

Corporate Policy Review Select Committee

A meeting of Corporate Policy Review Select Committee was held on Tuesday, 19th September, 2006.

Present: Cllr B Woodhead (Chairman), Cllr D T Brown, Cllr M Frankland, Cllr A Larkin, Cllr K Lupton, Cllr J M Lynch.

Officers: J Haworth (ACE); Mrs T Harrison, P Mennear and Mrs J Trainer(LD)

Also in attendance: No other persons present

Apologies: Cllr K Dewison, Cllr Mrs S Fletcher, Cllr Mrs E Nesbitt, Cllr R Patterson, Cllr Mrs M Rigg, Mrs B Robinson, Cllr Mrs M Womphrey.

637 Minutes of the meetings held on 14th June and 27th June 2006.

Members' considered the draft minutes of the meetings held on 14th and 27th June 2006.

CONCLUDED that minutes be approved for submission to Council.

638 Review of Corporate Consultation

The Committee reviewed a summary of the evidence which had been gathered throughout the review which included:

- Review of Corporate Consultation – Summary of Key Points from Evidence
- Summary of Consultation Workshop – 11 August 2006
- Corporate Consultation – Focus Groups' Summary
- Member Questionnaire Results

An email from Cllr Mrs Fletcher was circulated to the Committee suggesting that the Committee also considered how to address the issue of consultation falling short in present practices. The email reiterated concerns regarding the Open Spaces Audit and requested details of responses to the Ezee Survey by ward to be circulated to the Committee. A breakdown of the responses by ward was circulated and reinforced the importance of ensuring that consultation responses were representative.

The Committee requested that details of the costs of corporate consultation be provided to the following meeting of the Committee. Although it was acknowledged that details of the costs of individual service based consultation exercises were not held centrally, the Committee requested that indicative costs were provided regarding a large scale consultation such as the Billingham Town Centre consultation.

Members reviewed the summary of evidence and drew initial conclusions in answer to the following key questions:

How would the Authority avoid duplication of consultation exercises?

- Strengthen co-ordination arrangements
- An officer be nominated from each service area to provide the following role:

- Provide a link with Corporate Consultation Unit
- Act as a contact point for Members
- Disseminate best practice and alert the service to changes in legislation
- Business case to be prepared to justify the need for a consultation to take place (including costs) Consultation was not to take place unless the consultation could make a difference!
- The Corporate Consultation Unit had a vital co-ordinating role

How would the Authority make the widest possible use of consultation results?

- There was a role for the Consultation Plan in summarising the range of consultations which had and would be carried out
- The Business case should identify who would benefit from the consultation results and who feedback would be given to
- Needed to ensure that feedback was given to consultees
- Councillors should be informed of ward specific issues (it was felt that the consultation plan would alert Councillors to consultations taking place)

How would the Authority take a strategic approach to planning consultation?

- Update concordat for consulting Members to reflect comments made as part of the review
- Consider joint youth/adult consultation

How would the Authority spread the costs by consulting jointly with other agencies?

- The Business Case could have a role in identifying issues of joint interest
- Aspiration to move towards closer working/joint consultation with partners through the Strategic Partnership
- Consider Joint consultation with other Local Authorities
- Role for Parish Councils?
- Consider sharing the Consultation Plan with Partners, utilities

How would the Authority share good practice and expertise?

- Training
 - regular reminders of training events to staff
 - training should be compulsory for staff undertaking consultation (e.g designing questionnaires)
- Ward specific consultations – Ward Councillors to be consulted on the consultation process (There was an inconsistency in Member involvement identified by Councillors depending on which service area was conducting the consultation)

How would the Authority improve the quality of consultation exercises?

- Evaluation - audit a sample of consultations
- Build into Internal Audit work programme?
- Strengthen links with Corporate Consultation Unit
- How much weighting should be given when there were poor response rates?
- Needed to ensure that greater weighting was given to the views of consultees

most affected

CONCLUDED that

1. Members' comments would be forwarded on to the Policy Officers' Group for their input.
2. Details of the costs of corporate consultation, including the indicative costs regarding large scale consultations like Billingham Town centre, be provided at the next meeting.