

## CONSULTATION TASK AND FINISH GROUP SCOPING DOCUMENT

Review Topic	
The Council's Consultation Arrangements	
Origins of Review Group	Review Group Membership
Agreed by Scrutiny Management Committee Planning Group - 7 January 2016	Councillors R Bradburn, Ferrans, P Geary, D Hopkins (Chair), C Wilson and K Wilson
Overview & Scrutiny Officer	Initial Scoping of Review
To be confirmed	29 February 2016
1. Purpose	
To explore the value of how the Council undertakes consultation, in terms of how it gains the views of its diverse communities, the methods used to collect those views, best (better) practice elsewhere and to examine how councillors are kept informed of consultations taking place in their ward.	
2. Rationale	
Consultation is an important part of the Council's decision making process. The review will seek to address concerns, both from councillors and the public as to the way the Council is seen to carry out its numerous consultations and addresses issues raised.	
3. Proposed Outcomes	
To influence and provide guidance as to the ways in which consultations are conducted, in order that consultations successfully reach the target audience, including councillors, particularly affected ward councillors and a credible and reasoned response which addresses the issues raised by the respondents.	
4. Background	
Concerns have been raised with the Scrutiny Management Committee and at meetings of the Council with regard to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How the Council has consulted and the methods used which have appeared to exclude important stakeholders; and</li> <li>- the responses made to consultation feedback.</li> </ul> It has been suggested that the Council should be adopting more innovative consultation methods to ensure the target audience is reached.	

## 5. Timetable

Once the scope of the Group has been agreed, the Group will meet on no more than four occasions starting in June 2016,.

The Group will submit its report to the July meeting of the Scrutiny Management Committee (currently scheduled for 26 July 2016).

The Scrutiny Management Committee will decide whether any recommendations should be deferred to other bodies for consideration.

## 6. Methodology / Approach

1. The Task and Finish Group will address how officers establish:
  - (a) how significant / necessary consultation might be prior to the commencement of a change in policy / project / initiative / review
  - (b) the degree to which consultation is likely to contribute to a successful outcome
  - (c) whether projects should include a consultation plan at inception to:
    - (i) establish timescales, techniques, costings etc.;
    - (ii) determine the most appropriate forms of consultation;
    - (iii) involve local councillors to ensure the scale and nature of the consultation will be the most effective and reach the relevant audiences.
2. The Task and Finish Group will:
  - (a) consider the methods of consultation used, particularly the use of web pages and social media;
  - (b) consider if the current web design and ease of use makes it fit for purpose in terms of consultation exercises;
  - (c) possibly develop a toolkit for both officers and councillors that is easy to use and understand and be applied consistently across the Authority;
  - (d) possibly develop a Statement of Community Involvement, that sets out expectations for all 'stakeholders' prior to the start of any consultation exercise;
  - (e) look at ways to publicise extensively all consultations across a range of media and devices;
  - (f) consider creating a simple checklist for use by officers and councillors to include the matters covered by 'Engage' to ensure a consistent approach;
  - (g) look at ways to possibly involve local members and key partners (including parish and town councils);
  - (h) consider the possibility, in advance of a consultation exercise, of using local councillors, persons with local knowledge, or specialist expertise to plan the consultation, particularly with regard to engaging with local groups/special interest groups etc., and drawing up lists of events or venues to use in consultation exercises;

- (i) consider how best to (during a consultation activity) the Council can promote the consultation and the opportunity to comment;
- (j) look at ways of providing relevant feedback to respondents / the local community and how to ensure / reassure people that the exercise was worthwhile; and
- (k) investigate the value of undertaking formalised and ongoing training sessions for staff and councillors on the principles and concepts of consultation, including the possible use of Survey Monkey and other best practise techniques.

## 7. Evidence Sources / Witnesses / Site Visits / Observations / Public Meetings

- (a) Evidence will be taken from:
  - (i) Senior Officers
  - (ii) Members of the Council, including the Leader
  - (iii) Consultation Experts
  - (iv) The Consultation Institute ([info@consultationinstitute.org](mailto:info@consultationinstitute.org))
- (b) Desk research into other scrutiny reviews undertaken by other local authorities of consultation methods
- (c) Government guidance on undertaking consultations (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consultation-principles-guidance>)

## 8. Officer Support

Scrutiny Officer and Head of Communications.

## 9. Resource Requirements

48 hours of Overview and Scrutiny Officer time to arrange and attend meeting, conduct research and draft report.

Officer time to give evidence.

## 13. Risk Assessment

Attitude of officers to potential criticism

Subject may be bigger and need more time and work from both officers and councillors than anticipated

Availability of witnesses

Limited Overview and Scrutiny Officer resource to support the Group

## 14. Proposed Terms of Reference

1. To identify current practice adopted by the Council with regard to when and how the Council undertakes consultations
2. To identify best practice and innovative approaches to carrying out consultations.
3. To recommend changes to current practice, as considered necessary for the Council to become beacon of best practice.