

## **Cabinet – 18 April 2007**

### **Consultation and Engagement Strategy**

**Portfolio:** Transformation & Performance Management

**Service:** Corporate Services

**Wards:** All wards

**Key decisions:** No

**Forward plan:** No

#### **Summary of report**

This report sets out for approval a draft Consultation and Engagement Strategy for the council, set in the context of the Walsall Borough Strategic Partnership's Community Engagement Strategy and reflecting key issues within the white paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities*. The strategy will replace the Consultation Strategy approved by Cabinet in January 2004.

#### **Recommendations**

- (1) That the Consultation & Engagement Strategy attached to this report be approved

#### **Context**

Consultation and engagement –the extent and the nature of these activities, their coordination within the council and with partners, and our use of the results of these activities to drive service improvement and to meet customer expectations - are key issues for the council as it seeks to meet requirements in the white paper *Strong and prosperous communities*.

The council's current consultation strategy was developed in 2003/04 and approved by Cabinet in January 2004. The council-wide officer level Corporate Consultation Group (CCG) has now revised the current strategy doing so in the context of the WBSP's new community engagement strategy, and the publication by government of the white paper.

The community engagement strategy, to which the council is committed, has led to the establishment of the Partnership Engagement Forum which will help coordinate consultation activity between partners and across the WBSP, and will also encourage greater sharing of the results of consultation. This work is now underway, and is focussing on the use of e-solutions, with the development of a partnership-wide database for the sharing of information, the sharing of planned consultation activity, and

the creation for local residents and service users of an easy to use web gateway to current consultation activity, to deliver a key council pledge for 2007/08.

The white paper stresses the importance of the coordination of activity, between partners, and also highlights the importance of services reflecting customer needs and expectations, and of the positive use of customer feedback. Increasingly, councils must demonstrate not just that they consult and engage, but that consultation and engagement has a positive impact on service delivery, with the outcomes of consultation activity used to drive service improvement.

The draft strategy (**appendix 1**) seeks to

- provide overall context to the activity
- define what we mean by consultation and engagement
- explain why consultation and engagement is important
- explain why the coordination of this activity is vital
- include a common set of principles, shared with our partners in the community engagement strategy and the Local Compact
- provide a framework to ensure that the strategy is implemented.

Consultation and engagement activity by the council, at a corporate and service level, encompasses a very wide range of activities, some of which can be pre-planned, whilst for others the need to consult may emerge during the course of the year. It is vital that activity is identified, and coordinated across the whole council, though as now the majority of consultation exercises will take place locally, at a service level, rather than corporately, provided by the corporate centre. The corporate centre will continue to provide core activities, including support for and coordination of Local Neighbourhood Partnerships, the Citizens' Panel, e-consultation through the web site, budget consultation activity, and Best Value surveys.

However, so that the council can

- avoid duplication, and make best use of our resources
- provide our partners in the Partnership Engagement Forum with a clear picture of consultation activity
- maintain up to date information on our website about current and forthcoming consultation opportunities

it is vital that all such activity is coordinated. The Corporate Consultation Group will provide coordination, with details of forthcoming consultation fed through by directorate representatives, for inclusion in the web-based diary and database. The cross-functional group will also provide a 'quality check' and a source of expertise and know-how available to all council services.

In addition, for the council to demonstrate that consultation and engagement activity makes a real difference, in terms of service improvement and customer satisfaction, the Corporate Consultation Group will also ensure that the results of consultation are analysed, shared with others as appropriate, and utilised to the full, with changes in service provision made as a result of consultation identified, as evidence of a learning organisation. Forthcoming consultation activity and the outcomes of consultation will be fed through to corporate and directorate performance boards on a regular basis.

## **Resource and legal considerations**

The council corporately and at a service level already directs significant resources to consultation and engagement activity. This report does not propose any additional expenditure, but offers a means to achieve more effective use of existing resources through greater levels of coordination of these activities, and improved access to the results of previous consultation activity, within the council and undertaken by our partners. The strategy will bring together resources from all services and directorates and, through the Partnership Engagement Forum established by the WBSP, with our partners, to ensure the sharing of good practice, and the pooling of expertise and experience.

## **Citizen impact**

The strategy will ensure that consultation and engagement activity is coordinated, and that any risk of consultation overload or duplication is avoided. Consultation will ensure that council services reflect customer expectations, and build on improving customer satisfaction levels. Corporately, the results of consultation activity through the year will be fed through to the annual People & Place Perspective report on the borough and its needs, and will thereby inform policy development and budget planning, and will help maximise its impact on matters of priority to local people.

## **Community safety**

There are no specific community safety implications arising from this report, but clearly the development of the strategy, the commitment to share the results of consultation activity, and the strengthening of the council's commitment to work with our partners in consultation activity will ensure that community safety related outcomes are identified and used to best effect.

## **Environmental impact**

Likewise there are no specific environmental implications arising from this report but, as above, the approach advocated in the report and strategy will ensure that environmental outcomes are identified from specific and general consultation activity, undertaken by council services and by partners, ensuring that the council's environmental policies and services reflect local needs, views and concerns.

The strategy reflects and supports the council's Statement of Community Involvement.

## **Performance and risk management issues**

The development and launch of the new strategy, and arrangements to support it, provide a means for the council to move further forward in this important area. Implementation of the strategy will enable the council to demonstrate a wide range of activity, across our services to a consistent standard, coordinated within the council and with partners, and will ensure that improvement through consultation and engagement activity is captured as evidence of a learning organisation. It will also help to reinforce a 'one council' approach to performance management activities. The strategy is a key element of the Corporate Integrated Planning & Performance Framework, and is aligned with other documents within the CIPPF.

Public and partner expectation, and also the white paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities*, mean that the council must be able to demonstrate coordinated consultation activity, both within the council and with our partners, and the effective use of the results of consultation towards service improvement. The revised strategy and the framework have been developed for this purpose. Failure to consult effectively would impact on our path to excellence aspirations and impact on the production of essential feedback data required to develop service plans and service transformation activities. Failure to effectively implement the strategy would have a negative impact on local and national perceptions of the council.

## **Equality implications**

Implementation of the new strategy will underpin the council's commitment to ensure that our services and functions reflect the needs of all residents. The strategy and the principles within it, based partly on the existing Local Compact, stress the need for consultation and engagement activity to be broadly based, and designed so as to capture the views of all our residents, including children and young people, by employing a variety of innovative techniques and approaches, sensitive to the different needs and lifestyles of citizens. The council is already committed to undertake consultation towards its programme of equality impact assessments, and the new strategy will strengthen that commitment by focussing our resources and building on existing expertise in relation to consultation and engagement.

## **Consultation**

The new strategy has been developed within the council by officers of the cross-functional Corporate Consultation Group, including representatives of all directorates, and reflecting their needs and priorities. The new strategy has been developed mindful of the white paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities*, which places emphasis on consultation and citizen involvement in service planning, and on coordinated consultation activity across councils, and with their partners. The new strategy also reflects recent work at a partnership level to develop a revised community engagement strategy, and will ensure that the council is able to deliver the commitments made in signing up to that document.

## **Vision 2008**

The council's vision stresses the need for the council and its services to listen to the views of local people.

## **Background papers**


All published.

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**Signed:**

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**Portfolio Holder: Councillor M Longhi**  
**2 April 2007**

**Signed:**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carole Evans', written on a light-colored background.

**Portfolio Holder: Carole Evans**  
**2 April 2007**



Walsall Council

# Consultation and Engagement Strategy 2007 – 2010

## CONTENTS

	<b>SECTION</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
1	Introduction	2
2	Corporate integrated planning and performance framework (CIPPF)	2
3	What do we mean by consultation and engagement?	4
4	Why is consultation and engagement important?	6
5	A strategic approach to consultation and engagement	7
6	A common set of principles	7
7	Making a difference	9
8	Making it happen	9
9	Evaluation and review	11
10	Risk management	11
11	Further information	12
	<b>APPENDIX</b>	
	Statement of Community Involvement	13

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this strategy is to provide a framework for the council to obtain the views of all citizens, partners, and other users of our services, and to use the information obtained to inform decision making by the council.

This is Walsall Council's third corporate consultation strategy, and builds on the previous strategies published by the council in 2000 and 2004.

This document sets out what we mean by consultation, and by community engagement, and explains why these are important to the council and at the heart of all that we do. It:

- gives key examples of how we currently consult and engage with local communities,
- commits the council to a set of standards, or ground rules, to govern how we consult,
- and finally sets out some key actions for the year ahead, as we seek to maximise the impact, and the benefit to residents and stakeholders, from our consultation and engagement activity during the year.

This strategy will build on the existing good practice that already exists within the council. It will ensure that the council contributes fully to consultation and engagement activity within the Walsall Borough Strategic Partnership (WBSP), sharing our arrangements with our partners as well as learning from, and tapping into consultation activity undertaken by those partners.

Our strategy is written in the context provided by the revised Community Engagement Strategy, launched by WBSP in October 2006, and by the Local Compact, launched in September 2005. The council has signed up to both the Compact and the Community Engagement Strategy; this document shows how the council will be backing that commitment with a set of measurable actions.

## **2. CORPORATE INTEGRATED PLANNING & PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK (CIPPF)**

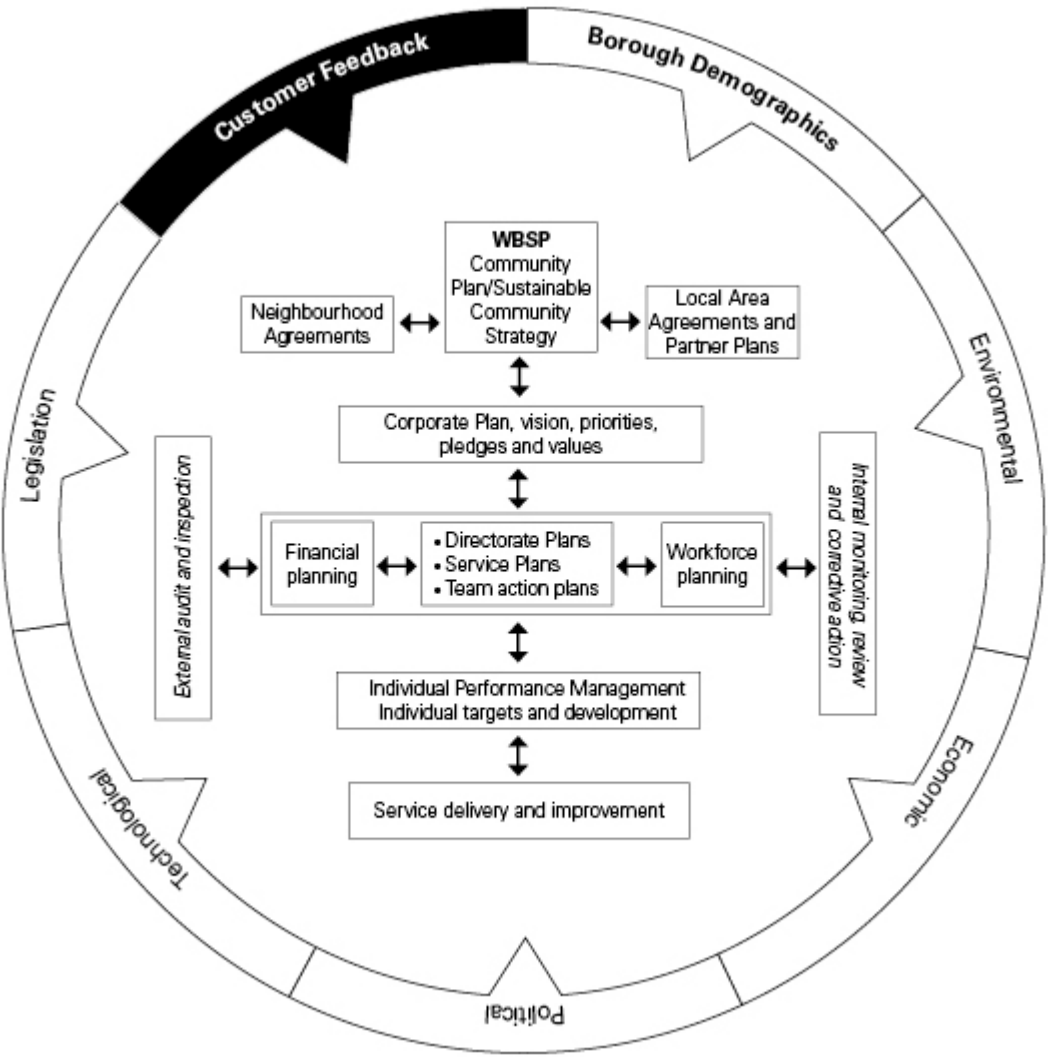
The CIPPF sets out how the various planning processes interlink and jointly demonstrate how services and resources are managed. It is the framework within which the council operates and is underpinned by functional frameworks that provide guidance and protocols. The CIPPF exists to embed performance management and continuous improvement into our normal business activities. It connects the following:

- Community Plan (Sustainable Community Strategy)
- Corporate Plan, vision, pledges and values
- Service planning (of all levels) of the council and its partners
- Financial planning (of all levels)
- Local Neighbourhood Plans
- Individual Performance Management (IPM)

All of which take place in an environment of stakeholder influence, audit and inspection, internal control and monitoring in order to develop continuously improving services. The diagram below shows the major components of the CIPPF.

The present strategy embeds our approach to consultation and engagement within the CIPPF; see **figure 1**. Effective consultation and engagement activity by the council, and by the WBS, ensures that services are designed, delivered and performance managed based firmly on the issues and concerns of our communities, our stakeholders, and our citizens.

**Figure 1. Corporate Integrated Planning and Performance Framework (CIPPF)**



**3. WHAT DO WE MEAN BY CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT?**

Consultation has been defined as “the dynamic process of dialogue between individuals or groups, based upon a genuine exchange of views, and normally with the objective of influencing decisions, policies or programmes of action”.<sup>1</sup> It has long been recognised that consultation and engagement can mean different things to different people. The terms cover a wide range of activities, all of which seek to enable people – in our case,

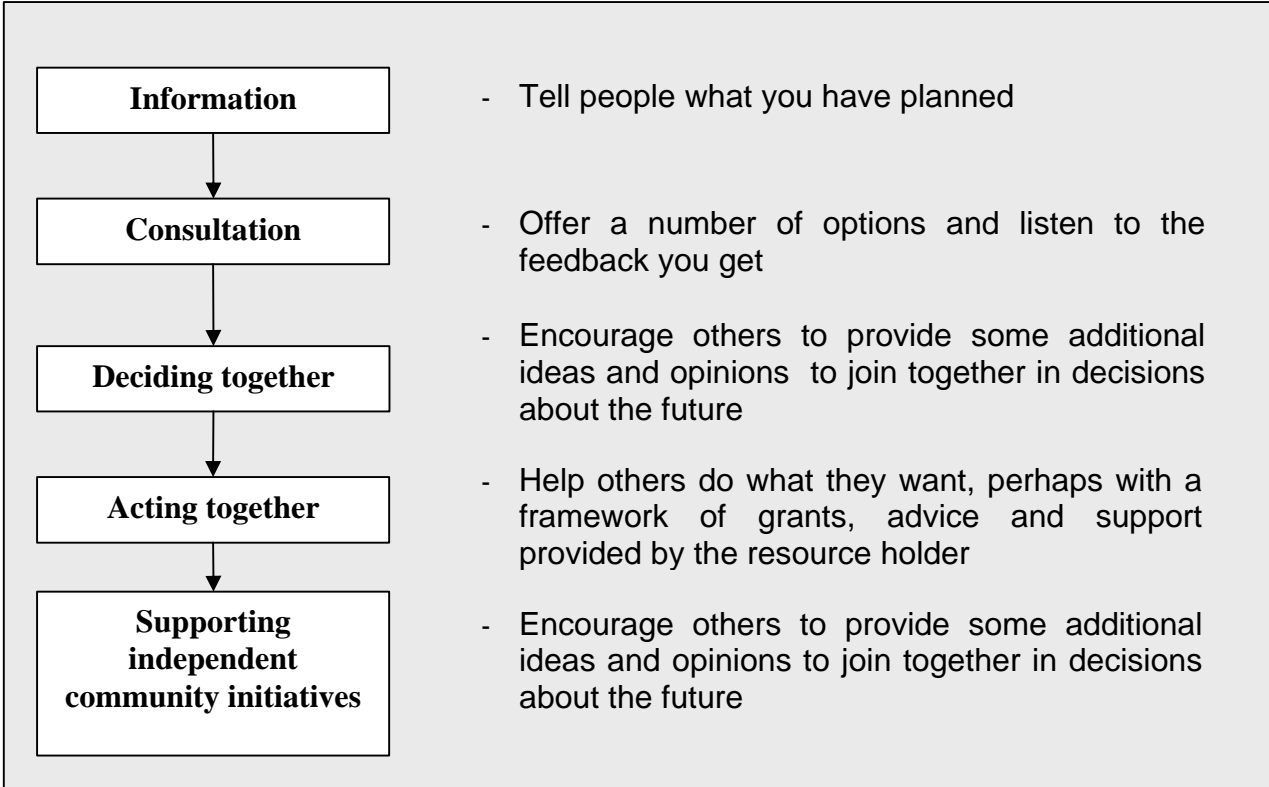
<sup>1</sup> [www.consultations.gov.uk](http://www.consultations.gov.uk)



local residents, people who use our services, businesses and organisations with an interest in the borough and its future – to influence decisions that may affect their lives, and the services and facilities they use and rely upon.

A well established model of participation<sup>2</sup> sets out 5 levels of participation, from providing information right through to community ownership of a service;

**Figure 2.**



The best practice toolkit prepared by the WBSPP provides examples of other similar 'participation ladders'.

Like most councils, Walsall provides a wide variety of services, and undertakes a range of different functions. Some of our services are performed to a tightly drawn legal framework - for instance, development control – whilst other services reflect local arrangements and priorities.

Whilst fully committed to consultation and engagement, we will consult and engage at different levels, according to the context and circumstances, the nature of the service or function, the level of public interest in a topic, availability of related feedback information and whether there is the statutory requirement to consult or not.

Likewise, each consultation activity will have a different audience, depending on its purpose and its topic. Consultees might include:

- the community as a whole

<sup>2</sup> David Wilcox, Guide to effective participation

- residents living in a particular part of the borough, large or small (community of place)
- people sharing a particular characteristic, such as young people, older people, faith groups, disabled people, minority ethnic residents, or carers (communities of interest)
- clients and users of a specific service
- local businesses
- voluntary and community organisations
- our partners - the police, NHS, housing providers, etc.
- individual residents
- local neighbourhood partnerships

This strategy seeks to ensure that whenever local residents and partners may wish to participate in shaping our borough, our local communities and services, there is an opportunity for meaningful participation to take place. We are committed to achieve the standard set out in the WBSB's community engagement strategy, namely 'partnership engagement', negotiation between citizens and the council so as to demonstrate shared decision making responsibilities.

Within the council, consultation and engagement currently happens in many ways. At the centre of our approach are the nine Local Neighbourhood Partnerships (LNPs), each covering either two or three of our electoral wards. These bring together ward councillors, other public service providers, and local people and groups, and provide a forum for discussing, and shaping local service provision. Each LNP is supported by a framework of community based groups reflecting local issues and priorities.

Other ways that we use to obtain feedback include:

- surveys of the council's 1,250 member Citizens' Panel
- Best Value satisfaction surveys and other statutory surveys
- service based surveys, using service measurement techniques
- community involvement in planning processes including the Local Development Framework (see Appendix)
- liaison with the community empowerment network, disability forum and other umbrella organisations
- one off focus groups or workshops
- service user panels
- equality impact assessments
- friends of local parks groups
- via the council website
- school councils
- consultation with children and young people including Youth Opinions Unite (YOU)
- arts based activities
- Tell Us – the council's comments, complaints and customer feedback procedure
- Other Informal customer feedback processes dealing with comments, complaints and customer feedback outside the Tell Us process
- Statutory complaints and customer feedback processes for social care services

A best practice toolkit prepared by the WBSB gives details of a range of innovative activity carried out by council services and by partners.

## **4. WHY IS CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT IMPORTANT?**

By consulting effectively with residents and others with a stake in the work of the council and the future of our borough, the council can;

- obtain valuable feedback about our services, to enable us to tailor those services to meet the needs of all our users and citizens
- identify the changing needs and priorities of local communities, ensuring that we can move fast to change our services accordingly, and develop services to meet local needs
- understand the needs of local people, and appreciate their aspirations, as we work with our partners on key plans and strategies for the borough and its future
- plan our services better, and ensure that we use our resources appropriately
- tap into local knowledge and experience and pick up new ideas
- build confidence and trust through dialogue with local citizens, promoting the council as a listening and responsive organisation
- build a public understanding of the constraints and other issues facing the council and the borough
- identify more sustainable solutions to local issues and concerns
- help strengthen local democratic processes
- contribute towards the delivery of vision priorities and pledges

Consultation and engagement supports the council's vision for the borough, and our strategic priorities, as set out in our corporate plan.

## **5. A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT**

To maximise the positive impact of consultation and engagement activity, it is important that the council coordinates this activity. This strategy provides a clear framework for the coordination across all our services and functions of all consultation and community engagement activities, whether carried out corporately or by a service area, in-house or by others on our behalf. Coordination is important because:

- we will avoid duplication and waste of resources
- we will be able to plan our consultations to avoid overloading residents and consultees
- we can combine consultations, where possible, to make best use of our resources
- we can promote best practice in line with corporate standards and principles
- we can share the results of consultation across all services, and with our partners, on a reciprocal basis
- we are a single organisation, and local people see us as such

## **6. A COMMON SET OF PRINCIPLES**

Through this strategy, the council reaffirms its commitment – corporately and at a service level – to:

- seek to reach those communities and individuals not yet engaged

- share information and expertise, pool partner resources, to maximise engagement and reduce overload and duplication for communities and individuals
- engage in innovative and creative ways using 21<sup>st</sup> century media where appropriate
- recognise and value existing channels and work to make these more responsive and effective
- engage using a range of flexible methods to avoid relying on one source or route
- have clear objectives for engagement and to communicate clearly and openly about decisions and actions and the reasons for them.

We are committed to:

- using the most appropriate level of involvement and participation for each activity
- ensuring that community engagement activity, wherever possible, meets WBSP's agreed quality standard
- building on the existing skills of local people and communities so they are empowered to engage in decision making
- developing the voluntary and community sector to play a key role in influencing and delivering services
- developing a culture where other peoples' views are valued and listened to and are part of the decision making process and help build cohesion in the borough of Walsall.

Through this strategy, we also reaffirm our commitment to follow the best practice principles of consultation and engagement set out in our Local Compact with the community and voluntary sector, where it says that:

'Consultation is about finding the best course of action by giving the people and organisations the chance to have a say on real choices. It provides us all with the opportunity to be part of decision making.'

Through the Local Compact we have affirmed that:

- We believe that consultation is essential if decisions are to be realistic, workable and reflect local people's needs and wishes. Consultation may be about big issues, affecting the whole Borough, or about a single issue, specific to a place, time or situation. We believe that consultation is a key form of dialogue between partners. Where appropriate, partners will work together on consultations, undertake consultation together and share the results of consultation exercises.

Through the Local Compact we have pledged that, when we consult, we will:

- set out the basis of consultation (how consultation is to happen, who is being consulted, how this will influence the decision and what use will be made of the information collected)
- ensure WBSP and relevant partners are advised of our intention to consult
- present the clearest and fullest picture possible
- build on existing networks, partnerships and forums
- ensure that consultation processes are inclusive
- take account of the specific needs, interests and contributions of those whose views may not otherwise be heard

- be open about any implications there may be for the full range of partners and people and make sure that we include them in the process
- allow reasonable timescales and recognise the constraints that each sector has to work within, whilst recognising the national compact guidelines to allow 12 weeks for most consultations; where this is not possible clear reasons should be given
- respect confidentiality
- give an honest picture of responses received
- expect new solutions to emerge
- listen and make changes
- seek to maintain open channels of communication with those we have consulted
- will feedback results of consultations to those who took part

## **7. MAKING A DIFFERENCE**

To be effective, and to maintain the trust, confidence and commitment of those we consult, it is vital that the results of consultation are used to effect change. Hence it is vital that we let consultees and the community at large know what changes we have made, and why. The council will follow ACT principles: **A**sk, **C**hange and **T**ell. Also after we have completed a consultation exercise, we will evaluate that exercise, learning from our successes and any failures that occur for the future. We will take the opportunity to ask consultees for their views on our approach to consultation.

## **8. MAKING IT HAPPEN**

Consultation and engagement are core tasks for the council, at an executive and strategic level, at a service and team level, and for all who work for the council. To maximise the benefits that an effective consultation and engagement strategy can bring to the council, and to the community, this strategy must be reflected in all that we do, corporately, in our directorates and services, and in our work with partners.

Elected councillors have a key role, as representatives of their own wards within the council and as representatives of the council within the local community. Councillors, whether as part of the executive (cabinet), or of the scrutiny and performance panel process, of the regulatory functions such as development control, audit committee or licensing, or on LNPs, provide an insight to the views of the borough and its people. Whether taking key decisions for the council, scrutinising those decisions, or determining a planning application, councillors rely on the provision of accurate information, including the views of local people. The council needs to demonstrate that its decisions reflect the needs of the borough and meet local expectations and concerns. Councillors are critical to the strategy. They contribute to our knowledge of citizens and users and their views; they make use of the outcomes of consultation; and they can judge the effectiveness of our consultation techniques and programmes.

At the officer level, overall responsibility for ensuring the strategy is delivered rests with Strategic Leadership Team. SLT will monitor the implementation of this strategy, receiving progress reports from a Corporate Consultation Group (CCG), whose activity will be coordinated and managed by Corporate\_Performance Management (CPM) service. Those reports will be incorporated into regular SLT performance reports. The core members of the CCG will comprise a representative from each directorate, with

input from Equality and Diversity, Transformation (E-Government), and Communications. Directorate representatives will be responsible for ensuring that proposed directorate consultation and engagement activity is fed into a rolling corporate consultation plan. Other services with a significant focus on consultation and engagement activity, will also attend. The CCG will seek to identify any duplication, and to identify areas where one service could work with another – or with partners – in their proposals, to achieve best use of resources.

Directorate representatives, working with CPM, will be expected to report to Directorate Performance Boards, on a quarterly basis, on consultation and engagement activity, including relevant customer and citizen intelligence from the outcomes of consultation and from complaints, and with details of forthcoming consultation activity. In this way, consultation will inform directorate and service planning.

Service managers should ensure that consultation activities for the year ahead are set out in their service plans, and built into key projects, priorities and tasks for the year. Likewise, the results of relevant consultation activity - specific to the service or council wide – should be reflected in service priorities. All proposed consultation activity within their service area should be brought to the attention of their directorate representative, at a draft stage, and that a simple pro forma is prepared to set out:

- the purpose and focus of consultation
- the audience for the consultation
- the method(s) proposed to be utilised
- whether other services in practice are involved
- proposed timescales/key milestones
- arrangements for analysis/ communication

The CCG's role will be to assist services in this respect, to identify best practice, and to offer 'challenge'.

Once consultation has taken place, the service manager should ensure that the results are analysed and the process is evaluated, and then fed into the next service planning process, with feedback provided to participants.

As part of its coordination and management role, CPM should, in each case, ensure that the results are made available to other services via the intranet or public folder system, and that both details of forthcoming consultations and the results of exercises are fed through to WBSP, via its Shared Partnership\_Information Resource (SPIR). Working through the CCG, CPM will ensure that the strategy itself, best practice, and details of consultation activity within the council are widely known throughout the organisation, and that all staff are aware of the common principles and standards.

Working through the CCG, CPM will coordinate consultation and customer feedback input to the annual People and Place Perspective report, which in turn informs the council's annual policy led budget preparation procedures and service planning process.

## **9. EVALUATION AND REVIEW**

This strategy, and its implementation, shall be reviewed and revised annually. The following indicators will help us evaluate the overall success of the strategy during its first year:

- By the end of 2007/08 the council will have improved the way we listen to the views and opinions of local people, so that 57 - 62% (Beacon Index 1.9.1) of residents say that we listen to the concerns of local residents a great deal / to some extent.
- By the end of 2007/08 the council will have improved the extent to which residents feel we act on their views and opinions, so that 52% of residents say we act on the concerns of local residents a great deal / to some extent.
- By the end of 2007/08 the council will have improved opportunities for residents to influence decisions, so that 49% of residents will say they feel they can influence decisions in their local area.
- By the end 2007/08 the council will have improved the way keep residents informed, so that 40% residents say that we keep them very well informed / fairly well informed about the services and benefits we provide.
- By the end of 2007/08 all consultation exercises that we undertake with the public are included in a council consultation database.

## **10. RISK MANAGEMENT**

The following risks have been identified for inclusion in the risk register:

- that the council fails to coordinate consultation activity effectively
- that citizens and service users are excluded from consultation activity because of poor planning or inadequate publicity and awareness
- that opportunities for obtaining customer feedback are not used to the full, and learning opportunities for service improvement are therefore missed
- that resources are used ineffectively by duplicated consultation, by poor planning, or inadequate partner liaison

This strategy seeks to address those risks. Therefore the implementation of the strategy is of critical importance. To achieve this, a further risk must also be managed:

- that the implementation of this strategy is given insufficient priority, corporately or at directorate/service level, and fails to engage with corporate and directorate performance structures.

## 11. FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information please contact:

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## APPENDIX

### Statement of Community Involvement

All planning authorities are required to prepare a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), setting out the standards that they will follow when engaging with local communities and other stakeholders in the planning process.

The Council's current SCI was adopted in June 2006 and is available on the council's website<sup>3</sup>. It explains how local communities, the WBSP and other bodies will be involved in the preparation of different types of plan by the council and what will be expected from developers submitting major planning applications. The key principles underpinning the approach to consultations are as follows:

- Targeting communities – actively encouraging participation by communities who tend not to be involved in the planning process;
- Open access to information for all – producing information in plain language, avoiding the use of jargon and providing information in alternative languages and formats where required;
- Advertise widely the opportunities for involvement – ensuring that communities affected by plans have sufficient opportunities to have their say;
- A toolkit of a range of methods by which people can put forward ideas and comment – using consultation and engagement techniques appropriate to the situation, e.g. internet, local newspapers/ newsletters, local radio, mail out, information in libraries, consultation bus, public meetings, focus groups and workshops
- A transparent process for considering any comments received – ensuring that communities understand how to make comments and how they will be received and taken on board
- Provision of feedback to those involved on the outcomes of consultation – all comments to be acknowledged where contact details are provided, published in summary form, and distributed to those who have commented
- Working in partnership – using existing networks and organisations linked to WBSP, LNPs, Community Empowerment Network and Registered Social Landlords, attending and presenting information at meetings where appropriate, and promoting role of West Midlands Planning Aid in providing independent planning advice to communities who are unable to afford professional advice.