

# Corporate Policy Select Committee

## Corporate Consultation



**2006-2007**

Corporate Policy Select Committee  
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council  
Municipal Buildings  
Church Road  
Stockton-on-Tees  
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## **CORPORATE POLICY SELECT COMMITTEE – MEMBERSHIP**

Councillor Woodhead (Chair)  
Councillor Larkin (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Brown  
Councillor Dewison  
Councillor Mrs Fletcher  
Councillor Frankland  
Councillor Lupton  
Councillor Lynch  
Councillor Mrs Nesbit  
Councillor Patterson  
Councillor Mrs Rigg  
Councillor Mrs Robinson  
Councillor Mrs Womphrey

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The Committee thank the following contributors to this review.

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## Corporate Consultation

### Original Brief

**What are the main issues?**

To achieve the Government's agenda of civic renewal and community engagement. To gather information to address the priorities of local people.

**The Thematic Select Committee's overall AIM in doing this work is:**

To improve community engagement. To ensure corporate approach by all departments. To determine how views are used to shape service delivery.

**The main OBJECTIVES are:**

To review the Council's consultation strategy to determine whether it is fit for purpose and identify any improvements.

**The possible OUTPUTS (changes in service delivery) are:**

To assist the development of a revised Consultation Strategy, achieve a co-ordinated approach and to reduce the likelihood of 'consultation fatigue'.

**The desirable OUTCOMES (benefits to the community) are:**

An increased opportunity to provide customer feedback to ensure Council priorities and focus meet requirements and expectation.

**What specific value can scrutiny add to this topic?**

Provides a forum to formulate innovative solutions to address this issue involving a wide range of stakeholders.

**Who will the panel be trying to influence as part of their work?**

All Council departments

**Who can provide us with further relevant evidence? (Cabinet Member/portfolio holder, officer, service user, general public, expert witness, etc.)**

Other Local Authority, expert witness on consultation, Council departments, young people, BME communities, (+ other community groups)





## 1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Audit Commission defines consultation as "... a process of dialogue that leads to a decision. It can be a powerful tool for improving the quality and cost-effectiveness of services, and for ensuring that policy makers stay in touch with citizens."
- 1.2 Recent years has seen the growth of the consultation culture and increasing requirements for Local Authorities to consult. 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 1999 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.
- 1.3 It is essential for consultation to be a meaningful two-way dialogue leading to decision-making. The Council must ensure that all sections of the community are given the opportunity to be involved in local decision-making and consultation should not take place where there is no realistic intention that the results will be acted upon. Likewise, the impression should not be given to respondents that their wishes will be made reality where options are limited. The purpose and limitations of consultation must be made clear from the outset.
- 1.4 The Audit Commission argue that innovative Councils are:
- Linking consultation to the decisions that Members need to take
  - Taking a strategic approach to planning consultation programmes, often jointly with partners
  - Designing and carrying out individual consultation exercises to high standards
  - Involving all sections of the community
  - Reporting the results to Members so that consultation can directly inform policies and decisions
  - Letting consultees know how their contribution has influenced policies and services
- 1.5 Prior to 2001, the Council carried out a number of consultations on specific services. However, there was not a co-ordinated Council wide approach. As a result a Consultation Strategy was produced in line with the Local Government Act 1999.
- 1.6 Continued concerns regarding consultation fatigue led to a strengthening of co-ordination arrangements and the appointment of a Corporate Consultation Officer. During 2001/02, the first corporate Consultation Plan was produced in order to summarise all key consultations taking place and the Adult and Youth Viewpoint Panels were established. Subsequently, the Black and Minority Ethnic Viewpoint Panel, Disability Panel and the Children's Participation and Involvement Networks were established.
- 1.7 The majority of consultation activity within the Council is carried out by the individual service areas with the Corporate Research and Consultation Team providing a co-ordinating and advisory role.

- 1.8 The Committee found that the Council undertook a wide range of consultations across all service areas and that consultation activity was co-ordinated primarily through the Consultation Plan. Officers had, however, experienced difficulties in ensuring that all planned consultations were included in the Consultation Plan and there was inconsistent feedback in respect of consultation results and outcomes. Without a reliable record of consultations and consultation results, there was a danger that there could be duplication of consultation activity and valuable information relating to the views of the community in Stockton being underused or overlooked.
- 1.9 The Committee concluded that co-ordination of consultation activity should be strengthened through stronger links between services and the corporate consultation unit. As a result of consultation with the Council's Policy Officers Group, it was suggested that this Group could fulfil this role. The Committee also concluded that there was scope to develop the Consultation Plan as a wider communication tool to provide links to information relating to planned and completed consultation exercises. This corporate register of consultation could be a valuable resource and made widely available both internally and externally.
- 1.10 Recommended 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
- 1.11 **Recommended 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.**
- 1.12 **Recommended 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.**
- 1.13 The Committee found that the quality of consultation activities varied and felt that there should be robust business case justification and project planning mechanisms in place to clarify the purpose of consultations, the costs, the outcomes and the feedback mechanisms. The Committee also felt that there should be arrangements in place for robust post consultation review incorporating, where possible, independent external challenge into this process.
- 1.14 **Recommended 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.**

- 1.15 Recommended that training on consultation is compulsory for staff directly involved in organising and running consultations.**
- 1.16 Recommended 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).**
- 1.17 Recommended that all Members be asked for feedback on consultation activity annually.**
- 1.18 The Committee found that sometimes Councillors were unaware of consultations in their wards and there were inconsistencies in communications with Members. The Committee concluded that Councillors should receive advanced notification of all ward related consultations and more information on consultations through the Consultation Plan and the Executive Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.19 Recommended 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**
- 1.20 Recommended 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.**
- 1.21 The Committee recognised the benefits of conducting joint consultation and the importance of strengthening links with Partner organisations in order to maximise opportunities for conducting joint consultations and sharing consultation results. Although, there were examples of the Council working with other agencies such as through the Children's Participation and Involvement Network, the Committee felt that this was an area for development and the Committee concluded that this needed to be developed as a long term aspiration and taken into account in the revised Consultation Strategy.
- 1.22 Recommended that the Consultation Plan is shared with key partners on a quarterly basis and extended to include a section for consultations undertaken by Renaissance.**
- 1.23 Recommended 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.**



## **2.0 Introduction**

- 2.1 Recent years has seen the growth of the consultation culture. It is estimated that the Government itself, through central Government departments and Executive Agencies, launches about 1,000 consultation exercises annually. Local Government also undertakes a huge amount of consultation with over 10,000 public sector staff in the UK estimated to be spending a significant amount of time on public and stakeholder consultation.
- 2.2 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.

## **3.0 Background**

### **National Context**

- 3.1 There has been a shift in the policy context over recent decades in respect of consultation and public engagement. The 1980s saw a changing emphasis from Councils as public service administrators to providing services to the public as "customers"; the 1990s saw an increased emphasis on partnership working, engagement and participation. A key element of the modernisation agenda for local government was about making services more accountable to customers and the general public.
- 3.2 The Local Government Act 1999 introduced Best Value, and required local authorities to not only seek continuous improvement in service delivery, but also to consult with local tax payers, service users, business ratepayers and other stakeholders when setting service standards and performance targets.
- 3.3 Guidance was issued on how Local Authorities should consult on specific strategies and plans such as the Local Development Plan and the Community Strategy and in relation to individual local policies such as planning applications and licensing.
- 3.4 User and citizen engagement is also a key element of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) framework. The framework, developed by the Audit Commission, is about improving services for local people. It draws together the existing information on Council performance that is held by Councils, Government Departments, auditors and inspectors and builds in a corporate assessment of the Council's ability to improve.
- 3.5 The Audit Commission has identified five factors that are critical to successful user and citizen engagement.
- Commitment to user focus and citizen engagement – strong user focus is underpinned by core values, such as honesty, inclusiveness, fairness and realism. Those Councils that are succeeding in engaging users, are committed to these and such values are demonstrated in their organisational behaviours and priorities.

- Understanding your community – successful Councils understand the perspectives of the people they serve and the complexities of their communities. They are able to anticipate, plan and respond to peoples' needs. These Councils have adopted a variety of methods to engage users and citizens.
  - Clarity of purpose – Councils that gain the most from a user and citizen focussed approach are clear about what they are trying to achieve, whether it be simply providing information to citizens, undertaking a consultation exercise with users or attempting to encourage greater involvement in decision-making. All of these aims require very different methods and processes. Appropriate and timely feedback is important, with Councils providing information and communicating clearly on how consultation has affected their priorities.
  - Communicating in appropriate ways – the most effective Councils use a combination of approaches that enable people to communicate with their Council at a time and in a manner that suits them.
  - Delivering change and improved outcomes – the most successful exponents of user engagement not only put into place the practice and values of critical success factors one to four, but also ensure that the rationale behind user focus and citizen engagement results in positive change and better services.
- 3.6 Under the Race Relations Amendment Act, Councils must also consult on the likely impact their proposed policies may have on race equality and consult those groups which may be affected. In December 2003, the Disability Discrimination Act came into force and placed similar duties on public authorities in relation to disability. The Children's Act also requires Councils to have a stronger approach to consultation and engagement.
- 3.7 The recent Local Government White Paper "Strong and Prosperous Communities" introduces a new duty to "secure participation" of local citizens and communities building on the best value duty to consult, including hard to reach groups, voluntary and community groups and businesses and more effective use of information on people's needs and views.
- 3.8 Whilst there are increasing pressures on Local Authorities to consult, there is also a need to ensure efficiency and effectiveness as part and the efficiency and value for money agendas.

### **Local Context**

- 3.9 Prior to 2001, the Council carried out a number of consultations on specific services, many being prescribed by central government. In 1998 the first Stockton Residents' Survey was commissioned. However, there was not a co-ordinated Council wide approach. As a result a Consultation Strategy was produced in line with the Local Government Act 1999.
- 3.10 Continued concerns regarding consultation fatigue led to a strengthening of co-ordination arrangements and the appointment of a Corporate Consultation Officer. During 2001/02, the first corporate Consultation Plan was produced in order to summarise all key consultations taking place and the Adult and Youth

Viewpoint Panels were established. Subsequently, the Black and Minority Ethnic Viewpoint Panel, Disability Panel and the Children's Participation and Involvement Networks were established. In the Autumn of 2005, the Black and Minority Ethnic and Disability Panels were merged with the Adult Panel; the advantage being that all surveys could be analysed by key demographics. The Council is still able to consult by specific characteristics when required.

3.11 The majority of consultation activity is carried out by the individual service areas with the Corporate Research and Consultation Team providing a co-ordinating and advisory role comprising the following elements

- Co-ordination
- Training
- Support
- Advice and Guidance





## 4.0 Evidence/Findings

### Methodology

#### Stage One

- 4.1 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. During this stage, the Committee received written and oral evidence as follows:

##### *Written Evidence*

- Briefing Paper on Consultation
- Audit Commission Briefing Paper – “Listen Up! Effective Community Consultation”
- Consultation Strategy
- Toolkit for Consultation – Questionnaires and Focus Groups
- Guide to Effective Consultation for Members and Officers
- Concordat for Communication and Consultation with Members
- Examples of Consultation Materials

##### *Oral Evidence*

- Jenny Haworth (Assistant Chief Executive, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council)
- Helen Dean (Head of Policy and Performance, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council)
- Kate Dumain (Research and Consultation Manager, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council)
- Ann Atkinson (Policy and Research Manager, Newcastle City Council)
- David Allen (Independent Consultant)

#### Stage Two

- 4.2 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.

##### *Written Evidence*

As a basis for discussion, departmental managers were asked to provide information summarising:

- Consultation and date undertaken
- Target audience/groups
- Consultation methods and response rates
- Lessons learned
- What changed as a result of the consultation?
- How were the consultation results and outcomes fed back to consultees?
- Issues for consideration

Details of the costs of corporate consultation and indicative costs of a large scale consultation were also supplied.

#### *Oral Evidence*

4.3 The Committee then divided into smaller sub-groups and a workshop event was held to examine the information provided in greater detail in discussion with departmental managers. The four “case studies” chosen and the departmental representatives who attended are set out below:

- Youth Matters – Ezee Survey (Alison Stephenson, Head of Integration, Children’s Trust)
- Budget Consultation (Paul Saunders, Head of Finance)
- Billingham Town Centre (Nigel Laws, Town Centres and Major Projects Officer)
- Open Spaces Audit (Andrew McMillan, Planning Officer)

#### **Other Methods**

4.4 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.

#### **Effective Community Consultation**

4.5 The Audit Commission defines consultation as “... a process of dialogue that leads to a decision. It can be a powerful tool for improving the quality and cost-effectiveness of services, and for ensuring that policy makers stay in touch with citizens.”

4.6 Effective consultation increases the Council’s ability and capacity to:

- Understand the social, environmental and economic needs of local communities
- Understand the problems and needs of local communities
- Improve awareness of different ways of doing things, as a basis for innovation, change of policy or service delivery
- Understand the views of local citizens and other stakeholders about the services and activities of the Authority
- Promote involvement and participation of citizens and partnership working with other stakeholders
- Develop stronger local democracy through local accountability and responsiveness and by showing that they really can make a difference
- Understand the impact of strategies, policies, programmes and services on the well-being of communities and the locality
- Gain greater acceptance by local people of Council decisions because people understand what is being done and why
- Provide better services that are more responsive to local needs
- Improve the quality of decision-making because the people affected by the decisions are directly involved.

- 4.7 It is essential for consultation to be a meaningful two-way dialogue leading to decision-making. In line with the Equality Standards for Local Government, the Council must ensure that all sections of the community are given the opportunity to be involved in local decision-making, not just those who have traditionally communicated with the Local Authority. It is important that the voices of a communicative few are not taken as representative of the whole of the local population.
- 4.8 Consultation should not take place where there is no realistic intention that the results will be acted upon. Likewise, the impression should not be given to respondents that their wishes will be made reality where options are limited. The purpose and limitations of consultation must be made clear from the outset along with details as to how a decision will be made for example, combination of costs, public consultation, specialist knowledge and technical considerations.
- 4.9 The Audit Commission argue that innovative Councils are:
- Linking consultation to the decisions that Members need to take
  - Taking a strategic approach to planning consultation programmes, often jointly with partners
  - Designing and carrying out individual consultation exercises to high standards
  - Involving all sections of the community
  - Reporting the results to Members so that consultation can directly inform policies and decisions
  - Letting consultees know how their contribution has influenced policies and services

## Consultation Arrangements in Stockton

### *Structure*

- 4.10 The majority of consultation activity is carried out by the individual service areas with the Corporate Research and Consultation Team providing a co-ordinating and advisory role. This can be summarised as follows:
- **Co-ordination** – This is predominantly through the Consultation Plan which is updated on a quarterly basis. From the information provided by the services, the team collate outcomes and reports. The Plan is available on the Council's Intranet and there is initial development work to roll out the Plan to partners. The Plan details:
    - Purpose
    - Audience(s)
    - Methodology
    - Timescales
    - Support required
    - Feedback Methodology

In addition the plan details completed projects including outcomes and actions and includes pro forma detailing information of each exercise before and afterwards.

It is also proposed that an Annual Report will be produced detailing the key outcomes of consultation by service group.

- **Training** – The Team provide three training courses: Introduction to Consultation, Focus Group Facilitation and Consulting the Hard to Reach. Training is provided for officers, Partners and Members and ad hoc tailored training can be provided on request.
- **Support** – The Team provide support to services when developing consultation strategies and a sounding board for developing consultation ideas. The team act as quality control service for questionnaire design and other consultation materials. In addition, higher risk consultations receive more dedicated support.
- **Advice and Guidance** – The team disseminate guidance from national sources and produce the following guidance booklets:
  - Consultation Strategy
  - Toolkit for Consultation – Questionnaires and Focus Groups
  - Guide to Effective Consultation for Members and Officers
  - Consulting people with a Disability or Sensory Loss
  - Consulting with Children and Young People

4.11 The Committee found that the Council undertook a wide range of consultations across all service areas and that consultation activity was co-ordinated by the Corporate Research and Consultation Unit primarily through the Consultation Plan. Officers had, however, experienced difficulties in ensuring that all consultations were included in the Consultation Plan. Without a reliable record of consultations and consultation results, there was a danger that there could be duplication of consultation activity and valuable information relating to the views of the community in Stockton being underused or overlooked.

#### *Types of Consultation*

4.12 Types of consultation undertaken by the Council can be summarised as follows:

- **Adult Viewpoint** - Operational since 2001 and has 1,250 members. The average response rate is 65%. The Adult Viewpoint Panel is consulted via three surveys per year, ad hoc service or demographic specific issue surveys, focus groups, visits and service testing. One third of the Panel is replaced each year. In the Autumn of 2005, the Black and Minority Ethnic and Disability Panels were merged with the Adult Panel; the advantage being that all surveys can be analysed by key demographics. The Council is still able to consult by specific characteristics when required.
- **Youth Viewpoint** - Established in November 2002 and has 500 members. The Youth Viewpoint Panel is consulted via three surveys per year, events, workshops and focus groups.
- **Established Forums and Groups** - These include resident and community groups, special interest groups (e.g. Stockton Blind People's

Voice), PIC network (participation, involvement and communication) and support groups (e.g. Carers' Associations).

- **General Surveys** - These include the Biennial Residents Surveys and BVPI (Best Value Performance Indicator) statutory user satisfaction surveys.
- **Service User Consultation** – such as tenants surveys, library users surveys.
- **Service Based/ Thematic Non Regular Consultations** – for new initiatives, regeneration developments etc.
- **Service Based Regular Consultations** – Examples include street surveys following road works and satisfaction cards.

### Satisfaction Statistics

#### *Viewpoint*

4.13 The Committee found that overall net satisfaction with Viewpoint was 90% with 92% of Panel members feeling very or fairly well informed about Viewpoint and the consultation exercises that had been carried out. A further breakdown is set out below:

#### Questionnaires:

Subject matter	92%
Overall layout	96%
Variety of question styles	91%
Readability	94%

#### Focus Groups:

Arrangements	87%
Involvement	79%
Subject Matter	83%
Follow Up/ feedback	70%

#### Feedback:

Length	93%
Content	94%
Readability	95%
Layout	91%

4.14 The 2004 MORI survey revealed that although 14% of residents felt that involvement of residents in local decisions was one of the most important things in Stockton-on-Tees over the next five years.

4.15 The 2006 MORI survey revealed that 60% of residents did not feel that they could influence decisions affecting their local area and 25% wanted to have more of a say in what the Council does and the services it provided.

## **Evidence from Ann Atkinson, Policy and Research Manager, Newcastle City Council**

4.16 The Committee heard that Newcastle's approach comprised the following elements:

- Central Research Unit
- Research carried out by Departments
- Research Steering Group
- Research Protocol
- Consultation Website
- Consultation Guidelines

4.17 In 2005, an Audit Commission User Focus Pilot Project had concluded that improvements were needed in respect of co-ordination and sharing of skills and knowledge.

4.18 Newcastle City Council was therefore seeking to improve by:

- Producing an Engagement Strategy and Protocol
- Improved monitoring and evaluation of engagement processes and outcomes
- Developing an Engagement Toolkit for staff and partners
- Awareness raising and training for staff and Members
- A Research Services Review evidencing value of research and best practice
- Improving opportunities for partnership working

## **Evidence from David Allen, Independent Consultant**

4.19 Research revealed that 50% of consultations undertaken were about monitoring with only 10% about service improvement:

Monitoring – 50%  
Prioritisation – 20%  
Horizon Scanning – 10%  
Options Decisions – 10%  
Service Improvement – 10%

4.20 David Allen stressed that Councils had to ask the right questions; not questions that they already know the answers to, questions that did not help them to understand and improve performance or questions that were pointless.

4.21 Good questions (the “what?” and “why?” of performance) were:

- What matters to the customer?
- Factual questions before opinions
- Process question before results

4.22 He urged the Committee to consider other ways that the Council could “hear” the customer and suggested consideration of the following:

- Complaints, letters, call logs, call centre recordings
- Can information needed be obtained from existing records?
- Does a system need to be set up so that information is collected in the future?
- Do front line employees already know the answer?

### Consultation “Case Studies”

4.23 The Committee selected the following four Council consultations to examine in greater detail:

- Youth Matters – Ezee Survey
- Budget Consultation
- Billingham Town Centre
- Open Spaces Audit

4.24 The Committee were provided with background information regarding the consultations and this provided the basis for further discussions with departmental representatives at a workshop event. A summary of these discussions is attached at **Appendix 1**.

4.25 The key learning points identified by Select Committee Members during discussions are as follows:

- It is good practice to have a strategy for large scale consultations and seek input from corporate consultation on approach
- There is a need to manage expectations
- Consultation must add value rather than put extra strain on resources for little benefit
- Consultation provides a two way educational process. This could be developed outside of the consultation process to provide a platform for future consultations
- When using an IT based approach, the proposed system should be subject to external trial before the consultation goes live
- Where possible language recognised by consultees should be used
- Effectiveness of publicity should be measured
- Cost savings in one element of a consultation process should be used to support other parts of a departmental budget
- Improved links with other partners and agencies would support future consultations
- More localised consultations might produce more representative results and encourage Councillors to participate in consultation in their wards
- Resources are needed to ensure the use of the most effective methods

### Feedback from Member Survey

4.26 As part of the review a Member Survey was undertaken. 20 responses were received and the results are summarised below:

- Are you aware of Council wide consultations being carried out in your ward before they take place?

All of the time – 4

Some of the time – 14  
None of the time – 1

Councillors gave examples of where ward Councillors had been notified and not notified of consultations. Sometimes notification was late or residents were aware of issues before Councillors, sometimes this was because other agencies were involved. There was an expectation that communications would improve with more 'e' information

- Do you feel that you have sufficient access to results of consultation that have been undertaken?

All of the time – 5  
Some of the time – 13  
None of the time – 1

Why?: Sometimes information has to be requested. Members gave examples of where results had been difficult to access. Viewpoint was cited as an example of results being easily accessible on the website.

- How do you want to be informed of consultation taking place?

Email was generally acceptable with a hard copy of anything sent out to residents. Members wished to be kept informed at all stages and briefed on ward issues.

- What type of consultation do you wish to be informed of/involved with?

Members generally wanted to be informed of any issues affecting their ward but also wider Borough issues. Environmental type issues were cited specifically.

- In what format would you like feedback on consultation undertaken?

Email was again generally acceptable with hard copies available if required. Members felt that, ideally, all should be on the website/ intranet.

- Do you think that there are occasions when you should have an active role in the consultation process

Yes – 19  
No – 1

Why?: Responses varied – some Councillors wished to have input into the consultation process based on their ward expertise, some Councillors expressed a desire to inform and champion consultation in their wards and others referred to the need to represent residents who might find it difficult to express their own views. One comment highlighted that ward Councillors might have a wider view than those directly affected.

- Have there been occasions where you feel that insufficient time has been given for consultation responses to be made?

Yes – 10



No – 8

Examples and what would be a reasonable period of time?: Councillors provided examples of where they felt insufficient time had been given. A number of Councillors felt that it was difficult to generalise – responses varied between 2 and 4 weeks.

- If you have any comments or suggestions for how consultation can be improved within the Council, please give your ideas below:
  - A leaflet drop is usually very good depending on proposed changes intended
  - Share the proposed wording with the Ward Councillors to remove any ambiguity and give time for amendments to the draft
  - The percentage response rate should be improved
  - Better/more interactive use of website
  - I appreciate the timing is difficult but this is sometimes caused by items having to go to Cabinet prior to any consultation being undertaken. There needs to be a protocol where ward Members can be consulted and it remains confidential (and not used to gain political points) - very difficult
  - Greater involvement with ward Councillors at an early stage, before all is finalised. More planning ahead so not such a short time scale at the end. Also we could help organise some consultation to our residents if planned ahead (ie area transport strategy consultation)
  - Comprehensive and take into account the effect it has on people's lives
  - It is not telling people what is to happen; it is informing them and asking their views

### Feedback from Viewpoint Focus Groups

4.27 As part of the review, Adult and Youth Viewpoint Panels were held. A list of the key points is set out below. A more detailed summary of the focus group sessions is attached at **Appendix 2**.

#### *Feedback on Viewpoint*

- Viewpoint should target the area affected
- Adult panellists felt that the number of surveys was about right and feedback was good
- Youth Panel members felt that sometimes questions were aimed too much at adults
- Adult Group was happy with the content of questionnaires
- Young people want to be consulted on children's activities
- Youth Newsletter could more eye catching – Adults could be made plainer to reduce costs
- Youth Panel Members would welcome more regular postings

#### *Comments regarding other consultation*

- Young people suggested more consultation could take place through schools
- Should only consult when views of consultees can make a difference
- Timescales for consultation would vary depending on the consultation

- Should be careful not to overburden consultees with information
- Stockton News is a good way to communicate and letters to households were also suggested
- Greater weighting should be given to responses from those people who would be most affected by the decision
- Should be feedback so that people who are unhappy with a decision understand that their views have been taken into account even though the decision was not what they wanted to happen
- Some youth panel members felt that they were not listened to in the same way that adults were and it was suggested that some combined adult and youth consultation could be considered

## 5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

- 5.1 The Committee concluded that overall there was a need to strengthen co-ordination of consultation activity, make better use of the information collected and improve the sharing of skills and knowledge.
- 5.2 The Committee found that the Council undertook a wide range of consultations across all service areas and that consultation activity was co-ordinated by the Corporate Research and Consultation Unit primarily through the Consultation Plan. Officers had, however, experienced difficulties in ensuring that all planned consultations were included in the Consultation Plan and there was inconsistent feedback in respect of consultation results and outcomes. Without a reliable record of consultations and consultation results, there was a danger that there could be duplication of consultation activity and valuable information relating to the views of the community in Stockton being underused or overlooked.
- 5.3 The Committee concluded that co-ordination of consultation activity should be strengthened through stronger links between services and the corporate consultation unit. As a result of consultation with the Council's Policy Officers Group, it was suggested that this Group could fulfil this role. The Committee also concluded that there was scope to develop the Consultation Plan as a wider communication tool to provide links to information relating to planned and completed consultation exercises. This corporate register of consultation could be a valuable resource and made widely available both internally and externally.
- 5.4 The Committee found that the quality of consultation activities varied and felt that there should be mechanisms in place to clarify the purpose of consultations, the outcomes and the feedback mechanisms. The Committee also felt that there should be arrangements in place for post consultation review incorporating, where possible, independent external challenge into this process.
- 5.5 The Committee found that sometimes Councillors were unaware of consultations in their wards. The Committee concluded that Councillors should receive advanced notification of all ward related consultations and more information on consultations through the Consultation Plan and the Executive Scrutiny Committee.
- 5.6 The importance of strengthening links with Partner organisations was also recognised in order to maximise opportunities for conducting joint consultations and sharing consultation results and the Committee concluded that this needed to be developed as a long term aspiration and taken into account in the revised Consultation Strategy.

## Recommendations

### The Committee recommends

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.



## APPENDIX 1

### CONSULTATION WORKSHOP – 11 AUGUST 2006 - SUMMARY

#### **Billingham Town Centre Consultation - Group Feedback**

(Councillors Brown and Woodhead

Nigel Laws – Town Centre and Major Projects Officer)

#### **Background/General Issues**

Nigel Laws explained that this was a key regeneration project which had been ongoing since 2000/01. Two previous consultations had been carried out prior to the Phase 1 and 2 consultations which had met with public criticism. The criticisms had centred on the timescale for the consultation and that the consultation had not been far reaching enough. After the planning application had been withdrawn, it was felt that a fresh approach was needed. The key objectives of the new approach were to regain the trust of the community and address the spread of misinformation.

A great deal of time was devoted to the development of a strategy and a phased approach was adopted. Phase 1 fed into the development of an initial vision for the town centre which was subsequently consulted on in phase 2.

#### **What worked well about the consultation**

- A lot of careful planning and preparation
- Leant from previous experiences and mistakes
- The input from an officer working group
- Advice and support from the corporate consultation unit
- The development of a strategy whilst at the same time there was flexibility to respond to demand for further meetings
- Expectation were managed successfully
- Carefully targeted audience

#### **What didn't work so well**

- Disappointing response from young people – Perhaps should have been closer liaison with schools
- Difficult to resource all the breakout sessions with staff who were fully conversant with the all the issues

#### **Learning Points/Areas for improvement to Council's overall approach**

- Spend as much time as possible planning/ have a strategy
- Need to consider carefully how to manage expectations
- Need to target approach

#### **Budget Consultation – Group Feedback**

(Councillors Lupton, Rigg and Dewison

Paul Saunders, Head of Finance)

## **Background/General Issues**

There is a statutory duty to consult business interests in relation to the setting of the Council budget; this is done through the Business Forum.

The group was happy that the consultation covered a wide range of people as both adult and youth Viewpoint panel members were involved in addition to business. This was on top of the feedback received from Members through the Members' Budget Seminar. There were 887 questionnaire responses from adults and 165 from young people. The public meetings attracted 84 people.

## **What worked well about the consultation**

The consultation with the public was in two parts; firstly a questionnaire was circulated, then public meetings were organised to follow up. Officers attended the meetings to give further information and this allowed participants to change their initial answers to the questionnaire. Officers were able to provide further guidance at an appropriate level of detail.

The public meeting was split into two sessions this year (afternoon/evening). Roughly half the people who indicated that they would be attending turned up on the day compared to last time. It was felt by the group that attendances of 53 and 31 still represented a good level of public involvement and was a slight increase on the previous year.

During earlier consultations, there were additional funds available and because of this it was possible to feed the results of the consultation into the budget process and to have an effect upon services. It should be noted that as the money was available it was spread over all services.

It was felt that the process worked best as a method of sharing information about the budget setting process with the public.

## **What didn't work so well**

During the last budget process (05/06), due to the severe budget pressure, there was little room for manoeuvre when it came to allocating funds. This meant that the Viewpoint participants felt that they were not able to change anything. During the public meeting, individual problems were raised and it risked becoming a 'ward surgery' type situation.

## **Learning Points/ Areas for improvement to Council's overall approach**

The usefulness of budget consultation was seen as being dependent on the financial climate. It is more likely to be seen to have an impact if there is some money to spend. When there are severe budget pressures it is very difficult for *anyone* to decide on priorities.

Due to the Medium Term Financial Plan, it is already known that this year's tax rise will be in the region of 3.9%, and with the maximum possible being 5% there is little room for change if the consultation brings an increased pressure to spend.

The group was happy that this particular type of consultation should continue to be on a borough-wide basis rather than on a more local level. There was concern that

any future consultation must 'add value'; consultation must not put extra strain on resources for little discernible benefit.

The need for compromise in budget setting is not widely understood. The group thought that the biggest advantage of the consultation was the two-way educational process. The group suggested that the provision of information was worthwhile and that it could be extended outside the consultation process. In turn, this will hopefully ensure that people who take part in future consultations will come along with more knowledge of the budget. This could be extended to schools and the possible creation of a good quality education pack for schools to help explain the functions and procedures of Stockton Council; the possible link-in with citizenship classes was mentioned. The possibility of officers attending the meetings of groups such as resident associations was also mentioned, along with the idea of a 'Council open day'.

### **Open Spaces Audit - Group Feedback**

(Councillors Mrs Fletcher and Womphrey

Andrew McMillan – Planning Officer (Development Plans)

(The views given have been supplemented with responses from the department which was given an opportunity to check the factual accuracy of the information recorded at the consultation workshop.)

### **Background/General Issues**

Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) 17 advises that an open space audit should be undertaken and its findings made available for general consultation (public and local stakeholders) in order to promote public debate about the recreational needs of the community and public attitudes to open space provision. The Audit findings will then be a credible data source to inform and justify future policy.

This consultation is non-statutory unlike many other planning surveys, so there is greater flexibility in the way consultation can be undertaken – especially in terms of timing. Notwithstanding this, the Council treated the Audit as if it were a statutory consultation and followed the same process as it would for any other planning consultation.

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council used maps@stockton to provide a stand alone model for the open spaces audit. This was in addition to the normal paper-based consultation methods.

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council is the only council known to have used the Internet in order to provide the high level of information necessary to consult its residents properly and can therefore be seen to be a leading authority in consultation techniques as applied by a planning department.

1007 sites were identified for consultation – a huge amount of data to deliver, and the majority of which being of little or no interest to the individual. Indeed the public are likely to be interested in perhaps 6 or 7 sites. To assist people in finding the information of direct relevance to them quickly, ICT was used to enable fast searches of the database either via post codes or through 'zooming' in on a site using the online mapping. This is far easier than trying to locate a site on a large paper map and then looking for the corresponding data in a thick paper file.



### **What worked well about the consultation?**

Consultees could target their responses and focus on the areas of open space that were of interest to them.

If a person was only interested in providing views about open space in the vicinity of their house then using a postcode as the basis for the search was a user-friendly method of pinpointing areas for response, thereby speeding up searches.

There was a fundamental/overall question – “do you value the site?”

A flexible timescale allowed the consultation period to be extended as increased interest was shown near the end of the audit following low interest at the beginning.

If a person was familiar with operating the GIS system, then the web based consultation for open spaces was relatively easy to use.

There was a higher response rate (57) than other planning consultations with a majority (over 70%) producing useful comments. This compares with one telephone response and five letters received.

The amount of printing required was reduced and a large amount of information in a useable and searchable format was produced.

Respondents were also provided with the opportunity to give views in person by visiting the Planning Office to examine printed information so ensuring that no people with little or no experience of computers or access to the Internet were excluded from the consultation. KEY POINT: The computer-based consultation was in addition to the other methods we used, not the sole method.

The Planning Office database ensured that contact was made with the likeliest source of interested persons/bodies that would provide relevant responses for the audit. Targeting attempted to make the best use of resources. All people/groups on the planning database were informed by letter of the Audit and the website, including the Parish Councils.

A presentation was provided to certain consultees to heighten awareness of the audit and provide greater understanding of how to make representation by computer.

### **What didn't work so well?**

<b>Views given at consultation event</b>	<b>Further Departmental response (18.8.06)</b>
Some people found using the system difficult.	Clear instructions were provided on the website
The descriptions/names of open spaces did not always match local terms which could create difficulty in accurately responding to the audit	Local names for sites are often difficult to know unless you live in the vicinity. Some sites have several names and these may be taken forward in subsequent reviews
The only press release noticed was one week before the date that the consultation was due to end.	There was little awareness of other public notification of the audit, although there was an advert placed in the

	Evening Gazette, three press releases at varying times, an article in the Stockton News, posters in the libraries, four open days/drop in sessions in the libraries, a dedicated link form the Council's home page, information on the Planning pages of the website, presentations made to Area Partnership Boards and letters to all interested parties on the Planning contact database. There were also the original Planning Committee and Cabinet reports to inform Members and anyone else interested in such reports.
The presentation (seen at Central Area Board meeting) was not considered appropriate for the audience, instead it had a greater emphasis for officers.	It is difficult to pitch presentations at the right level as we tried very hard to provide a large amount of complex data as clearly as possible. The presentation given did outline why we are doing the consultation, when and how. It asked for input from local people on their open spaces.
The presentation was not delivered to all interested parties (e.g. parish councils)	They were notified by letter. There are resource limitations which mean that we are unable to give presentations to everyone
The questions had to conform to the legal requirements of the Planning System which could have resulted in potential respondents having difficulty in understanding how best to respond to the questions being asked.	It is very difficult to deliver legally-specific information to a non-professional layperson. We try to get it right but always welcome suggestions for improvement
Due to the legal requirements of questions used this discounts other surveys that may provide complementary information (e.g. Care for your Area)	Care For Your Area were heavily involved in the Audit process and they have been able to use all their information in undertaking the Audit

### **Learning Points/ Areas for Improvement to Council's Overall Approach**

Consider how using new technology to gather consultation responses impacts on the respondents (do they have the knowledge or experience to use the equipment/website?) Trial a new system with people outside the department to ensure ease of use when the consultation goes 'live'.

More consideration should be given to the level of publicity required to get a suitably large response rate. The effectiveness of a publicity campaign should be measured.

Those targeted for a response should be given adequate information, and the information must be tailored for the audience. Consulters should put themselves in the position of the consultees.

Where possible, use language/terms that would be recognised by consultees.

Views given at consultation event	Further Departmental response (18.8.06)
<p>Is it possible to use the budget that would have been expected for printing to provide more support to consultees? Ensure that cost savings in one element of a consultation process are not 'lost' to support other parts of a departmental budget.</p>	<p>No budget saving to be made as the online consultation method cost significantly more than the cost of printing, and it was felt that delivering in this method would be of greater benefit to the majority of residents than having to search through over 45 maps and the associated 300 pages of survey forms. Nevertheless, consideration should be given to using the budget that would otherwise have been used for printing to provide more support to consultees. Cost savings in one element of a consultation process should not be 'lost' and used to support other parts of a departmental budget.</p>

### **Youth Matters – Ezee Survey – Group Feedback**

(Councillors Frankland and Larkin

Alison Stephenson – Head of Services Integration)

#### **Background/General Issues**

Due to the imminent publication of the Government Green Paper, Youth Matters, Stockton Council wanted to find out what it was like to be a young person in Stockton and establish what they considered their main priorities to be. The questionnaire produced was made available on the Council's Internet site and in hard copy format at Libraries, Schools and Connexions. Through contracts with TFM and Zanzibar an Ezee event was organised and in order to get a ticket for the event young people had to fill in the questionnaire.

#### **What worked well about the consultation**

- The response – 800 responses were received.
- The incentive – using a ticketed event to motivate young people was a success.
- Reached vulnerable groups and 'savvy' groups – working in partnership with professionals who have links to vulnerable people meant the questionnaire was publicised and made available to them. Using the radio (TFM) as a medium to publicise the ticketed event and thus the questionnaire reached the 'savvy' groups.
- The format of the questionnaire - producing the questionnaire as a download from the Council's website and also in hard copy format was considered a success.

#### **What didn't work so well**

- The questions – it was felt that the questionnaire had too many questions and that less questions would help to focus a young persons mind. It was also felt that, although the questions were useful for many Council departments, the results did not give the reason – they were simply statements.

- Groups of young people missed – although it was considered a success in consulting hard to reach groups and ‘savvy’ groups it was felt that the consultation may have missed all the groups in the middle.

**Learning Points/Areas for improvement to Council’s overall approach**

- Focus more on institutions – for example, in this case more could have been done to encourage Schools to participate thus strengthening the links for future consultation.
- More localised consultation – it was discussed that ward specific consultation may produce more representative results and encourage councillors to participate more in consultation in their wards.
- Utilise Outside Bodies more – it was discussed that Outside Bodies could potentially provide another method of consultation.
- It was noted that in order for improvements to be made, resources would need to match the methods for it to be effective.

## APPENDIX 2

### Corporate Consultation Focus Groups Summary 1 – 3 August 2006

#### **Background**

To gain the views of the general public in order to inform the scrutiny review of corporate consultation, it was decided to hold focus groups consisting of Viewpoint Panel members.

Two sessions with adults were planned, one was held on the morning of 1 August but the other was unable to go ahead due to low attendance. A youth panel was held on the morning of 3 August.

The sessions were facilitated by Judith Trainer and Graham Birtle, and were also attended by Peter Mennear and Joanne McGeeney.

A summary of the comments made at both sessions follows:

#### **Introduction**

##### **First impressions of being a Panel member?**

Participants were pleased to have joined the Panel, they thought consultation was a good thing and it was good to 'put forward the views of people who don't have a voice in the community'.

The youth panel mentioned that they like to think about the world about them.

##### **Good example?**

- Easy and straightforward
- Varied consultation
- Improvement in disability awareness especially with regard to transport
- Feedback
- Youth panel - 'They don't ignore you – they take down what you say.'

##### **Bad example**

- Views not taken into account
- 'Why bother?'
- Outcomes decided before meetings
- Can be like 'banging a head against a brick wall.'

## **Viewpoint General**

### **What works well?**

The children liked the competitions and that the different points of view were taken into account. Adult panellists thought that officers were efficient and that the feedback was good, also that there was the right number of surveys.

### **What doesn't work so well?**

One member thought the Viewpoint doesn't always target the area in which it [the consultation?] affects eg. Hardwick demolition. There was a concern in the youth group that not enough people were being invited to focus groups. They also thought the Youth Viewpoint newsletter should be in colour, and would like to suggest things to go in it.

### **Overall ideas for improvement?**

It was suggested that the consultation should be more targeted towards the people it will affect, and for it to also include opt out options. The youth group wanted more people to be invited to focus groups, and also suggested the use of treats to encourage participation.

## **Viewpoint Questionnaires**

### **What do you think of the content?**

The adult group was happy with the content ('excellent') and generally speaking so was the youth group. However, some questions were thought to be aimed more at adults.

### **What do you think of the style?**

The adults thought that too much time was spent on the design. Young people thought that there was a good variety of questions and the tick boxes were popular, especially as you can add more if you needed to.

### **What do you think of the length?**

The adults felt that the length was 'about right', conversely the youth group thought that they could be longer although they 'do cover the issue.'

### **What do you think of the frequency?**

The youth group looked forward to the questionnaires arriving – in fact they were 'bored in between doing them!' They would also appreciate more regular post/newsletters etc. However, the adults thought that any more than 3 per year and the number of members would reduce.

### **Are they easy to understand?**

Both groups were happy that they were easy to understand.

### **Are they easy to complete?**

Both groups thought that they were easy to complete – ‘able to do them straight away.’

### **How can they be improved?**

On one hand, the adults wanted a plainer design to reduce costs. However, the young people wanted brighter colours and the introduction of cartoons to help illustrate a topic.

### **Focus Groups**

#### **What do you think of the content?**

The adults thought that smaller groups were best when trying to elicit opinions, whereas larger groups were okay when it was more a case of providing information.

The youth panel suggested that a future topic could include activities for children during school holidays. They enjoyed looking at areas that were new to them as it gave them the opportunity to find out more.

#### **What do you think of the frequency?**

The number of focus groups was seen as being adequate.

#### **What do you think about the running of the sessions?**

The youth panel felt that the sessions were enjoyable especially the fact that they were able to say what they thought because nobody minded.

#### **What do you think of the administrative arrangements?**

The youth panel felt that they should be held at different times of the day, and it is sometimes difficult to get to them if they are too soon after the finish of the school day. One member had only received the letter about this session one day before it was due back, whereas one week’s notice would be sufficient. Notification letters should also state everything that will be talked about during the session.

#### **What do you think of the feedback?**

Both groups welcomed the feedback and that points of interest are included on questionnaires.

### **Other consultation – types of issues**

#### **Which issues do you think the council should consult on?**

- Issues which affect day to day life eg. education, leisure, refuse/recycling, transport, health  
Youth panel:
- What children think about their schools
- Local issues and also borough-wide issues such as leisure and sport
- Transport

- Type of things being done to improve their area
- Safety and security issues for young people – ‘they are not always the ones causing trouble, can be victims too.’

### **How should the Council consult?**

It was felt that the Council should use Viewpoint members as they have shown they’re willing to be consulted; but consultation should be wider for major issues. The youth panel felt that they would be willing to be consulted through school and also by text but not ‘cold-call texts’. One member felt more willing to do random face to face questionnaires, but maybe not posted questionnaires.

### **Are there any things that the Council should not consult on?**

Both groups felt that there was no point in being consulted on issues they could not change anyway. Government policies, pre-determined policies.

### **Other consultation**

#### **How long should the Council allow for in consultation periods/ what is a reasonable period of time?**

Some thought present timescales were adequate, although leeway should be given for people on holiday. The youth panel said it should be 2 weeks at least, several months for bigger consultations. A reasonable period of time may depend on the topic.

#### **How much information should be provided about the topic being consulted on?**

The adults feel as though sometimes they are overburdened with information and that depending on the topic, maybe information should be limited. Could they have ‘for further information, please contact...’? The youth group asked for ‘not too much’ but ‘not too brief’.

#### **What is the best way for the Council to communicate with people in the borough?**

It was suggested that a dedicated article could be placed in Stockton News. The youth panel thought that letters should be sent and to ‘make them look like bills, then people will open them.’

### **Listening**

#### **Do you feel that the Council listens to local people/young people?**

Some felt that the Council listens, others don’t; most of the youth panel answered ‘no’ to this question. One participant thought that people would listen if you ‘sounded professional.’

The adults said that they felt this way [when Council hadn’t listened] because of decisions taken against people’s views, and their evidence was both through experience and by word of mouth.



**Please give examples of where you feel that we have:**

**Listened?**

Participants mentioned battery recycling, and the Preston Park sweet shop (youth).

**Not Listened?**

Billingham Forum was mentioned.

**If a decision was taken by the Council where 80% of people were in favour of a course of action and 20% were against, would you feel that they hadn't been listened to? How do you think the decision should be communicated back to the people who were consulted?**

It was thought that this should be a democratic result. It was seen as being important that the decision was explained to everyone involved, possibly through a follow up meeting.

One member of the youth panel thought that if it was a borough-wide survey, then the issue might not affect everyone to the same extent and that the majority may vote without thinking too much about the issue – should greater weight be given to the views of the people it is more likely to affect?

**From this point all answers are from the youth panel**

**Feedback/Results/Involvement**

**Are you aware of Council linked consultations that have taken place either locally or across the whole borough?**

Elmtree Community Centre – special meetings were held for both young and old people.

**How did you find out about them?**

From the mayor.

**Did you get involved/respond?**

The person couldn't make the meeting but would have gone along if it had been possible.

**What do you think the barriers are to people getting involved/what stops them?**

It was thought that even if people are listened to, there is a perception that they are not. Decisions should be explained so that people in a minority do not feel as though their views have not counted. The youth panel thought that groups should be mixed as they would then be treated equally if with adults.

There was also concern at a lack of information.

**Following consultation, do you find out about the results of consultation, decisions taken and reasons for the decisions?**

While it was felt that results should always be sent out, one person sometimes gets results without having known about the consultation in the first place.

**How should the Council give feedback?**

It was suggested that a leaflet could be made to explain how feedback would be given. For any big or controversial issues it was thought a meeting could be held to explain decisions made.

**Overall**

**How do you think consultation can be improved?**

It was acknowledged that consultation was a good idea but there was concern that the youth voice was not being listened to: 'if you asked your Mam to put your point across they would listen to her.'

More Youth Viewpoint newsletters would be welcomed, though not so many that people get bored. It was suggested that more people should be involved and concern that no-one gets told when spaces are available.