

Meeting:	Cabinet
Date:	18 th September 2008
Subject:	Consultation Strategy
Key Decision:	No
Responsible Officer:	Tom Whiting, Assistant Chief Executive
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Osborn, Performance, Communications and Corporate services
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	Consultation Strategy Consultation Charter

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report describes a strategy for extending the range of consultation that the Council employs, co-ordinating its customer and resident research and using the results to improve service outcomes and customer satisfaction.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is requested to adopt the Consultation Strategy attached to this report

Reason: (For recommendation)

To enable the Council to get the best value for its investment in consultation.

Section 2 – Report

Introductory paragraph

The consultation strategy attached to this paper presents a change management plan to achieve appropriate, co-ordinated consultation, in a way that supports and enhances the Council's communications activities and the development of services that address the needs of harrow residents.

Options considered

The Council undertakes a range of consultation activities ranging from large scale, formal, statutory consultations about issues such as changes to the way education is organised or the content of the Local Development Framework through to small scale, local consultations about, for example, the layout of a local playground. Although the volume of consultation is impressive, it is not yet comprehensive nor all of an acceptable quality. In addition, the Council does not always publish the results of consultation; explain what use will be made of the outcomes or co-ordinate consultation across services. There is also variation in the process and the communication of matters surrounding consultation.

The Consultation Strategy is designed to address these issues by ensuring that:

- the need to undertake consultation is fully appreciated across the Council;
- the most appropriate method of consultation is chosen in each instance;
- consultation is co-ordinated to avoid overloading the community;
- feedback is provided to consultees and the community;
- the results of consultation are available to all services within the Council and used to inform decision-making; and
- the impact of consultation on the final decision is communicated to consultees and the community.

Effective consultation will help to improve service design and delivery by taking customers' views into account and lead to improved customer satisfaction scores

The Strategy places consultation within the spectrum of interactions with the community that runs from providing information at one end to empowering at the other. In this sense consultation is a communication mechanism and expanding consultation activity will also increase the proportion of the public who feel that the Council keeps them informed.

The Strategy describes the steps necessary to ensure that consultation is regularly included in reviews of every service that the Council offers is of a high quality to add value to the provision of services and the Council's community leadership role.

Implications of the recommendation

Legal comments

Once the Council decides to consult it must do so lawfully. Should a consultation be inadequate then the Council may be at risk of judicial review proceedings and the decision may be quashed. The principles established by case-law that are required to be taken into account in order to demonstrate a lawful consultation are:

- a) Consultation must take place at a formative phase of the proposal;
- b) Sufficient reasons and adequate time must be given to allow for intelligent consideration and intelligent response to the proposal;
- c) The Decision-maker must demonstrate that it has taken the product of the consultation into account before the decision was made.

Financial Implications

The recommendations from this report can be contained within existing budgets

Performance Issues

Effective consultation directly impacts on National Indicator 4: The percentage of people who feel that they can influence decisions in their locality. The views of service users, residents and community groups will be a key source of evidence for the new Comprehensive Area Assessment.

In as much as consultation contributes to communications, the strategy will support an improvement in the current rating of 46% of local people who feel very or fairly well informed about Council services. It is interesting to note that residents who feel well informed are significantly more likely to say that they are satisfied with how the Council runs things and the services it provides so, the strategy will also contribute to customer satisfaction through enhanced communications. A further impact on customer satisfaction can be expected through tailoring service provision and delivery methods to be in line with customers' wishes as expressed through service consultation.

Risk Management Implications

There are risks associated with the proposed strategy, largely connected with the degree to which services will buy into the strategy but also with the purchase or development of an effective consultation database system. The major risks are being addressed through establishing a cross directorate consultation group to act as champions for the strategy and communication channels to ensure that consultation activity is known and shared.

The identification of an appropriate database will be pursued with the assistance of Capita.

These risks will be included in the Directorate Risk Register

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: ...Sheela Thakrar..... on behalf of the*
Chief Financial Officer

Date:26 August 2008

Name: Helen White..... on behalf of the*
Monitoring Officer

Date:24 August 2008.....

Section 4 – Performance Officer Clearance

Name: ...Tom Whiting... Divisional Director
(Strategy and
Improvement)

Date:26 August 2008.....

Section 5 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Desiree Mahoney Policy Officer 020 8424 1390 ext 2390

Background Papers:
Consultation Strategy
Consultation Charter