



Akureyri Town Policy on Resident Consultation in the Years 2022-2026.

A View of the Future

Resident consultation is a natural and important feature in the work procedure of the town of Akureyri, in its policy making and development of its services. As a town, Akureyri systematically and repeatedly seeks the active participation and views of its residents. Various and versatile ways and means are applied in order to reach the different groups of society, specifically those, who seldom seize the initiative through active participation of their own. There is a persistent effort constantly underway to refine work procedures, explain tasks and learn from experience.

The administration is transparent and emphasis is placed on effective interaction between residents and the town of Akureyri. Confidence in the local administration has a high rating and there is general approval of the services rendered by the town. Residents and employees find that the time spent on preparation, implementation and their participation in joint consultation is rewarding.

Purpose and Background

The aim of the joint consultation policy consists of at least three phases.

Concerning residents, the policy aim is to increase their possibilities to exert influence, improve relations with society and the municipality. Provide the voices of different social groups with added weight

Concerning elected officials, the aim is to improve the work environment and decision making by means of enlightened discussion, increased support, knowledge and improved social contacts with residents.

Concerning the administrative system, the purpose is to affirm the position of joint consultation among residents, increase the confidence of residents in the administrative system, reduce the possibility of mistakes, improve services and render them more effective.

Together with the introduction of a new ideology, emphasis is placed on improvement of the joint consultation processes that are already in effect in the municipality of Akureyri.

Thus, joint consultation in planning is clearly defined in law, but the town of Akureyri plans to go even further than legal requirements stipulate, especially in terms of clarifications and versatile media methods of communication. There are also opportunities for improvement in terms of both legally required joint consultation and a more conventional approach, already applied by the town of Akureyri, e.g. in the form of district committees, currently active on the islands of Hrísey and Grímsey, youth and senate councils, as well as a consultation council focusing on issues of handicapped people. In addition there are proposals on reviving the multicultural council. It is important to conduct consultations

with these groups, while pending issues of joint consultation are still at the preparatory level and not in their final stages.

On the basis of this policy, an ideology will be introduced by the Icelandic Association of Municipalities, as presented in its *Manual on Joint Consultation and Participation by Residents in Municipalities*, which relies on experience and knowledge gained by the Swedish Federation of Municipalities that has during the past two decades emphasised the development of resident consultation and introduced knowledge and models i.a. from Canada, Britain and Denmark.

Current Status

During the current electoral term, emphasis has increasingly been applied to having Akureyri township adopt innovations especially in its joint planning with residents. The municipality has furthermore, together with the Association/Federation of Icelandic Municipalities, received a subsidy from the Equalisation Fund, in order to launch an experimental project in the sector of resident consultation, and three other municipalities were invited to participate in the project, which enjoyed the support of Swedish experts in this field. Thus, a great deal of knowledge has been accumulated the last few months.

Discussions with current consultation groups; youth councils, senate committees and a consultation group on matters concerning the handicapped have disclosed that they would welcome having earlier access to these matters and receiving more cases than they have in the past. In this context, it is important to define precisely access by these groups and to seek ways to ensure that their knowledge, experience and insight will provide maximum benefit. The Youth Council has its observers in the educational and public health councils as well as in the environmental and public building commission. This has not applied to the senate council nor the joint consultation group on matters relating to handicapped people, but it should be mentioned that the Akureyri Town Council appoints several of these delegates, a practice that differs from that of the Youth Council. When the Town of Akureyri organises a joint consultation project in accordance with this policy, it is important always to consult these groups.

District committees have been active in Akureyri since 2002, but there are different opinions concerning how well they function as forums of consultation with residents and whether they actually increase the influence of residents in individual town districts. This policy suggests that the arrangement of district committees in Akureyri should be reviewed and scrutinised in order to determine whether other arrangements might be more suitable e.g. regular district meetings with residents. Simultaneously, it is to be assumed that new approaches might be more suitable, such as consultation via *Okkar Akureyrarbær* website, which could replace the town district committees. No changes, however, are proposed in the roles of district committees on the islands of Hrísey and Grímsey, since their *primary purpose is advisory and that of introducing proposals on matters concerning the islands,*

but it is important nevertheless to improve even more the connections of the district committees with the administration system and thus ensure that their policies are promoted and correctly channeled.

It has been mentioned that the general response by Akureyri Town to queries presented, should be more effectively targeted and that follow-ups should be better managed to ensure responsible replies to queries. This situation urgently requires remedial action which goes hand in hand with joint policy projects in the sense that they are definitely not considered accomplished until feedback certification thereof has been received by participants.

Priorities and Primary Goals

1. *Targeted resident consultation*: Akureyri Township shall progressively attempt to determine what opinions and ideas the residents have concerning services and operations of the municipality. At each point in time, there is to be in operation at least one joint consultation project under the auspices of Akureyri township.

Plans

- Joint consultation on matters of planning shall be extended beyond the legally prescribed limits, the aim thereby is to secure access by residents at the earliest possible stage in the process.
- The Town Environment and Building Department shall annually insist on receiving ideas concerning maintenance- and/or new projects in town districts and that a specified amount of money in the Project Plan shall be allocated to these projects. (Project Pot)
- Joint consultation with residents shall be applied in all instances involving the adoption of new policies by Akureyri Town.
- All joint consultation projects shall rely on a) *Manual on Joint Resident Consultation in Municipalities and Participation by Residents* and b) *A Check List in Support of the Organisation and Preparation of Resident Consultation*.
Personnel of the Services and Planning Section shall on this basis prepare a plain/clear job description for resident joint consultation at Akureyri town, thereby explaining the procedure and its ways and means.
- All joint consultation projects shall conduct analytical studies of the groups that have substantial vested interests in the joint consultation project and there is to be a special appeal to those groups, which are unlikely to express their views unprompted.
- A special employee in the Services and Planning Section is to have resident consultation as one of his/her primary projects together with targeted information distribution. The employee concerned shall exercise supervision of all joint consultation projects.
- Joint consultation projects are always organised on the basis of teamwork. Without exception there is a project manager involved, responsible for resident consultation as one of his primary service and planning projects, as well as being the representative of the services and planning section concerned together with other employees, as required on each occasion.

2. *Diverse Methods*: A multitude of methods shall be applied in order to elicit the views of residents, both on the basis of the individual and that of representatives. Special emphasis is to be applied to reach the diverse groups of society, especially those, who rarely seize the initiative of active participation.

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- Our Akureyri town shall be the main electronic, municipal consultation forum, where residents can in a simple way submit ideas, suggestions and influence decisions and policy making. The development of this forum is to be continued according to the requirements of Akureyri township.
- When the use of electronic methods is not convenient, other methods shall be used that suit the occasion in each instance, such as screening of groups or direct interviews. An analysis of the interested parties at the beginning of a consultation process shall determine the procedures to be applied.
- New and even unconventional collaborative methods are to be increasingly applied. Personnel in the service and planning departments shall initiate introductory and imaginative meetings with managers at least once a year, where new and exciting consultation methods will be discussed.
- The use of electronic opinion polls will increasingly be used.
- Joint consultation events are to be featured at a variety of locations in order to meet residents such as at the municipal library, social organisations such as Birta and Salka, at the Akureyri swimming pool and in schools.
- Annual town district meetings are to be offered in all school districts in autumn, where residents have the opportunity to promote ideas, proposals and to discuss matters concerning their immediate environment. The meetings are designed to mark the beginning of work on municipal employment programs and the town budget for next year.
 - More joint consultation shall be exercised with permanent joint consultation groups such as the district councils on the islands of Hrísey and Grímsey, the senate council, a youth council and a joint consultation group on matters concerning handicapped people. Furthermore, a multicultural council is to be revitalised. Special emphasis will be placed on organised collaboration with the groups in the earlier stages, in order to apply wider consultation and approach the people represented by these groups.

Collaboration is to be launched between the service and planning departments, the office of education and public health, the youth council, preschools, elementary schools, secondary schools on developing methods to increase democratic participation. Children and youngsters shall regularly participate in actual resident consultation in schools and social centers and thus experience on their own how they can shape their environment (cf. The Akureyri Town Education Policy 2020-2025)

3. *Transparency and Communication*: Akureyri township shall manage the information flow to residents in such a manner that it will be easy to form an opinion on the subjects of consultation.

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- At the beginning of all resident consultation projects, an information plan shall be prepared, which takes into account a target group analysis and one employee shall be responsible for the management and follow - up together with a project manager, who is responsible for resident consultation in the service and organisation department
- Various media are to be used and media channels shall focus on the most important target groups on each occasion. If introductory meetings are held for consultation purposes, an effort should be made to transmit the meetings electronically as well.
- The Website *akureyri.is* is to be designed for all major consultation projects that last for a few months so that residents can at every stage observe their progress.
- Accessible, illustrated and understandable material shall have transmission priority.
- Methods of transmitting information for consultation on planning issues in more accessible and more reciprocal ways, e.g, by using the Akureyri town cartoscope or digital design tools.
- Complicated texts are to be simplified as much as possible in order to ensure that all target groups will easily be able to understand and make up their minds concerning the consultation subject. The primary items will also be translated and published in English and Polish and eventually in more languages.
- Live transmissions will be emphasised, when appropriate e.g. on field trips, walks and in public places, such as libraries or shopping centers.
- A special effort shall be made to familiarise managers, personnel and the residents of Akureyri with the joint consultation forum of *Okkar Akureyrarbær*.
- Town district pages in the social media shall be used in a targeted manner to provide information on resident consultation, especially concerning specific areas in town.

4. *Feedback*: A targeted and clear response to those, who participate in joint consultation, is to be an inseparable part of the process, especially when proposals or comments are not accepted.

Plans

- At the beginning of a joint consultation project, it is to be clear how the feedback to participants is to be arranged.
- Information, concerning the main conclusions of resident consultation, shall without exception be made accessible on the town website.
- Personal feedback shall be provided in instances, where possible, e.g. by a reply in writing via *Okkar Akureyrarbær*, by e-mail or a phone call.
- Ways and means are to be found to convey in writing and in an illustrative manner, the conclusions of consultation, especially in order to explain what ideas or hints could have been approved and why/why not.
- Resident consultation is not considered concluded till participants have been answered.