

GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

2 APRIL 2014

REPORT OF HEAD OF COMMUNICATIONS

**CONSULTATION RESULTS
AND
COMMUNITY CONSULTATION , ENGAGEMENT
AND INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY - REVISITED**

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 Further to Minute G55/13 of 27 November 2013 set out below, this report provides initial feedback from the consultation exercise at Appendix 1.

***RESOLVED** that the strategy be subject to a public consultation exercise over a 3 month period and the results be reported back to the April 2014 meeting of the Committee.*

- 1.2 After consideration of the consultation results, to request approval of the Community Consultation, Engagement and Involvement Strategy which was previously considered by the Committee on 27 November 2013 and which is attached together with its covering report.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **That the revised Community Consultation, Engagement and Involvement Strategy be approved and implemented with immediate effect.**
- 2.2 **That the Head of Communications be granted delegated authority to make amendments to the strategy following full consideration of the public consultation exercise as well as those in line with legislation and good practice.**

3.0 KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 Since the new Community Consultation, Engagement and Involvement Strategy was considered by the Committee on 27 November 2013, as requested a consultation exercise has been carried out on the proposed consultation arrangements at the same time as consulting on the Council's priorities. 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 priorities element of the consultation exercise will be reported to the Policy, Finance and Administration Committee at its meeting on 16 April 2014.
- 3.3 Section 2 of the survey related to the proposed new consultation arrangements to find out what people thought of these and whether they met their needs. The results of this section of the consultation are attached at Appendix 1 and are available to assist the Committee with their decision-making on the Council's consultation arrangements.
- 3.4 The online survey shown at Appendix 1 (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 1 (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 1 – 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 From the responses to the first question, there is an overwhelmingly positive view that people do want to be consulted on Council services, projects and issues that affect them and their life. This reinforces the value of consultation and that people want to be involved in having a say on Council issues.
- 3.12 The responses to the question about the Council taking into account consultation feedback in its decision-making indicated many did not know whether or not the

Council used this information. This demonstrates that the Council needs to work harder on its consultation processes in showing how consultation results are used in decision-making and ensuring such reports are publicly available.

- 3.13 The consultation method preferred was by far the online survey with 41 out of 54 responses. Questionnaires being delivered to people's homes, public meetings and contacting local Councillors being the next most popular method of providing views; these responses being in the low teens.
- 3.14 The survey highlighted a lack of knowledge on the Council's consultation arrangements with 28 out of 54 people saying they did not know whether the Council's draft Consultation, Engagement & Involvement Strategy set out what they needed when the Council consults with them. This will be addressed by the actions indicated in paragraph 3.17 below.
- 3.15 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.
- 3.16 In summary from the comments received, they demonstrate that people would like to be involved in matters that affect their lives and that people prefer to be involved at an early stage of the process and to receive feedback. The comments indicate that some people do not feel involved enough and when they do have a say, they are not knowing how the information is used. These areas are addressed in the strategy and toolkit and it is considered that devolvement of the processes outlined in the strategy to all Council staff will ensure that people are involved in matters that affect their lives, that they are kept informed and they are provided with results of consultation and reasons for these.
- 3.17 It is intended that full consideration be given to the qualitative feedback over the coming months whilst devolving the strategy across the Council. This is to ensure the processes are followed in line with the strategy which will mean that people are kept informed and feedback will be available. It is also important to promote individual consultation projects in the local media, through social media and on the website to ensure that people are aware when there is an opportunity to give their opinion and for it to be valued and used.

4.0 POLICY AND CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Revising the Community Consultation Strategy to ensure that it reflects our current arrangements and where the Council wants to be is a key part of the Council's ambition of being 'customer focused'. The strategy forms an important part of being 'A Well Run Council' by listening to what people say and using that information to tailor services around customer needs and therefore achieve customer satisfaction.
- 4.2 Ensuring there is a robust corporate consultation process in place ensures that the Council is able to meet the changing needs of its communities and respond in ways that deliver real improvement and value for money.

4.3 By carrying out a consultation exercise on the strategy, 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.

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.

6.2 When there is legal challenge, it appears that the issue of fairness is of paramount importance and as a general rule if people are affected by a policy change then they should be consulted and the results of the consultation must be made available to the decision-makers.

7.0 **COMMUNITY SAFETY**

7.1 There are no direct community safety implications in this report.

8.0 **EQUALITIES**

8.1 Consultation provides opportunities to reach all sections of the community and there is specific guidance in the toolkit as to how this can be achieved. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed and is available on the Council's website at this link :-

http://www.melton.gov.uk/equalities_and_diversity/equality_impact_assessments.aspx

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 Officers find the consultation process and toolkit too bureaucratic and do not follow the procedure. To mitigate, internal communication arrangements will follow approval of the revised strategy.

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 community consultation on the strategy and how we consult people was held 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 1.

12.0 WARDS AFFECTED

12.1 All wards will be involved in consultation.

Contact Officer	Sarah Evans, Senior Democracy Officer
Date:	March 2014
Appendices :	Appendix 1 – Consultation Feedback Appendix 2 - Report to Governance Committee of 27 November 2013 Appendix 3 – Community Consultation Strategy (includes Appendices A-E) Appendix 3 – Equalities Monitoring Form (App F) Appendix 3 – Consultation Toolkit (App G)
Background Papers:	Previous MBC Community Consultation Strategy Leeds Heart Centre Judgement – April 2013
Reference :	X : Cttee Council & Sub Cttees/GOV/2013-14/020414