

CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

AGENDA ITEM 4

REPORT TO CABINET

4 JANUARY 2007

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
POLICY SELECT COMMITTEE**

CABINET DECISION

**Corporate – Lead Cabinet Member- Cllr Coleman
Social Inclusion and Neighbourhoods – Lead Cabinet Member - Cllr Johnson**

REVIEW OF CORPORATE CONSULTATION

1. Summary

This report informs Cabinet of the outcomes of the review of the Council's review of Corporate Consultation undertaken by the Corporate Policy Select Committee between April and November 2006.

2. Recommendations

Recommended that:

1. That co-ordination of consultation arrangements is strengthened by extending the remit of the Policy Officers' Group to fulfil the following roles:
 - to disseminate best practice
 - to regularly review the Consultation Plan
 - to audit a sample of consultations
 - to conduct post consultation review
2. That Services be reminded of the importance of notifying the Consultation Unit of all consultations before consultation takes place and of keeping the Consultation Plan fully up to date.
3. That the Consultation Plan be developed as a communication tool and made widely accessible through the Internet/Intranet including links to consultation results and Business Case/ Project Plans.
4. That a Business Case/ Project Plan is prepared by the lead officer for significant consultations (determined by an assessment of risk and the scale of the consultation) and that the Business Case/ Project Plan identify opportunities for joint working, include an assessment of costs and set out how the consultation results and outcomes will be fed back to consultees.

5. That training on consultation is compulsory for staff directly involved in organising and running consultations.
6. That a robust post consultation review process be established to enable the Council to learn for future consultation activities (working, as appropriate, with local Councillors/partner agencies/other Local Authorities for greater challenge and independence).
7. That all Members be asked for feedback on consultation activity annually.
8. That a link to the Consultation Plan be emailed quarterly to all Members and summary information relating to the previous and next quarter consultations be reported to Executive Scrutiny Committee as part of its quarterly performance report
9. That the Concordat for Communication and Consultation with Members be revised to ensure that Councillors are notified of consultation proposed in their ward before the consultation commences and is in the public domain.
10. That the Consultation Plan is shared with key partners on a quarterly basis and extended to include a section for consultations undertaken by Renaissance.
11. That a revised Consultation Strategy be prepared taking into account the outcomes of the scrutiny review and that the revised Strategy seeks to strengthen the Council's links with partner agencies and approach to consulting with children and young people.

3. Reasons for the Recommendations/Decision(s)

This topic was identified as an area meriting a scrutiny review at a meeting of the Scrutiny Liaison Forum held on 8 March 2006. The issue was subsequently referred to the Corporate Policy Select Committee for approval, and passed to a meeting of the Executive Scrutiny Committee as part of the work programming procedure.

The objectives/aims developed by the Committee for the review were as follows: -

- To improve community engagement
- To ensure corporate approach by all departments
- To determine how views are used to shape service delivery
- To review the Council's consultation strategy to determine whether it is fit for purpose and identify any improvements

The review addresses the following strategic corporate objectives:

- Council Planning Framework – Putting people first / Working with others.

4. Members Interests

Members (including co-opted members with voting rights) should consider whether they have a personal interest in the item as defined in the Council's code of conduct (paragraph 8) and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with paragraph 9 of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest in the item, he/she must then consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest (paragraph 10 of the code of conduct).

A Member with a prejudicial interest in any matter must withdraw from the room where the meeting is being held, whilst the matter is being considered; not exercise executive functions in relation to the matter and not seek improperly to influence the decision about the matter (paragraph 12 of the Code).

Further to the above, it should be noted that any Member attending a meeting of Cabinet, Select Committee etc.; whether or not they are a member of the Cabinet or Select Committee concerned, must declare any personal interest which they have in the business being considered at the meeting, and if their interest is prejudicial, they must also leave the meeting room during consideration of the relevant item.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

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DETAIL

1. The Corporate Policy Select Committee were tasked with reviewing the Council's approach to corporate consultation.
2. Recent years has seen the growth of the consultation culture. In order to avoid a fragmented approach and a consequent rise in consultation fatigue, many public bodies have prepared Consultation or Public Engagement Strategies. Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's Consultation Strategy was produced in 2000 and a review of the Council's approach to corporate consultation was therefore considered timely to examine whether the Strategy was fit for purpose and to identify any improvements.
3. The Committee agreed to adopt a phased approach to the review. The purpose of the first stage was to set the review in context by gathering evidence on best practice and understanding the Council's consultation arrangements. The purpose of the second stage was to examine specific consultation "case studies" taking evidence from departmental managers. The Committee chose to examine four consultation exercises in greater detail. In addition, the Committee sought the views of the Adult and Youth Viewpoint Panels through a series of focus groups and also conducted a Member survey. Input was also obtained from Policy Officers Group on the Committee's initial conclusions and recommendations.

CONSULTATION, INCLUDING WARD COUNCILLORS

4. Consultation took place with Viewpoint Focus Groups and a survey of all Councillors was undertaken.

FINANCIAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5. No direct financial implications.

COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS

6. The Council's approach to consultation links with the civic renewal and community engagement agenda.

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Background Papers:

None

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors:

N/a