

Harrow Council

**Consultation Plan
and
Objectives**

1. Introduction

Consultation can give us and our partners business intelligence about our diverse communities; help to tailor services to meet specific needs; and help to improve levels of satisfaction. With this approach in mind, it is crucial to ensure that there is a joined-up co-ordinated approach to consultation at Harrow Council and the HSP. This strategy covers consultation which is initiated by the Council. Further consideration will be given separately to the agenda for empowerment and Residents can raise issues with the Council.

The Council undertook a Scrutiny review of Community Engagement in 2005/06 and the recommendations from this review have been taken on board in developing this Consultation Strategy.

This strategy sets out how the Council intends to raise its level of consultation performance to match current and future expectations by having a coordinated and effective approach to consulting our community. It describes what consultation is, makes the case for why we should consult, and considers how we should consult. The existing Consultation Toolkit will be revised, so that it provides detailed guidance on best practice, from choosing the best methodology to analysing and feeding back the results.

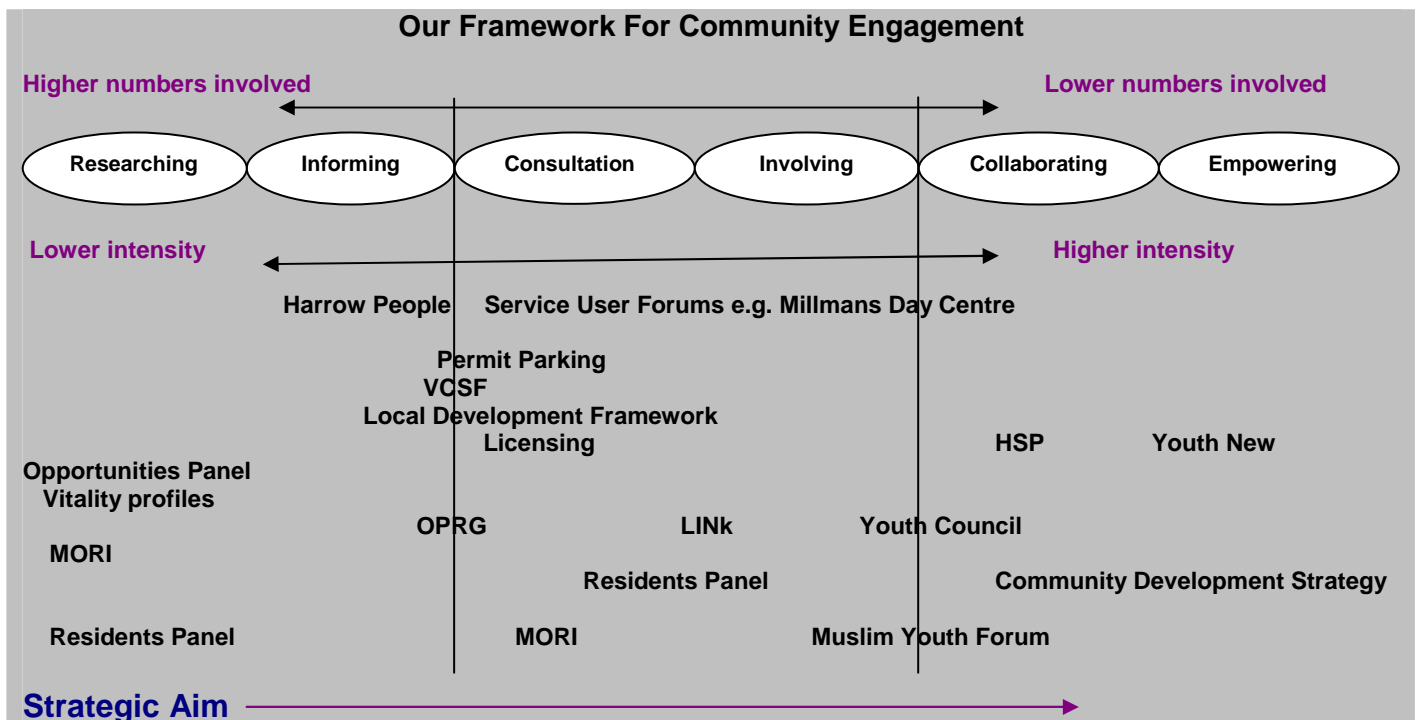
2. Context

2.1 What is consultation?

Consultation in the local government context is about finding out what people in the borough need and want. Consultation is at the very core of service improvement. It involves finding out what those with an interest in the content and delivery of services think of those services, how they think that services should be developed and identifying gaps in services and how they should be filled. Consultation is mid-point on the scale of our framework for community engagement.

Our Framework for community engagement

- **Researching history and background beforehand in order to plan and scope the process/project manage¹**
 - **Informing people by giving balanced and unbiased information to help them understand the problems and help identify the solutions**
 - **Consulting to ask for people's views on analyses, alternatives or decisions**
 - **Involving communities to make sure we understand them and their concerns**
 - **Collaborating with our communities to develop alternatives and identifying solutions**
 - **Empowering our communities, which is the most ambitious level of engagement and places the final decision-making in the hands of the public**
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Our strategic aim is to do more consultation and move towards a model of involving, collaborating and empowering. We already have some examples of this transition e.g. Youth New Opportunities Panel, young people communicate funding opportunities and evaluating bids and through Adult Services e.g. Millmans Day Centre service user group, clients involved with shaping services at the centre. The Council engages residents directly on recycling as a means of improving performance levels. The move towards self directed care in Adults Services is also an example of developing an 'empowering' model for working with Residents.

3. Why consult?

3.1 Statutory obligation

In many cases we have a statutory duty to consult. Examples of statutory consultations include Planning proposals, consultation with businesses about the budget, Equality Impact Assessments and Community Care Plans. The Duty to Involve, which derives from the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act and the Sustainable Communities Act 2007, both require the Council to establish a Panel of representatives of local people for specific consultation purposes. The role for the Harrow Strategic Partnership in terms of co-ordination of consultation, engagement and empowerment activities will become much more high profile in relation to the Comprehensive Area Assessment.

3.2 Non-Statutory consultation

The Council chooses to carry out non statutory consultation to develop a better understanding of things that people need and want improved e.g. cultural services Residents' Panel survey and customer care standards.

3.3 Timing

For non-statutory consultation, a minimum of **4 to 8 weeks** should be allowed, while for statutory consultation, a minimum of **12 weeks** is needed.

3.4 Comprehensive Area Assessment

Guidance for the Comprehensive Area Assessment process highlights the importance of a Partnership based approach to consultation. Councils and their partners will be required to demonstrate how the views of local people have informed their strategies and programmes.

3.5 Voluntary and Community Sector

The Council consults with the voluntary and community sector which can play a valuable role in helping the Council reach communities and individuals who are not involved 'the seldom heard'.

3.6 Service improvement

Consultation actively involves internal and external people in planning and implementing local services and corporate strategies. This will make services and strategies more successful as they will be based on the needs and wants of their target audience. Services which deliver what service users want will result in improvements in the image and reputation of the council.

3.7 Consultation and Communication

Residents' perceptions of how well informed they are about the council and the services it provides are important. This is because there is a strong correlation between levels of satisfaction with council services and communication and consultation. From consistent feedback from MORI surveys residents who see themselves as well informed are twice as satisfied with the council as those who do not. Harrows primary vehicles for informing our residents, as well as keeping our local press informed, include; e.g. Harrow People; distributed 6 times a year and the A-Z council tax brochure.

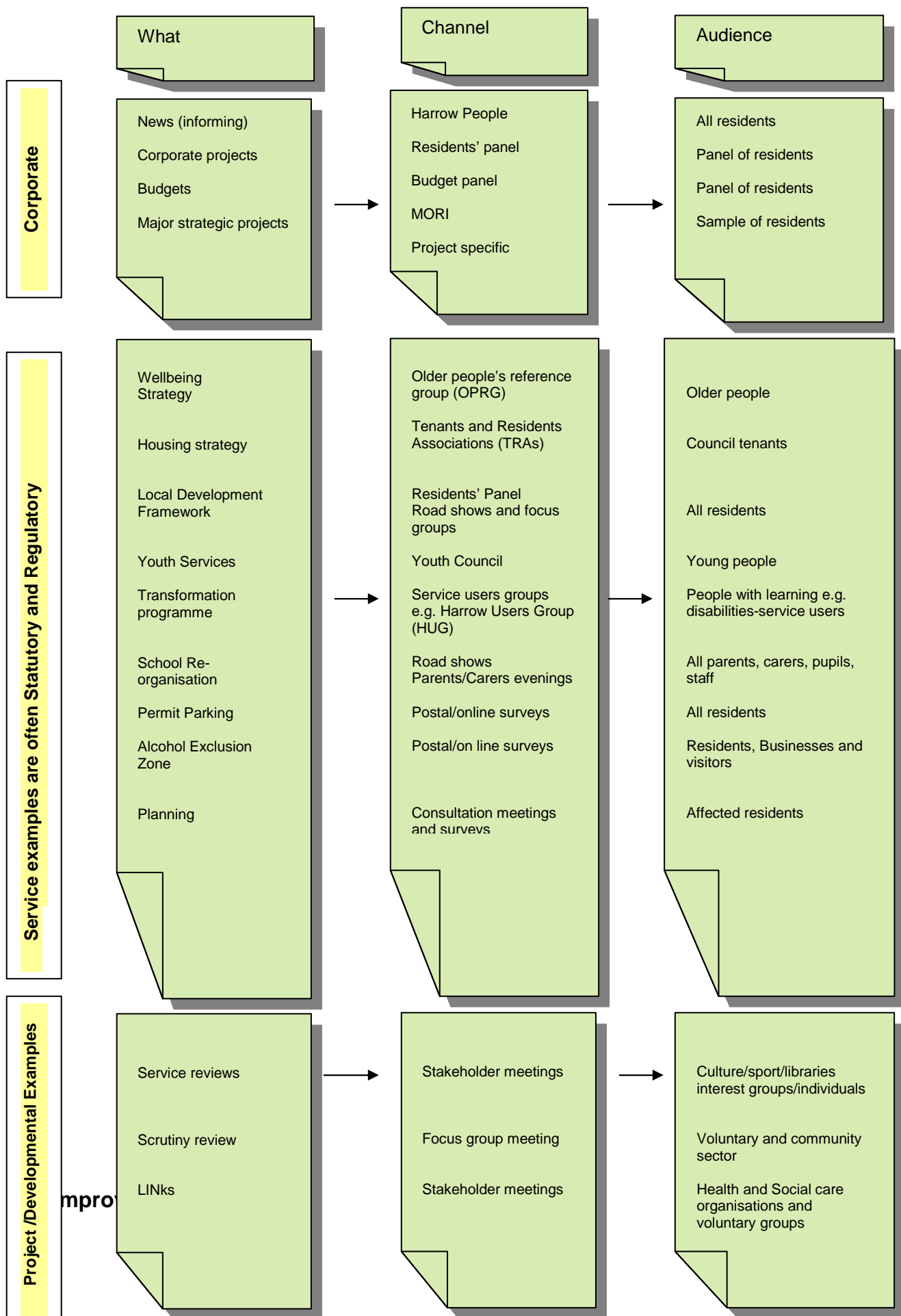
3.8 Other benefits

Consultation can strengthen local democracy by encouraging a closer relationship between decision-makers and the people affected by their decisions. Consultation results in better informed decisions by presenting users views to decision-makers. Consultation is also effective in increasing trust and engagement with internal and external people because it promotes transparency and accountability, improves awareness and understanding of the decision making process, and encourages stakeholder ownership and commitment to new developments.

Involving local people in service development, through the provision of adequate information at an early stage, may lead to new options emerging from collective local expertise that are both innovative and practical. Local people are the experts in what services they need and how they should be delivered.

4. Consultation channels

Consultation uses various channels ranging from using the Residents' Panel to carrying out a scrutiny review of the Council's relationship with the voluntary and community sector. Below are some examples of the channels that we use at a corporate level, service level and individual projects:













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A review of current consultation has revealed a number of issues which this strategy seeks to address. These include

- 1. making sure that consultation is clearly understood and undertaken consistently**
- 2. making sure that consultation is embedded across the council through a change management programme**
- 3. making sure that consultation is not carried out unnecessarily and has clear criteria for when and how to consult**
- 4. making sure that consultation is coordinated across the council and with partners, including sharing the outcomes and sharing channels**
- 5. making sure that consultation is inclusive and values diversity and that our forums are suitably diverse**
- 6. making sure that consultation is carried out competently, to consistently high standards, and that systems are in place to monitor and evaluate consultation**
- 7. making sure that results and outcomes of consultation are fed back to the community, and coordinated with partners**
- 8. making the best use of resources and seek new and innovative ways of consulting our community**
- 9. having a consistent model for Service User Groups**
- 10. increasingly involving, empowering and collaborating more than just consulting our residents.**

6. Change Management

6.1 We need to make sure that consultation is embedded across the council through a change management programme which will involve:

-  reviewing membership of the Consultation Link Officers group so that it is attended by officers who are directly involved with consultation;
-  developing and reviewing an annual consultation plan for the council;
-  communicating the annual consultation plan;
-  monitoring consultation;
-  refreshing the Consultation Toolkit , develop and populate the Consultation Finder – a database of consultations that have been undertaken, the methods used and the results produced;
-  presenting a regular item on consultation to the HSP Board;
-  publicising the Consultation Toolkit and the Consultation Finder;
-  running awareness raising and training sessions twice a year through the management development programme, members and HSP training;
-  developing a consultation module for staff inductions; and
-  developing a consultation e-learning tool for staff and partners.

More detail of the planned action is set out below

Objective 1

6.2. Making sure that consultation is clearly understood and undertaken consistently

All services should make consultation with users (and, often, with non-users) an integral part of their “plan, do, review, revise” cycle. This should be supported at all levels - political and managerial.

The actions supporting this objective are:

- raising awareness through the change management programme;
- develop clear criteria for when consultation should be undertaken;
- reviewing the channels in use and consultations taking place ensuring that channels are effective and representative;
- further developing the existing Consultation Toolkit;
- refreshing the Residents Panel every three years; and
- giving clear guidance about when consultation should be undertaken to fit into our business planning cycle.

Objective 2 is addressed by this change management programme.

Objective 3

6.3 We need to make sure that consultation is not carried out unnecessarily and that there are clear criteria for when and how to consult

There is a danger that uncoordinated consultation will ask the same question more than once and, sometimes, of the same people. It is also possible that some of the information sought by a consultation has already been obtained so the starting point in designing consultation is to review the results of previous exercises. Also, occasionally, consultation is undertaken when the decision has already taken place. If this is the case, a communication rather than consultation method should be used.

The actions supporting this objective are:

- developing clear guidance on when to consult and best practice;
- developing a Consultation Finder ; and
- regularly reviewing the content of the Consultation Finder.

Objective 4

6.4 We need to make sure that consultation is coordinated across the council and with partners including sharing the outcomes and sharing channels of consultation

All service departments within the Council must share information on consultation to avoid unnecessary duplication of effort and consultation overload or fatigue. Where appropriate, the authority will seek to work in partnership to ensure that consultation is cost effective and is not repetitious or confusing. Where opportunities exist, consultation should be carried out in partnership with other local service providers such as the Police and Health Service.

The actions supporting this objective are:

- extending use of our Residents Panel to partners;

- working more closely with partners to co-ordinate consultation;
- populating the Consultation Finder with all consultation activity planned, ongoing and recently completed;
- training staff to use the Consultation Finder;
- introducing a system for monitoring the Consultation Finder jointly with partners;
- developing consultation principles for the HSP;
- making business intelligence outcomes available on our website;
- considering whether consultation outcomes could form part of the brief for the proposed Joint Intelligence Unit;
- reviewing existing Service User Groups; and
- identifying with service directorate what additional service user groups are required.

Objective 5

6.5 We need to make sure that consultation is inclusive and values diversity and that our forums are suitably diverse

With such a diverse community in Harrow, it is important to ensure that consultation represents all sections of the community. Some minority groups are less likely to respond to traditional methods of consultation, so additional efforts are needed to help these people to participate. Sometimes minority groups may require different methods of consultation that run alongside the main methodology.

The actions to support this objective are:

- promoting consultation methods that increase participation from the 'seldom heard';
- providing specialist support on consulting our diverse communities;
- providing consultation training;
- ensuring that there is advance publicity for consultation; and
- conducting Equality Impact Assessments (EIA's) to ensure that proposed consultation will gather representative views and will meet the requirements of the Disability Equality Duty.

Objective 6

6.6 We need to make sure that consultation is carried out competently, to consistently high standards, and that systems are in place to monitor and evaluate consultation

Consultation should be targeted to make sure that the right people are involved, including those who have not been involved before. The method of consultation should be appropriate and members should make reference, where appropriate, to all relevant background information. Where possible, the Council should follow the principles set out in the Compact and the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on consultation.

It's not enough simply to do the consultation – the findings must also be used to inform decisions. We must be able to demonstrate how the results have been used.

The actions supporting this objective are:

- reviewing the use of SNAP (a tool for on line survey);
- renewing the Consultation Toolkit;
- refresh the Residents' Panel every three years;
- establishing a consultation consultancy service;

- building consultation requirements into all annual service and delivery; and
- publicising the COMPACT guidelines.

Objective 7

6.7 We need to make sure that results and the outcomes of consultation are fed back to the community, and coordinated with partners

Providing feedback is one of the most important stages of consultation and is often the one that is missed. Telling people about how the information they provided will be or is being used shows people that their involvement was worthwhile and actually counts and giving feedback helps to avoid a 'what's the point' attitude and encourages future involvement.

The actions to support this objective are:

- giving guidance on feedback as part of the Consultation Toolkit;
- posting consultation results on the Consultation Finder;
- encouraging Web based feedback; and
- setting up specific feedback channels for each consultation activity.

Objective 8

6.8 We need to make best use of resources and seek new and innovative ways of consulting our community

The options for consulting people continue to grow, as new technologies and consultation methods are introduced. It is important to keep up with new developments in consultation and to develop innovative ways of working wherever possible. This is particularly relevant to engaging and empowering our communities to be involved and using our expertise to work in partnership with other organisations e.g. carrying out joint research projects.

The actions to support this objective are:

- involving the community in partnership working through peer led consultation activity e.g. The Youth Council organising and consulting young people;
- devising innovative consultation methods to enhance the involvement of the voluntary and community sector; and
- working with businesses to conduct joint research projects e.g. The Business Panel measuring satisfaction levels amongst residents who shop and visit the Town Centre

Objective 9

6.9 We need to make consistent use of Service User Groups

Service User Groups are forums whereby users can come together to raise issues about:

- How services work
- Suggest improvements to services
- Be consulted and play a part in decisions regarding the future of the service
- Receive updates on the performance of services

The actions to support this objective are:

- establishing suitably representative Service User Groups across key areas e.g. Leisure and Cultural Services and Social Care; and
- developing criteria for when and how to use Service User Groups.

Objective 10

6.10 We need to increasingly involve, collaborate and empower more than just consult our residents

The Government's action plan for community empowerment 'Building on Success' sets out work towards three outcomes;

- Greater participation, collective action and engagement in democracy
- Changes in attitudes towards community empowerment
- Improved performance of public services and quality of life

The actions to support this objective are:

- bringing people together to develop a shared vision for Harrow –through the refresh of the Sustainable Community Strategy;
- enabling the public to monitor and review the commissioning and provision of local health and social care services through the Local Involvement Network(LINK); and
- Developing more local charters: voluntary agreements between local authorities and communities.

These actions are supported by a more detailed action plan which is attached as an appendix.

APPENDIX

Objectives and Actions

Action Plan

This action plan will be reviewed annually and, if necessary, additional measures will be introduced in order to effect the required improvements. The Policy Officer responsible for consultation will oversee implementation of the plan.

The 10 objectives of this plan have been identified for improvement over the next three years 2008-2011:

Actions	Progress	Person responsible
Objective 1 Making sure that consultation is clearly understood and undertaken consistently		
1. Seek approval to this plan and raise awareness	September –October 2008	Desiree Mahoney All Departments
2. Develop clear criteria for when consultation should be undertaken	October 2008	Desiree Mahoney
3. Strategic review of channels in use and consultations taking place ensuring that channels are effective and representative	June 2009	Desiree Mahoney
4. Further develop the existing Consultation Toolkit and make it available on our website	February 2009	Desiree Mahoney
5. We need to have clear guidance when consultation should be undertaken to fit into our business planning cycle	Being rolled out 2008/2009 ongoing	Link Officers and Planning officers
Objective 2 Making sure that consultation is embedded across the council through a change management programme		
6. Review membership of the Link Officers group so that it is attended by officers who are directly involved with consultation	September 2008	Desiree Mahoney Link Officers
7. The Consultation Link Officers group will support the development of the annual consultation plan for service departments. The Consultation Link officers group will also check and review the plan	October 2008	Desiree Mahoney Link Officers
8. Finalise the Annual Consultation Plan	October 2008	Desiree Mahoney Link Officers
9. Communicate this plan and the annual consultation plan via; the website, Grapevine and The Arrow	October 2008	Desiree Mahoney Communications
10. Monitor consultation	Ongoing	Desiree Mahoney Link Officers
11. Refresh the Consultation Toolkit, develop and populate the Consultation Finder	January 2009	Desiree Mahoney Link Officers
12. Have consultation as a regular item on the HSP Board	Ongoing	HSP members Link Officers
13. Communicate the Consultation Toolkit and the Consultation Finder on the intranet ,Grapevine and The Arrow	February 2009	Desiree Mahoney Communications
14. Implement awareness raising and training sessions ,twice a year, through the management development programme ,Members and HSP training	April 2009	Desiree Mahoney Organisational Development
15. Develop a consultation module for staff inductions		Desiree Mahoney Samantha Whittick
16. Develop a consultation e-learning tool for staff and partners		Desiree Mahoney
Objective 3 Making sure that consultation is not carried out unnecessarily and has clear criteria for when and how to consult		
17. Clear guidance on when to consult and best practice	September 2008	Desiree Mahoney

		Link Officers
18. Develop a Consultation Finder and make it available on our website to; a) record all consultation across the council (extract from the Annual Consultation Plan) b) stakeholder involvement c) results of consultation	<i>Website set up. Rolled out for departmental use February 2009</i>	Desiree Mahoney I.T Carol Cutler Liz Defries
19. Regular review of the Consultation Finder	<i>February 2009 onwards</i>	Desiree Mahoney
Objective 4 Making sure that consultation is coordinated across the council and with partners, sharing outcomes and channels		
20. Extend use of our Residents Panel to partners and develop consultation principles for the HSP	<i>June 2009</i>	Desiree Mahoney
21. Work more closely with partners to co-ordinate consultation	<i>June 2009</i>	Desiree Mahoney Link Officers
22. Through the Link officers group, train staff to use the Consultation Finder	<i>September 2009</i>	Link Officers Desiree Mahoney
23. To introduce a system for monitoring the Consultation Finder so that it is always up to date	<i>September 2008</i>	Desiree Mahoney
24. Develop consultation principles for the HSP	<i>September 2009</i>	Desiree Mahoney Link Officers
25. Make business intelligence outcomes available on our website	<i>January 2010</i>	Carol Cutler
26. To consider whether consultation outcomes could form part of the brief for the proposed Joint Intelligence Unit.	<i>September 2009</i>	Desiree Mahoney HSP members
27. Review existing Service User Groups	<i>June 2009</i>	Desiree Mahoney Link Officers All Departments
28. Identify when additional /revised Service User groups are required	<i>September 2009</i>	Desiree Mahoney Link Officers All Departments
Objective 5 Making sure that consultation is inclusive and values diversity and that our forums are suitably diverse		
29. To support all consultation associated with increasing participation from the 'seldom heard'	<i>June 2008 ongoing</i>	Desiree Mahoney Vijay Malik Link Officers
30. That the Corporate Consultation Officer provides specialist support on consulting our diverse communities (consultation toolkit)	<i>June 2008 ongoing</i>	Vijay Malik Desiree Mahoney Link officers
31. Implement consultation training	<i>April 2009 ongoing</i>	Organisational Development
32. Advance publicity for consultation	<i>January 2009 ongoing</i>	Desiree Mahoney Link Officers Communications
33. To make sure that all consultation activities complies with the council's Comprehensive Equality Scheme through conducting EIA's	<i>June 2008 ongoing</i>	Vijay Malik
34. To develop Service User Forums	<i>July 2008 onwards</i>	All Departments Link officers
Objective 6 Making sure that consultation is carried out competently, to consistently high standards, and that systems are in place to monitor and evaluate consultation		
35. Review SNAP (on line consultation tool)	<i>September 2008</i>	I.T
36. Renew the Consultation Toolkit, including evaluation techniques, and publicise it.	<i>November 2008</i>	Desiree Mahoney

37. Refresh the residents panel every three years	June 2010	Desiree Mahoney
38. Establish a consultation consultancy service, through advice from the Corporate Consultation Officer, for Directorates on consultation practices	September 2009	Desiree Mahoney Link Officers
39. To build consultation requirements into all annual service and delivery plans- including a summary for the previous year (explaining how consultation has been used to inform decisions) and a plan for the forthcoming years	August 2008	All Departments Link Officers
40. Make COMPACT guidelines available	September 2008 ongoing	Communications
Objective 7 Making sure that results and the outcomes of consultation are fed back to the community and disseminated to the relevant people		
41. Guidance on giving feedback on consultation findings	September 2008	Desiree Mahoney All Departments
42. Ensure all consultation results are posted on the Consultation Finder	January 2009	Link officers All departments
Objective 8 Making best use of resources and seek new and innovative ways of consulting our community		
43. Outreach and involve the community in peer led consultation	September 2009 onwards	Community Development
44. Devise innovative consultation methods to involve the wider community	June 2009	Desiree Mahoney Link Officers
45. Work with businesses to conduct joint research projects	September 2010	Desiree Mahoney Link Officers
Objective 9 Having a consistent model for Service User Groups		
46. To establish suitably representative Service User Groups across key areas	January 2009 onwards	Desiree Mahoney All Departments
47. Develop criteria for the establishment and usage of Service User Groups	January 2009	Desiree Mahoney Link Officers
Objective 10 Increasingly involve, collaborate and empower more than just consult our residents		
48. To secure more citizen focused services through the HSP by establishing a panel of people 'Citizens Jury'(bring people together to develop a shared vision for Harrow –Sustainable Community Strategy using the LAA as a delivery vehicle)	October 2009	Desiree Mahoney PCT Police Mike Howes
49. Through the Local Involvement Network(LINK) enable the public to monitor and review the commissioning and provision of local health and social care services	September 2009	Desiree Mahoney Parkwood Health Care
50. Develop more local charters: voluntary agreements between local authorities and communities	September 2010	Mike Howes All Departments