

BUDGET & PERFORMANCE PANEL

Consultation Strategy Update 13 March 2007 Report of Head of Corporate Strategy

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To advise members of progress to date with regard to the Council's corporate approach to consultation.

This report is public

RECOMMENDATIONS

(1) That members note the partial progress to date in developing the Council's corporate approach to its consultation activity and the actions put in place to improve capacity in this area.

1.0 Introduction

Lancaster City Council is committed to consulting widely with all sections of the community to make sure there is equal access to services and that our services meet the needs of the whole community.

External reviews of the Council have all commented that this was an area of activity for the Council that needed to be strengthened particularly in terms of sharing information across the Council.

2 Report

2.1 The Council has now acquired 'Consultation Finder', a web based consultation management system.

The system enables citizens and stakeholders to easily:

- Find out what consultations have happened, are happening or are about to happen within their area
- Register for, be alerted to and participate in consultation
- Obtain information on eventual outcomes and effects on policy decisions.
- Search for consultation by area, ward, topic etc.

2.2 In developing the Consultation Finder approach 'consultation champions' were identified within each Service area. A full days training seminar took place in March 2006 at which a revised Consultation Strategy and Toolkit was relaunched and participants introduced to the Consultation management system.

2.3 The consultation management system does not act as a substitute for other more traditional forms of consultation. Nor, in itself, will it address issues surrounding the quality

and effectiveness of individual consultations. It acts as a corporate repository of consultation information past, present and future. It should improve access to information (to members, staff and residents).

2.4 It should be recognised that effective consultation makes a key contribution to the efficient working of the Council. The Consultation Strategy should contribute to improving value for money and increased efficiencies. This is recognised in the Council's Efficiency Strategy. The value that active consultation plays in service delivery is recognised. Customer feedback plays an important role in identifying services standards and areas for improvement.

2.5 At the time of writing this report there were 26 consultations posted on Consultation Finder, 10 of which were 'live'. (details are shown in an appendix to this report). However the system is not being actively managed; a number of past consultations need removing from the system and more importantly, a number of consultations need to be 'closed' i.e. the results of the consultation need to be published so that those residents who did respond are made aware of what happened as a result of the consultation.

2.6 Last year the Council recruited (through the Council Tax letters send out) members of the public who wished to volunteer to be consulted as and when opportunities arose – in effect an emerging citizens panel. At the time of writing this report over 300 people were registered on Consultation Finder. There has only been limited use of panels and the exercise has not been repeated this year.

2.7 Responsibility for corporate aspects of consultation has been an add-on to other people's roles within the Corporate Strategy Service. As workloads have increased within the Service and additional duties taken on board, responsibility for taking forward these issues has 'slipped'.

2.8 Effective consultation should be one of the most effective of our information channels. A customer-focused approach to service delivery and Council prioritisation requires effective consultation. Customer satisfaction, our reputation, design of our services, community cohesion and children and young peoples issues are all underpinned by effective communication and consultation. With the exception of our neighbourhood management areas we rely, in the main, on a statutory satisfaction survey that takes place every three years.

2.9 Our approach to effective corporate consultation has been hampered by a lack of capacity and specialised skills. The potential impact of Consultation Finder and our emerging citizen's panel has been diluted. No corporate support is being offered to Services.

2.10 A number of reports have been taken to Star Chamber with regard to these issues and the lack of progress has been reported to the Budget and Performance Panel (BPP) through the Leader's Corporate Performance Monitoring Report (most recently in the red traffic lighted report to BPP 28/11/2006)

2.11 As a result a growth bid for a dedicated Consultation Officer post was considered by members as part of setting the Council's budget for 2007/08 and approval given to the establishment of such a post at the recent Budget Council meeting (28/02/06 Min 114 refers)

3.0 Conclusion

Effective community engagement and participation is vital as the Council seeks to deliver value for money services which meet the needs of our local community and year on year

deliver efficiency savings. Effective and meaningful consultation is a key building block of that engagement and is an area where the Council, through its Improvement Plan, has acknowledged the need to continue to improve. The Council has now allocated resources to make those improvements and Service business plans are now being developed to deliver those improvements.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)

Effective consultation processes will have a positive impact across all of these areas.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The cost of maintaining the Consultation Management System is a web hosting charge of £250 per month i.e. £3,000 per annum. Funding from the Modernisation Budget has been transferred into the Corporate Strategy Service budget to reflect the appropriate management and accounting arrangements. The Revenue Budget has been updated accordingly.

Following Council's decision, budgetary provision has been made for establishing the post of Consultation Officer.

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Section 151 Officer has been consulted and has nothing further to add.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The Head of Legal Services has been consulted and has nothing further to add

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has nothing further to add.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Lancaster City Council– Consultation Strategy and Toolkit.

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APPENDIX

Current Consultations

Food Complaint Survey	Customer survey following every food complaint (approx 60 complaints per year)
Food Safety - Alternative Enforcement Strategy (Food Safety)	Random survey of premises that have been subject to an Alternative Enforcement Approach so that a decision can be made on it's effectiveness & whether to continue with the strategy or make amendments / improvements.
Food Safety - Customer Survey of Food Businesses	Random survey of 20 - 25% of food premises which have been subject to a food hygiene inspection in the previous month
Health & Safety - Customer Survey of Inspected Premises	Random survey of premises following a Health & Safety Inspection
Survey of Users of Cemetery Services	Customer survey to ascertain views of recent users in order to improve level of service where appropriate
Consultation on Lancaster City Councils Disability Equality Scheme	Consultation on Lancaster City Council's Disability Equality Scheme.
Play 0 -18 yrs Consultation	Questionnaire to find out children's, young people's, residents and organisations opinions of play / free time provision within the district.
Annual Monitoring Report 2006	The Council has simply provided an opportunity for those reading the AMR to comment on the report. Web links and information has been sent out via E-mail to all on the LDF consultation database and the document is available to view on the website www.lancaster.gov.uk/amr
Design Supplementary Planning Document - Stage 1 - Issues and Options	The Issues and Options consultation is the first stage in preparing a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) as part of the Lancaster District Local Development Framework
Affordable Housing SPD - Stage 1- Issues and Options	The Issues and Options consultation is the first stage in preparing a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) as part of the Lancaster District Local Development Framework
Food Complaint Survey	Customer survey following every food complaint (approx 60 complaints per year)
Selective Licensing of the Private Rented Sector	Consultation will be on the proposed scope and content of the selective licensing scheme in the private rented sector in Morecambe