

Equality Considerations

Title	Blue Heart (Flood & Coastal Resilience Innovation Programme - engagement)
Team/Department	Flood Risk Management
Directorate	Communities, Economy and Transport
Provide a comprehensive description of your proposal	The goal of Blue Heart is to try out innovative ways to predict and mitigate the impact of flooding in Eastbourne and southern Wealden (running until March 2027). Alongside technical elements of the project – using smart technology to monitor water in real time and setting up a flood warnings system – is an engagement and comms workstream with the following vision: At the end of the Blue Heart project, the community of Eastbourne and southern Wealden will: • be more aware of water in their local environment • understand that many people live in a flood risk area • be ready to take steps to become more resilient. Technical elements are now reaching completion, and the engagement team is supporting the roll-out of live monitoring data and flood warning systems to ensure these are easy for non-specialists to use and understand. Engagement is devised and delivered (as far as possible) using Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) which concentrates on supporting local people to build on the strengths and assets of their community rather than focussing on what it lacks (a deficit model). An outline of our approach to engagement and communication, including inclusivity and equity, can be found on our website. Our approach is collaborative – working with community organisations already embedded locally and contributing to pre-existing events. The Community Fund supports local initiatives and community-based organisations to develop and deliver projects which broadly align with Blue Heart’s aims, allowing us to invest in communities and show allyship. Some messaging is catchment-wide, using social media, press and website to raise awareness of the project, flood preparedness and resilience measures. We have identified particular groups which require a more targeted approach eg. businesses, people who have already experienced flooding, people experiencing poverty. In these instances, activities are built around the specific needs of the relevant group.

	At the half-way point for engagement activity, the team recently reviewed the original Engagement and Comms Strategy, leading to a new Engagement and Communications Plan, 2025-27 informed by learning to date, some refocussing of aims and prioritisation of audiences. Legacy is part of this new plan, ensuring that skills and knowledge are embedded within communities, outlasting Blue Heart; working with other ESCC teams to ensure that our learning and community relationships can be transferred and continued post-project.
Engagement undertaken or planned	Making it Happen and 3VA (Community Development) Eastbourne Chamber of Commerce Local groups with a relationship to water (for leisure, ecological/environmental interests, growing)
Potential issues / barriers / impacts / opportunities	Notes and any mitigating actions
Content accessibility	- Language tailored to target audiences (non-specialist) in terms of length, depth and complexity of language. Terminology explained; plain English used as much as possible; large blocks of text broken up under headings to aid concentration; illustrations used to visualise and humanise content; focus on audio as well as textual content. - Speakers at events briefed about focus and level of detail required – and chosen for clarity and engaging style. - Wherever possible, Blue Heart represented by or with engagement team at events for general public to ensure informal communication style and awareness of access issues.
Digital accessibility	- Digital comms used where this is the most effective approach, supported by a monthly e-newsletter to reach those not on social media, plus print materials including a regular slot in BourneFree magazine. - Digital content created with adaptive technologies in mind, including Alt Text for images. - Widely used and free software/platforms – Zoom, Googlemeet, Padlet, YouTube
Physical accessibility	- Events venues chosen for physical accessibility (usually Towner Eastbourne which also has a T-loop for audience members using hearing aids). If another venue is used, the event has been recorded and made available online shortly after the event for anyone unable to attend in person. - Event venues near to public transport prioritised. - Online or hybrid meetings/events where possible so that travel is not a barrier.

Time poor	- Availability and other commitments of target audience factored into scheduling (school/work/caring responsibilities etc) - Meetings/events kept short and effective to reduce imposition on people's time.
Quiet voices / under-represented groups	- Community Fund supporting 3rd sector organisations that work with under-represented groups - Find relevance – start from what matters to target groups. - Preference for going to where people already are, rather than expecting them to come to you, potentially at an unfamiliar venue. - Collaborations with community organisations to boost delivery rather than diverting their limited resources. - Honorarium of £25 p/h paid to individuals sharing their expertise or lived experience on a voluntary basis. - Offering skills development/training in areas such as social media, websites, press, funding etc to increase resilience and support advocacy for community organisations. - Project exploring how to engage people experiencing poverty with resilience and flood preparedness > findings challenge ethics of pursuing this engagement as individuals concerned have other challenges and vulnerabilities.

Summary of impacts and actions planned, with timeframe

Impact	Action	Timeframe
We plan to implement our Engagement and Communications Plan, 2025-27, informed by our Engagement and Comms Strategy and values set out in our approach to engagement and communication, and in line with the Vision outlined above.		