



DERBY CITY COUNCIL

COUNCIL CABINET
5th September 2006

Report of Cabinet Member for Corporate Policy

ITEM 6

Proposed Revised Consultation Strategy

SUMMARY

- 1.1 The paper at Appendix 2 is a response to a review of the 2002 Consultation Strategy following the topic review by the former Community Regeneration Commission - Community Involvement and Consultation - submitted to the Council Cabinet on 27 September 2005.
- 1.2 The revised Strategy provides an overview of current consultation activities, proposes a number of key strategic objectives and key actions required to deliver a new corporate consultation strategy.
- 1.3 The revised Strategy has been discussed with senior officers, consultation practitioners, the Advisory Committees and members whose portfolios or championing remits are associated with the work of the Consultation Support Team.
- 1.4 The proposal was considered by the Scrutiny Management Commission on 11th July 2006.

RECOMMENDATION

- 2 To approve and adopt the revised Consultation Strategy with immediate effect.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 3 To respond to the former Community Regeneration Commission topic review – Community Involvement and Consultation – and to produce a revised Consultation Strategy which reflects current best practice.



Proposed Revised Consultation Strategy

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 1.1 In response to the Local Government Acts of 1999 and 2000 the Council, along with other key partners in DCP, developed and adopted a city-wide Consultation Strategy (2002) to guide all consultation activities undertaken across Derby.
- 1.2 In 2005, the Council's Community Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Commission undertook a review of community involvement and consultation. It found that whilst there is generally a good standard of consultation across the Council, there was a need to;
 - strengthen the strategy in the Council, focusing on developing the strategy internally
 - raise awareness of the consultation strategy and the benefits if its implementation among council officers
 - improve the planning and co-ordination of consultation exercises
 - adopt greater innovation in its approach to reach a wider range of groups and stakeholders
 - improve standards of communication and feedback on consultation
 - acquire more performance monitoring information especially on the cost of consultation.
- 1.3 The revised Strategy responds to the changing needs of service users as identified through consultation, the review findings and also the Audit Commission's new criteria for judging community engagement in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment.
- 1.4 The strategy has five key aims, these are listed below along with bullet points under each to highlight some examples of how these will be delivered.
- 1.5 The strategy aims to:
 1. strengthen strategic planning and co-ordination of consultation activities and demonstrate how consultation fits into the Council's decision-making processes.
 - planned consultation will make up a council consultation annual plan. This will make consultation activities more visible to council officers, and make it easier to co-ordinate and benefit from similar activities
 - planned consultation will be made visible to the public. One method will be through a database on the council website. This will also publish and report the results of consultation. The Your City Your Say database will be launched in the Autumn

- the Communications and Engagement Board, a sub-group of Building on Excellence Board will maintain an overview of the consultation plan and perform a quality assessment role
2. ensure the effective use of consultation to improve services and policy by supporting officers and members to help them make informed choices on appropriate consultation methods and delivery.
 - the Consultation Support Team (CST) will continue to provide advice and support on planning, running and evaluating consultation to new quality standards
 - performance indicators will be developed to monitor how well the council does consultation
 3. improve equality of opportunity in consultation using a wide range of methods and technologies to enable participation in consultation especially from 'harder to engage' groups.
 - the CST will investigate new methods of consultation for people who are reluctant or unable to take part in more 'usual' methods, in order to maximise a response from these groups
 - the Advisory Committees will be modernised and more thought given to consultation with the target groups they represent
 - the CST will continue to develop a network of children and young people, the Youth Forum Shadow Executive Board and "youth link derby", a dedicated website to support communication and consultation
 - the CST will continue to develop the Derby Seniors Forum and an older peoples network to support the delivery of the vision for ageing
 - representation and response rates for the Pointer Panel will continue to be improved
 4. make our consultation processes more meaningful for stakeholders and citizens through better communication about the purpose, topics and outcomes of consultation
 - performance indicators will be developed to monitor how well the council does consultation
 5. support the management of collected data and results to avoid repetition and build an 'information bank' by area and population group in the Data Warehouse.
 - information will be collected ethically and in ways which make it possible to compare and collate findings.

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 The Consultation Strategy was awarded a 'good' score in the CPA assessment in 2004. However the scrutiny review of community involvement and consultation suggested some improvement areas. A comprehensive search of other strategies and procedures in other councils suggested that the strategy, in itself, was compatible with these. However, some areas such as the review of Advisory Committees, the use of ICT and improved performance monitoring have been adopted within the strategy.

- 2.2 The main option to be considered was whether to bring the strategy into the City Council or retain the Derby City Partnership approach. Following a recommendation by the review to strengthen the role of the strategy within the council, it was agreed to bring the strategy 'in-house'. In the mean time the DCP has agreed to prepare an umbrella statement on community consultation.

**For more information
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Background papers:

List of appendices:

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None

Appendix 1 – Implications

Appendix 2 – Consultation Strategy

IMPLICATIONS

Financial

1. No new financial implications in the report. However, in performance management the cost of consultation would be tracked.

Legal

2. The council has a statutory duty to consult and consultation is measured in the Corporate Performance Assessment which evaluates the level at which the council is operating.

Personnel

3. None in this report

Equalities impact

4. The report proposes improvements to the way that hard to engage people are consulted. The proposals include modernisation of the Advisory Committees that has been the subject of separate consultation and reporting.

Corporate objectives and priorities

- 5.1 The proposal is key to working with local people to better understand their concerns and aspirations, it comes directly under the Council's objectives of healthy, safe and independent communities, a diverse, attractive and healthy environment, a prosperous, vibrant and successful economy and a shared commitment to regenerating our communities.
- 5.2 Consultation, a facility for capturing local expertise, is key to delivering all the council's priorities.



Consultation Strategy

This updated strategy is a response to a review of the 2002 City-wide Consultation Strategy. It proposes a number of key strategic objectives and key actions required to deliver a new corporate consultation strategy.

The previous strategy was prepared through collaboration and consultation, this revised strategy builds on that firm base. The main change is to strengthen the strategy within the Council. Although this means that the strategy ceases to lead consultation for the Derby City Partnership (DCP), we will continue to work with our partners as before. The DCP is working to adopt an umbrella consultation statement to link all partners' consultation strategies. The Council will be part of this process. Other changes within this strategy cover reporting structures and performance monitoring, embracing new technologies, enhanced supporting of participation and alignment with the Communications and Consultation Strategy.

1. BACKGROUND

The Local Government Acts of 1999 and 2000 set down new and specific requirement for local authorities to consult with a range of stakeholders on proposals for new constitutional arrangements, community planning and to inform continuous improvement in services. In 2002 the Council, along with other key partners in DCP, developed and adopted the first city-wide Consultation Strategy to guide all consultation activities undertaken across Derby.

The 2002 strategy set out to support consistent good practice in consultation, allow more co-ordination of consultation and systematic contact with harder to reach groups, store results and reports so that the findings of research and consultation are accessible, provide technical and practical support, develop in-house expertise and resources and develop public trust in consultation.

In 2005, the Council's Community Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Commission undertook a review of community involvement and consultation. It found that whilst there is generally a good standard of consultation across the Council, there was a need to;

- strengthen the strategy in the Council, focusing on developing the strategy internally
- raise awareness of the consultation strategy and the benefits if its implementation among council officers
- improve the planning and co-ordination of consultation exercises
- adopt greater innovation in its approach to reach a wider range of groups and stakeholders
- improve standards of communication and feedback on consultation
- acquire more performance monitoring information especially on the cost of consultation.

The revised strategy also responds to the Audit Commission's new criteria for judging community engagement in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment and to e-government targets on e-consultation.

2. INTRODUCTION – where we are now?

This revised strategy will complement the Communications and Consultation Strategy and supports the communications principle:

'All Council communications play a part in developing positive and effective dialogue and relationship with stakeholders'.

The Council's **Vision**, as expressed in the DCP Community Strategy is:

Derby - a city for all ages

'People from all walks of life will feel they belong to Derby and that Derby offers them every thing they need – for work, education, housing, leisure, and a safe, healthy lifestyle'.

Derby City Council is committed to conducting effective consultation to help the Council deliver this vision.

The Council has a range of activities to support community engagement and participation. The existing Area Panels and developing neighbourhood-working arrangements enable residents, businesses and local groups to raise their needs and priorities direct with the Council and other service providers. The Council also helps stakeholders and individuals engage through its community development work. The Council's strategy on Community Engagement (in preparation) explains the process of working with local people. Consultation is a crucial part of the Council's approach to community engagement and participation. In particular, it is used to collect information from people who do not wish to participate in on-going user or neighbourhood initiatives and can therefore have a broader base.

This strategy is also linked to the Vision for Aging initiative and the 'Children and Young Peoples' Participation Strategy'. Both of these describe the process of working alongside young and older 'stakeholders' to develop a strategic approach to service planning.

The term consultation has been defined as 'a process of dialogue that leads to a decision'¹. Box 1² defines different levels of participation from receiving information to being fully involved in decision making. The scope of this strategy is to guide those activities defined here as Inform, Research, Consult and Involve. Other council service providers, those who work directly with communities or community groups, will also work at the 'involve' level and are more qualified to support collaboration and empowering activities.

Box 1	
Inform	Providing the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding issues, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions
Research	Seeking information without directly involving the participants in the decision making process
Consult	Obtaining public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions
Involve	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered
Collaborate	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution
Empower	To place final decision making in the hands of the public

¹ Listen Up - Effective Community Consultation (1999), www.audit-commission.gov.uk/reports/

² Adapted from: People and Participation: How to put citizens at the heart of decision-making (2005), www.involving.org

The Consultation Support Team

The Consultation Support Team (CST) was established to develop and implement the Consultation Strategy. The team is a corporate resource providing expertise, advice and support on consultation methodologies and best practice. The CST is located in the Communication and Consultation Unit within Democratic Services in the Corporate and Adult Social Services Department.

The CST has established a range of mechanisms to support consultation activities including;

- the Derby Pointer Panel - a representative citizen's panel
- Derby Viewpoint - a user panel
- Advisory Committees for women, minority ethnic communities and disabled people
- Derby Seniors' Forum
- Derby Youth Forum and a dedicated website for young people 'youthlinkderby'
- a web-based database of consultation exercises, the Consultation Finder
- on-line questionnaires/forms generation
- advice and support service for people undertaking consultation
- quality standards
- method guides and training.

In addition to the CST, there are at least 30 practitioners across the Council who are members of a city-wide Consultation Network and who are involved on a regular or ad hoc basis in managing consultation activities. The Consultation Network, was established to share information on consultation exercises, best practice and expertise.

In Autumn 2005, a series of reviews and surveys were carried out to assess these consultation mechanisms and to compare the council's strategic approach to consultation with other Local Authorities.

3. STRATEGIC AIMS: where do we want to be?

This revised strategy seeks to build on the good practice in consultation already established in Derby. It provides the overarching consultation framework for other statutory documents.

The strategy aims to:

1. strengthen strategic planning and co-ordination of consultation activities and demonstrate how consultation fits into the Council's decision-making processes
2. ensure the effective use of consultation to improve services and policy by supporting officers and members to help them make informed choices on appropriate consultation methods and delivery
3. improve equality of opportunity in consultation using a wide range of methods and technologies to enable participation in consultation especially from 'harder to engage' groups
4. make our consultation processes more meaningful for stakeholders and citizens through better communication about the purpose, topics and outcomes of consultation

5. support the management of collected data and results to avoid repetition and build an 'information bank' by area and population group.

These aims will be achieved under the following strategic objectives.

Strategic Objective 1: Produce and implement an annual corporate consultation plan

The CST will produce a corporate consultation plan that will be updated on a quarterly basis. It will contain as a minimum, consultations;

- that support the overview and scrutiny functions
- on key customer service reviews
- on statutory corporate planning activities such as the annual budget
- regarding statutory planning requirements
- related to legislative developments impacting on local communities.

Planning for consultation is part of the annual business planning process and identified consultation will be included in the annual consultation plan. Delivery of the plan will be monitored and reported. The plan will be used to co-ordinate consultation exercises, build on synergy and avoid repetition. It will also be used for monitoring and evaluation purposes. The plan will inform the 'Your City, your say', which will be a publicly available on-line database of consultation activity made available through the Council's website.

The 'Your city, your say', will also show the results and outcomes of finished consultation to show transparency of process.

Strategic Objective 2: Support officers and members to help them make informed choices on appropriate consultation methods and delivery

The CST will continue to provide advice and support to help colleagues to plan and deliver appropriate consultation that is effective, efficient and informed.

The team will introduce a consultation quality standard to;

- help service managers understand what is good practice in consultation
- achieve consistent high quality consultation practice across the Council
- benchmark and measure our performance in this area of work
- communicate to the public what they can and should expect from our consultation exercises.

The CST will develop a planning tool to be used as a core component of every consultation exercise. On a corporate basis, the team will evaluate the effectiveness of consultation and community involvement to demonstrate to the public the impact their participation has had on the Council's decision-making.

The team will work to improve people's understanding of the Derby Pointer as a consultative mechanism that is representative of Derby citizens and will also work with the contractor to increase response rates.

The CST will develop our e-consultation capacity to support developments under the e-democracy initiative, in particular the ability to participate in live consultation electronically. The team will promote the use of the Council's website and e-resources to facilitate

consultation processes and increase participation. This will be an important approach for consulting with young people and others who prefer this method. In addition to form based online questionnaires, we will seek to adopt a wider range of consultation technologies to increase participation.

Strategic Objective 3: Improve equality of opportunity in consultation using a wide range of methods and technologies to enable participation

Through modernisation of the Advisory Committees, and through the Derby Seniors Forum and the Derby Youth Forum, the CST will continue to provide a consultation process with equality target groups.

The Youth Forum will work closely with the Children's and Young People's Strategic Partnership and the Seniors Forum will work closely with the Derby Older People's Strategic Planning Partnership.

In addition the CST will continue to develop innovative methods to enable participation and engage with harder to reach groups. The team will work with colleagues in areas that support community participation, such as the Area and Neighbourhood Unit and the Youth Service, to develop synergy in working on community issues.

Strategic Objective 4: Establish a corporate standard for communication and feedback on consultation activities

We will raise the standard of communication and feedback on consultation activities to three main audience groups:

- internally across the Council
- to stakeholders directly affected by the consultation
- to the general public.

Participants in consultation should have confidence in their experience and develop a positive perception of the way the council takes care to listen and respond to their views.

At the start of each consultation exercise we will define and communicate, using appropriate channels, the level of public and stakeholder participation. This will make clear how the information gained from the consultation will be used in the decision-making and if there are any limitations such as legislative or financial restrictions. At the close of consultations, feedback will be given on the results and outcomes.

Strategic Objective 5: Support the management of collected data and results

The CST will help colleagues collect data in an ethical and consistent way to help feed and build comparative information in the data warehouse. This will help the council to create data sets by population and area and to compare differences in responses that could lead to a better understanding of equality and locality issues.

- The data warehouse will deliver better quality, local information to support monitoring, research and strategy development.

4. HOW THE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES WILL BE DELIVERED

Delivering strategic objective 1: Produce and Implement an annual corporate consultation plan

The Communication and Engagement Board, sub group of Building on Excellence (BoE), will take responsibility for endorsing the council consultation plan and maintaining a strategic overview of planned consultations. They will have a monitoring role for quality assessment for both selected individual consultation exercises and for the Council's consultation activities as a whole.

The CST will take a lead role in developing, maintaining and monitoring the plan, reporting to the BoE sub group. The plan will be the key process for monitoring, co-ordination and evaluation. Appropriate consultation information from the plan will be added to 'Your city, your say'.

'Your city, your say', on the City Council web-site, will detail planned, current and completed consultation, both consultation results and outcomes will be published. 'Your city, your say'. users will be able to register for 'alerts', by preferred subject areas, for newly opened consultation, available results and the eventual outcomes.

Strategic Objective 2: Support officers and members to help them make informed choices on appropriate consultation methods and delivery

The CST will continue as a corporate resource providing expertise, advice and support on consultation methodologies and best practice. This service will be promoted within the Council. The intranet will be developed as a corporate consultation resource where officers can access practical materials and guides produced by the team.

The CST will develop a collaborative approach with colleagues in other divisions or departments with a named link consultation officer for each department. Where the CST is involved in assisting with projects a project plan outlining responsibilities will be prepared, this will describe the level of CST support and use a consultation planning tool to ensure that consultation exercises meet corporate process and quality standards. The CST will seek feedback from its internal customers and continue to develop a valued service.

Evaluation will be monitored through performance indicators such as, the number of responses received, how representative these are of the population of interest, the cost and timeliness of any consultation and the extent to which the results are able to influence ongoing service provision. Collated indicators will be used to measure the collective performance of the Council and reported on a regular basis to the BoE sub group.

The CST will identify areas for improvement and develop, source and implement appropriate training and support programmes to encourage improved consultation practice.

The Derby Consultation Network will be revived and resumed to improve communication and networking between consultation practitioners. The Network will be invaluable in generating the consultation plan and in identifying resources for joint projects. Members of the Network will be key contacts within departments and share the role of cascading consultation skills. Technology will be used for networking to maximise sharing of information while retaining meetings.

The proposed corporate consultation standards are included in Appendix 1.

Strategic Objective 3: Improve equality of opportunity in consultation using a wide range of methods and technologies to ensure that we enable participation.

The CST will modernise the role of the Advisory Committees to ensure the Council meets its requirements to consult with a range of equality dimension groups. In particular the role of quality assurance will be enhanced so that members of these committees have a role in endorsing the quality of consultation with equality target groups.

The CST will continue to develop Derby's Seniors' Forum and the Youth Forum to increase involvement and participation in service development. The team will continue to provide expertise and advice to colleagues seeking to consult with these groups. These two Forums will work closely with their appropriate strategic planning partnerships and consultation officers will support involvement at this level.

CST will seek to raise awareness and understanding of the role of the Derby Pointer Panel as one of the Council's significant mechanisms for consulting with residents. CST will work with the contractor to increase response rates by consulting with the Panel in different ways to ensure a more thorough representation of the whole population.

CST will help to pilot and prepare guidance on, new consultation approaches and methods. It will collect and share information about innovative ways to consult with 'hard to engage' groups. CST will develop an expertise in appropriate methods of reaching people and groups who may have difficulties in reading and writing, whose first language is not English or who have a mental or physical disability. In local neighbourhoods, CST will work with service managers to identify the use of other appropriate methods such as road shows and exhibitions.

The adoption of technology will be used to increase participation with some hard to engage groups.

Strategic Objective 4: Establish a corporate standard for communication and feedback on consultation activities

The CST will develop its communication with internal customers by implementing an awareness-raising programme, including promotion of this strategy and the quality standards. The CST will do more to promote the service they provide and their contribution towards enabling a dialogue with citizens which is continuous, open, inclusive, clear, secure and reliable.

CST and the corporate communications team will develop and promote communication quality standards and provide training and support on communication and public relations during consultation, including providing information and feedback. There will be a clear synergy between the Council's communications and consultation strategies.

The team will develop a consultation hub on the Council's website to support and improve communication. The CST will pilot the use of other methods, such as SMS texting, to support consultation exercises and will link with the e-democracy initiative to support this objective. 'Your city, your say', will be used to communicate current consultation and the results and outcomes of completed consultation. A system of 'alerting' registered users of 'Your city, your say', to consultation topics in which they have a declared interest will be developed.

Strategic Objective 5: Support the management of collected data and results.

The CST will develop the use of 'Your city' your say', as the principal public tool for presenting the results of consultation and indicating the outcomes of the process.

- The CST will also work with colleagues to ensure data compatibility with the data warehouse and other comparative opportunities and will promote the use of the data warehouse as a tool for delivering better quality, local information to support monitoring, research and strategy development.

The CST will promote good practice in data protection.

APPENDIX 1

DERBY CITY COUNCIL'S CORPORATE CONSULTATION STANDARDS.

In order to ensure our consultation processes are meaningful and effective we will;

- avoid consultation duplication by checking that the information sought is not already available
- ensure that consultation is well designed
- explain to participants why the consultation is being carried out and how the results will be used
- follow corporate process to make sure consultation and its outcomes are transparent
- use appropriate and innovative consultation processes to encourage a good response rate to enable participation
- allow time for the issues to be considered and responses to be submitted
- provide feedback to participants
- make sure that consultation is conducted ethically
- evaluate the effectiveness of consultation and regularly assess how well we are meeting these standards.