

REPORT TO CUSTOMER FOCUS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 28th November

Report of: Strategic Director People and Communities

Title: Consultation Charter

Is this a Key Decision?

Scrutiny is a non decision making committee

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Executive

1. What is the report about?

Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee have asked for an officer report

2. Recommendations:

It is recommended that Customer Focus Scrutiny Committee notes the contents of the report.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

The report is narrative, as requested by members.

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

Not applicable. Scrutiny is not a decision-making committee

5. What are the legal aspects?

Not applicable. Scrutiny is not a decision-making committee

6. Report details:

- 6.1 The Consultation Charter introduced by members was reviewed and updated in September 2023. This document has been used by officers to guide consultations.
- 6.2 The Senior Leadership Restructure has created a new department and Head of Service for Customers and Communities under the new Directorate of People and Communities. Whilst there are many examples 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.
- 6.3 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.
- 6.4 The new Strategic Director took up post in July this year and has introduced a 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.

- 6.5 In line with the consultation charter all formal council consultation activities are promoted on the Council website. Prior to commencement officers need to complete a consultation charter checklist to aid them in adhering to the principles set out in the Consultation Charter. So far this year we have completed 9 public consultations. 10 were completed in 2023; 3 in 2022; 5 in 2021 and 3 in 2020. Details can be found in the appendix.
- 6.6 Whilst no additional resources for consultation activity have been allocated the Director has remodelled a vacant post to create a Consultation and Engagement Manager. This post alongside the vacant Head of Service, Customer and Communities is being recruited to externally and are expected to be filled 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.
- 6.7 Since the appointment the Director has worked with SMB and the Executive to commission an expert market research agency to undertake a local version of the Local Government Association's Residents survey. The field work completed in September and the findings have been discussed informally with the Executive to aid their thinking about a new Corporate Plan. A series of themed briefings for communications with members and other stakeholders is now being planned to disseminate the findings.
- 6.8 A further public engagement and exercise will commence in November 2024 facilitated by an expert market research agency to seek feedback on the areas that residents would like to see invested in the next budget alongside their priorities for potential dis-investment or the introduction of charging for several services, all of which will be under consideration by the Executive as it plans the budget for 25/26. This exercise will also seek resident and stakeholder views on the longer term priorities being considered for a new Corporate Plan to be published in 2025.

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

Not applicable: Scrutiny is not a decision-making committee

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

Not applicable. Scrutiny is not a decision-making committee

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 potential impact because the report is for noting only.

11. Are there any other options?

Not applicable. Scrutiny is not a decision-making committee

Director Jo Yelland Strategic Director People and Community

Report Author: Jo Yelland

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

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

Consultation Charter December 2023

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