Tameside Metropolitan Borough



Tameside Council

Engagement Strategy

2026-2029

March 2026 (J009201)

Foreword

Tameside Council is committed to providing the best possible services for its residents, so it is important that we know what you want and need from us.

We want everyone in Tameside to be able to have their say and know that they have directly influenced the decisions made at the council.

This Engagement Strategy sets out our approach to encouraging as many local residents as possible to get involved in shaping their communities and the services that the council provides.

Whilst Tameside already has a strong track-record in engaging with local residents, there is always more we can do. We already engage and collaborate with residents in many different ways – meeting residents in-person through the Partnership Engagement Network, surveys through the Big Conversation, group work, projects to deliver change and improve service delivery, and the many and varied Panels of Children, Parents, Carers and other service-users we operate across the Council.

This strategy details our approach to strengthening these platforms, developing new ways of working such as Tameside Equalities Together, Cabinet in the Community and Neighbourhood and Community Forums, and using the powers granted to us in new national legislation such as the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill to bring decision-making closer still to our residents.

I am grateful for the input of local people in developing the strategy and I look forward to meeting more of you through upcoming engagement and consultation events.



Councillor Hugh Roderick

What is this Engagement Strategy for?

At its heart engagement is about developing relationships between the council and residents, businesses and community groups in order to have meaningful, two-way conversations about the things that matter to them.

There are many different types of engagement (see page 12 for The Engagement Spectrum) but, at a minimum, residents of Tameside should be able to have their say about the development and running of Council services. This strategy outlines our approach to how we will achieve this in a manner that works for our residents and aligns with our wider strategic goals such as the Council Plan, Borough Strategy and development of Neighbourhood and Community Forums.



How will we improve Engagement in Tameside?

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Below is a list of actions we will implement to improve how we engage with residents in Tameside. The actions come under six headings:

1. Reaching into Communities
2. Partnership Approach to Engagement
3. Accessibility of Engagement
4. Cultivate Seldom Heard Voices
5. Build Trust Through Transparency
6. Collaboration with Communities and Stakeholders



1. Reaching into Communities

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Aim:

Reach out and build relationships with residents and communities (particularly minority groups and those under-represented in our engagement)

Actions:

- Mapping – Gain a better understanding of the Council's relationships with community groups and residents to identify gaps and where we need to improve
- Cement and improve connections with Tameside's local networks of community groups, facilitated by voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) partners.
- Improve the presence of the local authority at meetings of local community groups and create more opportunities for communities to engage with us directly where they live, so that we can more meaningfully communicate with one another, and to improve relationships
- Develop the means for residents to have their say on how to improve council services when it suits them.



2. Partnership Approach to Engagement

Aim:

Improve how we work with partner organisations in our engagement to avoid duplication and develop more opportunities to work together for the benefit of Tameside residents

Actions:

- Develop a Partnership Participation Framework with partners, stakeholders and new and existing networks such as Tameside Equalities Together to instil a common approach to engagement across Tameside to maximise collaboration and resources
- Develop an Engagement Forum that serves as the primary arena for local partners and stakeholders to come together to share ideas and improve engagement in Tameside
- Develop agreements with partners to ensure engagement opportunities are shared with all networks.



3. Accessibility of Engagement

Aim:

Maximise awareness and publicity of engagement and opportunities to be involved, so that more voices are heard.

Actions:

- Review, re-brand, and re-launch the Big Conversation to become more of a consultation hub, exploring options to improve functionality, so that opportunities for residents to have their say are maximised.
- Increase awareness of The Big Conversation through improved signposting and navigation (e.g. "Have Your Say" button on Tameside Council's homepage), as well as advertisements on social media.
- Review the Partnership Engagement Network and the Neighbourhood Forums to create an improved engagement platform that reaches right into communities where they live to engage more residents and more diverse residents.
- Improve our use of social media to better advertise engagement opportunities, thereby reaching a greater volume of people.
- Establish routines of advertising engagement opportunities in physical locations, such as libraries, community noticeboards, GP surgeries, etc.
- Continually develop new ways of encouraging people to participate in consultations and engagement, using data to identify and intelligence to identify and understand seldom-heard groups and a test and learn method, drawing on best practice from other areas to stimulate participation

4. Cultivate Seldom Heard Voices

Aim:

Maximise and tailor engagement opportunities to residents and communities considered "seldom heard", removing any barriers that prevent them from having their say, so that more diverse voices are captured.

Actions:

- Establish and maintain open, continuous communication with local seldom heard communities to improve opportunities for engagement
- Improve relationships with VCFSE organisations that represent and work with protected communities, which will create better links between the council and these communities.
- Conduct targeted and tailored engagement with seldom heard groups when appropriate to ensure that our approach to engagement is culturally aware and accommodating, as well as to avoid duplication and 'engagement fatigue'.
- Investigate the use of technological and creative approaches to provide options for consultations and surveys to be available in different formats (e.g. translated versions, paper versions, Easy Read, Braille, focus group sessions) to ensure that specific groups are not excluded (e.g. those whose first language is not English, those who cannot read, those who are not confident digitally etc).
- Implement checks when organising engagement events to ensure that these are accessible to those who are physically disabled – e.g. nearby parking, building access.



- Identify community-specific media in which engagement opportunities can be publicised, using appropriate and culturally-sensitive communications when doing so, whilst remaining open and welcoming to feedback.
- Review the standardised demographics questions at the end of consultations and surveys to ensure that we are capturing all the correct demographic information that we need.
- Improve the monitoring of who is involved in engagement compared to the demographic breakdown of Tameside's population, establishing a system where our approach to engagement needs to be adapted when particular groups are under-represented.
- Agree and implement a policy or set of guiding principles for meaningful and fair engagement with young people.

5. Build Trust Through Transparency

Aim:

Improve communications and sharing of engagement outcomes to provide assurance and build trust with communities so that their voices influence and shape council strategies, policies, and programmes.

Actions:

- Develop a standard approach of sharing the outcomes of engagement, including where it might not have brought about a change.
- Proactively share outcomes of each project that we engaged on through local partnerships, networks, and newsletters, allowing people to see that through providing input, they can influence and directly impact decision-making.
- Publicise "You Said, We Did" information on social media.
- Create a central repository of "You Said, We Did" information on Tameside Council's website.
- Publish an annual summary of engagement activity, and share on social media as well as through other channels.



6. Collaboration with Communities and Stakeholders

Aim:

Further embed co-design and co-production in engagement across Tameside, strengthening the democratic voice in strategy, policy, and service development.

Actions:

- Develop an aligned approach with partners to build confidence in the principle and practice of co-design and co-production amongst communities.
- Raise awareness through council services of co-design and co-production by developing a suite of support resources, including a co-design and co-production guide.
- Develop methods to embed co-design and co-production at the start of strategy, policy, and service development processes (e.g. write engagement plans), so that resident voices are heard from inception, and opportunities for co-design and co-production are identified early to maximise time available for delivery and impact.



The Engagement Spectrum

The above priorities will improve our approach to engagement, which will provide more evidence and insight for service, policy, and strategy development. In turn, this will lead to better outcomes for local residents.

These priorities will be complemented by an Engagement Toolkit, which will encourage best practice in the delivery of engagement throughout the Local Authority. This toolkit will be underpinned by the Engagement Spectrum model below. On the spectrum, there are five phases ordered from the least to most amount of citizen participation: Monitor, Inform, Consult, Involve, and Empower. Each segment, defined in the model and containing a list of example tools, serves as a guide as to how an engagement exercise or process can be conducted. All segments are important; whichever segment is chosen will be determined by the desired outcome(s).



	MONITOR	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	EMPOWER
Definition	The monitoring of data to understand the broad issues that residents face and the needs that they have.	The provision of information to residents on policies, decisions, services, events, and other public notices.	A specific, time-limited exercise in which the views of residents and stakeholders are sought, which should then be considered in the decision-making process.	The collaboration with residents in devising, designing, testing, and evaluating solutions, strategies, and services, as well as having greater input in decision-making.	Granting leadership to residents and communities in the development and delivery of policies and projects, as well as direct influence and input into decision-making.
Tools/ Methods	Performance monitoring (e.g. Council Plan Scorecard) Equalities monitoring Complaints monitoring Councillor enquiries National datasets	Social media (Twitter, Facebook, TikTok, etc.) Newsletters Press releases Emails/letters Videos Face-to-face meetings Leaflets/posters Communications campaigns	Surveys – quantitative & qualitative In-depth interviews Focus groups Ethnographic research Panels – residents, service users, customers, protected groups, condition groups (e.g.: Tameside Equalities Together, Cabinet in the Community) Online discussions Public stalls Locality-based groups	Deliberative engagement forums and workshops (e.g. Partnership Engagement Network, Neighbourhood and Community Forums,, World Cafe) Co-design/co-production Advisory committees Panels – residents, service users, customers, protected groups, condition groups Locality-based groups (e.g.: Tameside Equalities Together, Cabinet in the Community)	Citizens' assemblies and juries Participatory decision-making Participatory budgeting Community development

Increase in Citizen Participation

How We Developed This Strategy

We have sought the views of local residents and stakeholders on our existing approach to engagement and how we can improve it in this strategy. We engaged through various avenues:

- **Engagement Strategy Consultation:** This was a two-phase online consultation hosted on the Council's SurveyMonkey platform. All responses from this exercise were fed into the development of the Strategy and associated recommendations.
- **Partnership Engagement Network (PEN) Conferences:** PEN is the Council's regular forum to bring together stakeholders to discuss and influence local public services. We conducted two sessions looking at how we engage with residents.
- **Cabinet in the Community:** A series of public engagement events between elected members and residents were held in Tameside's towns to understand their views on local issues and hopes for the future.
- **Tameside Equalities Together:** A number of work streams from Tameside Equalities Together (formerly the Inequalities Reference Group) identified engagement-related recommendations that have been fed into the Strategy - further information on this can be found on the next page.
- **Action Together:** Action Together is the infrastructure organisation for the VCSE sector in Tameside. Through a series of workshops and structured discussions, they developed a number of recommendations based on the lived experiences of racially-minoritised residents that have been incorporated into the final Strategy.



- **GM Resident's Survey:** The GM Resident's Survey is ongoing consultation to gain insight from residents in the city region about their attitudes, behaviours and experiences, particularly around issues like cost of living. The findings of the GM Resident's Survey have influenced a several key elements of the Engagement Strategy.

Additionally, we sought expert advice and feedback from think-tanks that specialise in engagement and consultation (e.g. the Consultation Institute), and through informal discussions with council colleagues and partners within healthcare services and VCSE organisations.

We also assessed the feedback to our wider consultation and engagement activity over the past 24 months to identify patterns and trends relevant to the Engagement Strategy. Particular focus in this exercise was given to adult social care, children's services and the new Borough Strategy.



A summary of the key points that we were asked to address is below:

- Engagement opportunities need to be advertised better through multiple channels. We should use social media to achieve greater reach and advertise in physical locations to account for those who are digitally excluded.
- We need to evidence that we listen and act on the input of residents and stakeholders, particularly input that is contrary to our proposals.
- We need to be more visible and active, going out and engaging directly with communities, particularly those who are "seldom-heard", rather than expect communities to approach the Council. We need to go where the people are – at community group meetings, forums, and events; at community centres; at supermarkets; through pop-up stalls.
- Engagement should be continuous and open, not restricted to time-limited consultation exercises.
- We should adopt an approach that places greater value on co-design and co-production, so that engagement is not "doing to" but "doing with".
- We should recognise the strengths, talents, and knowledge in the communities that we serve, so that we treat residents as experts of their own experiences.



Tameside Equalities Together

We have also incorporated findings from investigations conducted under the remit of Tameside Equalities Together (formerly the Inequalities Reference Group). This was formed in 2020 to identify pressing issues of inequality in Tameside that needed further investigation.

The following recommendations relevant to engagement that we have taken on board for this strategy were identified:

- Improve links with community organisations that support people from protected groups, which will improve links with and knowledge of those communities
- Engagement should be ongoing to improve relationships between the Council and communities, as well as building connections between communities through dialogue
- Allow people to advocate and speak for themselves, providing opportunities to be involved in projects as early as possible through co-production
- Provide accessible information and communication to people from protected groups in settings where they frequent (e.g. healthcare service settings, libraries)
- Develop inclusive and tailored communication methods, taking into account people who cannot read
- Ensure that all aspects of public services, including engagement, are culturally aware and engage in a culturally appropriate manner, not expecting people from ethnic minority communities to approach services without being accommodating to their needs



- Digital exclusion is a prevalent issue that affects many in Tameside, so we need to cater our approach to those who do not have digital access
- Agree and implement a policy or set of guiding principles for meaningful and fair engagement with young people.
- The most recent workstreams include:
- Debt Patterns and Journeys and Proactive Service Response
- Poverty and Private Renting
- Access to and Experiences of Ethnic Minority Groups in Healthcare
- Educational Inequalities
- Tameside Racial Inequalities Project

Any findings and recommendations relevant to engagement from these reports will be incorporated into the Engagement Action Plan referenced below.



Accountability and Governance

To ensure that we are progressing on the ambitions set out in the strategy, we will present progress reports to Executive Cabinet, including a summary of engagement undertaken each period.

Given the Partnership ambitions within the strategy we will also provide updates periodically to the Health & Wellbeing Board, which holds a key position as a forum where political, clinical, professional and community leaders from across the spectrum of Tameside organisations meet to improve wellbeing and drive down inequalities.

We will also ensure that we adhere to our legal responsibilities as outlined in Appendix 1.



Monitoring

To ensure that this strategy is successful, we will monitor progress through several avenues:

- **Engagement Action Plan**
  We will create an Engagement Action Plan, which will contain the actions listed under each engagement priority. This action plan will identify who is responsible for each action and when each action needs to be completed by. It will be overseen by the governance arrangements described above.

- **Equalities Monitoring**
  We currently monitor participation in our online consultations and surveys, and analyse the demographic breakdown compared to Tameside's population figures.

  We will investigate other ways to monitor equalities in our engagement and improve the proportion of people who provide their demographic data in order to obtain a fuller, more representative picture in line with ambitions set out in the council's Equalities Strategy 2023-27.

- **Satisfaction with Engagement**
  We currently do not measure or monitor resident satisfaction with our engagement. We will look into how we should measure this and then monitor this on an ongoing basis.

  All these avenues of monitoring the success of this strategy will be included in the reports, which will be overseen by the governance arrangements above.

Appendix 1: Legal Context

The "Gunning Principles"

The Gunning Principles apply once it has been agreed that consultation should take place. The "Gunning Principles provide a set of fundamental consultation propositions, established through case law, that must be adhered to.

The Gunning principles are that:

1. Consultation must take place when the proposal is still at a formative stage;
2. Sufficient reasons must be put forward for the proposal to allow for intelligent consideration and response;
3. Adequate time must be given for consideration and response;
4. The product of consultation must be conscientiously taken into account.

Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) / Equality Act 2010

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities. Under the Public Sector Equality Duty and the Equality Act 2010, there are nine protected characteristics groups:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender Reassignment
- Pregnancy and Maternity
- Race
- Religion/Belief
- Sex
- Sexual Orientation
- Marital/civil partnership status – is also relevant for some areas of the Public Sector Equalities Duty.

In Tameside we have also identified some other local groups: Socioeconomic status, Carers, Looked After Children, Mental Health and Neurodiversity.

Appendix 1: Legal Context

Best Value Duty

Under the Local Government Act 1999, local authorities are subject to the general Duty of Best Value. This requires them to "make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness."

To achieve this, local authorities are under a Duty to Consult representatives of a wide range of local persons. Authorities must consult representatives of council taxpayers, those who use or are likely to use services provided by the authority, and those appearing to the authority to have an interest in any area within which they carry out their functions.

English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill

Now at Report Stage in the House of Commons, the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill will require all local authorities in England to establish effective neighbourhood governance within defined 'neighbourhood areas.'
Regulations made after the Bill becomes law will set out the specific obligations on local authorities, potentially including criteria for neighbourhood size or population and required governance arrangements.
It is not yet known how prescriptive these regulations will be, but they may determine key aspects of how Neighbourhood Forums operate, such as their size, frequency, structure, powers and budgets. A transitional year is therefore proposed to evolve the current model ahead of any requirements introduced through the new legislation.