

Meeting:	Overview and Scrutiny
Date:	9 <sup>th</sup> December 2008
Subject:	Consultation Strategy
Responsible Officer:	Tom Whiting, Assistant Chief Executive
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	<b>Consultation Strategy</b>

## Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

### **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.

### **Reason: (For recommendation)**

To inform Overview and Scrutiny of the recently adopted Consultation Strategy, by Cabinet.

## Section 2 – Report

### **Background**

2.1 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.

### **Why a change is needed**

2.2 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.

2.3 Although the volume of consultation is impressive, there are opportunities to improve quality of consultation in some instances and coordination of consultation across the Council.

2.4 The Council does not always publish the results of consultation or explain what use will be made of the outcomes.

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

- Consultation is clearly understood and undertaken consistently
- Consultation is embedded across the council through a change management programme
- Consultation is not carried out unnecessarily and has clear criteria for when and how to consult
- Consultation is coordinated across the council and with partners including sharing the outcomes and sharing channels of consultation
- Consultation is inclusive and values diversity and that our forums are suitably diverse
- Consultation is carried out competently, to consistently high standards, and that systems are in place to monitor and evaluate consultation
- Results and the outcomes of consultation are fed back to the community and disseminated to the relevant people
- We make best use of resources and seek new and innovative ways of consulting our community
- We need to have a consistent model for Service User Groups
- We need to increasingly involve, empower and collaborate more than just consult our residents.

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

## **Options that Cabinet considered**

2.7 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.

2.8 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.

2.9 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**

### **Equalities Impact**

2.10 Major instances of consultation is subject to undertaking an Equalities Impact Assessment.

### **Legal Comments**

2.11 Once the Council decides to consult it must do so lawfully. Should a consultation be inadequate then the Council maybe at risk of judicial review proceedings and the decision maybe 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**

2.12 The recommendations from this report can be contained with existing budgets.

### **Performance Issues**

2.13 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.

2.14 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.

2.15 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.

2.16 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 Implications**

2.17 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.

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

2.19 These risks will be included in the Directorate Risk Register.

## **Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance**

None required.

## **Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers**

Contact: Desiree Mahoney Policy Officer 020 8424 1390 ext 2390

Background Papers:

Consultation Strategy

Consultation Charter

If appropriate, does the report include the following considerations?

1.	Consultation	YES
2.	Corporate Priorities	YES