



# MetroWest+

## Portishead Branch Line (MetroWest Phase 1)

TR040011

Applicant: North Somerset District Council

### 5.1 Consultation Report and Appendices Appendices K1 to K2: Other supporting documents

Planning Act 2008: Sections 37(3)

Author: North Somerset District Council

Date: November 2019



**Document Index**

K1	NSDC Research Governance Framework
K2	Social media protocol



# MetroWest+

## Portishead Branch Line (MetroWest Phase 1)

TR040011

Applicant: North Somerset District Council

### 5.1 – Consultation Report and Appendices

#### Appendix K1: NSDC Research Governance Framework

Planning Act 2008: Sections 37(3)

Author: North Somerset District Council

Date: November 2019





## **Consultation and Research Framework**

### **North Somerset Council**

---

Introduction

Why consult (or conduct research)?

Principles to adhere to in consultative / research projects.

- Clarity of purpose

- Planned effectively

- Relevant information

- Inclusive

- Appropriate methods

- Sufficient time

- Using the results

- Feeding back

The role of service areas

The role of Business Intelligence

---

### **Introduction**

North Somerset Council is committed to making sure decisions are evidence-based, taking into account the views and experiences of residents and service users, that our services are designed around those who need them, ensuring that customer views, opinions and feedback is actively sought and used effectively.

Consultative and research activities within North Somerset Council are managed, resourced and undertaken within individual service areas, supported by a small specialist team in Business Intelligence.

This framework is intended to help ensure that consultation and research activity is effective, appropriate and transparent.

This framework is supported by a toolkit, providing more operational guidance and advice on planning an effective consultation / research exercise, choosing the right approaches for engaging with our communities and drawing together people's input into practical and meaningful insight.

### **Why consult (or conduct research)?**

In order to provide services that are best suited to our customers we will listen to our citizens and stakeholders. Consultation and research around an issue will help tailor services, and better meet the needs of our community.

Consultation and research will help garner views and preferences, help understand possible unintended consequences of a policy or decision, or get views on implementing change. All this ensures that our decisions and policies are made from a strong evidence base.

This framework focuses on the more systematic processes of gathering information from the general population, specific service users, or those potentially affected by an issue or proposal to inform the decision making process. Consultation and research is only one rung on the [ladder of participation](#) and it may be appropriate, in scoping out your broader project needs, to develop a more participative process of engagement, or co-production so that those affected are involved more collaboratively in the development, design and testing of what is being proposed.

The Strategy and Policy team in P&C have developed and adopted a Co-Production Policy Statement which sets out the principles and practices involved when embarking in fuller engagement exercises when changing or developing policies or services. For further guidance and information on engagement and co-production, please contact Alun Davies.

Legislatively, the Department for Communities and Local Government's revised [Best Value Statutory Guidance](#) (2011), restates that local authorities are under a *Duty to Consult*. This states that in "making arrangements ... in the way in which its functions are exercised ... authorities must consult with representatives of council tax payers, 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 in which the authority carries out its functions".

Equally, the [General Equality Duty](#) requires public authorities to have an adequate evidence base for their decision-making and places a duty on the local authority to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and promote equality of opportunity. As such, the council's equality impact assessments form the basis from which evidence about the impact of changes in service provision is gathered and presented.

However, a genuine commitment to improving consultation and engagement is not driven solely by legislation. There is a direct correlation between how well informed and involved people feel and how satisfied they are with the council and the services it provides. Good quality consultation and research demonstrates that involving people builds capacity within communities, leads to better, more appropriately delivered services and a council more closely connected to its communities.

## **Principles to adhere to in consultative / research projects.**

Undertaking effective consultation and research is essential in making sure decisions are based on sound and reliable information.

Poor consultation or research will lead to misleading results which can be just as damaging, if not more, than having none at all. Similarly, consultation for its own sake is a waste of public money, resources, your, and participants' time.

We strive to ensure consistently high standards of consultation across all service areas. This includes effective planning, setting clear objectives, using appropriate methods and timescales, making maximum use of results and feeding back what has happened as a result to participants.

Where an exercise is embarked upon, it must be carried out *fairly*. 'Fairly' is defined within a set of principles, used in case law, known as the Gunning Principles. These are the criteria which consultations are typically judged against, should the process be challenged – e.g. through a judicial review. These are defined as:

*1. When proposals are still at a formative stage*

Public bodies need to have an open mind during a consultation and not already have made the decision, but have some ideas about the proposals.

*2. Sufficient reasons for proposals to permit 'intelligent consideration'*

Respondents need to have enough information to make an intelligent choice and input into the process. Equality Assessments should take place at the beginning of the consultation and be published alongside the document being considered.

*3. Adequate time for consideration and response*

Timing is crucial – is it an appropriate time and environment, was enough time given for people to make an informed decision and then provide that feedback, and is there enough time to analyse those results and make the final decision?

*4. Must be conscientiously taken into account*

Think about how to demonstrate that decision-makers have taken feedback into account.

These are all common-sense principles, naturally forming part of the consideration and planning of any exercise at its inception.

The toolkit supporting this framework, provides practical guidance and advice on ensuring that exercises are carried out in an appropriate and robust manner. To be clear however, there are no general rules as to the kind, or amount, of consultation / research that may be required. By the nature of each proposal or issue, the appropriate approach to eliciting feedback will vary depending upon the circumstances which call for it. Therefore it is neither feasible, nor possible to lay out prescriptively a 'one size fits all' approach.

There are however a number of key, general principles that should be applied in running exercises to ensure they are undertaken in a fair manner.

***Clarity of purpose***

We need to be clear what decision or action plan the project will feed into. If it does not explicitly inform a decision to be taken, or we are unable to act on the results, then there is no point in doing it.

We may undertake a consultative or a research project for a number of different reasons. These could be to:

- draw feedback on the broad thrust of a policy or ambition;
- understand issues in delivering a service or implementing change;
- elicit interest others already do, or might, contribute to an aim, or to uncover what might already be happening;
- understand the implications of a proposed course of action on service users;
- understand whether all reasonable considerations have been factored in;
- identify unforeseen consequences.

It is important therefore that we are clear about the purpose and scope of each exercise that we undertake. Any exercise should contain a clear, overarching statement describing why it is being carried out and how the results will be used. The questions posed will make it clear what feedback is being sought and how it will be used to inform the decision. It needs to be clear to participants what the timeframe for the decision-making process is, what may be influenced by responding to the consultation - and what cannot.

### ***Planned effectively***

Often, an exercise gathering feedback can be considered as an afterthought, or is undertaken to fulfil a statutory obligation. As such, they can be seen as a pointless exercise open to challenge, or a process in and of itself, rather than an opportunity to build our understanding of an issue or its implications. Consultation and research exercises – as with any other project - need to be carefully planned and resourced.

This includes, scoping out the requirements of the project: what is it seeking to achieve and the point in the decision making process it will inform. Scoping out what time is available and how much resource is available to commit to the exercise.

At the planning stage, it is essential to identify what it is we need to know - to identify those areas where there is a gap in our understanding: in essence, asking the question, 'what do we know already and what do we yet need to determine in order to fully inform the decision?' For example: the impact on individual recipients or service users; how stakeholders may respond to the changes in their day to day activities; areas where a proposal could be strengthened or refined; how stakeholders may help in implementing the changes, or; views on the principles or proposal as a whole.

This will then also help us to identify and map out who we are seeking to draw feedback from - for example, specific service users, older people, younger people, people from a specific area, the general population at large – and then identify the best way of engaging with them.

From this, we are able to determine the key target groups to engage with, the most appropriate methods for drawing this feedback from them, likely resourcing requirements and timescales.

Planning is the essential foundation for any research or consultation project – ensuring it is properly designed and that we are getting the most out of it. See the toolkit for advice and guidance on scoping and planning.

### ***Relevant information***

We need to provide sufficient information to enable respondents to properly understand the issue and be able to respond to it. In launching an exercise, it should be clear what the proposals are, who may be affected, what questions are being asked and the timescale for responses.

If drawing feedback on a proposal, we need to be clear about the basis on which a proposal has been considered - and will thereafter be considered. Those responding should be aware of the criteria that will be applied when considering proposals and what factors will be considered 'decisive' or 'of substantial importance' at the end of the process.

How much information needs to be provided will be dependent on the issue being considered and the audience from whom views are being elicited. Where the group to be targeted are particularly expert, then greater detail may be required. In any case, information will need to be published in a form which participants can understand.

### ***Inclusive***

Everyone who will be affected should have the opportunity to have their views heard. Therefore, we need to ensure we have taken all reasonable steps to ensure all directly affected and interested parties have been made aware and have been offered the opportunity to respond.

Part of the planning of any consultation or research activity will include a 'stakeholder mapping' exercise to ensure all relevant groups have been accounted for, identifying and taking account of particular 'seldom heard' groups and including, for example, businesses and charities affected. This should also include an active consideration of the extent to which any proposal might disproportionately impact on people with protected characteristics (as defined by the [Public Sector Equality Duty](#)) and ensuring the opportunity to engage in the process.

We should be seeking to use existing networks and voluntary and community organisations wherever possible – as well as considering how to engage with individuals or communities who might not typically engage with this process.

As a minimum however, all consultations must be registered on [eConsult](#). This ensures that we maintain our repository of all key activity undertaken across the authority, allowing both residents to track consultations that have taken place, and officers to understand what activities have already taken place – and hence what we already know about an issue, topic or locality.

### ***Appropriate methods***

We need to ensure we are using the most appropriate methods (both electronic and more traditional) for the aims of the exercise and the audience, ensuring that all groups can participate fully and we are drawing the right kind of information.

There is no 'right way' and the method / combination of methods chosen will be dependent on what you are trying to achieve, who you are engaging and the level of detail and understanding needed.

Any activity or event will need to be mindful of the timing and location, including access requirements, and the provision of information in different formats.

It is important that plain English is used and that any published material is jargon free to allow participants to fully and easily understand the issues and questions.

The consultation / research project may be part of an on-going process rather than a one-off exercise. It is worth considering therefore whether an informal, iterative dialogue is appropriate, using new digital tools and open, collaborative approaches. Drawing feedback is not necessarily just about formal documents and responses.

### ***Sufficient time***

We need to allow sufficient time for planning, carrying out, responding to, analysing and considering responses.

Adequate time will be given in which participants can reasonably be (a) made aware of the exercise, (b) consider the proposals and, (c) respond.

The amount of time provided will vary and be dependent on a range of factors, including ensuring that people have enough time to comment and should allow for those who may take a little longer to respond (e.g. due to disability or public sector partners (e.g. charities, or parish councils) who may need to formulate a response through a scheduled meeting).

As a minimum, this should be four weeks, to elicit feedback (which should realistically be extended if running over summer holidays, for example). More time will be appropriate if the exercise raises very complex issues or involves a large volume of materials to read in order to be properly informed of the issues.

### ***Using the results***

One of the purposes of gathering feedback and evidence is to make sure we are aware of the span of views on an issue: to draw out key, substantive points. Issues considered can be difficult, sometimes contentious and the decisions to be taken not easy.

That said, it is important to make it clear how feedback and evidence elicited has been taken into account in the final decision-making process. A clear audit trail will highlight key, substantive points which have emerged from the feedback / evidence, which have been highlighted and presented to the decision maker to consider.

For varying reasons, the authority may not be able to accommodate or act on all concerns and issues raised, although the point is to make sure we can demonstrate that these have been considered in informing the decision. In feeding back therefore, we will demonstrate how we have considered all concerns and explain the rationale for the ultimate decision taken.

As well as being part of supplementary documents informing the decision (i.e. through the Executive agenda), key findings should be published on eConsult. This should also include information on how improvements or changes have been made as a result of the feedback.

### ***Feeding back***

Key findings should be published and distributed in a timely and appropriate fashion - typically within three months of the close of the exercise – or timed to coincide with the publication of the agenda item, if informing an executive decision. Due consideration should be given to who should receive a copy and the most suitable medium for publication. All respondents should receive a summary of the findings and be directed to where they can access a fuller version, if desired.

All participants should be fed back to in an accessible format which should include both the results of the exercise and how they will be used. Occasionally, the results of a consultation will be outweighed by other evidence or considerations and in such cases a clear and honest explanation of the decisive factors should be included in the feedback.

In any subsequent evaluation of the policy or service delivery proposal, the results of this should be made available so that the actual impact of the proposal is evident.

### ***The role of service areas***

Service managers need to ensure that staff engaging in any consultative / research activity understand and apply the principles outlined in this framework and that there is sufficient time and resource allocated to undertake the exercise effectively and meaningfully.

Activities should be identified well in advance of any planned launch date to allow sufficient time to scope and plan any activity. As a minimum, service areas should contact Business Intelligence at the scoping stage to get advice, guidance and support in planning, designing and running the activity. Equally, services should engage with the Strategy and Policy Development team in P&C when embarking on a more participative exercise.

Service managers need to ensure that projects should have a lead officer identified and responsible for planning, designing and undertaking the exercise and disseminating the findings. This will include ensuring the principles and commitments to consult in this policy are adhered to.

## The role of Business Intelligence

Business Intelligence is there to provide oversight, advice and guidance in research and consultation exercises. In doing so, the team can:

- advise on issues to consider when planning consultation or research project, for example: developing research aims, choosing between different approaches and techniques, design of questions; who to consult;
- provide training and support to make sure consultation and research activities are planned, to a high standard;
- signpost to gatekeepers and groups we can approach;
- provide information on best / good practice;
- provide training and support for using eConsult and access to the online survey software;
- identify opportunities for joint / partnership working on consultation and research activities within the council and partners.

In addition, there are a number of research projects and consultations, which Business Intelligence is responsible for administering, analysing and reporting on. These are typically the larger scale, 'corporate' projects and are detailed within the Business Intelligence service delivery agreement.

Business Intelligence can be approached to provide more detailed support in administering, analysing and reporting. A fee however will be levied for this level of detailed support – for example in undertaking analysis and writing reports. Requests for additional support should be identified and discussed with the service lead as early as is possible in order to agree requirements.

*For further information please contact the Research and Insight Team within the Business Intelligence Service – [business.intelligence@n-somerset.gov.uk](mailto:business.intelligence@n-somerset.gov.uk) / tel: 01275 88 4274.*

Business Intelligence Service  
North Somerset Council  
March 2016



# MetroWest+

## Portishead Branch Line (MetroWest Phase 1)

TR040011

Applicant: North Somerset District Council

5.1 – Consultation Report and Appendices  
Appendix K2: Social media protocol

Planning Act 2008: Sections 37(3)

Author: North Somerset District Council

Date: November 2019





# MetroBus and MetroWest Social Media Policy

## Twitter

### Aim of the policy

1. To ensure that the MetroBus and MetroWest Twitter feeds are a source of positive information about the projects.
2. To reduce as far as possible the number of negative comments on the MetroBus and MetroWest Twitter feeds.
3. To ensure that the MetroBus and MetroWest projects set their own agenda on Twitter feeds, and are not driven by reacting to objectors.

### What should the MetroBus MetroWest Twitter accounts be used for?

The MetroBus and MetroWest Twitter accounts should be used for announcements, project updates and to link to currently relevant information on the MetroBus and MetroWest websites. When there is nothing new to say about the projects, and where there is no current need to highlight existing information, then we should consider whether Twitter activity is really required and the pros and cons of any activity.

### Twitter policies

The following three policies are suggested as guidelines for Twitter use.

1. We do not reply directly to negative Tweets or Tweets from opposition groups.
2. We do not provide direct answers to questions posted on Twitter. Instead, we post a standard response explaining that all questions should be submitted by email.
3. We do not engage in conversations on Twitter and seek to divert all communications to the most appropriate channel, which would normally be email.

At times, it may be necessary to make an exception to the above policies. When such a need is identified, the response should be agreed by two members of the communications team.

### Issues addressed by suggested policies

The issues addressed by these policies are detailed below.

#### Policy 1: Direct replies to Tweets

##### Suggested policy

We do not reply directly to negative Tweets and Tweets from opposition groups.

##### Reason for policy

If someone sends us a negative Tweet it doesn't show on our public Twitter feed, only on the original Tweeters. However, once we reply the original negative Tweet then becomes visible on our Twitter feed. By replying to negative Tweets we are therefore choosing to post them on our Twitter feed, increasing their visibility and potentially raising the profile of opposition groups.

A significant proportion of Tweets to the MetroBus account come from a very small group of opponents and there is little prospect of changing these peoples' minds. Responding to these negative Tweets therefore does nothing but generate further negative Tweets in reply.

## **Policy 2: Answering questions**

### Suggested policy

We do not provide direct answers to questions posted on Twitter. Instead, we will post a standard response explaining that question should be submitted by email.

### Reason for policy

We get many questions posted to our Twitter and while some can potentially be answered, many are unsuitable for a Twitter response.

We risk underselling the scheme by attempting to answer complex questions in the short Twitter format.

The majority of questions come from people/groups opposed to the scheme. They are often not interested in the answers and are seeking only to start a conversation in which they can attack us and the responses we give.

Because we have previously been selective in what questions we answer on Twitter we are often attacked for ignoring specific questions campaigners have posted.

A significant proportion of Tweets to the MetroBus and MetroWest accounts come from a very small group of opponents and we little prospect of changing these peoples' minds - whatever response we give.

## **Policy 3: Twitter conversations**

### Suggested policy

We do not engage in conversations on Twitter.

### Reason for policy

A significant proportion of Tweets to the MetroBus and MetroWest accounts come from a very small group of opponents and there is little prospect of changing these peoples' minds. Responding to these negative Tweets therefore does nothing but generate further negative Tweets in reply.

## **Public Comments Policy as stated on the Twitter page (August 2018)**

MetroBus example:

*“The metrobus Twitter account promotes metrobus services*

*We reserve the right to delete posts or comments on social media. This is done when we believe the comment or post is in breach of the following terms and conditions:*

- contributions must be civil and tasteful. They must not be defamatory, libellous, in breach of the Data Protection Act 1988 (as amended), contain obscenities or foul language*
- contributions must be constructive and polite, not mean-spirited or contributed with the intention of causing offence or trouble. Users who persistently post comments which are unrelated to the item being commented on may be blocked and their comments deleted*
- we reserve the right to block users who are in breach of the terms and conditions above without prior notice*

*Updates about traffic disruption in the West of England region area provided on @travelwesteng*

*If you wish to contact us there is a well promoted email address on all printed material, a bus stops and on the front page of the metrobus twitter account.*

*The metrobusbristol.co.uk website address is on all printed material and at bus stops and can also be accessed via the established travelwest.info site. A ‘contact us’ form is in the ‘typical place in the footer on the front page.’”*



**metrobus Bristol**  
@metrobusBristol

An express bus network for the Bristol area. We can't answer every tweet but will respond to emails sent to metrobus@westofengland.org

[Bristol, England](#)

[metrobusbristol.co.uk](http://metrobusbristol.co.uk)



**metrobus Bristol** @metrobusBristol

An express bus network for the Bristol area. We can't answer every tweet but will respond to emails sent to metrobus@westofengland.org

[Bristol, England](#)

[metrobusbristol.co.uk](http://metrobusbristol.co.uk)

Joined February 2013

890 Photos and videos

**Tweets** 5,636 | **Following** 160 | **Followers** 1,882 | **Likes** 510 | **Lists** 1

**Tweets** | **Tweets & replies** | **Media**

**Pinned Tweet**

**metrobus Bristol** @metrobusBristol · Jul 9

We're a buy before you board service. Buying your ticket before you get on means our boarding times are up to five times faster. This, coupled with two sets of doors (one to get on, one to get off), means less delays and quicker journeys for everyone! [metrobusbristol.co.uk/tickets/](http://metrobusbristol.co.uk/tickets/)

**how to buy metrobus tickets**

**metrobus Bristol** @metrobusBristol · 5h

Thanks again to @retrocoffeebrs for serving free coffee yesterday to everyone catchna our new m2 service! coffee-bike.com

**New to Twitter?**

Sign up now to get your own personalized timeline!

**Sign up**

**You may also like**

- First WestofEngland** @FirstBSA
- Mhairi Threfall** @mthrel
- Marvin Rees** @MarvinJRees
- Mark Bradshaw** @mark\_bradshaw
- travelwest** @travelwestEng

## Facebook

### Aim of the policy

1. To ensure that the MetroBus and MetroWest Facebook pages are a source of positive information about the projects.
2. To reduce as far as possible the number of negative comments on the MetroBus and MetroWest Facebook pages.
3. To ensure that the MetroBus and MetroWest projects set their own agenda on Facebook pages, and are not driven by reacting to objectors.

### Facebook Policy

Same as Twitter Policies above.

### Public Comments Policy as stated on the Facebook page (October 2016)

MetroBus example:

*“We welcome you and your comments to the Facebook page for MetroBus. This site intends to inform and engage with the fans, friends, and other businesses, entities, or interested persons of MetroBus. You are encouraged to submit comments, questions, and concerns, but please note this is a moderated online discussion site and not a public forum. Once posted, MetroBus reserves the right to delete submissions that contain vulgar language, personal attacks of any kind, or comments we deem to be offensive or disparaging. Further, MetroBus also reserves the right to delete comments that:*

- *Contain spam, advertising, solicitations or include links to other sites;*
- *Are clearly off topic or disruptive;*
- *Are obscene, vulgar, or sexually explicit. This includes masked words (\*\*\*), acronyms, and abbreviations;*
- *Are chain letters, pyramid schemes, or fraudulent or deceptive messages;*
- *Promote particular services, products, or political organizations or campaigns;*
- *Infringe on copyrights or trademarks;*
- *Advocate illegal activity;*
- *Violate any policies of MetroBus.*

*Please note that the comments expressed on this site do not reflect the opinions and official position of MetroBus.”*