



# Consultations Task and Finish Group Report February 2017

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# 1. Introduction and Consultations Task and Finish Group Membership

The Consultations Task and Finish Group was established by the Scrutiny Management Committee's Planning Group on 7 January 2016, and confirmed by the Scrutiny Management Committee on 27 January 2016 in preparation for the 2016/17 Municipal Year.

The Terms of Reference for the Consultations Task and Finish Group can be found at Annex A.

The Task and Finish Group comprised Councillors D Hopkins, R Bradburn, J Ferrans, P Geary, C Wilson and K Wilson. The Group was Chaired by Councillor D Hopkins.

Catherine Greenfield (LGSS) served as the Overview and Scrutiny Officer.

The purpose of this report is:

- (i) to outline the work the Consultations Task and Finish Group has carried out in scrutinising the way in which consultations are carried out by Milton Keynes Council and to consider, determine and recommend methods of best practice.
- (ii) to present the recommendations of the Consultations Task and Finish Group to the Scrutiny Management Committee on 8 March 2017.

Councillor David Hopkins  
Chair, Consultations Task and Finish Group  
February 2017

## 2. Summary

The Task and Finish Group met on five occasions as follows:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Subject</b>
2.8.16	Establish and agree the scope of the Consultations Task and Finish Group
15.9.16	Evidence gathering session; Rhion Jones and Rennert Keikzer of the Consultations Institute
31.10.16	Evidence gathering session; Alasdair McKenzie, (Outreach & Engagement Officer), Houses of Parliament
22.11.16	Evidence gathering session; Kelly Evans (Head of Communications) Milton Keynes Council and Mick Hancock (Assistant Director [Joint Commissioning]), Milton Keynes Council
13.12.16	Evidence gathering session; Sarah Hine (Senior Planning Officer), Milton Keynes Council and Tim Marren (Chief Executive), Community Action: MK

*The agenda, reports, presentations and minutes for each of the above meetings are available on the Council's website at:*

[http://milton-keynes.cmis.uk.com/milton-keynes/Committees/CurrentCommittees/tabid/154/ctl/ViewCMIS\\_CommitteeDetails/mid/521/id/943/Default.aspx](http://milton-keynes.cmis.uk.com/milton-keynes/Committees/CurrentCommittees/tabid/154/ctl/ViewCMIS_CommitteeDetails/mid/521/id/943/Default.aspx)

## 3. Background

- 3.1 The Consultations Task and Finish Group was established following concerns raised at various Council meetings, including at meetings of the Scrutiny Management Committee regarding how the Council had undertaken consultation and the methods which had been used. Concern had been expressed that important stakeholders had been excluded from the process. There was also concern that the responses to consultations were not always considered in the final decision making process.
- 3.2 It was suggested that the Council should be adopting more innovative consultation methods in order to ensure that the target audience was reached.
- 3.3 At its initial meeting the Consultations Task & Finish Group agreed to consult and take evidence from a number of sources which included both Council officer colleagues and external organisations.

## 4. The Evidence

### The Consultations Institute

- 4.1 Rhion Jones and Rennert Keijzer of the Consultations Institute were invited to come and discuss approaches, processes and best practice when undertaking consultations.
- 4.2 The Consultations Institute is a best-practice, not-for-profit, independent body which offers advice and guidance in the field of public consultation and engagement.
- 4.3 The Group noted that:
- (a) Consultation was a dynamic process of dialogue undertaken with a view to influencing a decision.
  - (b) It should not be assumed that undertaking consultations was simply an officer led process. Officers tended, in general, to conduct consultations in order to ensure statutory compliance, however, it should be the politicians who drove the consultation agenda. This depended on the local culture and political will.
  - (c) Many Local Authorities had the responsibility for consultations sitting within the Communications function, however, current good practice was for the responsibility for consultations to sit within the portfolio of one of the Directors. It was also important to have skilled professionals who could work to help counter public scepticism of the consultations process and listen to the responses.
  - (d) It was important to consult with and obtain the opinions of a wide range of people, not just those who shouted the loudest. The sample of consultees had to be credible otherwise the results would be meaningless and skewed. Qualitative consultation was imperative in order to achieve a useful and constructive result.
  - (e) A consultation should not be carried out if there was only one option or outcome available. Consultees would look at flaws in a consultation and were becoming increasingly vocal about them.

- (f) Care should be taken when using social media unless it was through a managed platform where users were required to register before leaving their responses. This approach would enable the Council to ensure the credibility of responses. Opinions on social media could be polarised and unless they were managed properly any credibility would be lost.
- (g) Emerging trends in best practice included managed online consultation and pre-consultation work. Pre-consultation involved interested party involvement during the development of options or policies. This could be achieved by publicising the decisions and policies which were being considered by the Council earlier on in the process, for example library closures. By publishing advanced notice of items under consideration by the Council allowed those people who were interested in the potential changes to make themselves known and enabled public and partner involvement at an earlier stage in the formation of proposals as opposed to involvement only at the end of the process.
- (h) Other methods of good practice included the holding of public consultation hearings where interested parties were invited to give evidence to the decision makers similar to the way in which evidence was given to Parliament Select Committees. The events should be chaired by an independent person who had the power to decide who would give evidence.
- (i) The Gunning Principles of consultation and legitimate expectations were that; there must be no pre determination; consultees should be given adequate information to enable intelligent consideration; sufficient time should be given to consider the responses and conscientious consideration should be given to those responses.

### **Alasdair McKenzie (Outreach and Engagement Officer) Houses of Parliament**

4.4 Alasdair McKenzie was invited to give a presentation followed by a question and answer session. An invitation to attend was open to all councillors. The presentation given is available to watch on You Tube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iLvNmMJmD0w>

4.5 The Select Committees were chaired by an elected Chair and were made up of 11 members reflecting the political balance of the current Parliament. The work of the Select Committees was broadly similar to that of Local Government Scrutiny Committees.

4.6 The following areas were of particular relevance to the work of the Task and Finish Group;

- (a) The Select Committees were able to choose their own subjects and all enquiries were based on the evidence they received. Select Committees had the ability to be proactive and were not just dependant on the Government's agenda.
- (b) The Select Committee findings were made available to the public through reports, press releases and the website, and the work of the Select Committees was available online from start to finish.

- (c) A call for evidence was made through various sources including Facebook and You Tube inviting the public and interested parties to give evidence. Evidence could be given in person or in writing. Select Committees were also able to call Ministers to provide evidence. Anyone could write to a Select Committee and suggest a topic for consideration.
- (d) The Select Committee members were well informed, calm and interested and the process gave the opportunity for members of the public to speak to those who could make a difference.
- (e) There was an eight week response time in which a Select Committee report was required to be published on line.
- (f) Pre-emptive scrutiny of policy formation had been recommended a few years ago and more pre-emptive work was now being undertaken than had been in the past especially in the development, planning or amendment of policy. Both pre-legislative scrutiny and post-legislative scrutiny could be undertaken.
- (g) Public engagement and increased awareness of the work carried out by Select Committees had grown through the setting up of email alerts as well as each committee having its own Twitter feed.
- (h) Members of the public could sign up for email alerts at [www.Parliament.uk](http://www.Parliament.uk) and the details of how to contact the committees as well as staff contacts were also available.
- (i) Attendance and interest in the Select Committees had improved through media attention including articles in the specialist press. Online forums were being considered and a broader range of input was being sought. Local Authority scrutiny work could also be submitted and fed into relevant enquiries.

**Kellie Evans Head of Communications, Milton Keynes Council**

4.7 The Head of Communications was invited to come and speak about the role of the Communications Team in the Council's consultations process. The Task and Finish Group noted the following points:

- (a) The Council's individual services were expert in undertaking consultations with their own customers.
- (b) Help and guidance was available through the Communications Team, for example the holding of events and focus groups, but the majority of consultation work took place through the services. Officers were strongly recommended to get help from the Communications Team and the Team was usually aware of consultations taking place.
- (c) Consultation respondents were not mapped, but the number of responses was recorded. Budget consultation received on average 2,000 to 3,000 responses.
- (d) The Citizen's Survey was expensive to conduct and a more pragmatic approach was required. The Local Government Association had said that the proportion of people who wanted to be involved depended on the impact of the issue on their lives. It was important therefore that consultations were pitched accordingly and large scale consultations could not be reasonably conducted in every case.

- (e) In terms of undertaking consultation earlier in the process of forming proposals there was a fear of giving out incorrect information rather than a better formed proposal. However stakeholder involvement and discussions would be useful.
- (f) The Communications Team published warm up messages in the weeks before the start of the annual budget scrutiny consultation process so as to raise awareness amongst the public.
- (g) Milton Keynes Council used a number of channels for undertaking consultations such as forums, letters and group interviews. It was preferable that people came to the Council directly to discuss issues rather than using social media.
- (h) Proposals were usually well formed before they went out to consultation.
- (i) Petitions were submitted via Democratic Services and the process was available online.
- (j) In terms of examples of good practice most Local Authorities conducted consultations in much the same way. They were not aware of anything ground breaking.

**Mick Hancock - Assistant Director (Joint Commissioning) Milton Keynes Council**

4.8 The Assistant Director (Joint Commissioning) was invited to give evidence with regard to the carrying out of consultations from the point of view of the Council's services. The Task and Finish Group noted the following points:

- (a) The Communications Team was the first port of call for services for advice when undertaking a consultation and were relied upon heavily.
- (b) Three consultations had been undertaken during the previous year and each had received very different levels of response despite a similar approach being taken for each. The three consultations were around a change in services, strategic development and policy change.
- (c) The consultations received varying levels of response and this was likely to have been due to the subject matter as well as the fear that services were being, or could be cut. If a change was likely to affect you directly you were more likely to engage in the consultation.
- (d) Networking was an important factor where by people spread the word amongst themselves through both individuals and community groups. This in turn energised others and encouraged them to participate.
- (e) Training on undertaking consultations had not been available in the past, but it would be welcomed.

**Sarah Hine – Senior Planning Officer, Milton Keynes Council**

4.9 The Senior Planning Officer was invited to give evidence about the forms of consultation undertaken through the Planning process. The Task and Finish Group noted the following points:

- (a) Members of the public were notified of planning applications in a number of ways including the posting of neighbour letters, the placing of site notices and the publication of notices in the local press. Press notices were a statutory requirement and, depending on the number, could cost in the region of £3,500

per month. This cost was currently unavoidable because of the statutory requirement and because there was currently only one local newspaper.

- (b) Adjoining land owners were notified of larger developments as well as neighbouring residents by a generic letter, however this could be costly. Respondent's details were recorded and they were notified when the application went to the Development Control Committee. This form of consultation was becoming increasingly expensive and costs could be reduced by looking at other methods as well as an increased reliance on site notices.
- (c) Notices were published in Parish / Town Council newsletters on occasion, but Parish / Town Councils were not used formally.
- (d) In relation to other Local Authorities the Council was doing more than the statutory requirement, but this might not be sustainable. Nevertheless it provided a good balance at present.
- (e) The number of site notices posted on site was at the discretion of individual officers, however there were plans to develop a framework which would take into account site lay out, footpaths, access and so forth. The statutory requirement was for one notice to be displayed per site. There was also a resource requirement in having to take notices down again.
- (f) Some pre-application engagement was carried out by developers, but generally consultation was triggered further down the line. However it was hoped that there would be more involvement with Parish / Town Councils and Ward Councillors in the future. The Council could influence developers and encourage public engagement through the issuing of pre-application guidelines to include the involvement of Parish / Town Councils.
- (g) The Council could make better use of Twitter to increase public awareness of planning applications.
- (h) Unfortunately there was not enough capacity within the department to be able to explain why each decision had been taken. However officer colleagues were happy to explain why a decision had been reached.
- (i) Strategic planning had the greatest influence overall, however it was difficult to attract and encourage people to participate in the strategic planning consultation process.

#### **Tim Marren Chief Executive, Community Action: MK**

4.10 Community Action: MK was an organisation that worked in partnership with the voluntary and the community sector, public sector bodies and private organisations. It had an established community engagement network of over 1000 groups and 60,000 volunteers.

4.11 The Task and Finish Group noted the following;

- (a) Community Action: MK had been part of the Community Development and Engagement Programme, formerly known as the Community Mobiliser Programme.

- (b) Some of the work it had undertaken was strategic helping enable the voluntary sector to work with strategic bodies as well as within the private sector. Community Action also worked with local people to identify their needs and find ways of working together.
- (c) Community Action was a trusted partner who would be willing to work with the Council to help undertake consultations. Similar work had been undertaken in the past and they had experience of engaging with Black and Minority Ethnic(BME) and hard to reach groups through both established links and by going out and knocking on doors and engaging face to face, although it would be necessary to work with Parish / Town Councils in order to reach a larger geographical area.
- (d) Community Action took a loose approach to ways of working and a variety of options were available. If the Council set the parameters to a consultation then Community Action would decide on the approach based on its experience.
- (e) Community engagement and the views of people were inseparable.

## 5. Conclusions

- 5.1 The Consultations Institute is an organisation which provides both advice and training on how and when a consultation should be undertaken. Many Local Government and other organisations such as the Health Service are current members of the Consultations Institute. The Institute provides advice and guidance on a variety of consultation needs and is recognised as being an important centre of good practice.

**Recommendation 1; that consideration be given to Milton Keynes Council becoming a member of the Consultations Institute.**

- 5.2 The Consultations Institute advised that it was considered current good practice within Local Government for the responsibility for consultations to sit within the portfolio of one Directorate and not necessarily with Communications. The Task and Finish Group was also of the view that the Scrutiny Management Committee had a role in monitoring consultation activity.

**Recommendation 2; that consideration be given to the appointment of a single specialist officer with overall responsibility for consultations, who amongst other duties, will monitor and co-ordinate responses to comments received in liaison with officers from the service department responsible for the consultation.**

**Recommendation 3; that the Scrutiny Management Committee receives, on a quarterly basis, a report which monitors:**

- (a) details of consultation activity and the number of interactions;
- (b) the purpose methodology, quality and timing of consultation activity.

- 5.3 The current Council consultations webpage does not provide links to or further information about ways in which members of the public can become involved in the decision making process apart from through the consultation process. For example there is no link to information about petitions or how people could get involved by joining a Resident's Panel.

The ability for people to sign up to emails advising of forthcoming consultations and areas in which they had an interest was another way in which people might become involved in local issues.

**Recommendation 4; that the Council's website be developed so that it provides an easy to use facility for residents and other stakeholders which:**

- (a) Allows them to sign up for email alerts and offer comments through a 'Have Your Say' series of consultation pages; and
- (b) Provides links to other areas of the website such as petitions, resident's panels and how to get involved in decision making.

- 5.4 The Task and Finish Group noted that the current Consultations Toolkit was not available on the Council's Intranet. Advice from the Consultations Institute warned against some of the pitfalls of social media and the importance of establishing a managed platform. The Task and Finish Group was of the view that this information should form part of the Council's Consultations Toolkit.

**Recommendation 5; that the Consultations Toolkit be made available to all officers via the Council Intranet' to include the use, and dangers of online consultation.**

- 5.5 The Consultations Institute cited as good practice the involvement of the public and organisations in the formation of proposals at an earlier stage rather than at the end when the proposals were fully formed. This approach was seen as being an example of good practice and was being increasingly employed. The process enabled the public, voluntary and other interested organisations to become involved in the decision making process at an early stage which in turn added validity to the final proposals which would then be put out to wider consultation. The Parliamentary Select Committees supported the pre-emptive scrutiny of policy formation and this approach was being increasingly employed.

The publication of information about future consultations was already being used regarding the annual scrutiny of the budget. However, consideration should be given to alerting interested parties and the general public to future consultation and pre-emptive scrutiny of proposals.

The Task and Finish Group is of the opinion the Council should publish a forward plan of activity (calendar). The consultation calendar would allow residents and interested groups to plan to participate in Council consultation and engagement activities, for example a Parish Council may want to call a special meeting of its members if a consultation impacting upon their area does not fit in with their scheduled meeting dates, or if the Parish Council wished to undertake a local version of the consultation in advance of the Milton Keynes Council sponsored activity.

One of the issues which had given rise to the formation of the Task and Finish Group was that of public perception around consultation, particularly poor perception regarding the validity and effect of responding to consultations. Although consultations were conducted and responses and opinions were given there was very little feedback provided after the consultation had closed. Consultations do influence decisions, but it was difficult for people outside the Council to know where to go to easily find information relating to the consultation in which they had participated. Select Committee reports were published on the Parliament website within 12 weeks and if the Council's consultation results were published online the public and other contributors could see how their participation had influenced the decision making process as well as encourage future participation.

The Task and Finish Group agreed that resident's feedback was essential. Whether from an individual or as part of a group, and that there should be a variety of ways to enable residents and organisations to tell the Council about issues in the Borough. In addition, a proactive You Said, We Did facility should be incorporated that assures respondents that the Council was genuinely listening and that, in response to residents or organisations telling the Council what they wanted - this is what the Council did in response.

**Recommendation 6; that the Council supports the involvement of interested parties in the consultation process at an earlier stage in order to help formulate proposals. Directorates should ensure that proposals for the redesign of services are based on a clear understanding of the likely experiences and impact of any proposed changes on residents and other service users.**

**Recommendation 7; that a dedicated area / page of the Council's Website be provided for the promotion of the up and coming consultations and the publication of live consultations which incorporates all consultations being undertaken by the Council and:**

- (a) publicises that stakeholder consultation is about to start on the formation of policy in an area, (by a new status on the consultations website) and publishes the list of organisations and groups to be consulted, and invites any other interested organisations to contact the Council, and any interested individuals to make contact and express their issues and suggestions to whichever stakeholder organisation best reflects their involvement with the issue and this is also publicised to parish/town and ward councillors;**
- (b) Provides a means of responding to live consultations;**
- (c) Publishes the results of consultations within 2 months of the consultation closing.**

**Recommendation 8; that the pre-notice of up and coming consultations and the publication of live consultations on the dedicated consultation area / page of the Website be mandatory for all services.**

**Recommendation 9; that all forthcoming consultations be published in advance in a new Council Consultations Forward Plan web page to allow local parish and town councils, other organisations and interested stakeholders to prepare for their response in due time.**

- 5.6 Rarely are respondents to consultations able to see why a majority response has either been accepted or rejected by the decision maker. If the decision maker was to provide reasoned arguments as to their decision the transparency and validity of the consultation process would be enhanced.

**Recommendation 10; that the decision maker should, where relevant, post their response to consultations either stating their reasons for not agreeing with the majority replies, or alternatively indicating their intention to implement the findings and the proposed timescale for doing so.**

- 5.7 Members of the Task and Finish Group suggested that the appointment of Community Champions would encourage greater engagement in consultations.

**Recommendation 11; that consideration be given to the appointment of Community Champions possibly in liaison with Town, Parish and Community councils, to help encourage engagement with future consultations and raise awareness within the community.**

- 5.8 Training in undertaking consultations was not currently available, however it was noted that it would be welcomed by officers. Training could be provided through membership of the Consultations Institute (Recommendation 1 above), or in house and would encourage a consistent approach throughout the Council and the sharing of best practice.

**Recommendation 12; that consideration be given to the provision of Consultations training for officer colleagues and councillors as part of a wider training programme.**

- 5.9 The use of Twitter in promoting planning notices was highlighted as a potentially useful tool which would help to raise awareness of local planning issues and improve overall engagement.

**Recommendation 13; that the Council's Development Control Committee considers the use of Twitter in issuing planning notices and as a method of increasing awareness of forthcoming planning matters and future consultations.**

- 5.10 Community Action: MK is a voluntary organisation which has experience of working with a number of private and public organisations. Community Action has experience of working with the Council in the past and would be willing to work with the Council in order to help access the opinions of hard to reach groups amongst others. Community Action: MK has established links within local communities and experience of listening to people and their concerns.

**Recommendation 14: that the Council gives consideration to future working with Community Action: MK the opportunities and services they provide as a trusted advocate in helping to contact communities and hard to reach groups.**

- 5.11 The Task and Finish Group identified, during its evidence gathering sessions, that there was currently an inconsistent approach to consultation and engagement across the Council. The current guidelines and supporting documents were not being used by all Council services on a consistent basis and in-turn this leads to consultation and engagement events and documents that vary greatly in quality.

**Recommendation 15: that the Council's Consultation Strategy be reviewed and re-launched and possibly rebranded as the *Communities Involvement Strategy*, with the document being user friendly and concise. The Consultation Strategy should include:**

- (a) Corporate standards and protocols that should be adhered to by all services
- (b) Clear guidelines on how to ensure that the public and other stakeholders can genuinely influence decision making
- (c) A clear and active role for elected members in consultation and community engagement exercises
- (d) A commitment by Milton Keynes Council to report the outcome of all consultations and engagement activities to residents and other stakeholders.

# Recommendations

1. That consideration be given to Milton Keynes Council becoming a member of the Consultations Institute.
2. That consideration be given to the appointment of a single specialist officer with overall responsibility for consultations, who amongst other duties, will monitor and co-ordinate responses to comments received in liaison with officers from the service department responsible for the consultation.
3. That the Scrutiny Management Committee receives, on a quarterly basis, a report which monitors:
  - (a) details of consultation activity and the number of interactions;
  - (b) the purpose methodology, quality and timing of consultation activity.
4. That the Council's website be developed so that it provides an easy to use facility for residents and other stakeholders which:
  - (a) Allows them to sign up for email alerts and offer comments through a 'Have Your Say' series of consultation pages; and
  - (b) Provides links to other areas of the website such as petitions, resident's panels and how to get involved in decision making.
5. That the Consultations Toolkit be made available to all officers via the Council Intranet' to include the use, and dangers of online consultation.
6. That the Council supports the involvement of interested parties in the consultation process at an earlier stage in order to help formulate proposals. Directorates should ensure that proposals for the redesign of services are based on a clear understanding of the likely experiences and impact of any proposed changes on residents and other service users.
7. That a dedicated area / page of the Council's Website be provided for the promotion of the up and coming consultations and the publication of live consultations which incorporates all consultations being undertaken by the Council and:
  - (a) publicises that stakeholder consultation is about to start on the formation of policy in an area, (by a new status on the consultations website) and publishes the list of organisations and groups to be consulted, and invites any other interested organisations to contact the Council, and any interested individuals to make contact and express their issues and suggestions to whichever stakeholder organisation best reflects their involvement with the issue and this is also publicised to parish/town and ward councillors;
  - (b) Provides a means of responding to live consultations;
  - (c) Publishes the results of consultations within 2 months of the consultation closing.
8. That the pre-notice of up and coming consultations and the publication of live consultations on the dedicated consultation area / page of the Website be mandatory for all services.

9. That all forthcoming consultations be published in advance in a new Council Consultations Forward Plan web page to allow local parish and town councils, other organisations and interested stakeholders to prepare for their response in due time.
10. That the decision maker should, where relevant, post their response to consultations either stating their reasons for not agreeing with the majority replies, or alternatively indicating their intention to implement the findings and the proposed timescale for doing so.
11. That consideration be given to the appointment of Community Champions possibly in liaison with Town, Parish and Community councils, to help encourage engagement with future consultations and raise awareness within the community.
12. That consideration be given to the provision of Consultations training for officer colleagues and councillors as part of a wider training programme.
13. That the Council's Development Control Committee considers the use of Twitter in issuing planning notices and as a method of increasing awareness of forthcoming planning matters and future consultations.
14. That the Council gives consideration to future working with Community Action: MK the opportunities and services they provide as a trusted advocate in helping to contact communities and hard to reach groups.
15. That the Council's Consultation Strategy be reviewed and re-launched and possibly rebranded as the *Communities Involvement Strategy*, with the document being user friendly and concise. The Consultation Strategy should include:
  - (a) Corporate standards and protocols that should be adhered to by all services
  - (b) Clear guidelines on how to ensure that the public and other stakeholders can genuinely influence decision making
  - (c) A clear and active role for elected members in consultation and community engagement exercises
  - (d) A commitment by Milton Keynes Council to report the outcome of all consultations and engagement activities to residents and other stakeholders.

# Acknowledgements

The Task and Finish Group would like to thank all external evidence providers and Council Officer Colleagues who assisted with preparing documents and presentations, giving up their time to speak at the meetings and their assistance in supplying supplementary information when requested to do so.

## Terms of Reference

### 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> <p>It has been suggested that the Council should be adopting more innovative consultation methods to ensure the target audience is reached.</p>	

## 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 meetings, 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 a beacon of best practice.

### Additional Information

The following additional information was circulated to the TFG as background information;

- THE COUNCIL Consultations Tool Kit
- HM Government Code of Practice on Consultation.
- Presentation by Alasdair Mackenzie



## Democratic Services

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### Overview and Scrutiny

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Overview & Scrutiny Officer

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