

Communication Discussion Group

8 July 2009 10.00am

<p>How well informed do you think Stockton Borough Council keeps you about the services and benefits it provides?</p>	
<p>What do you expect the Council to be telling you about as a local resident?</p>	<p>Performance information on ward councillors e.g. what committees they are on, their attendance at meetings, and expenses they receive</p> <p>When road works are taking place – letters are sent to homes too early</p> <p>Information on moving bus stops and changes to services</p> <p>How Tees Active fits in with SBC</p> <p>More detail on recycling programme</p> <p>Parish/Town Councils role – should have more information in Stockton News and on the website about Parish/Town Councils</p>
<p>Do panel members have examples of where Council communications have been good? Why was it good?</p>	<p>Stockton News - quite informative but generalised</p> <p>Found letters received from SBC are quite good, better than other local authorities, when work for Mencap and CAB</p> <p>Mixed reports with call centre staff – must ensure that any changes in service/officers is fed down to the call centre</p> <p>SBC good for highlighting both complaints and praise Praise important</p>

Are there instances where communications have not been good? How could they have been improved?

Don't get full version of Stockton News on audio

Audio version of Stockton News does not give dates of ward surgeries

Need a directory of services in addition to Stockton News

Attendee noted an incident when she contacted SBC wanting information regarding Town Hall. Was given telephone number but over course of two week could not get in touch with Town Hall. Contacted SBC again and was given several numbers to try, and was then able to get in touch with somebody to answer their query.

Not enough information on redevelopment plans

Confusion with which organisations are responsible for different issues, SBC should explain who does what eg NHS, Tees Active, Register Social Landlords, Public Transport Companies

Not enough communication on the redevelopment of Billingham

Some attendees use to receive a newsletter from ward councillors, but now either not as regularly or do not receive them at all

Issue with Yarm parking consultation – SBC and Town Council held a meeting and then consulted via leaflets and van in High Street. The content of the consultation exercise was misleading, and when this was highlighted to SBC corrections were made on website, but not satisfactorily resolved

Viewpoint questionnaires need to be planned better

	<p>SBC needs to coordinate communication between different authorities, agencies, and organisations to get things done e.g. hogweed problem still an issue after five years of reporting</p> <p>SBC and local MP's need to communicate to agree common objectives</p> <p>Social Services had not communicated or consulted with parents of a person in a care home</p>
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<p>Do you feel that the Council is in touch with people in the Borough? Why? Why not?</p>	<p>Although SBC is good, Billingham people feel marginalised</p> <p>Don't get information through letterbox and do not see councillor</p> <p>Not in touch with people individually but do a lot of PR focussed on the masses</p> <p>Village communities are more involved in local issues and more participation needed</p>
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<p>Do you feel that the Council gives good value for money?</p>	<p>Some attendees were not aware of how much SBC costs each individual</p> <p>When talking to people from other areas about services receive from SBC and cost of council tax, they believe that SBC gives good value for money</p> <p>Stockton is cleaner and area is better looked after than other local authority areas</p> <p>SBC has a good reputation</p>
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<p>How do you feel the Council is viewed by local people; what does it stand for?</p>	<p>Viewed poorly by Billingham residents</p> <p>SBC should have more control of property they own e.g. Billingham Town Centre</p> <p>Well thought of by Stockton residents</p> <p>View is dependent on individual problems as some areas are better than others</p> <p>View dependent on the individual, people need to take responsibility for own problems rather than blame SBC</p> <p>Local people do not consider SBC until problems arise</p>
<p>Do you think that a strong identity and positive image is important for the Council</p>	<p>Yes, but one that is earned.</p>

<p>Do you feel you have enough information about decisions that are being made by the Council?</p>	<p>Information is given if you specifically ask for it.</p> <p>SBC are good at giving information that is requested</p> <p>Reading minutes of meetings to find out about decisions made put onus on individual.</p> <p>Would like councillors to be on Radio more</p>
<p>Do you feel that you can personally influence decisions affecting your local area? How?</p>	<p>By time hear about decisions being made it is too late to get involved</p> <p>If do not have information in time then can not influence decisions</p> <p>Human nature to complain about decisions made but there is apathy when it comes to getting involved in making the decisions</p> <p>Example given of a planning application where objectors were able</p>

	<p>to influence the decision and the application was rejected</p> <p>Example given of a planning application where objectors were not able to influence the decision and the application was approved</p> <p>Momentum planning applications affects Stockton residents but going to Hartlepool Planning Department – won't be able to influence decisions as much</p> <p>Consultations usually ask a yes or no question, and people are therefore not given enough/a real choice</p>
<p>To what extent do you want to be involved in decisions being made?</p>	<p>Want to be involved in big decisions i.e. Momentum, Billingham forum</p> <p>People only get involved when the issue affects them personally</p> <p>Low number of people turnout at elections and attend meetings</p> <p>Viewpoint has a place in involving the public in decisions</p>
<p>How do you want the Council to keep you informed?</p>	<p>Would like to see the roles and relationships between officers and councillors</p> <p>Communication on SBC decisions and issues with schools, who will then inform parents</p> <p>Website – with a monthly 'what's on Cabinet' section</p> <p>Email alerts with links to the website</p> <p>Local newspapers – the free weekly paper should have more SBC information/news and less advertising</p> <p>Stockton News – good vehicle, should have a Council Plan, SBC consultation, SBC information pull out</p>

	<p>section</p> <p>Annual Plan and Forward Plan should be issued with Council Tax bill</p> <p>Ward newsletters – should be done in other formats, including podcasts, to involve younger people</p>
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<p>Have you ever used the Council website?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When? • How frequently? • What for? • Was it easy to use? • Could you find what you were looking for? • Was the information clear and readable? • How could it be improved? 	<p>Some attendees used the website daily, some weekly, and some only when they had a problem</p> <p>Was used for parking, finding details for conservation and CFYA offices, planning issues</p> <p>Positives CFYA and Planning online services are either on a par or better than other local authorities</p> <p>Website is better than surrounding LA's websites</p> <p>Library service on website excellent</p> <p>Planning section good</p> <p>Adult education section good</p> <p>Negatives Search engine presents information that is not relevant</p> <p>A – Z tool not very good</p> <p>Website can be misleading and is not updated frequently enough</p> <p>Not always given an officer contact name</p> <p>Text only version has been removed</p> <p>Website text is faint when enlarged for those with visual impairments</p> <p>Can be used as propaganda tool</p>
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	<p>Other Improvements</p> <p>Should be a daily news page on the website similar to 'breaking news' section on BBC website and/or Stockton blog</p> <p>Website – with a monthly 'what's on Cabinet' section</p> <p>Would like to be able to sign up for email alerts</p> <p>Would like to be able to personalise the SBC homepage to suit your needs</p> <p>Departments change names, responsibilities and officers – website should have a plan of these departments showing responsibilities</p>
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<p>How you ever seen Stockton News?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you read Stockton News? • How useful/informative is it? • How long do you keep it for? • Is it enjoyable to read? • Could the content be improved? • Could the format/layout be improved? 	<p>Everybody had read Stockton News</p> <p>Some kept it for a few weeks, some cut articles out to keep.</p> <p>Ratings Stockton News varied from 2 out of 10, due to being abridged, to 8 out of 10</p> <p>Positives</p> <p>What's on section</p> <p>Day in the life section</p> <p>Pie chart of expenditure</p> <p>Enjoyable to read</p> <p>Negatives</p> <p>Does not give the name of the editor and contact details</p> <p>Cannot contain all the information required</p> <p>Too much of a positive spin on SBC performance/propaganda tool</p> <p>Format difficult for those with visual</p>
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	<p>impairment</p> <p>No information on the work of individual councillors</p> <p>Audio version is abridged</p> <p>Other Improvements Should have a pull out section informing of Council Plan, consultations, useful information/contacts</p> <p>Should have alternative views published</p> <p>Should have a letters page</p> <p>Should have A Day in the Life Of a councillor section</p> <p>Councillor expenses should be published in Stockton News</p>
<p>Do you have suggestions for improving any other Council publications that you have seen?</p>	<p>Would like the information on where to get leaflets, documents etc in other formats in more prominent position on these documents</p>

<p>Additional Comments</p>
<p>Queried if officers received disability training, and suggested that this needed to be carried out with those with a disability.</p> <p>Fire Brigade good at PR, providing alarms free of charge</p> <p>Officers with a responsibility for communication should have attended to observe the focus group</p>