

**Public Engagement and Corporate Consultation Review: 12 months on**

**Review title:** Public Engagement and Corporate Consultation  
**T&F Group chairman:** Avril Davies  
**Date reported to Cabinet:** 9 May 2011  
**Cabinet Member:** Martin Phillips (Bill Chapple at time of review)  
**Lead officer:** Sarah Ashmead  
**Date of progress report:** 20 June 2012

Recommendation	Agreed Y/N	Cabinet Response (from 9 May 2011)	Responsible Officer	Action by date (from Cabinet)	Six months on update (Nov 2011)	12 month update (June 2012)	Implemented Y/N
1. The Council's Consultation Strategy is rewritten and relaunched. The rebranded 'Public Involvement Strategy' should be user friendly and concise. The strategy should include the following: a. Corporate standards and protocols which should be adhered to by all services. b. Clear guidelines on how the public can influence decision making. c. A clear and active role for elected members in consultation and engagement exercises. d. A commitment by the Council to report	Yes	The Cabinet is fully committed to engaging residents and service users in its decision making in a meaningful way. This is reflected in the approach taken in relation to our recent consultations, for example with day services, libraries and youth services as well as the Bucks Debate. The Cabinet recognises that we need to update the Council's consultation protocols to reiterate this commitment and welcomes the work carried out by the Task and Finish Group which will inform the scope and	Sarah Ashmead	October 2011	The Public Involvement Strategy is currently under development, with the guidance of the Member Development Working Group, including the development of corporate standards and protocols and arrangements for monitoring these.  The Cabinet Member for Community Engagement has established a clear role for elected members in individual consultations, including the recent budget consultation.  A new corporate consultation officer has	The new Consultation and Engagement Strategy is being adopted as a Cabinet Member Decision. The strategy has been developed, shaped and approved by the Member Development Working Group (MDWG) and through discussion and involvement of senior officers across the Council (Appendix 1).  The strategy sets the direction and shape of activity through:  a. <b>Corporate standards and protocols</b> – the MDWG review the type, scale and approach of consultation activities by using a full list of past activity and in-depth case studies. This activity is being used alongside professional research guidelines to develop standards and protocols.  b. <b>Guidelines on influencing decisions</b> – to be addressed through principles in strategy around openness, involvement, consistency in presentation, legal and professional codes, and consideration of	Yes - Cabinet Member Key Decision in June 2012 – for strategy

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the outcome of all of consultation and engagement activities to the residents.		content of a new Public Involvement strategy.			been appointed, with specific responsibility for ensuring all consultation and engagement activities are reported to residents through the consultation portal software and to support the delivery of the Public Involvement Strategy.	<p>how specific groups can become involved or views sought.</p> <p>c. <b>Active Member involvement</b> – Working group structures are being implemented for consultations varying by scale of consultation (appendix 2). The MDWG will distinguish between Key and Large consultations, where a Cabinet Member will sit on the steering group for the former and front line members will be invited to join the latter through the MDWG.</p> <p>d. <b>Reporting the outcome of consultations</b> – Results can be reported for all consultations individually, which will be actively monitored for ‘Key’ consultations.</p> <p>An annual council wide response is also being developed to show how residents views gained from all consultations have been used by the Council – demonstrating an integrated use of consultation and engagement results,.</p>	
2. Services should undertake engagement activities prior to formal consultation. This will ensure that proposals for redesigning services are based on a clear understanding of the experiences and	Yes	The Cabinet agrees that it is good practice to work with service users to develop proposals, before undertaking formal consultation and has many examples of where this has taken	Sarah Ashmead	October 2011	<p><b>6 months update (Nov 2011)</b> Under development as part of the Public Involvement Strategy.</p> <p>Research on the impact of changes being proposed as part</p>	<p><b>12 month update (June 2012)</b> The new strategy stipulates that the council needs to undertake engagement activities to shape proposals to change services prior to consulting on them.</p> <p>An internal Forward Plan is being established that will ensure there is suitable lead in time to allow engagement prior to consultation on</p>	Yes - Approach embedded in strategy

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impact of proposed changes on residents and service users.		place successfully across the Council. We will reflect these principles in the Public Involvement Strategy.			of the MTP is being undertaken as part of the current budget consultation.	a decision. The new working group structures and their guidelines will ensure delivery. This will be monitored by the Chief Executive's Management Team on a six monthly basis.	
3. A cross-party corporate involvement group, consisting of Councillors and officers, should be established to monitor the purpose, methodology, quality and timing of proposed consultation and engagement activity.	Yes	The Cabinet agrees with the principle of involving a group of Members and officers in overseeing a consistent approach across the Council and, in particular, in promoting an active role for elected members in consultation and engagement activity. Rather than creating a separate group, it is proposed that the existing cross-party Member Development Working Group, which advises the Deputy Leader, should assume this role and amend its terms of reference accordingly.	Sarah Ashmead	July 2011	<b>6 months update (Nov 2011)</b> The Member Development Working Group was re-constituted in July 2011 under the chairmanship of the Cabinet Member for Resources. The new terms of reference of this group, agreed by the group on 15 July, include a responsibility to oversee and monitor the purpose, methodology, quality and timing of key consultations.	<b>12 month update (June 2012)</b>  The Member Development Working Group continues to meet to discuss consultation quarterly.  The group review past consultations and identify specific consultations they want to target to identify learning points. (Last meeting 22nd May 2012)	Yes

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<p>4. To improve the timeliness, participation and the efficiency of consultation and engagement exercises the Council should:</p> <p>a. Publish online a calendar of planned engagement and consultation activity for use both internally and by the public. The entry of data onto the calendar should be mandatory for all services.</p> <p>b. Provide a facility for residents and interested groups on the public website to sign up for email alerts from the 'Have Your Say' consultation pages.</p>	Yes	The Cabinet agrees that these two recommendations will both be helpful in improving access to the Council's consultation activity.	Sarah Ashmead	October 2011	<p><b>6 months update (Nov 2011)</b> An online calendar of consultation activity is in place for BCC and partners, and is designed for internal and public use.</p> <p>An online facility is under development linked to the consultation portal software which is run through our partner BMG Research. This will enable residents to register to take part in selected consultations with the residents' panel, and also to log interest and receive alerts on the basis of both topic areas and geography.</p>	<p><b>12 month update (June 2012)</b> <b>a. Online calendar</b> – current and planned consultations appear on the have your say internet pages.</p> <p>Senior managers will log key and large scale consultations onto an internal forward plan for consideration by the MDWG. This will enable activity to be planned through specific project working groups.</p> <p><b>b. Alerts</b> - Members receive an update email fortnightly of consultations.</p> <p>The specification for the Web-Procurement project (due to be mobilised in 2012/13) includes alert system functionality for stakeholders.</p> <p>Delivery of an automated alert system through the consultation software supplier (BMG) has not been possible.</p>	<p>Planned, current and past consultations appear online</p> <p>Member alerts Implemented</p> <p>Stakeholder alerts 2012/13</p>

# Appendix 1 – Consultation and Engagement Strategy

## CURRENT POSITION

- The Council undertakes 2 or 3 new consultation or engagement activities a week
- The majority of these are specific surveys, mainly targeted at service users
- There are approximately 10-15 key consultations that carry high political or financial importance
- The established consultation process does not differentiate on consultation scale or importance and does not allow sufficient planning and steering from officers and members
- The levels of resources invested do not always reflect the importance of the consultation

## VISION

Stakeholders<sup>1</sup> are positively involved in consultation and engagement activities that shape and inform decisions so that services and activities best meet their needs.

## AIMS

1. Having your say – Stakeholders are positively involved in giving their opinions and perceptions, and are clear on how their views are being used to influence decisions.
2. Informing Decisions – The Council understands the key perceptions, attitudes and behaviours of stakeholders and undertakes engagement activities prior to formal consultations on proposed service changes to ensure their views shape proposals.
3. Research approach – Consultation and engagement research is coordinated, is of a suitable size and quality for its intended use and is joined up with partners where appropriate.

## OBJECTIVES

### 1) Having your say

1a) *Openness and Involvement* – The reach of consultation and engagement activities are appropriate so that all relevant stakeholders are positively involved and are able to have their say.

1b) *Engagement and feedback* – Relevant stakeholders are given an opportunity to get involved in helping to shape services, policies and proposals promoting active involvement in their communities.

1c) *Consultation on proposals* – Consultations are undertaken to understand who may be significantly negatively affected by key service or policy changes and to assess the impact on them.

1d) *Suitable representation* – Relevant stakeholders are given suitable opportunity to contribute to the research, to ensure responses received are suitably representative of the population intended.

1e) *Vulnerable<sup>2</sup> groups* – Where they would be specifically affected, targeted consultation and engagement activities will give vulnerable groups an opportunity to influence services and policies.

1f) *'Seldom heard' / 'Hard to Reach'<sup>3</sup> (Cohesion)* – Where they would be specifically affected, hard to reach groups are actively targeted to ensure their views are heard.

1g) *You said we did* – Stakeholders are clear how their views have influenced services and policies and this is communicated and fed back.

### 2) Informing decisions

2a) *Shaping Policies* – Views on services and council proposals are sought from service users and non-users to inform service delivery and policy changes.

2b) *Timing* – Stakeholders are given an opportunity to engage at a time when they can influence the decisions on services and policies.

2c) *Elected councillors and decision maker involvement* – Councillors and senior officers are involved in shaping 'key' engagement and consultation activities, which are sufficient in size and scope.

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<sup>1</sup> In this strategy 'Stakeholders' refers to all residents, partners, groups and organisations based in Buckinghamshire or who use Buckinghamshire services

<sup>2</sup> In this strategy 'Vulnerable' refers to those who depend on specific council services e.g. those meeting social care eligibility criteria

<sup>3</sup> In this strategy 'Hard to reach' refers to people from ethnic minority backgrounds, those with life-limiting illnesses, young people and those in Hard Pressed and Moderate Means ACORN groups.

2d) *Results* – Results are analysed and presented so that they clearly link into service and policy decisions.

### 3) Appropriate research approach

3a) *Scale* – Engagement and consultation activities are conducted using a research plan that is appropriate to their size and scope<sup>4</sup> and stakeholders understand why their views are being sought and how their views will be used.

3b) *Planning and Structure* – Engagement and consultations activities have a lead in period which is long enough for key decision makers, councillors and research professionals to shape the consultation and engagement activities, and is appropriate to the size and scale of the consultation.

3c) *Scoping and Methodology* – Engagement and consultation activities are fully scoped before topics and questions are created. Appropriate methods and tools are used to engage and consult stakeholders.

3d) *Consistency* – Consistent themes and messages will be used throughout the course of each consultation and engagement activity.

3e) *Coordination* – Consultations are coordinated internally and with partners and relevant data is shared to improve service and policy decisions.

3f) *Legal and professional guidelines* – Consultations are planned and managed in accordance with relevant legal frameworks, recommendations and professional codes.

3g) *Duty to inform* – Statutory and legal notices are published appropriately to give all stakeholders an opportunity to comment or object to proposals.

### Outcomes

- Stakeholders are engaged and their perceptions are used to shape services so that they better meet their needs.
- Key consultations are identified, planned and are of an appropriate quality to provide an understanding of how well stakeholder needs are being met and to directly inform policy decisions.
- Consultation and engagement activities provide an un-biased, representative view of stakeholders opinions, where results are not misleading and appropriately inform the issues relating to decisions.

Measured by:		Targets tbc
Aim 1	% of residents who agree the Council “is open and honest about its activities”	
	% of residents who agree the Council “involves residents when making decisions”	
	% of residents who agree the Council “listens to the concerns of local residents”	
	% of residents who agree they “are able to influence Council decisions”	
	Feedback on key results and how they have been used to influence decisions is given on all consultations	
Aim 2	The Forward Plan identifies all key consultations and members chair the project steering groups	
	Members and research professionals steer all key consultations to improve their quality	
	% of consultations aims and objectives directly addressed from the results (key consultations only)	
Aim 3	Number of sub-groups with sufficient sample size to create representative results, as a % of the number of sub-groups identified at the outset of the research (for key consultations)	
	100% of key consultations show results for specific groups affected	
	The number of vulnerable groups engaged, as a % of the number identified in the research objectives for key consultations	
	All statutory consultations are conducted in accordance with the appropriate legal frameworks and professional guidelines	

<sup>4</sup> Activity will be segmented according to 3 scales ‘key’, ‘large’ and ‘small’.

## Appendix 2 – Consultation Project Working Groups

### Key Consultations

- The MDWG will identify which consultations on the forward plan are 'key'
- Key consultations will include, at minimum, a Cabinet Member on the project steering group
- The Cabinet Member, as project sponsor, will involve other members as appropriate.
- The Lead officer will set up the project working group consisting of:
- The **Project Steering Group** consisting of: Cabinet Member (Project Sponsor), Other Member(s), Research Professional(s), Project Manager; should meet at minimum 3 times:
  - The project Steering Group will oversee the development of the consultation with the Project Sponsor approving the consultation prior to launch.
  - Prior to the consultation development to agree timescales, aims and objectives and topic areas
  - Prior to consultation commencement to approve the consultation content and approach
  - After the consultation has closed to review results, report back, and develop actions
  - The Cabinet Member is responsible for raising awareness of the key consultation with other Members – typically via Member news, Member briefing sessions or email.
- The **Project Delivery Team** will develop a high quality consultation that meets the Project Steering Group's specifications
- The Project Delivery team will consist of: Research Professional(s), Project Manager - Service area lead officer, Other service area officers
- Guidelines will be created for the key consultations to support the planning of each project, including timescales, using the appropriate quantitative or qualitative methodology, designing quality questions based on appropriate topics and considering how results are presented and used.

### Large Consultations

- The MDWG will identify which consultations on the forward plan are 'large' and do not require Cabinet member steer.
- The MDWG could inform Local members of upcoming large consultations and invite them to liaise with the lead officer regarding involvement in the consultation working group – **MDWG to decide**
- The **Project Steering and Delivery Team** consisting of: Senior Officers (steer), Local Member (steer), Research Professionals, Service Area Officers should:
  - Oversee the development of the consultation
  - Agree timescales, aims and objectives and topic areas
  - Approve the consultation content and approach
  - Review results, report back, and develop actions
  - Consider how members view and use the results from the consultation
  - Develop a high quality consultation that meets the project's specifications
- Guidelines will be created for the large consultations to support the planning of each project, including timescales, using the appropriate quantitative or qualitative methodology, designing quality questions based on appropriate topics and considering how results are presented and used.

### Smaller Feedback and Engagement Consultations

- For smaller consultations that are not identified on the consultation forward plan, service areas should set up their own Delivery Teams to plan the activity in accordance with the research project guidelines for small feedback and engagement consultations
- Research professionals can be contacted for support to improve the methodology, timescales, topics and questions
- Members will be made aware of the consultation through the 'consultation registration process'