

Executive

Consultation and Engagement Strategy Update 2012 - 2015

28 May 2012

Report of the Head of Transformation

PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report outlines the Council's updated Consultation and Engagement Strategy performance for the period 2012 -2015.

This report is public

Recommendations

The Executive is recommended:

- (1) To note past achievements in this area as a foundation for the updated strategy and action plan.
- (2) To agree the proposed consultation and engagement strategy and action plan and request that performance is reviewed on a regular basis.

Executive Summary

Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides the background to Cherwell District Council's approach to consultation and public engagement and proposes an updated strategy for 2012-15.
- 1.2 The Council has a good deal of local determination about how it undertakes public consultation. However, there are some specific requirements. These include the requirement to consult with local businesses with regards to the Council's budget, the updated Best Value Guidance (2011) which sets out certain requirements to consult, particularly with regards to the voluntary sector and service specific requirement, for example around planning.

Proposals

- 1.3 We ask the Executive to note the Council's past achievements in this area.

These have been noted in the introduction to the strategy and include:

- National recognition for best practice budget consultation (at the LARIA conference 2010)
- Setting up a local faith forum and disability forum, with local partners, to improve our engagement with harder to reach groups.
- Integrating service and financial planning with consultation to ensure local priorities directly inform the council's budget and business plan.
- Establishing and coordinating 'Connecting Communities' another activity undertaken in partnership which aims to take local services out to local communities and use innovative techniques such as video and graffiti walls to get on the ground feedback.
- Establishing a consultation portal which all services can use to collect feedback from local residents and to publicise consultation.

- 1.4 The strategy for 2012/15 has been reviewed and updated. Given the Council's strong focus over the last three years the strategy does not propose radical change. It aims to build on current good practice, increase the use of electronic consultation and ensure consultation is cost effective and robust.

The objectives of the strategy are:

1. Demonstrate clear commitment to consultation and community engagement
2. Develop flexible ways of engagement to effectively support formal processes, other council departments and partners
3. Work in partnership with others to ensure joined up consultation and engagement
4. Undertake consultation in line with clear standards and good practice
5. Ensure our consultation and engagement is open, accessible and inclusive
6. Demonstrate how the results of our consultation influences outcomes

Conclusion

- 1.5 The Council has a strong track record with regards to public consultation. It includes collecting information on customer satisfaction, budget and spending priorities as well as many activities to improve customer service and accessibility.
- 1.6 The strategy aims to continue with this approach, to maximise the use of electronic consultation and ensure that local residents and stakeholders continue to be able to feed their views into the council to help shape services and improve performance.

Background Information

- 2.1 The Council's current consultation strategy expired at the end of 2011/12. The actions outlined in the supporting plan have been implemented and over the past three years the Council has effectively undertaken a number of successful consultation initiatives.
- 2.2 Over the last 18 months the Council has also developed a wider approach that includes public engagement. This has led to the creation of a number of local forums that meet to discuss issues and help improve public services. Many of the events are held in partnership which reduces costs and helps improve locally 'joined-up' consultation.
- 2.3 The new strategy takes into account national policy changes such as the updated Best Value guidance (2011) and also policy agenda such as localism and the big society.
- 2.4 Consultation and engagement remain important to the Council in terms of the local information that is collected that can then be used to plan services and allocate budgets. A key part of this approach is the annual round of corporate consultation looking at customer satisfaction, areas for improvement and local spending priorities. This programme will remain at the core of the Council's approach to consultation and over the next three years the Council will seek to further reduce consultation costs whilst retaining and improving high quality and accessible consultation activities.

Key Issues for Consideration/Reasons for Decision and Options

- 3.1 This report presents the Council's updated consultation and engagement strategy and action plan for the period 2012/15.

The following options have been identified. The approach in the recommendations is believed to be the best way forward

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| Option One | (1) To note past achievements in this area as a foundation for the updated strategy and action plan.

(2) To agree the proposed consultation and engagement strategy and action plan and request that performance is reviewed on a regular basis. |
| Option Two | To reject the strategy as it currently stands and request amendments. |

Consultations

The strategy has been reviewed by the Joint management Team and will be subject to an equalities assessment.

Implications

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| Financial: | Financial Effects – The resource required to deliver the strategy is contained within existing budgets. |
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Comments checked by Karen Curtin, Head of Finance, 0300 0030106

Legal:

There are no direct legal issues arising from this report but having a sound approach to consultation bolsters the robustness of the Council's decision taking and reduces the overall likelihood of legal challenge.

Comments checked by Kevin Lane, Head of Law and Governance, 0300 0030107

Risk Management:

The consultation and engagement strategy ensures the Council undertakes public consultation in an effective and coordinated way. This minimises the risk of decisions being taken on the basis of poor information and other issues such as consultation fatigue or consultation that is neither robust nor offers value for money.

The author of this report is responsible for risk management.

Wards Affected

All

Corporate Plan Themes

The strategy covers all strategic priorities.

Executive Lead Member

Councillor Barry Wood
Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Corporate Strategy

Document Information

Appendix No	Title
Appendix 1	Consultation and Engagement Strategy 2012 – 15
Appendix 2	Consultation and Engagement Action Plan
Background Papers	
None	
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