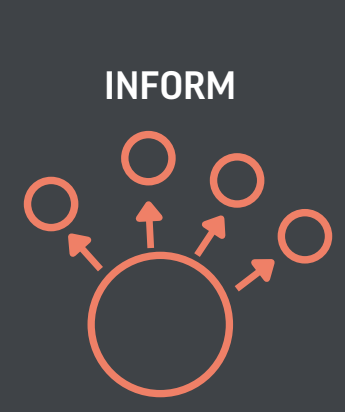




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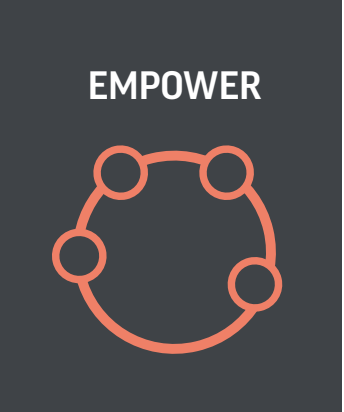
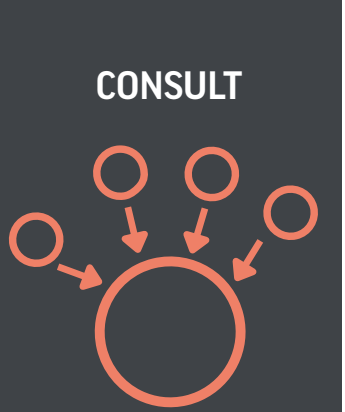
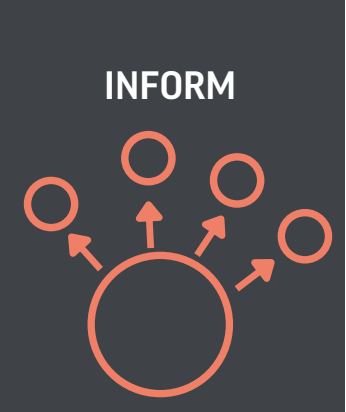
Type of process	What are they	When are they useful	Best for	Limitations and considerations
Deliberative and representative processes <i>Involve, Collaborate, Empower</i> SEE IAP2 DIAGRAM ABOVE	These approaches are designed to bring together a broadly representative group of participants — often selected through random stratified sampling — and support them to engage deeply with complex issues over time. They allow participants to hear evidence, question assumptions, and deliberate collectively before forming considered views.	• Where decisions involve uncertainty, competing priorities, or distributional impacts • Where there is a need to build legitimacy, demonstrate fairness • Ensure that decisions are informed by a balanced cross-section of perspectives rather than the most vocal or engaged groups • Bridging the gap between technical expertise and public values, particularly in areas such as energy system transformation where trade-offs are unavoidable.	<i>Best suited for agenda setting, addressing trade offs and polarising issues; strategy and project and policy design</i>	Require significant time, resource, and facilitation, and are therefore best used selectively at key decision points rather than as a default approach.
Co-design, co-production and collaborative design <i>Collaborate and Empower</i> SEE IAP2 DIAGRAM ABOVE	Working with communities to actively shape solutions, rather than asking them to respond to predefined options. They are particularly useful where interventions need to reflect local knowledge, lived experience, and place-specific needs, and where there is flexibility in how solutions can be developed.	• Especially valuable in stages where options are still emerging and where local insight can materially improve design quality and feasibility. • Develop shared ownership of ideas and outcomes • Can strengthen buy-in, improve usability of solutions, and uncover insights that would not emerge through more traditional consultation	<i>Best suited to project, service, programme or infrastructure work at the implementation stage. Particularly valuable where inclusive engagement matters — especially reaching seldom heard groups — and where the goal is to build legitimacy, trust, and buy-in. Supports behaviour change and helps move towards both better decisions and shared conclusions.</i>	If expectations are not managed, or if decisions are already largely fixed, these approaches can undermine trust. They also require skilled facilitation and sustained engagement.
Place-based and community conversation approaches <i>Inform, Consult and early Involve</i> SEE IAP2 DIAGRAM ABOVE	These approaches focus on engaging people within the context of a specific place, often through open dialogue and listening. They are typically more informal, flexible, and accessible.	• Well-suited to gathering insight, building relationships, and understanding lived experience • Useful in early stages of a process or where there is a need to reach a broad and diverse audience • Help surface local priorities, identify issues that may not be visible through technical analysis, and build trust between institutions and communities.	<i>Hyper local decision making where the goal is to do something differently, generate understanding, buy-in and promote long term solutions that give power to communities.</i>	These methods are traditionally self-selecting but recruitment can be tailored to produce a more representative sample They are most effective when used alongside more structured or targeted approaches.



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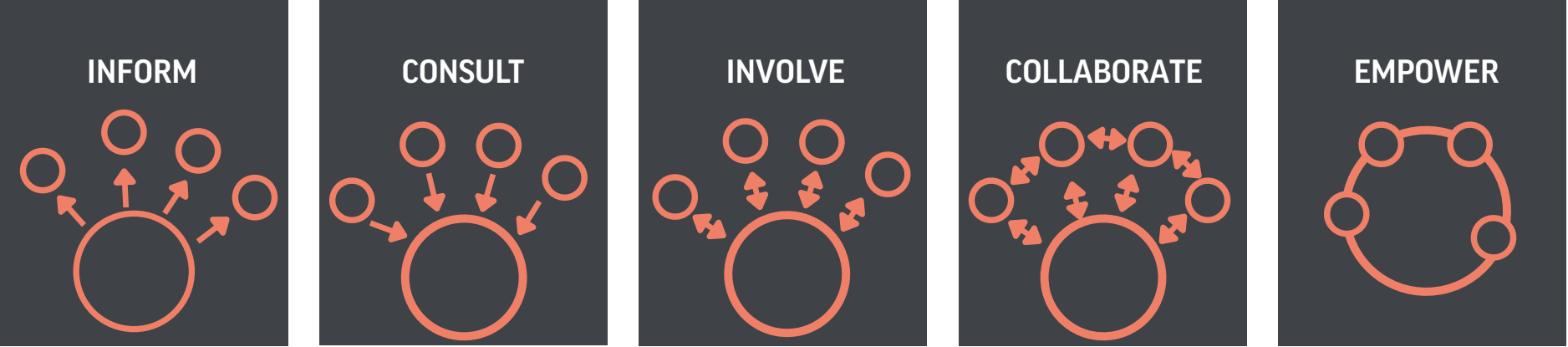
Type of process	What are they	When are they useful	Best for	Limitations and considerations
Participatory decision-making and resource allocation <i>Collaborate; Empower</i> SEE IAP2 DIAGRAM ABOVE	These approaches give communities direct influence over decisions, particularly in relation to funding, priorities, or resource allocation.	• Help ensure that decisions reflect local priorities and can increase transparency in how resources are allocated • Where there is a desire to share decision-making power and demonstrate tangible influence • Can play an important role in building trust and legitimacy, particularly in contexts where communities have historically had limited influence	<i>Best suited to decisions around resource or funding allocation, where public scrutiny and accountability are important considerations. Helps build legitimacy, trust, and buy-in, and supports the embedding of public views over the long term, working towards a shared conclusion.</i>	They are not always suitable for highly technical or constrained decisions and can create challenges if expectations are not carefully managed.
Spatial and visual engagement methods <i>Consult, Involve, can Collaborate</i> (where participants are actively shaping spatial decisions) SEE IAP2 DIAGRAM ABOVE	These approaches help translate complex technical and spatial information into accessible, visual formats that enable participants to engage more meaningfully with decisions.	• They are particularly important in energy, infrastructure and planning contexts, where understanding location, scale, and system interactions is critical. • They support more informed participation and help people engage with trade-offs in a tangible way.	<i>Best suited to project design and implementation where the topic benefits from tangible, physical or visual representation, particularly useful for spatial planning and addressing complex issues where seeing or touching something concrete aids understanding and engagement.</i>	They require careful design to avoid misinterpretation or bias, and depend on appropriate tools and facilitation.
Stakeholder and partnership-based engagement <i>Involve and Collaborate</i> SEE IAP2 DIAGRAM ABOVE	These approaches focus on structured engagement with organised stakeholders, institutions, and delivery partners, either alongside or in place of broader public engagement.	• In complex systems such as local energy transitions, stakeholder engagement is often essential to ensure that plans are feasible, financeable, and deliverable. • They are particularly important in contexts where successful delivery depends on coordination across multiple actors — for example, between local authorities, utilities, housing providers, community organisations, and private sector partners. • They support shared problem-solving, alignment of priorities, and collective ownership of delivery pathways • Valuable in later stages of project development and delivery, where technical, financial, and operational considerations need to be aligned. • They also support continuity across stages, enabling sustained dialogue rather than one-off engagement	<i>Best suited to strategy development, project design and implementation where there is a strong technical need but lower levels of public concern. Useful for engaging institutions and building support and buy-in.</i>	They can become insular if not carefully designed. There is a risk that stakeholder processes prioritise institutional perspectives over lived experience, or that certain actors dominate discussions. They should therefore be complemented by wider community engagement approaches where appropriate.



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Type of process	What are they	When are they useful	Best for	Limitations and considerations
Targeted / insight-driven engagement <i>Consult and Involve</i> SEE IAP2 DIAGRAM ABOVE	These approaches are designed to generate specific, actionable insight from defined groups or individuals, rather than broad-based input. They are particularly useful where decisions require detailed understanding of user needs, behavioural drivers, or barriers to uptake. They focus on gathering input to inform decision-making rather than sharing decision-making power directly.	• When used well, they can significantly improve the relevance and effectiveness of interventions. • Valuable in design and development stages of projects, where there is a need to test assumptions, refine propositions, or understand how different groups may experience or respond to a solution. • They can also help ensure that engagement is inclusive by focusing on groups that are often underrepresented in broader processes.	<i>Best suited to infrastructure, project or service design where an issue or decision particularly affects a specific group. Valuable for bringing relevant lived experience into decision making through inclusive engagement and targeted information gathering, especially for reaching seldom heard groups leading to better decisions.</i>	Their main limitation is that they provide depth rather than breadth. They do not generate representative input and should not be used as a proxy for wider engagement. Instead, they are most effective when combined with broader approaches.
Community-led and peer-based approaches <i>Involve, Collaborate, and in some cases Empower</i> SEE IAP2 DIAGRAM ABOVE	These approaches shift the locus of engagement from institutions to communities themselves, enabling residents to lead, facilitate, or mediate engagement within their own networks. This can be bottom up (instigated by communities) or about providing resources to communities to engage and providing a route for influence. Communities can mean organised community groups or residents, however, the level of resourcing required will vary depending on which ‘type’ of community is leading.	• Effective in building trust, reaching underrepresented groups, and supporting behaviour change. • They redistribute influence and create more equitable engagement dynamics • Valuable in contexts where trust in institutions may be low or where peer influence plays a significant role in shaping behaviour. • Can generate richer, more authentic insights and foster stronger local ownership of projects and outcomes. They also help build local capacity and leadership, which can be critical for long-term delivery and stewardship.	<i>Best suited to situations where you genuinely want to share decision making with communities. Valuable across a wide range of goals — from understanding shared priorities and addressing complex issues, to developing strategies, services or infrastructure, and building community resilience. Supports inclusive engagement, reaching both many people and seldom heard groups, while building legitimacy, trust, and buy-in, and enhancing public scrutiny and accountability.</i>	They require collaboration between decision makers and communities and clear avenues of support and resourcing for community groups. Do not expect community groups to do this sort of engagement for nothing.
Participatory delivery and implementation approaches <i>Collaborate and Empower, as they involve shared responsibility for delivery and can create a stronger sense of ownership among participants.</i> SEE IAP2 DIAGRAM ABOVE	Involve communities directly in the delivery and implementation of projects, rather than limiting their involvement to planning and design stages.	• These approaches can improve the effectiveness and uptake of interventions, particularly where behaviour change or local knowledge is critical. They also help build local capacity and resilience. • Important in ensuring that projects are grounded in local context and that outcomes are sustained over time.	<i>Best suited to situations where you genuinely want to share delivery and ownership with communities. Valuable for project implementation, addressing complex issues, and building community resilience, legitimacy, trust, and buy-in.</i>	They require clear roles, appropriate support, and effective coordination. Without these, there is a risk of overburdening communities or creating confusion about responsibilities.



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Type of process	What are they	When are they useful	Best for	Limitations and considerations
Digital and hybrid engagement <i>Inform, Consult, and Involve, though new platforms are now supporting more collaborative or deliberative engagement</i> SEE IAP2 DIAGRAM ABOVE	These approaches use digital tools and platforms to enable participation, extend reach, and provide flexibility in how people engage. They are rarely standalone methods, but instead form part of a broader engagement ecosystem that combines online and offline approaches. They can include but are not exclusively AI-powered or AI-enabled platforms	- Useful for reaching larger audiences, enabling asynchronous participation, and maintaining ongoing communication. - Particularly valuable for scaling engagement, capturing structured input, and maintaining engagement over time.	<i>Best for when there are constraints with delivering in-person engagement, or your target audience is more likely to engage online.</i> <i>Good for when you need to reach a lot of people.</i> <i>Also for capturing data and feedback.</i>	Digital engagement can increase accessibility for some groups, but can exclude others due to digital access, confidence, or literacy barriers. As such, hybrid approaches, combining digital and in-person engagement, are often the most effective. Similarly, AI-enabled approaches can be valuable for scaling participation, but come with risks and considerations around public acceptability and ethical deployment. They require careful design to ensure accessibility, usability, and meaningful participation.
Communication, awareness and transparency approaches <i>Inform</i> SEE IAP2 DIAGRAM ABOVE	These approaches focus on providing information, building understanding, and maintaining transparency throughout a process. While they do not, on their own, constitute participatory engagement, they are essential for enabling meaningful participation at higher levels.	- Strong communication and transparency can build trust, reduce misunderstanding, and create the conditions for more constructive engagement. - They are particularly important in complex or technical areas such as energy systems, where lack of understanding can be a barrier to participation.	<i>Best for telling people a story or sharing important messages, and increasing transparency</i>	These approaches are insufficient if used in isolation. Without opportunities for input or influence, they can be perceived as one-way communication rather than engagement.
Light-touch and broad-reach engagement methods <i>Inform and Consult</i> SEE IAP2 DIAGRAM ABOVE	These approaches provide low-cost ways of reaching large numbers of people quickly.	- Useful for early-stage engagement, awareness-building, and ensuring that engagement is not limited to those already inclined to participate in formal processes. - For widening participation and capturing initial views. They can help ensure that engagement reflects a broader cross-section of the population.	<i>Best suited to gathering individual, front of mind views quickly and at scale. Useful for rapid engagement, reaching many people, and building support and buy-in and for complementing mini-publics with a broader maxi-public.</i>	They tend to provide limited depth and are not suitable for exploring complex issues in detail. They are most effective when used as part of a wider engagement mix, complementing more in-depth or targeted approaches.
Governance, oversight and accountability approaches <i>They align with Collaborate and Empower, as they provide ongoing influence over decisions, performance, and direction.</i> SEE IAP2 DIAGRAM ABOVE	These approaches focus on embedding community involvement in governance, monitoring, and accountability structures over the long term.	- They are critical for maintaining trust, legitimacy, and transparency, particularly in projects with long lifecycles or significant impacts. - Help ensure that engagement is not a one-off activity but is embedded throughout the lifecycle of a project or programme. They also provide mechanisms for challenge, scrutiny, and continuous improvement	<i>Best suited to situations where public scrutiny and accountability are priorities, supporting better decisions and the embedding of public views over the long term.</i>	They require sustained commitment, clear governance structures, and support for participants to engage effectively over time.

Evaluation indicator table

Objective (what is your objective for the engagement exercise)	Success Factor (how will you know if you achieved this objective)	Indicators (what can you observe or measure)	Data Source (how will you collect this data)
Reach a broad range of people	The engagement involved a diverse cross-section of the community	% of participants from underrepresented groups. Participant demographic breakdown compared to local population.	Participant survey Census data
The engagement influenced climate-related decisions	Participant input was reflected in final decisions or policies	Number of participant recommendations adopted in policies Decision maker references to engagement in meeting minutes	Follow up interviews with decision makers Policy documents

TEMPLATE workshop facilitation plans (in-person and online)



[In-person workshop template](#)



These are editable spreadsheets for you to fill out. They have formulae that sort out the timings for you.

[Online workshop template](#)



Evaluation indicator table

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Participant support journey template

This table describes what one person's journey might be from start to finish if they are taking part in an engagement.

This guide is written primarily for structured engagements (e.g. forums, panels, workshops, etc.) where you know in advance who will be attending.

However, if you're running a drop-in or open event, we still recommend working through the stages and adapting the support actions where relevant.

Step	Why it matters	Actions and Considerations	Prompt Questions	Your response
Assign a participant support contact(s) within your organisation	Having a dedicated, named contact helps build trust and ensures continuity. It also gives them a clear route to ask questions and share any needs.	• Appoint a friendly, reliable person as the main contact. • Include them in the delivery team so they are a familiar face at events. • Share their contact info with the participant (dedicated email and/or phone number).	Who on your team is best suited for this role? Do they have experience working with a wide range of people? They may have training in trauma-informed situations, or something similar.	
Design Your Onboarding Plan	An onboarding plan is a clear, step-by-step process to inform, prepare, and support people to participate. A well-structured onboarding plan helps people feel informed, prepared, and supported from the beginning.	• Create a timeline for key liaison points. • Develop a 'welcome form' to collect access needs, payment details, and consent. • Develop a participant handbook or digital info hub with clear, accessible info about the event they are taking part in.	What are all the steps people need to go through? How can we make them simple and supportive?	
Consolidate Your Materials	Minimising admin helps reduce stress and ensures people receive the info they need in a way that suits them.	• Combine forms where possible. • Offer paper versions and phone support for those who don't have access to a computer • Design materials for screen readers and with accessibility in mind.	Are we giving people multiple ways to complete what's needed? How accessible are our documents, really?	

Participant support journey template

Step	Why it matters	Actions and Considerations	Prompt Questions	Your response
Communicate Clearly and Consistently	Regular, friendly communication reduces anxiety and helps people feel secure and included.	• Send a warm first email with all key info and links. Consider creating an FAQs document too. • Name the support team and set expectations about when/how you'll be in touch. • Use clear, plain language.	How can we make our first email feel welcoming and human? Can we create an FAQs document? Are we clear about what comes next?	
Travel support and tech support (for online or hybrid events)	Confidence with tech and ease of travel are critical for inclusive engagement.	• Provide devices/data if needed for online events. • Run practice sessions or 1:1 support for online platforms. • Arrange and confirm any travel or accommodation needs in advance	Who might struggle to access or feel confident using the tech/platforms? What are the common travel or accommodation barriers?	
Continue Listening and Adapting	Peoples' needs may evolve over time as they build confidence or face new challenges	• Respond promptly to new or changing access needs. • Be flexible and empathetic. • Keep channels open between events.	How can we ensure we find out if people's needs change?	
Pre-Event and On-the-Day Support Prep	Careful preparation ensures everyone feels welcomed, safe, and supported on the day.	• Prepare a register and fire safety list with relevant participant info. • Print necessary materials (handbooks, forms, surveys). • Ensure safeguarding process is in place. • Order catering and refreshments that meet the dietary requirements of the people participating. • Consider what materials with information about the content for discussion (e.g. slides) you should share before the day.	Have we double-checked all needs are met for access, catering, and safeguarding? Who is the on-the-day support lead? Do you need to share any reading materials or slides with people before the event(s)?	

Participant support journey template

Step	Why it matters	Actions and Considerations	Prompt Questions	Your response
After the Event	Timely follow-up shows respect and care for people' time and input.	• Send a thank-you and feedback email. • Include expense/gift of thanks form • Follow up with individuals if issues occurred	Have all people received their follow-up? Do any need additional support or a personal check-in?	
Closing the Loop	A thoughtful close-out builds trust, completes the process respectfully, and opens doors for future engagement.	• Share key outcomes, outputs or next steps. • Decide who will be keeping in touch with people now the process is over and ensure they have the correct data permissions • Finalise any outstanding reimbursements.	What do people need to feel a sense of closure? Are we respecting their data and communication preferences post-project?	
Ongoing Engagement	Keeping people informed helps maintain trust and encourages future involvement.	• Share how input shaped decisions. • Send opportunities for future engagement—only to those who gave consent. • Send out a “keeping in touch” form for GDPR-compliant communications.	Who wants to stay involved? How can we honour their consent preferences and keep them meaningfully engaged?	

Venue and Timing Checklist

This checklist can be used to think through what is important when picking a venue for engaging with people.

Not all of these criteria will always be applicable for every engagement process and there will be factors which inform your choice of venue that are not covered in this checklist.

Physically getting to / accessing the venue	Your response
Is it accessible by public transport at times which will allow people to travel using free or subsidised travel passes?	
Will people be able to travel to and from the venue during daylight hours?	
Is there a wheelchair accessible entrance?	
Is there accessible parking?	
Can accessible taxis access the premises?	
Are the corridors wide enough for wheelchairs to pass each other and turn around?	
If there are multiple floors: • How many lifts are available? • Are lifts wide enough for wheelchairs / are the lifts and buttons a suitable height? • Do lifts give audio and visual indications?	
Is the venue easy to find? Are there well-known landmarks nearby?	

This resource is a starting point for you to apply to your own context.

Main room	Your response
Does this have enough space for small group tables?	
Does it have WiFi?	
Does it have a screen to present slides big enough so the back/side of the room can see?	
Does it have space for PA equipment such as microphone and speaker?	
Is there space for a flipchart stand at each table?	
Are there walls that flipcharts/information can be put up on using blu-tac?	
What are the acoustics like (avoid echo)?	
How is the lighting? Are there any adjustments needed for people with visual difficulties?	
Does it have a hearing loop system?	
Is there enough space for mobility aids and wheelchairs?	

Venue and Timing Checklist

Making people feel welcome	Your response
Is there somewhere we can set up a welcome table and sign-in desk?	
Are all people likely to feel welcome in this space, or might it make some feel like outsiders?	

Refreshments	Your response
Is there space where the refreshments can be set up. At a minimum this needs to be a place for drinks and food to be laid/served so that people can queue up and be served quickly.	
Is there enough space for mobility aids and wheelchairs?	
Are there places to sit and eat away from the main room breakout tables?	

Prayer room / Quiet room	Your response
Is there a separate room that can be set up to accommodate multi-faith needs, prayers, and moments of spiritual reflections?	
Is there a separate room where participants can go if they have any reason to remove themselves from activities? (can be same as prayer room if required)	
Can this room be set up to provide quietness?	

Toilets	Your response
Are there separate Male/ Female toilets and non-gendered toilets?	
Is there an accessible toilet? How easy is this to get to from the main room?	

Outside building	Your response
Is there somewhere outside where participants can get fresh air?	
Is there a designated smoking area?	

Other health and safety considerations	Your response
Will there be a member of staff/ security on site at all times?	
Will there be someone first aid trained on site at all times?	
Is there a first aid kit on site?	
Are there any risks of slips / trips and falls?	
Is there a defibrillator on site or close by?	
Where are the fire exits?	
What is the fire safety procedure? Are there any accessibility considerations within this?	

Thank you gift and expenses payment

As an issue of inclusion and to ensure everyone can participate, you should consider people's needs around expenses.

This can include travel, childcare, respite care or other expenses which people may incur when they attend an engagement process.

Considerations	Further Information	Your response
Fair Compensation	<i>Payment should be at the same rate as the real living wage.</i>	
Consistency	<i>Apply the same criteria and compensation rates to all participants regardless of expertise, qualification or job role, to ensure fairness and transparency.</i>	
Communication at the recruitment stage	<i>Clearly communicate the purpose and terms of the payment to participants before they commit to the process. Address any questions or concerns they may have regarding compensation, and try to communicate in Plain English.</i> <i>Ensure that team members working with participants are aware of the rate and the timetable for payment. When people have more specific questions you can signpost participants to places like Citizens' Advice.</i>	
Communication at onboarding stage	<i>If you are recruiting participants in advance, share information with them about the level of payments and their frequency in an easy to access resource. This could be on a webpage or a participant handbook.</i>	
Alternative payment options	<i>Offer alternative methods of payment. Some people find it useful to be offered alternative forms of compensation, such as vouchers, or non-monetary incentives.</i> <i>Participants should be provided with information so that they can make an informed decision about whether they want to receive the payment as a bank transfer or voucher. You should ask how they would like to receive the payment, including securely recording bank details so that payments can be made without delay.</i>	

Thank you gift and expenses payment

Considerations	Further Information	Your response
Timely payment	<i>Make the payments promptly after each event or stage of the process rather than waiting until the end of the whole process. You should set up the payment process in advance.</i>	
Expenses	<i>Expenses for travel, childcare, respite or other costs incurred through taking part are separate from the gift of thanks payment, though both are often paid at the same time. It can help to offer expenses in advance, or to book travel directly on behalf of participants where appropriate, for example, arranging a minibus or booking specific train travel ahead of time.</i> <i>If you are paying the gift of thanks by voucher, you will need to think about how expenses are handled separately, this may mean making a bank transfer for expenses or reimbursing on the day. Consider what receipts you will need and how you will collect them.</i> <i>If reimbursing for mileage you can calculate distance from the participants home address rather than requiring a receipt for fuel.</i>	
Reimbursements when receipts aren't available	<i>Sometimes participants cannot easily obtain a receipt. Two common instances of this are where they use a babysitter rather than a registered childcare provider (and registered childcare is not always flexible enough or suitable to the needs of attending an engagement process), or where they travel on public transport with tap on/tap off payment.</i> <i>To maximise participation and ensure against inequity, (particularly in instances of child care that cannot be met with a registered provider), where receipts cannot be obtained we recommend asking for confirmation of cost and payment based on trust as long as the expense seems reasonable.</i>	

Thank you gift and expenses payment

Considerations	Further Information	Your response
Benefits	Offering a financial gift of thanks may have implications for people receiving means tested benefits. You do not need to know whether participants are affected, but you should share this information so they can make an informed decision. Read more here. Key points to share: Payment for time as a voucher or other types is always considered earnings by DWP, regardless of how it is described. Out of pocket expenses do not affect benefits, but must be clearly documented. Most benefits have a maximum earnings allowance, below which payments will not affect benefits.	
Tax	For tax purposes, a gift of thanks is generally considered taxable income in the UK, just like any other form of income. People who receive a gift of thanks are responsible for reporting it to HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and paying any applicable taxes on it. Everyone has an allowance of £1,000 'self employed' income, only payments that means a person exceeds that allowance would need to be declared.	
Asylum Seekers	Most asylum seekers are not permitted to work whilst their application is being considered. Where people seeking asylum have been given permission to work, they are not permitted to be self-employed. Asylum seekers who wish to contribute voluntarily must speak to their case owner to ensure there is no detrimental impact on their claim.	
Non-UK Citizens	Non-UK citizens (excluding those from the Republic of Ireland) who do not have settled status or leave to remain are likely to require a visa to work legally in the UK. Visa restrictions may affect a person's ability to be paid for their participation, and advice should be sought from the Home Office.	

More resources and references

- » [Energising Britain: Your voice in our Clean Energy Superpower Mission.](#) Department of Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ)
- » [Local Power Plan.](#) Great British Energy. February 2026.
- » [‘Establishing a climate communications and engagement baseline for public bodies’.](#) Net Zero Hubs
- » [Net Zero Go: Best practice for communications and engagement on Net Zero](#)
- » [Innovate UK’s Net Zero Living Programme](#)
- » [Cost of Not Engaging: reducing financial risk with public participation.](#) Innovate UK, April 2026.
- » [Apathy and Opposition: Understanding the Real Threats to Net Zero.](#) Becca Massey-Chase, Steve Akehurt and Sam Alvis, IPPR, March 2026
- » [Westminster Climate Assembly final report,](#) November 2023
- » [Climate Assemblies: Emerging Trends, Challenges and Opportunities A Report of the Knowledge Network on](#)
- [Climate Assemblies.](#) Graham Smith, KNOCA, June 2025
- » [Citizens White Paper.](#) Involve and Demos. Miriam Levin, Polly Curtis, Sarah Castell, Hana Kapetanovic, July 2024.
- » [Climate Barometer Tracker: MPs and the public continue to underestimate local backing for wind, solar and pylons](#)
- » [Public Engagement for Net-Zero: A Literature review.](#) Centre for Public Impact and Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (UK Branch).
- » [Public Engagement on Climate Change: A Case Study Compendium.](#) Centre for Public Impact and Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (UK Branch).
- » [Citizen engagement on Net Zero: Local Authority self-assessment questionnaire,](#) March 2025
- » [Citizen engagement on Net Zero: Local Authority self-assessment framework](#)
- » [Local Climate Engagement Resource Hub](#)



Glossary

As you read through this document, you'll come across words that may seem unfamiliar. Find some definitions here.

anchor politician

someone who holds power and recognises the problem and is able to make the case and advocate to others.

co-design

“refers to a participatory approach to designing solutions, in which community members are treated as equal collaborators in the design process.” [Sunlight Foundation](#)

co-designer

a participant in the process

co-production

a way of designing and delivering public services in a more democratic fashion, giving citizens control over the day-to-day decisions which affect their lives. ([Local Government Association](#))

deliberation

is an approach to decision making that encourages reflection, promotes equality of contribution and is non-coercive. It is a form of collective reasoning. In public deliberation, those involved consider relevant, balanced and unbiased information and experiences from different points of view, to engage with trade-offs collectively and form a shared conclusion or recommendation on what to do next.

engagement

the practice of involving the public in the agenda setting, decision making, and policy-forming activities of organisations and institutions, when that involvement is initiated by the organisation or institution.

lived or living experience

someone who has been impacted by the issue.

mindset

a way of being and thinking.

minoritised voices

the voices of those who do not belong to a majority.

participation

the ways that members of the public engage with structures and institutions of democracy, including when that engagement is led by the public.

power

the ability to influence an outcome.

sortition

often referred to as a civic lottery or democratic lottery, is the selection of a certain population based on demographics (like age, gender, education level and/or ethnicity), geography and/or attitudes to a certain topic. Internationally

recognised as the gold standard recruitment methodology for deliberative processes.





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