



North West Business
Leadership Team

Better Policy Making and Outcomes

Principles for Collaboration

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In 2023 we published our [‘Business Case for Place’](#) and articulated the clear benefits of business involvement in policy development through the lens of ‘place’.

“Businesses need places just as places need business, whether this is as somewhere to make and sell products and services; somewhere to source the talent and resources they need to succeed and grow or somewhere to do business with other businesses and develop new ideas and markets”.

Having established the value that having the business perspective can bring, in 2025 we explored with stakeholders from across the public and private sector the appetite and views on the current effectiveness of business engagement. There was universal recognition that business engagement is an important part of good policy development and successful delivery of outcomes. But that while good practice is present, that this can be disparate, with a shared optimism that we can do better.

Guided by our prior work, and working together with experts in their respective fields, we have developed some principles to support more effective partnership working between public and private sectors into the years ahead.



Because Good Relationships Matter

Underpinning these principles is an acknowledgment that good relationships are built on trust, that this takes time and effort, and is reliant on communicating honestly and openly.

Having good, trusted relationships helps to build knowledge and understanding of different sectors – recognising that many in the public sector will not have worked in business and vice versa. We should appreciate that individuals and organisations will not be ‘expert’ in everything (in fact, acknowledging this can be a good basis in aiding collaboration), but we do need to be able to identify and connect to the right expertise, at the right time.

Building good links between the public and private sector outside of formal consultation processes can provide the foundations for good policy development and delivery. With the potential for ongoing forums to be built upon, or adapted, to respond quickly to specific policy development.

For long term challenges, eg Net Zero, these can often benefit through adopting place based, a-political, and output focussed frameworks that can work over the long term and resilient to electoral cycles.

Purpose

We have a shared purpose to deliver better outcomes for people, communities, and the economy. To achieve that purpose, we have identified principles for effective public-private co-creation in policy development and delivery. These principles articulate a shared responsibility to support collaboration that is meaningful, balanced, transparent, and therefore, effective.

Principles for Engagement

Meaningful

To achieve genuine policy co-creation, engagement must move beyond consultation and compliance, avoiding what can be tokenistic or superficial. This means:

- Engagement should start early, when objectives and delivery models are still being shaped and the challenge being addressed should be framed collectively. When engaging with senior leaders from the public or private sector, building in sufficient timescales and notice for participation is vital.
- Where early engagement isn't practicable, partners should be clear that the engagement is being used to 'test' ideas or to communicate activity that will be taking place. Lack of clarity on the purpose of engagement is often a key source of tension or conflict and can result in reluctance to engage in future.
- Encourage partners to be open about where public/private collaboration may be beneficial and responsive to interest or ideas – business may have solutions in unexpected areas.
- Secondments or mentoring are suggested as mutually beneficial routes to build understanding between partners, supporting problem solving and developing expertise.
- Strong, visible leadership from both sectors is essential to drive momentum and credibility and is preferable to engagement that is public sector led. We should aspire to genuine joint working, with collaboration and co-creation at its core, together with clarity over decision making.



Balanced

- Participation should be tailored to the problem and include a range of perspectives, including SME's and/or sector representatives. One size does not fit all – different businesses will have different capacity or expertise, with larger organisations inevitably having more capacity for the detail. Engagement should be tailored to reflect this.
- The benefits of business engagement more broadly are clear, but to support businesses to engage it is vital to be clear on 'WIIFM' – What is in it for me?
- Engagement should focus on efficacy – don't have too many in the room. Ensure that those involved are relevant and have sufficient opportunity to input.
- To ensure that the range of perspectives are heard the emphasis should be on inputs – limiting presentations to encourage insights. Consideration should be given to tailoring the format and mechanism of engagement to suit the preferences of different audiences or working styles.

Transparent

- Scope, roles, responsibilities, and decision-making authority must be clearly defined and shared appropriately across public and private partners. Shared understanding of objectives and clarity of purpose, and how the engagement will inform outcomes, underpins effective collaboration. Everyone involved should have an understanding of 'what's next'.
- In the context of devolution, attention needs to be given to how we develop mature routes for relevant issues and insights to be shared between local, regional and national level.
- Partners should be open about their intention and any constraints or trade-offs.
- When disagreement occurs, be clear when partners agree to disagree.
- Ongoing dialogue with no purpose serves no-one. Provide clear exit pathways so that partners can step away responsibly.
- Build feedback into engagement – the conversation should not end once the business has had their 'say'. This risks the perception that the engagement has been meaningless.

Final Thoughts

The best policy outcomes depend on practical, continuous co-design rather than one-off engagement, working across and between the sub-regional, regional and national spheres.

When we get this right; we improve policies so that they pass the 'real world' test, building organisational learning and capability; we provide better value for money – helping access the right expertise and reducing duplication; we help reduce uncertainty, support innovation and unlock investment, and provide for stronger, place-based outcomes.

In sharing these principles, NWBLT commits to exploring how we can best support this way of working, and together with our partners create the right conditions for public, private engagement driving better policy and better outcomes.





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