

## **AGENDA ITEM**

### **REPORT TO EXECUTIVE SCRUTINY**

**8<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2016**

### **REPORT OF CORPORATE MANAGEMENT TEAM**

## **SCRUTINY REVIEW OF CONSULTATION**

### **SUMMARY**

1. This report presents Elected Members with context, findings and recommendations following the officer led review of practice with respect to Consultation.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Members note the detail of the report and approve the recommendations set out in paragraphs 10-16 for presentation to Cabinet on 23 March 2016.

### **BACKGROUND**

1. The "Reporting In" review of Consultation began in September 2015 and the purpose of this final report is to summarise the findings of that work and to make recommendations to report to cabinet on 23 March 2016.
2. The Baseline Report and Scoping document for the review are attached at Appendix 1 for reference. In overview they identified:
  - a. The overall aims of the review as:
    - i. An agreed policy and approach to consultation that takes account of the risks to the Council (reputationally, financially and politically)
    - ii. Improved co-ordination and management of Consultation across the Council
    - iii. An approach that better links the content of consultation with key communications
    - iv. Ensuring compliance with any statutory duties with regard to consultation and where there is no statutory duty compliance with other agreements such as the Compact with the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector (VCSE).
  - b. Defined the Review's key lines of enquiry as:
    - i. How Consultation can be improved across all areas of the Council
    - ii. Take up and adoption of a Stakeholder Consultation solution ("My Views")
    - iii. Enhancing links between Stakeholder Consultation and the Customer Portal (My Stockton)
    - iv. Exploring links between the Consultation, Community Engagement and Communication strategies.
  - c. Summarised the statutory requirements placed on some consultations that are undertaken by the Authority and how consultations impacting the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector (VCSE) should be conducted in order to comply with the Compact (the agreement between the public sector and the VCSE).

## FINDINGS

The findings, summarised below, are in line with the Review's key lines of enquiry:

3. In order to deliver independently obtained and objective results, there will continue to be occasions where it is prudent to use external research service providers. Key examples include the Residents Perceptions Survey and to support some service or policy changes. Experience suggests this should be decided on a case by case basis, depending on potential impact and upon available resources.
4. Corporately, consultation advice, support and guidance is available for all consultation activity. However the bulk of consultation activity (with the exception of major pieces of work such as the Residents' Survey and the Employee Survey) is actually undertaken by operational services. The degree of involvement of the central advice and guidance varies across the Council and consequently the approach to consultation varies depending on the team undertaking the consultation. Whilst it is recognised that some variation is desirable and necessary to reflect the scale, content and nature of the consultation it is considered that the involvement of the small central resource and the guidance could be improved to ensure some greater degree of consistency and co-ordination of consultation activity.
5. The use of the previous in-house Consultation Database across the Council had been used to record the consultations that were taking place, however it was not a full record of all consultation activity and a new IT solution, set of guidelines and support from across the organisation to provide details of all planned consultation is needed to improve consultation activity.
6. During the course of this review a comprehensive, multifunctional consultation software solution has been procured and is now available for use by the whole Authority. It provides a web-based 'Stakeholder Consultation Portal' for the Authority and is called "My Views" (Appendix 2). The Portal has been tailored to meet the corporate visual identity guidelines and is currently being used as part of the development of the consultations on Childrens' Centres and Community Transport. It will be publicly available via the Council website when these consultations begin. Work with Customer Services has also established the potential to link this with 'My Stockton' in future. key things to note:
  - a. "My Views" offers a single place for all consultation to be promoted and for all online consultation to be delivered through. This allows us to conduct consultation in a variety of ways in addition to standard surveys e.g. bulletin boards, document consultations and online forums.
  - b. Internally, trained Super Users play a key role in raising awareness, and supporting the use, of "My Views" across the whole of the Council. The number of Users in each Directorate is growing steadily and new Super Users will be identified and trained as necessary. Led by Community Engagement, regular meetings of Super Users supports additional knowledge exchange and peer to peer support.
  - c. To help users to work independently there is a Community Library and consultation project planning tool within the system which provides 'virtual' support, tested questions and surveys from over 170 different local authorities, government departments and agencies and National Health Trusts. This means that each user can create their own consultations but with centralised publishing by corporate Community Engagement this provides both peer to peer support at the time of creation and quality control.

- d. Consultation results are analysed and may be published in “My Views”, this closes the consultation loop and communicates the outcomes to the stakeholders, making the consultation process and outcomes transparent.
7. In addition to and alongside the introduction of “My Views” a bespoke consultation training package has been developed with an external provider. This teaches participants how to plan, deliver, analyse and report on consultation projects. This has been piloted with key staff across Directorates, particularly those with up and coming services reviews, feedback was excellent from participants. All participants had a clear view of how they would use their training to support their review work and used the training sessions to support their project planning work.
8. Closer working with Communications in the newly formed ‘HR, Legal and Communications’ Directorate has enhanced our collective approaches to PR and marketing for consultation projects. The use of “My Views” will help raise the profile of all planned, live and completed consultations that the Authority undertakes.
9. The Consultation and Engagement Strategies were due to be refreshed in 2013 but work was put on hold until the PIE service review in July 2015 was completed. Organisational change approved by Cabinet in September 2015 which realigned the consultation and community engagement functions to sit within the Authority’s new “HR, Legal and Communications” Directorate provided the perfect opportunity to bring together and refresh the currently separate Consultation, Community Engagement and Communication Strategies.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

10. Continue to maintain a small Corporate consultation resource to provide strategic consultation advice and guidance for the organisation, including supporting the procurement of external research services as required.
11. Provide clear guidelines for Directorates about when a consultation should be corporately-led or Service- led. This guidance will support the requirement to identify a clear lead for all consultations and will identify the consultations with the broadest potential impact (either financially, reputationally or politically) and where the Corporate Consultation team should be involved.
12. Maximise use of “My Views” as the single, corporate, consultation software solution and as the single place for any of our stakeholders to access information about any and all of our offline and online consultations and engage in any of our online consultations.
13. Continue to provide training to key officers on the use of “My Views” and expand the user base.
14. Continue to promote and deliver consultation methods training as required across the whole Authority.
15. Replace the Council’s Consultation, Community Engagement and Consultation strategies with one new combined Communication, Consultation and Engagement strategy.
16. Continue to participate in sharing good practice, local and regional benchmarking groups to help ensure that corporate advice, support and guidance is current.

## **Next Steps**

17. Following the approval of any recommendations by Cabinet on 23 March 2016, an action plan will be developed to progress the recommendations. Reports on progress on delivery of the action plan will be made to Executive Scrutiny committee.

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