



# ***“ RETHINKING A COUNCIL-LED APPROACH TO ENGAGING RURAL AND COASTAL COMMUNITIES ”***

## **Good Practice Mentors case study with: North Somerset Council - Transport Decarbonisation**

As part of its commitment to achieving net zero by 2030, North Somerset Council is working to engage communities in conversations around transport and decarbonisation.

The Transport Decarbonisation team wanted to explore more effective ways of reaching people, particularly through informal, community-based engagement.

Following extensive work since 2022 with North Somerset Council and local VCSE networks, GPM were introduced to the Transport Decarbonisation team to support their approach to community engagement.



## Embedding new engagement approaches

The Lead for Transport Behaviour Change requested a series of webinars focused on preparing the transport team to engage communities more informally, including through outreach and community-based activity.

The aim of the support was not just **how** you deliver this work, but also **why** it makes a difference to engagement work with communities and supports residents to engage with policies and strategies that can feel irrelevant or inaccessible.

GPM support was offered to multiple teams across North Somerset Council, offering an opportunity for colleagues to collaborate, share good practice, and develop a network of support from peers.

GPM webinars focused on:

- Reaching people in everyday settings and locations
- Using more accessible and informal engagement approaches
- Moving beyond traditional engagement methods such as surveys and formal consultations
- Understanding the theory and principles that underpin a different way of working with communities



## Building confidence across the organisation

The sessions brought together **33 officers** across multiple directorates, and local councillors, creating a rare opportunity for cross-council learning.

Despite the scale and diversity of the group, engagement remained high:

***“These sessions are the most engaged that I have seen a group of NSC officers... this is a big achievement as the cross-directorate attendance meant that many attendees could have been daunted by the number of unfamiliar faces.”***

The accessible and supportive facilitation helped create an environment where staff from different teams felt comfortable reflecting on their own approaches, sharing challenges and learning from one another.

***“The team did very well to create an approach that covered the learning needed for our transport decarbonisation project, while keeping the content broad enough for officers from across the council to join.”***



## A shift in mindset and approach

The support helped build confidence in alternative ways of engaging communities.

The team lead explains:

***“I feel much more confident in my knowledge of the different approaches to informal community engagement, and the value this can bring.”***

This included encouraging staff to think more creatively and flexibly about how they engage communities:

***“I am more likely to consider street outreach as a way to complement or replace more structured engagement like surveys and workshops.”***

This shift is helping teams think more flexibly about how they design engagement, particularly when working on complex issues such as climate change.



## Creating ongoing change

Beyond individual learning, the sessions helped spark wider organisational change.

This included encouraging cross-council conversations about informal engagement, sharing learning and resources across teams, and building connections between staff to support ongoing application of GPM approaches.

***“The sessions have sparked conversations among officers and helped build connections between engagement-minded people across the council.”***

This is helping to create a more collaborative and consistent approach to engagement across the organisation.

## Looking ahead

The learning is already influencing future approaches. The lead highlights how the team will continue to apply GPM's methods:

***“Going forward I will consider where approaches like SOSAR (Street Outreach as Social Action Research) can replace or complement more formal types of engagement.”***

This includes embedding informal, community-led approaches into both project delivery and wider organisational practice.

## Conclusion

Through flexible and responsive support, GPM helped North Somerset Council to:

- Build confidence in informal engagement approaches
- Adapt to changing project constraints
- Reach a wider internal audience across the council
- Spark ongoing organisational learning and collaboration

The support has had a lasting impact, helping to reshape how the council thinks about engaging communities on complex issues like climate change.



If you would like to discuss how GPM could support you to reach, engage and connect with your community then please drop us an email:

✉ [GPM@syha.co.uk](mailto:GPM@syha.co.uk)

For more information and resources please visit our website:

🌐 [GPM Website](#)

Please see our Eventbrite page for our upcoming workshops:

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