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**COMMITTEE:** East Lothian Council

**MEETING DATE:** 17 February 2026

**BY:** Depute Chief Executive – Children and Communities

**REPORT TITLE:** Community Engagement

**REPORT STATUS:** Public

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## **1 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 This report updates East Lothian Council on work underway to strengthen community engagement and seeks permission to commission an independent peer review to provide objective assessment and recommendations for future delivery.

## **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Members are recommended to:

- 2.1 Note work already underway to develop a Participation and Engagement Strategy through the East Lothian Partnership.
- 2.2 Agree to an independent peer review of the Councils' approaches to community engagement with clear recommendations to enhance and strengthen ongoing community engagement.
- 2.3 Agree to delegate authority to the Depute Chief Executive – Children and Communities, supported by the Head of Communities & Partnerships and in consultation with political group leaders, to secure the independent peer review.
- 2.4 Agree that a report will be brought back to Council with an update on progress by August 2026.

### **3 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 East Lothian Council is committed to working in partnership with our communities and engaging with them in developments across the county now and in the future. The Council is operating in a changing and challenging landscape with increasing demands and a significantly challenging fiscal environment. We recognise how we deliver services and engage with our communities will need to evolve and change also. It will be important that the Council captures the widest range of views from our communities moving forward so as many people as possible feel engaged, listened to, and represented. We recognise that there are times where our residents either feel an element of consultation fatigue or that the Council is not listening, including on specific single issues and we want to ensure that where possible, we take our communities with us as we navigate a complex and challenging fiscal environment.
- 3.2 Work is now well underway in developing a Participation and Engagement Strategy through the East Lothian Partnership which has included a significant amount of engagement and gathering the views of our communities.
- 3.3 The Accounts Commission, the body responsible for helping to ensure that public money is spent properly, efficiently and effectively, reported in their Transformation in Councils report that communities and partners need to be involved more meaningfully in development and delivery of transformation plans. In addition, Audit Scotland issued a report on 29 January 2026, noting that councils risk becoming financially unstable due to a lack of funding and increased demands on services. This was despite councils having made huge savings over several years.
- 3.4 Given the significant challenges facing East Lothian Council and the difficult decisions that will lie ahead, we are seeking approval to commission an independent peer review of our approaches to community engagement. A peer review will help us to better understand our strengths in participation and engagement and where we need to improve. The peer review will also seek to consider specific recommendations for the Council, taking cognisance of the challenging landscape the Council is operating in financially, and will continue to be, over the medium to longer term.
- 3.5 In taking forward an independent peer review, we are keen to reflect on our approaches to date and keen to learn more about approaches that work elsewhere, as well as the ways in which our communities want to engage with us. A key consideration in appointing the reviewer will be relevant local authority/public sector experience and a strong background in community engagement.
- 3.6 An independent peer review with clear recommendations will support the Council in determining our next steps and strengthening our approaches to community engagement.

3.7 If approved, work will begin immediately to secure an independent peer review, with a report brought back to Council by August 2026 setting out progress, next steps, and how we share with, and engage accordingly with our communities on recommendations.

#### **4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 None

#### **5 RESOURCE AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 Finance: The independent review will require some up-front costs; however, our aim is to have an objective view on our approaches with clear next steps. This will help increase our capacity and capability to ensure we rely less on external support in the future.

5.2 Human Resources: None

5.3 Other (e.g. Legal/IT): None

5.4 Risk: None

#### **6 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

6.1 **Select the statement that is appropriate to your report by placing an 'X' in the relevant box.**

An Integrated Impact Assessment screening process has been undertaken and the subject of this report does not affect the wellbeing of the community or have a significant impact on: equality and human rights; tackling socio-economic disadvantages and poverty; climate change, the environment and sustainability; the Council's role as a corporate parent; or the storage/collection of personal data.

**or**

The subject of this report has been through the Integrated Impact Assessment process and impacts have been identified as follows:

Subject	Impacts identified (Yes, No or N/A)
Equality and human rights	
Socio-economic disadvantage/poverty	

Subject	Impacts identified (Yes, No or N/A)
Climate change, the environment and sustainability	
Corporate parenting and care-experienced young people	
Storage/collection of personal data	
Other	

*[Enter information on impacts that have been identified]*

The Integrated Impact Assessment relating to this report has been published and can be accessed via the Council's website:

[https://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/info/210602/equality\\_and\\_diversity/12014/integrated\\_impact\\_assessments](https://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/info/210602/equality_and_diversity/12014/integrated_impact_assessments)

## 7 APPENDICES

7.1 None

## 8 BACKGROUND PAPERS

8.1 None

## 9 AUTHOR AND APPROVAL DETAILS

### Report Author(s)

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Date	04/02/2026

### Head of Service Approval

Name	Lesley Brown
Designation	Depute Chief Executive – Children and Communities

<b>Name</b>	Lesley Brown
<b>Confirmation that IIA and other relevant checks (e.g. finance/legal) have been completed</b>	Confirmed
<b>Approval Date</b>	5 February 2026