

REPORT TO CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 1 July 2021

REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

Date of Meeting: 8 July 2021

REPORT TO COUNCIL

Date of Meeting: 21 July 2021

Report of: Chief Executive & Growth Director

Title: Consultation Charter

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Council

1. What is the report about?

The report seeks agreement to adopt a Consultation Charter, which sets out the Council's commitment to best practice in consultation.

2. Recommendations:

That Executive recommends approval of, and Council approves, the Consultation Charter.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

To formalise the council's commitment to consultation and to ensure consistent arrangements.

To ensure that communities in Exeter and interested parties have an opportunity to inform proposals for council policies/decisions and changes to those policies/decisions.

4. What are the resource implications including non-financial resources?

The charter in itself will not have implications for resources. Previous and existing consultations have largely followed the arrangements in the Charter and budgets for each consultation are approved on an individual basis.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

There are no specific financial implications for Council to consider arising from this report.

6. What are the legal aspects?

There is no legal obligation to have a charter but the council is obliged to consult in certain circumstances and having a charter in place will ensure a consistent approach to consultation.

7. Monitoring Officer's comments

A consistent, transparent approach to consultation is commendable and the Monitoring Officer would commend this approach to consultation.

8. Report details

Members will recall that, at its meeting on 9th February 2021, Executive resolved to recommend Council's adoption of the draft Consultation Charter subject to consideration by the Scrutiny Programme Board (SPB) at its meeting on 18 February 2021. The SPB subsequently resolved to convene a Spotlight Review Group to consider the Charter in more detail.

The Spotlight Review Group met on 16 March 2021. The group comprised councillors Atkinson, Buswell, Leadbetter, D. Moore and Wardle with Councillor Atkinson appointed Chair. Councillor Atkinson had referred Members to the Guide to Community Engagement report - New Conversations - produced by the Local Government Association. The Review Group had considered the LGA document in detail and agreed that it would be appropriate to amend the draft Charter to incorporate elements from the LGA document. In addition, it was agreed that consultation plans should be prepared for all council consultations to build in the detail contained in the LGA Guidance.

To recap, the Council carries out numerous consultations every year, both formal and informal. In order to ensure that common and consistent principles are applied in all cases, the Consultation Charter has been developed in accordance with best practice guidance from the Local Government Association and other local authorities, including Bristol and Hounslow. Importantly, the Charter has been informed by The Consultation Institute and its 7 principles of best practice: visibility, accessibility, transparency, disclosure, fair interpretation, publication and integrity (overarching).

In addition, the publication of a Consultation Charter was an action in the Corporate Equality Plan. It supports Equality Impact Assessments by clarifying what specific or general consultation we will do to assess specific impacts.

The Charter contains principles that explain how and when we will undertake consultation and what consultees can expect. Copies of the revised Charter, incorporating the revisions made by the Spotlight Review Group, and a template for consultation plan, as agreed by the group, are included at Annex A.

9. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?

The Charter underpins the priorities for a well-run council and value-for-money services.

10. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

There are no risks associated with adopting the charter. Adoption will ensure that the council meets best practice consultation standards.

11. Equality Act 2010 (The Act)

11.1 Under the Act's Public Sector Equalities Duty, decision makers are required to consider the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct;
- advance equality by encouraging participation, removing disadvantage, taking account of disabilities and meeting people's needs; and
- foster good relations between people by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

11.2 In order to comply with the general duty authorities must assess the impact on equality of decisions, policies and practices. These duties do not prevent the authority from reducing services where necessary, but they offer a way of developing proposals that consider the impacts on all members of the community.

11.3 In making decisions the authority must take into account the potential impact of that decision in relation to age, disability, race/ethnicity (includes Gypsies and Travellers), sex and gender, gender identity, religion and belief, sexual orientation, pregnant women and new and breastfeeding mothers, marriage and civil partnership status in coming to a decision.

11.4 In recommending this proposal potential impact has been identified on people with protected characteristics as determined by the Act and an Equalities Impact Assessment has been included in the background papers for Member's attention.

12. Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

No direct carbon/environmental impacts arising from the recommendations.

13. Are there any other options?

There are no alternatives.

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Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

[New Conversations: LGA guide to engagement | Local Government Association](#)

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