

**PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNICATION AND CONSULTATION**

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**1. Purpose**

- 1.1 To draw upon the experience of the IDeA simulation to identify principles to act as a checklist to underpin the development of communication and consultation processes in relation to the new structures.

**2. Summary**

- 2.1 The new democratic structures need to be developed and tested against an understanding of what they are designed to achieve. This report identifies principles, which can be used to test the effectiveness and the efficiency of the new systems.

**3. Recommendations**

- 3.1 That the following principles be adopted and used when drawing up the detailed working arrangement for the new systems, and used also to evaluate the working arrangements periodically:
- (a) Transparent - it should be clear:
    - (i) who is deciding what, when and how; and
    - (ii) what opportunities there are for contributing to, influencing, questioning or overturning decisions.
  - (b) Consultative - there should be opportunities for influence for external stakeholders to be built into the system.
  - (c) Accessible - efforts should be made to ensure that all sections of the local community have the opportunity to influence decision making.
  - (d) Open - there should be opportunities for public questions, scrutiny and influence over decision making.

- (e) Efficient - the systems should have regard to efficient use of Member, officer and stakeholder time and costs.

#### 4. **Background**

- 4.1 The White Paper 'Modern Local Government – In Touch with the People' suggested that in relation to the new structures, local people should know:
- (a) who takes decisions;
  - (b) who to hold to account;
  - (c) who to contact with problems; and
  - (d) who to complain to when things go wrong;
- 4.2 The Paper also suggested that there should be clear roles for Councillors.
- 4.3 By implication, what is said to be wrong with the current system is that it leads to:
- (a) inefficient and opaque decision making;
  - (b) significant decisions being taken behind closed doors;
  - (c) many Councillors having little influence over Council decisions;
  - (d) too much time in committees; and
  - (e) lack of clarity over who is taking decisions.
- 4.4 The IDeA simulation brought a number of learning points for communication and consultation processes:
- (a) the importance of being able to explain to anyone how the system works, and making efforts to do so;
  - (b) the importance of understanding different Member roles, relationships and responsibilities, in particular Members' relationships with officers and external partners (e.g. Executive Member portfolios, Scrutiny Members' interests and concerns);
  - (c) the importance of building consultation in the decision making processes, (with non-Executive Members and stakeholders);
  - (d) the importance of communicating at all times about proposed decisions, processes, timescales and opportunities for intervention;
  - (e) the importance of consistent external communication with the Press; and
  - (f) the potential for conflict, confusion, time-wasting and misunderstanding.

- 4.5 Although the IDeA simulation highlighted community organisations and public, private and voluntary sector stakeholders it did not include staff members who will also need to be informed and involved if decisions are to be implemented.
- 4.6 This item was considered by the Democratic Structures Working Group on 8 February 2000 (Minute DS48/00 refers), which supported the principles set out in the recommendations to this report.

## 5. **Issues and Choices**

- 5.1 Clearly, a range of different decision making systems are possible within the Leader/Executive model and the core of that structure is approaching agreement.
- 5.2 The way the Scrutiny and Executive decision making and decision challenging processes work should be open to period review to test their efficiency. It is therefore suggested that criteria are adopted to:
- (a) assist in the development of the detail of the new systems and structures; and
  - (b) act as a means of evaluating the process once the new system is in place.
- 5.3 Drawing upon the lessons of 2020, the experience of the simulation and the guidance provided by the Government the following principles are suggested for discussion, amendment and subsequent adoption:

The new decision making systems should be:

- (a) Transparent - it should be clear:
    - (i) who is deciding what, when and how; and
    - (ii) what opportunities there are for contributing to, influencing, questioning or overturning decisions.
  - (b) Consultative - there should be opportunities for influence for external stakeholders to be built into the system.
  - (c) Accessible - efforts should be made to ensure that all sections of the local community have the opportunity to influence decision making.
  - (d) Open - there should be opportunities for public questions, scrutiny and influence over decision making.
  - (e) Efficient - the systems should have regard to efficient use of Member, officer and stakeholder time and costs.
- 5.4 These principles should act as a checklist to evaluate the future operation of the systems from the perspective of key stakeholder groups:

- (a) Internal
  - (i) The Council Assembly
  - (ii) The Executive
  - (iii) The Scrutiny Commission
  - (iv) Non-Executive Members
  - (v) Officers (at different levels)
  - (vi) Trade Unions
  
- (b) External
  - (i) Voluntary organisations
  - (ii) Community organisations
  - (iii) Local Councils
  - (iv) Business Community
  - (v) Other Public Sector Parties
  - (vi) Press

## 6. **Implications**

### 6.1 Environmental

Paper consumption may need to be monitored.

### 6.2 Equalities

Equality of access to and participation in decision making is an important consideration in the new arrangements.

### 6.3 Financial

Use of time and the cost of arrangements are an important consideration.

### 6.4 Legal

The arrangements will need to fit both the current and also future prescribed legal frameworks for decision making.

6.5 Staff and Accommodation

Staff time is an important consideration.

7. **Conclusions**

7.1 The new democratic structures need to be developed and tested against an understanding of what they are designed to achieve. This report identifies principles, which can be used to test the effectiveness and the efficiency of the new systems.

Background Papers:           None