

## Corporate Policy Review Select Committee

A meeting of Corporate Policy Review Select Committee was held on Tuesday, 27th June, 2006.

**Present:** Cllr B Woodhead (Chairman), Cllr K Dewison, Cllr Mrs S Fletcher, Cllr M Frankland, Cllr A Larkin, Cllr Mrs M Rigg, Cllr Mrs B Robinson, Cllr Mrs M B Womphrey,

**Officers:** Ms H Dean (CE); Mrs K Dumain (PPS); Mrs T Harrison and Mrs J Trainer (LD)

**Also in attendance:** by invitation: Mrs A Atkinson (Policy & Research Manager, Newcastle City Council) and Mr D Allen (Independent Consultant).

**Apologies:** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Brown, Lupton, Lynch, Mrs Nesbitt and Patterson.

### 457 Review of Corporate Consultation

A presentation was given by Mrs A Atkinson (Policy and Research Manager for Newcastle City Council) in which she highlighted the following aspects of consultation:-

- Role of research
- Defining research
- Drivers of research
- Research in Newcastle
- Audit Commission user focus pilot project 2005
- User focus pilot – Conclusion
- Examples of good practice
- Examples of good practice
- How are we seeking to improve?
- Research service review and
- Research effectiveness

Newcastle City Council had established Ward Committees between Ward Councillors and local residents. The Committees met to discuss local issues, and these had recently been reviewed along with area committees, to improve them and make them more effective.

Ward based youth, elderly and environmental forums had also been introduced.

The meetings did not overlap or affect ward surgeries.

Members queried how the budget information was presented to panels as it could be confusing but were advised that such information was not presented in detail as it would be confusing.

The Chair observed that Stockton Borough Council had a consultation panel and used the Keeping You In Touch and Stockton News magazines.

Mr Allen (Independent Consultant) also provided a presentation in which he touched on the following issues:-

- Hearing and listening
- Many methods, but doubts persist

- Purpose (who, what and why)
- Customer-in thinking leads to good questions and
- Alternatives

Members were advised that in a study undertaken he discovered that the percentage of what was actually done within business was:

- |                       |     |
|-----------------------|-----|
| • Monitoring          | 50% |
| • Prioritisation      | 20% |
| • Horizon scanning    | 10% |
| • Options decisions   | 10% |
| • Service improvement | 10% |

A Member advised that they had found it very interesting listening to customer phone calls regarding housing to hear what they really thought of the service.

It was felt that far too often consultations were undertaken at the wish of managers rather than the customers.

Members raised concern that consultations could be duplicated due to the lack of communication and coordination.

Some Members felt that press releases should be issued prior to consultations and suggested that people were notified after the consultation and advised the results of the consultations, what had been done and what would be addressed. However, it was observed that even if press releases were done, the papers were under no obligation to print the article.

Members stressed that consultations should not be predetermined to get a desired result.

Members acknowledged the difficulty in bringing high level strategies to the public by making them meaningful and easy to understand without simplifying them so much that they became meaningless.

Members discussed the method used by Newcastle City Council in relation to ward meetings. Some members were unsure about holding ward surgeries and ward meetings as they felt it could lessen the effectiveness of both. The situation would be difficult in wards where there were more than one elected political party. However, some Members felt that the introduction of ward meetings along with ward surgeries would be useful even with more than one political party in a ward.

The Committee were presented with a selection of consultations which had been carried out by the Council.

From the details presented, Members requested that the following consultations were examined in more detail as part of the scrutiny of consultation:

- Open Space Audit
- Youth Matters
- Billingham
- Budget

The Committee agreed that where Members were geographically linked to any of the topics or had a close involvement in the issues they should take part in one of the other topics to avoid conflict of interest.

CONCLUDED that:

1. The reports from Mrs Atkinson and Mr Allen were noted.
2. Members chose to scrutinize four previous consultations – Open Space Audit, Youth Matters, Billingham and Budget.
3. Small group meeting will be organised at which the 3 self appointed Members will discuss one of the 4 chosen topics. Their comments and findings will be reported back to Members at a full Corporate Policy Select Committee meeting.