



Future Northants Internal Engagement Strategy

1. Purpose

This strategy is designed to set the overall principles for engagement and consultation with internal stakeholders in the Future Northants programme. For the purposes of this strategy, internal stakeholders are members of staff, councillors and Trade Unions. While it is acknowledged that the programme will result in two unitary authorities with their own identities and priorities, this strategy represents a shared desire to engage with our internal stakeholders throughout the design, creation and stabilisation of the two new authorities.

2. Principles underpinning this strategy

This strategy is being delivered by Northamptonshire's current local authorities, and will be used by the Shadow Authorities as the programme moves through the different phases until the proposed Go Live date of 1 April 2021. The strategy will ensure that consultation and engagement activity is:

- accessible and inclusive
- genuine and honest
- appropriate for the purpose
- compliant with any statutory requirements
- efficient, using existing mechanisms and forums where possible
- used to inform the development of unitary authorities

The strategy covers the spectrum of consultation and engagement from specific and formal consultation to the broader and more varied types of engagement activity.

The Future Northants Programme has a number of phases, and the engagement strategy will evolve alongside the projects as they progress.

3. Context

The Government has proposed the creation of two new unitary councils in Northamptonshire to provide all local government services in the county. This would come into being on 1 April 2021 and Northamptonshire's current eight councils will cease to exist.

The new North Northamptonshire unitary authority will cover the areas of Corby Borough Council, East Northamptonshire Council, Kettering Borough Council and Borough of Wellingborough Council. A new unitary council for West Northamptonshire will cover the areas of Daventry District Council, Northampton Borough Council and South Northamptonshire Council. Services



currently provided by Northamptonshire County Council and the districts and boroughs will be delivered by the two new councils.

The creation of North Northamptonshire Council and West Northamptonshire Council is an opportunity to develop and transform services so they deliver what residents and businesses need, are modern and provide good value for money. Internal engagement is key to transforming services and maintaining support of the programme.

4. Objectives

The primary objective of this strategy is to ensure that opportunities for consultation and engagement with internal stakeholders are used to enable the effective development of the new unitary authorities. The Future Northants Programme has a number of phases, and this strategy will evolve alongside the projects. The strategy aims to:

- Drive engagement of staff, members and Trade Unions across all partner councils at all stages of establishing the unitary councils.
- Empower staff, members and Trade Unions to be part of the unitary journey to ensure they feel informed, engaged and positive, have the opportunity to feed back, and be involved in shaping the future of the two new organisations.
- Promote involvement and participation opportunities to ensure staff, members and Trade Unions are given the chance to have their say and their voices are heard.

The benefits of achieving these objectives include:

- different professional perspectives that provide a more comprehensive view of staff and resident needs
- better services through shared wider experiences and ideas from subject matter experts
- a wider understanding of the unitary model and the opportunities it can bring for professional development
- greater chance of staff retention through continual collaboration
- support for the programme and its ambitions
- well-informed and engaged staff and members who provide an effective ambassadorial role front-line when dealing with residents.

5. Target audiences

Everyone who works in the existing Northamptonshire authorities has an interest in the creation of the two new unitary authorities.



The use of a stakeholder matrix will help to identify who is a stakeholder for projects on an individual basis, and the toolkit will help to establish whether there is a need for formal consultation and whether more informal engagement would benefit the project.

The following list is by no means exhaustive or hierarchical and additional stakeholders may be identified as the programme progresses, particularly in terms of segmentation within the larger stakeholder groups:

- Staff
- Trade Union members
- District, borough and county council members

6. Channels

A range of channels across partner councils and the programme will be used to engage with the internal stakeholders throughout the programme:

- Intranets
- Internal newsletters
- Core brief/team briefs
- Email/ emailed bulletins (staff and members)
- Video
- Staff meetings
- Trade Union meetings
- Council meetings
- Programme engagement workshops – leaders
- Programme briefings for members
- Change Champions network

7. Resources

Staff

Change Managers focus on the people change required to successfully deliver the programme. Each portfolio is allocated a Change Manager in order to understand and tailor the approach to change, based on the requirements of the employees of each authority impacted by the portfolio.



Change Managers retain a helicopter view of their portfolio and drive employee engagement in order to share information and collect feedback to inform the programme approach and future communication required.

By driving active engagement with employees, their aim is to enable faster adoption, higher utilisation and proficiency to use the changes implemented.

One of the key resources supporting this activity is the change champion network. Led by change managers, change champions have volunteered to adopt the role in addition to their substantive post. Change Champions are advocates of the programme and support two way communication between the wider workforce and the programme. Via regular engagement with the change managers, change champions are provided with programme updates prior to wider dissemination and support their teams and colleagues to receive and understand the information we share. The network provides a vital 'temperature check' across the business about how our employees are feeling, any myths/rumours and insight into any potential gaps in communication.

Change Managers work intrinsically with their communication lead to review the stakeholder maps at each stage of the programme, ensure an appropriate approach/channels are used to deliver key messages and link comms leads to project managers for communication support as required.

A proportion of the Change Manager role provides coaching to all levels of managers and supervisors as they help their colleagues through change. This includes senior leaders and execs in helping them fulfil the role of change sponsor.

Trade Unions

Engagement and consultation with Trade Union members will be carried out as per the working group agreement [INSERT LINK TO FINAL DOCUMENT](#)

This document provides a transparent mechanism for the Future Northants team and the eight employers to meaningfully engage trade unions in the work the employers are undertaking in preparation for the two new authorities in Northamptonshire.

Members

Leaders of all eight authorities are primarily engaged with via the Leaders Oversight Board and programme workshops, which are hosted by programme officers.

All other members are engaged in the programme via their own council's respective Local Government reform committees/ working groups alongside the regular updates from the communication leads. Briefings for members of all Northamptonshire councils on progress with the programme will be held at appropriate times. These sessions will be opportunities to ask questions of the programme team and the Senior Responsible Officers.

8. Governance

Staff consultation and engagement activity within each programme area will be planned and agreed by the Change Manager and Communications Lead and signed off by the Senior Responsible Officer (SRO). Planned activity will be managed and monitored by the Change Managers and the Future Northants Communications and Engagement Lead.

Trade Union consultation and engagement will be governed as per the working group agreement with activity and results being fed back to the Comms and Engagement lead.

Engagement with members will be monitored by leaders and chief executives with feedback being provided via the Design Board and Leaders Oversight Board meetings.

9. Risks

The following risks should be considered as part of the consultation and engagement approach of the programme, and ultimately the two unitary authorities. These may also change over time and may need to be reviewed.

- Too much divergence in the approach to consultation and engagement leads to feelings of dissatisfaction and inequality between the stakeholders of the North and West authorities
- The scope of the programme and the scarcity of consultation and engagement resources amongst existing staff means that requirements around consultation and engagement are not met. Furthermore, that statutory consultation is not carried out which raises the risk of legal challenge
- The desire to adopt an individual consultation and engagement approach for each unitary authority could result in duplication and increased costs



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- Consultation and engagement activities are viewed as tokenistic by stakeholders which in turn could lead to lack of engagement and dissatisfaction with the Future Northants programme.
- Inadequate staff engagement leading to difficulties with recruitment and retention, resulting in potential deterioration of services
- Inadequate engagement with members leading to lack of understanding or confusion about the work of the programme
- Significant and unexpected change in government or parliamentary process delays progress