

POLICY, FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

16 APRIL 2014

REPORT OF HEAD OF COMMUNICATIONS

PRIORITIES CONSULTATION RESULTS

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 Further to Minute P25/13 of 7 October 2013 set out below, this report provides initial feedback from the consultation exercise at Appendix A.

'Consultation with the Public on Corporate Priorities and Budget Setting 2013/15 and beyond

RESOLVED *That the proposals should follow the outline given by the Chair: the website should always be used, that flyers or the Melton Mail should be used where convenient, practical and justified, and that other methods used when convenient and timely.'*

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **That the consultation results be used to inform the more wider consultation on the priorities planned for 2014/15.**

3.0 KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 As requested by the Committee a consultation exercise has been carried out on the Council's priorities at the same time as consulting on the Council's consultation arrangements. Due to these two areas of the Council's work being related in that to find out what people's views were of the Council's priorities, a consultation process was needed, it was considered appropriate to bring the two matters together for an online public consultation exercise. It was felt that each issue would help the other in terms of interest and responses and there were also economies in promoting the survey, the public's time and effort as well as staff time in bringing the two subjects together. Therefore the survey was constructed in 3 parts as follows :-

- Section 1 – Tell us what is most important to you (priorities)
- Section 2 – Making your views count (consultation strategy)
- Section 3 – About you (information requested about the consultee)

- 3.2 The results on the consultation arrangements of the exercise were reported to the Governance Committee at its meeting held on 2 April 2014.

- 3.3 Section 1 of the survey focused on the Council's 10 priorities and gave a brief summary of each whilst asking that the participant numbered each priority in their preferred order of what is most important to them by allocating a number between 1 and 10, 1 being of the highest importance. The results are available at Appendix A.

- 3.4 The online survey shown at Appendix A (Annex 2) was launched on 23 December 2014 and closed on 14 March 2014. It was promised that the results of the survey

were to be made available on the Council's website by 25 April 2014 along with a report back on what was said and how this information was used. Hard copies of the questionnaire were available upon request.

- 3.5 To promote the survey, a Press Release was sent out on 23 December 2013 and an article appeared in the Melton Times on 2 January 2014. The Melton Times published another article on 23 January 2014.
- 3.6 A5 flyers were produced as shown Appendix A (Annex 1) and circulated to our regular user groups and Parish Councils for the village noticeboards. The flyers were available in Parkside Reception, at the library and at the Children's Centres as well as handed out at Tenant Residents' meetings. Also articles were included in the Corporate Messenger and Members' Bulletin to promote the survey to Members and staff so that they could encourage customers/electorate to take part.
- 3.7 It was recognised that ongoing promotion was needed to keep the survey in the public eye and Councillors helped by promoting the survey to shoppers at their Surgery Market Stall held on Saturday 25 January 2014 and mainly handed out hard copies of the survey for people to complete and return at their leisure. The survey was given a high profile on the front page of the Council's website and regular tweets were sent out
- 3.8 There was a link to background documents available on the survey webpage so that consultees could understand what was being consulted on and find out more about the Council's consultation arrangements (Appendix A – Annex 3).
- 3.9 Section 3 of the survey asked for basic information about the respondent ie. whether male or female, age range and postcode. This was considered the minimum standard of what the Council needs to know to provide a benchmark to help inform future consultations as to who is responding and how this level of response can be improved.
- 3.10 The consultation attracted 54 responses to the online survey and there were no hard copies of the survey returned. The survey results are set out at Appendix 1.
- 3.11 An update on the survey results was provided to the Budget Away Day held on 16 January 2014 as well as reported to the Full Council at its meeting on 5 February 2014 when the budget for 2014/15 was considered.
- 3.12 The results are designed to assist Members in determining priorities and allocating budgets and resources against priorities in 2014/15 and beyond. The Council will also be undertaking a wider and more in-depth consultation exercise on the Council's priorities in 2014/15 which will involve focus groups and community events.
- 3.13 The results show that the public attach a higher rating to supporting people and businesses through the economic downturn, reducing crime, encouraging people to take an active role in their communities and meeting the economic needs of the Borough. There appears to be less emphasis placed on maximising the potential of the town centre, providing housing stock and supporting the most disadvantaged and vulnerable. The lowest scored priority is providing high performing services that are efficient and meet customer needs. This may be as people consider this as a 'given' for a Council to provide services to a certain standard.

From the 30 individual comments received there were 11 that related specifically to the beauty of the rural areas around the Borough and included their concern about wind turbines in the open countryside. There were also 4 separate comments that made reference to the lack of priority given to the infrastructure and facilities in the rural areas within the Borough such as the cost of living out of town, transport links, recreation areas, internet speed, preserving the countryside and working with Parish Councils. Due to these comments and the interest shown in rural matters, whilst this is not currently a Council priority, it is an area that the Council may wish to consider as such in the future. These comments will be considered further within the wider public consultation on the Council's priorities.

- 3.14 Of the other comments received, there were suggestions for reducing expenditure on Councillor allowances, staff being paid on a performance related basis, removing superfluous quangos, ensuring confidence to go out in the evening without the fear of criminal activity, ensuring equality and diversity and Human Rights in all activities, challenging those on benefits and helping them to get jobs, improving online services which will help the vulnerable to have better access to services, working to improve the economy by using Sainsbury's as a model, increasing the recovery rate of those in rent and Council Tax arrears. These comments will be considered further within the wider public consultation on the Council's priorities.
- 3.15 Following circulation of the survey web-link to our existing network of groups, Voluntary Action Leicestershire invited the Head of Communities and Neighbourhoods to speak on the Council's priorities and update on the consultation at their local meeting held on 14 March 2014. The Head of Communities and Neighbourhoods gave a presentation on the current position of the priorities and updated the group on the forthcoming wider consultation due to take place in 2014/15. Following this meeting, Voluntary Action Leicestershire has provided some positive feedback specifically on Mr. Rai's presentation which is as follows :-

*'Following today's update do you have a better understanding of Melton Borough Council Priorities, Goals and Promises 2011-2015?
89% said Yes (11% said not sure)'*

- 3.16 The information collected is valuable to the Council however the overall response being only 54 individuals out of the total population of the Borough is at a low level. Therefore it is anticipated that the wider public consultation due to take place later in the year, will help to reinforce or otherwise the responses received.

4.0 POLICY AND CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 To consult on the Council's priorities is an important part of being 'A Well Run Council' in listening to what people say and using that information to tailor services around budgets and customer needs which in turn helps to achieve customer satisfaction.
- 4.2 By carrying out a consultation exercise on the Council's priorities, the Council has followed through on its intentions to listen and involve people in matters that affect them and to help make more publicly informed decisions.
- 4.3 The Council has comprehensive plans to refresh the Council's Corporate Plan that will include further targeted Consultation and evidence to include:

- Residents Groups
- Survey leaflets
- Stakeholder involvement
- Partner Evidence
- National and Sub-regional Priorities

5.0 FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial and resource implications will mainly be met by in-house arrangements.

6.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS/POWERS

6.1 There are no overarching pieces of legislation on how local government should consult especially since the 'Duty to Involve' was repealed with the introduction of the Localism Act however there are various duties contained in specific pieces of legislation. Case law helps to inform the duties of consultation and the Gunning Principles (from 1985 case law) are used as a measure to assess whether a consultation exercise has been followed fairly and these principles explain a staged approach to consultation.

7.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY

7.1 It is noted from the survey results that there is continued importance placed on community safety issues.

8.0 EQUALITIES

8.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment on the Council's new Consultation Strategy has been completed. From the assessment, it is recognised that information on participation of those with protected characteristics in consultation is not consistently collected in the Council's consultations and therefore the Council cannot be certain that it is reaching these people when it consults. To address this, it is proposed that Equalities Monitoring Forms be used for all consultations as part of the strategy that was presented to the Governance Committee for approval. This will ensure that monitoring of those with protected characteristics taking part in consultation will be recorded and that information used to inform future consultations. This consultation was conducted using previous consultation guidance due to the revised arrangements, which include the new equalities monitoring form, not yet being approved by Members for consultation. Therefore of those that responded, statistics on postcode, age and gender are available and these are set out at Appendix A.

8.2 On the responses to the questions about the consultees, the summary of postcodes of respondents showed a higher response from the rural areas with 16 being from an LE13 postcode, 32 being out of the town area and 6 non-responses. The 54 responses showed a slightly higher response rate among males. The age range of respondees was higher in the over 45's and particularly in the 45-54 age range. There were no responses from the under 19 age group and the 75 and over age ranges.

9.0 RISKS

- 9.1 Lack of recognition as to when to consult can result in lost opportunities for customer feedback and involvement in Council initiatives.
- 9.2 The low response to the consultation could impact on the design of the priorities and this needs to be taken into account together with some consolidation of the views expressed sought in the wider public consultation due to take place in 2014/15.

10.0 CLIMATE CHANGE

- 10.1 In accordance with the Council's commitment to meet green targets and engage with customers through the website, the strategy refers to electronic methods of communication and consultation where appropriate.

11.0 CONSULTATION

- 11.1 A consultation was held on the Council's priorities from 23 December 2013 to 14 March 2014. An online survey was available on the Council's website during this period and this was promoted in the local media as well as through our user groups and Parish Councils network. The results of the consultation are available at Appendix A.

12.0 WARDS AFFECTED

- 12.1 All wards are affected.

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Date:	March 2014
Appendices : Background Papers:	Appendix A – Consultation Feedback
Reference :	X : Cttee Council & Sub Cttees/PFA/2013-14/160414