

REPORT TO CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 3 October 2024

Report of: Strategic Director People and Communities

Title: **Update on the Consultation Charter and Development of an Engagement and Consultation Policy**

Is this a Key Decision?

Scrutiny is a non decision making committee

Is this an Executive or Council Function? Neither

1. What is the report about?

This report is in response to a request for information from members about the development of a Consultation Policy.

2. Recommendations:

No recommendations

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

Not applicable.

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

Whilst no additional resources for consultation activity have been allocated the Director will be remodelling a vacant post to create a Consultation and Engagement Manager. This post alongside the vacant head of Customer and Communities will be recruited to externally and are not expected to be in post until early in the New Year. The Consultation and Engagement Manager will have responsibility for drafting a consultation strategy and annual delivery plan alongside co-ordinating and advising on engagement and consultation exercises across the council. In future members can expect to see an annual report on the insights gained from this activity.

5. What are the legal aspects?

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the development of a consultation policy. Accordingly there are no legal issues to consider at this stage.

6. Report details:

The Senior Leadership Restructure has created a new department and Head of Service for Customers and Communities under the new Directorate of People. Whilst there are pockets of good practice in relation to public consultation and engagement this new designation has come about in recognition of the need to increase and better co-ordinate formal consultation and engagement work with residents and communities. The importance of increasing this activity was highlighted in the Digital Customer Strategy approved in November 2023 and in feedback from external auditors who have highlighted opportunities for improving consultation to aid budget setting.

The new Strategic Director took up her post in July this year and has introduced a new operational Consultation Gateway to start to co-ordinate consultation activity and to improve the quality of proposed engagement and consultation exercises. Over time this process will also enable the collation feedback so insights can be better utilised at a strategic level. The Director also worked with the Executive to commission and external agency to undertake a local version of the Local Government Association's Residents survey. The field work completed in September and the findings will be presented to the Executive in due course and will be used to inform thinking about revised Corporate Plan priorities and the setting of further public consultation in October to inform priority setting for the 2025/26 budget.

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

There is no decision but consultation and engagement is necessary for the Council to achieve its ambition of Leading a well-run Council.

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

The actions reported on in this note will mitigate the risk of further negative audit feedback in relation to consultation on budget setting.

9. 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 No potential impact has been identified on people with protected characteristics as determined by the Act because the report is for noting only

10. Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

12.1 Important to complete this section in light of the Council declaring a Climate Emergency. Consider whether the recommendations you are making in the report will help, hinder or have no direct impact on delivering our carbon reduction target (carbon neutral by 2030).

12.2 You should think about things like:-

- Travel (and, if travel is unavoidable, whether lower carbon options will be pursued e.g. walking, public transport, electric car);
- Infrastructure (e.g. LED lighting, energy efficient heating/hot water, solar panels, electric car charging points);
- Waste (e.g. recycling, composting, reducing non-recyclable waste); and
- Any other specific carbon reduction initiatives.

12.3 If there are no direct carbon/environmental implications for the decision please state:

No direct carbon/environmental impacts arising from the briefing note.

11. Are there any other options?

There are lots of other options but given the scarce resource this is the option identified as the most cost-effective at this time.

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

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

None

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