

People Select Committee

Scrutiny Review of Public Consultation

**(DRAFT) Final Report
November 2020**

DRAFT

People Select Committee
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Municipal Buildings
Church Road
Stockton-on-Tees
TS18 1LD

<u>Contents</u>	Page
Select Committee membership and acknowledgements	4
Original Brief	6
Executive Summary	9
1.0 Introduction	11
2.0 Evidence	12
3.0 Findings and Conclusions	26
4.0 Recommendations	27

DRAFT

Select Committee – Membership

Councillor Marilyn Surtees (Chair)
Councillor Mrs Jean ODonnell (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Helen Atkinson
Councillor John Gardner
Councillor Stefan Houghton
Councillor Eileen Johnson
Councillor Mrs Sylvia Walmsley
Councillor William Woodhead MBE
Councillor Barry Woodhouse

Acknowledgments

The Committee would like to thank the following people for contributing to its work:

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Cllr Steven Nelson
Cllr Norma Stephenson
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Planning Team, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Social Media Team, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Bright Minds Big Futures, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Ipsos MORI
Bluegrass Market Research Ltd
North Tyneside Council

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Foreword

TBA



**Councillor Marilyn Surtees
Chair**



**Councillor Mrs Jean O'Donnell
Vice Chair**

Original Brief

Which of our strategic corporate objectives does this topic address?

The review will contribute to the following Council Plan 2019-22 themes and objectives:

Stronger Communities

- Deliver effective consultation and engagement

Our Council

- Deliver effective communication

What are the main issues and overall aim of this review?

Effective consultation with the public is an essential part of ensuring that the Council is able to serve the people of the borough to the best of its abilities. Effective consultation on policy changes, service delivery and issues of importance to the people of the borough is critical to the development and delivery of all aspects of the Council Plan. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that the way we consult with the public is subject to regular review and scrutiny to ensure that it is working well. In addition, this is a period of great change, both in technology and service delivery, and the review would provide a timely opportunity to ensure that all innovations and developments in consultation platforms and channels are being considered and where appropriate adopted.

The ongoing challenge of handling the financial cuts faced by the Council means that it is likely that the programme of service reviews will continue for the foreseeable future. Changes to policies and service delivery are therefore likely and an effective consultation mechanism is essential to ensure that these changes are informed by the views of residents, partners and stakeholders.

It is recognised that individual departments/service areas in the Council decide on what they wish to consult on. This review will consider the various options that are available to them when undertaking consultations and seek to ensure that the effectiveness of these various options is maximised. The Council is also increasingly using a range of Social Media platforms for consultation activity. The review would explore best practice in this area and inform future policy and strategy.

The Committee will undertake the following key lines of enquiry:

- What are the principles of good consultation? (Including an outline of SBC's approach to consultation)
- Are all innovations and developments in consultation platforms and channels being considered and where appropriate adopted?
- Are changes to policies and service delivery (including financial cuts) being informed by the views of residents, partners and stakeholders?

- What best practice and industry developments exist?
- Do we evaluate the effectiveness of our public consultation?
- How do we ensure that Council consultations are representative and meaningful? What steps are taken to engage with hard to reach groups?
- Are services equipped to run consultations? What support and guidance is provided?
- Scrutiny of the membership and operation of The Viewpoint Panel
- Scrutiny of the “My Views” on-line consultation platform (due for review in 2019) and input to the specification of the new/upgraded system
- How will the results of the Four yearly Residents’ Survey be shared and used?
- Consideration of “Bright Minds Big Future” and what lessons can be learned for other consultation activity
- Scrutiny of the Planning Portal – is it an effective platform?
- What can we learn from the approaches of other Councils?
- How can feedback from previous and ongoing consultations inform our approach to future consultations?
- What impact has Covid-19 had on the public consultation process and outcomes?

Who will the Committee be trying to influence as part of its work?

Cabinet, Service Departments

Expected duration of review and key milestones:

6 months:

Approve scope and project plan – February 2020

Receive evidence – 16 March 2020 /27 July 2020/ 28 September 2020

Draft recommendations – 26 October 2020

Final report – 23 November 2020

Report to Cabinet –17 December 2020

*Committee meetings from July 2020 will be held remotely via Microsoft Teams until further notice.

What information do we need?

Existing information (background information, existing reports, legislation, central government documents, etc.):

CCE strategy, Objective consultation portal overview, Viewpoint Panel - demographic information and how and what they are used for, BMBF

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

What specific areas do we want them to cover when they give evidence?

Consultation Officer

Context setting. Is the consultation portal fit for purpose?

Viewpoint Panel

Do we consult enough with the public before changes are made?

BMBF

Methods of consultation– do we use appropriate methods?

IPSOS MORI

Four yearly survey–relevance/ value for money?
Best practice and Industry developments

Another Council

What can we learn from other Councils and their approaches to consultation?

Representative from market research group – eg Bluegrass

Additional information on market research and methods which could be used in future consultations

Super-users

What can we learn from them?

Communications Officer SBC

How are consultations publicised on social media? How do the public engage with the consultation process online?

Executive Summary

The aim of the review was to improve performance of the consultation activity itself and of all Council activities that use the results of the consultations. In addition, there was the potential for making savings or meeting growing demand from existing resources through the introduction of new approaches.

It was recognised that individual departments/service areas in the Council decided on what they wished to consult on. The focus of the review was to consider the options that were available to these departments/service areas when undertaking consultations and to ensure that the effectiveness of these various options was maximised.

The Select Committee's key findings were as follows:

- The Town Centre Consultation was praised for its wide reach. The availability of paper consultation forms, as well as online forms, and public meetings meant that residents who did/could not complete the consultation online were still able to contribute their views.
- Members have suggested that public consultation questions or links to current consultations could be added to the start-up screens of public computers in libraries across the Borough.
- All consultation activity is already included within Stockton News. This section is entitled 'Your Views Matter'. This section could be feature more prominently in the future.
- Some consultations were open to all residents in the Borough. These consultations were advertised in various forms. For example, in the press, on the Council website, in libraries, and through residents' groups. In other instances, some consultations have focussed on services which might affect specific groups and so information has been sent to them as a closed group.
- There was a higher response rate on issues residents felt most passionate about and were most affected by.
- With regards to the Viewpoint Panel and the Town Centre Consultation, the category which engaged the least was young people.
- Following the example of other Councils, there is an interest in increasing Stockton Council's involvement with young people. This could be achieved by expanding the Council's engagement activities with Bright Minds Big Futures.
- In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has resulted in a need to increase digital/online services and reduce face-to-face meetings, the Residents' Panel could be utilised more effectively in future as a means of engagement outside of formal consultations for a wider cross-section of people.
- The promotion of the Viewpoint Panel, the Residents' Panel, and 'Your Views Matter' could be increased via social media platforms (Facebook and Twitter) to increase engagement with those who prefer to communicate their views online.
- It would be useful to review consultation platforms. The current system requires training provided by officers to each new member of staff which can be time consuming. It would be beneficial to investigate alternative platforms which are available to Councils.

Conclusion

Public Consultation is a valuable and effective means of engaging with all residents across the Borough. In addition, the Public Consultation team lead on employee consultation across all Directorates. Both online and face-to-face methods are utilised by the team. External market research organisations have also facilitated larger-scale consultations, such as the Residents' Survey and visitor research of yearly events.

The Committee supported a re-evaluation of the current consultation platform, and an exploration of alternative platforms, following this review. The Committee also recognised the importance of retaining paper consultation forms, and improving print coverage of consultation activity, where appropriate. It was also acknowledged that engagement with young people should be increased.

Recommendations

1. That, building on the success of the Town Centre Consultation, paper consultation forms and public meetings are retained in future for large-scale consultations, where appropriate, to allow residents who cannot access online consultation to contribute their views.
2. That the Council improve the quality of the information on the consultation pages of the website and in Stockton News, including both activity and feedback. This will help to raise awareness of consultations to all residents and foster trust.
3. That engagement with young people be increased, through the use of engagement activities with Bright Minds Big Futures.
4. That promotion of '*Your Views Matter*', *The Residents' Panel* and regular feedback via social media platforms, including Facebook and Twitter, be increased.
5. That, as per normal practice, the current consultation platform continued be reviewed regularly to determine if alternative consultation platforms are available to SBC.
6. That links to current consultations be embedded into the start-up screens of public computers in libraries across the Borough.
7. That *The Residents' Panel* be used more effectively as a means of engagement outside of formal consultations and we provide regular feedback to the panel.

*Activities carried out in relation to recommendations are subject to Covid 19 guidelines and restrictions.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This report presents the outcomes of the Scrutiny Review of Public Consultation.

1.2 The aim of the review was to improve performance of the consultation activity itself and of all Council activities that use the results of the consultations. In addition, there was the potential for making savings or meeting growing demand from existing resources through the introduction of new approaches.

1.3 It was recognised that individual departments/service areas in the Council decided on what they wished to consult on. The focus of the review was to consider the options that were available to departments/service areas in the Council when undertaking consultations and to ensure that the effectiveness of these various options was maximised.

1.4 The Committee examined the following key lines of enquiry:

- What are the principles of good consultation? (Including an outline of SBC's approach to consultation)
- Are all innovations and developments in consultation platforms and channels being considered and where appropriate adopted?
- Are changes to policies and service delivery (including financial cuts) being informed by the views of residents, partners and stakeholders?
- What best practice and industry developments exist?
- Do we evaluate the effectiveness of our public consultation?
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- What can we learn from the approaches of other Councils?
- How can feedback from previous and ongoing consultations inform our approach to future consultations?
- What impact has Covid-19 had on the public consultation process and outcomes?

1.5 The Committee has taken evidence from Council Officers, Bright Minds Big Futures, The Viewpoint Panel, Ipsos MORI, North Tyneside Council, Bluegrass Research Limited.

2.0 Evidence

Background: Consultation, Engagement, Communications

2.1 Stockton Council's consultation department sits centrally within the Council, meaning it is not aligned to a particular service area. All information gathered from consultations has been sent to this central department. The feedback has then been sent to the relevant service area.

2.2 Consultation is any activity that gives people a voice and an opportunity to influence important decisions. Engagement is a broader and ongoing process of sharing information and seeking feedback and helps to facilitate strong relationships. Communications refers to a passing of information, which may be two-way in its interaction, but it contains no commitment to make use of what comes back.

2.3 The Local Government Act 1999 includes a general requirement on Local Authorities to undertake consultation on the provision of services. The Council encourage public participation in the decision-making process and will consult if there is an identified objective to: understand what residents think; better understand communities; improve Council services; provide value for money; and keep residents informed and engaged. There are statutory and non-statutory requirements to consult.

Consultation 2019/20

2.4 In the last year there have been a total of 93 consultations (including surveys) across all Directorates.

2.5 2019-20 activity included major projects, such as for the Residents' Survey and the Town Centre Consultations, which involve a wide range of consultation methods (e.g. My Views, public meetings, Viewpoint, face to face market research activity) to smaller consultations on the quality of specific services.

Directorate	Consultations	Responses
Adults & Health	17	1427
Children's Services	9	469
Community Services	3	253
Culture, Leisure and Events	25	1963
Economic Growth & Development	12	3184
Finance & Business Services	6	215
HR, Legal & Comms and Corporate	21	1780
Total	93	9291

2.6 The Gunning principles are the Council's agreed reference point for good practice and a consultation is only relevant when these four principles are met. Firstly, that proposals are still at a formative stage. Secondly, that there is sufficient information to give 'intelligent consideration'. Thirdly, that there is adequate time for consideration and response. Fourthly, that 'conscientious consideration' must be given to the consultation responses before a decision is made. Consultation activity includes surveys, events, public meetings, face-to-face/interviews, feedback, and social media to suit the size/scope of the project.

Consultation Procedure

2.7 All Local Authorities have a statutory duty to consult on a variety of services. The Council goes far beyond any statutory duty. Consultation is crucial in helping to make decisions which will affect the Borough and consultation has a key role in informing and influencing decision making processes and activities. The Council aims to consult with stakeholders on many aspects of service planning and delivery.

2.8 The Council's approach is coordinated in the following ways. All activity is agreed and discussed as part of the Consultation, Communications and Engagement team forward plans. There is a single point of contact for all consultations and support across all directorates. Public Consultation is part of the Consultation, Communications and Engagement team, providing wider/on-going project support. There is consultation portal 'super-users' in each directorate.

2.9 For clarity, the central Consultation team will take a lead role in all corporate consultations, which include consultations that may be contentious and/or could result in:

- Changes to services,
- Reduction in services,
- Budgetary changes,
- Reputational damage,
- Press related enquiries,
- Require bespoke promotional materials and support from comms.

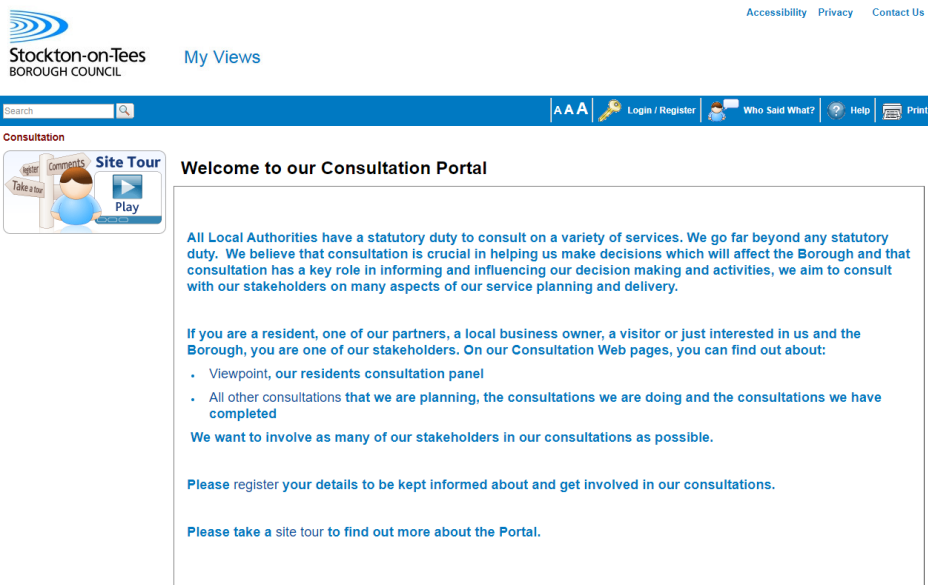
2.10 In addition, the Consultation team will support all service-led consultations, which would normally be in the form using surveys to gather information and opinions to support an on-going project and inform service development. All activity will have a clearly identified objective and consultation will be used to influence local decision making. Activity will be coordinated, and all activity will follow stated consultation strategy.

Consultation Methods

2.11 The Public Consultation team use several Consultation methods. They include: My Views, Viewpoint, the Residents' Survey, Bright Minds Big Futures (BMBF), and focus groups. In addition, social media-based consultation, market research, and employee consultation are conducted.

2.12 Objective Keystone is SBC's current consultation portal, online surveying and stakeholder management system (since 2015). The portal is used for all online consultation and for recording paper-based consultation. It is controlled and operated by the Consultation Team with support from 'super-users' across each Directorates. System development is ongoing to allow better web-based integration within the Council's Internet and intranet and to provide better links with the Council's social media platforms. Consultations can be accessed via the portal, our website or via an e-mail link depending on whether the consultation is public or private.

2.13 The user area of the consultation portal is 'My Views' and offers questionnaire production, a fully customisable portal, reporting tools, and stakeholder management tools. The consultation portal is compliant with GDPR. The portal also has functions for user management and internal employee engagement.



Ipsos MORI

2.14

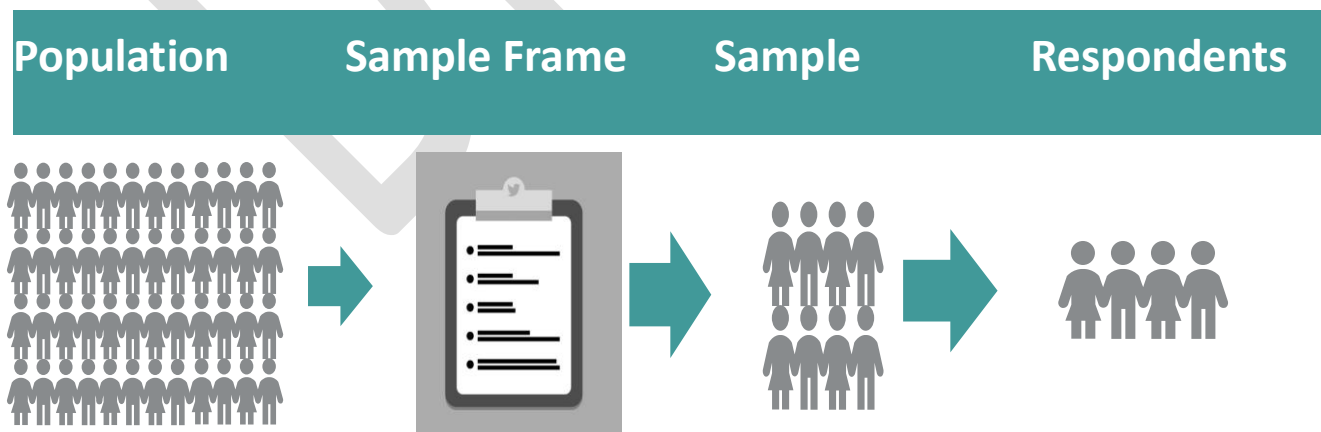
Members received a presentation from Ipsos MORI, a market research company. The presentation outlined the principles of good consultation. The following questions were offered as a guide to ensure a consultation is representative:

- Who will you interview?
- How many?
- What mode will you choose?
- Think about response rate

2.15 For example, the question was posed, in Oxford would it be wise to consult students as part of a resident’s survey because they live in the city for four years on average and do not pay council tax? The Royal Mail postal address file was determined to be the most up-to-date contact address system. The consultation budget was also a factor. It needed to be understood what could be achieved with the budget available.

Selecting your sample

2.16



Interviewers

2.17 Interviewers can help by finding the right respondent / household and encouraging participation / discouraging breakoffs. Interviewers can guide the respondent in answering difficult questions and probe for detailed / high-quality responses. But they can also be a source of error

through social desirability effects. Including self-completion sections into surveys allow respondents to give a more honest answer rather than telling interviewers what they think they want to hear.

Mode

2.18

	Online	Postal	Phone	Face-to-face
Sample frame	Poor coverage	Good coverage	Average coverage	Good coverage
Self-completion	Yes	Yes	No	No
Response rate	Poor	Poor	Medium	Good
Max Q'aire length	Short	Short	Medium	Long
Design considerations	Device agnostic	Readability of layout	Script for telephone interviewer	Showcards, Display tablets on
Time required for fieldwork	Very quick	Medium	Quick	Slow

Maximising response

2.19 Methods of non-contact include pre-notifications reminders / mailings / calling patterns. The length of data collection period should also be noted. Survey materials, incentives and interviewers can all be used to maximise the response rate of those who initially refuse to take part.

Social exchange theory

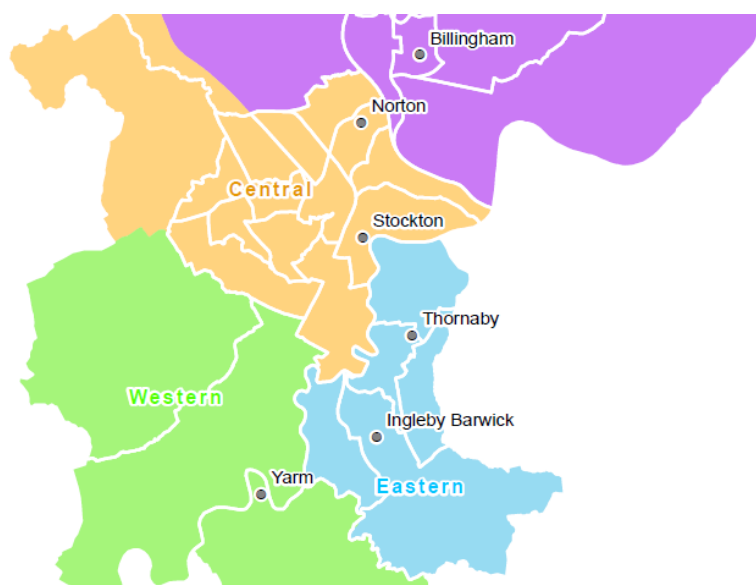
2.20

Maximise rewards	Minimise costs
Demonstrate importance and usefulness of research (offer to share findings)	Avoid inconvenience (flexibility of time, pre-paid postage)
Make it interesting	Minimise requests for personal information (and explain the need and reassure confidentiality)
Show positive regard (request help/thank your respondents)	Avoid embarrassment (don't begin with sensitive questions)
Give social validation (e.g. others have responded)	Avoid unnecessary burden (q'aire length/complex tasks)
Provide tangible incentive (financial or non-financial)	

2.21 Think creatively about how to promote a survey. Ensure every member of staff is aware of which surveys are happening. Consequently, frontline staff will be able to say to members of the public 'have you heard about/completed our survey on...' Think about survey response timescales – make sure there is enough time for people to respond.

The Stockton Approach

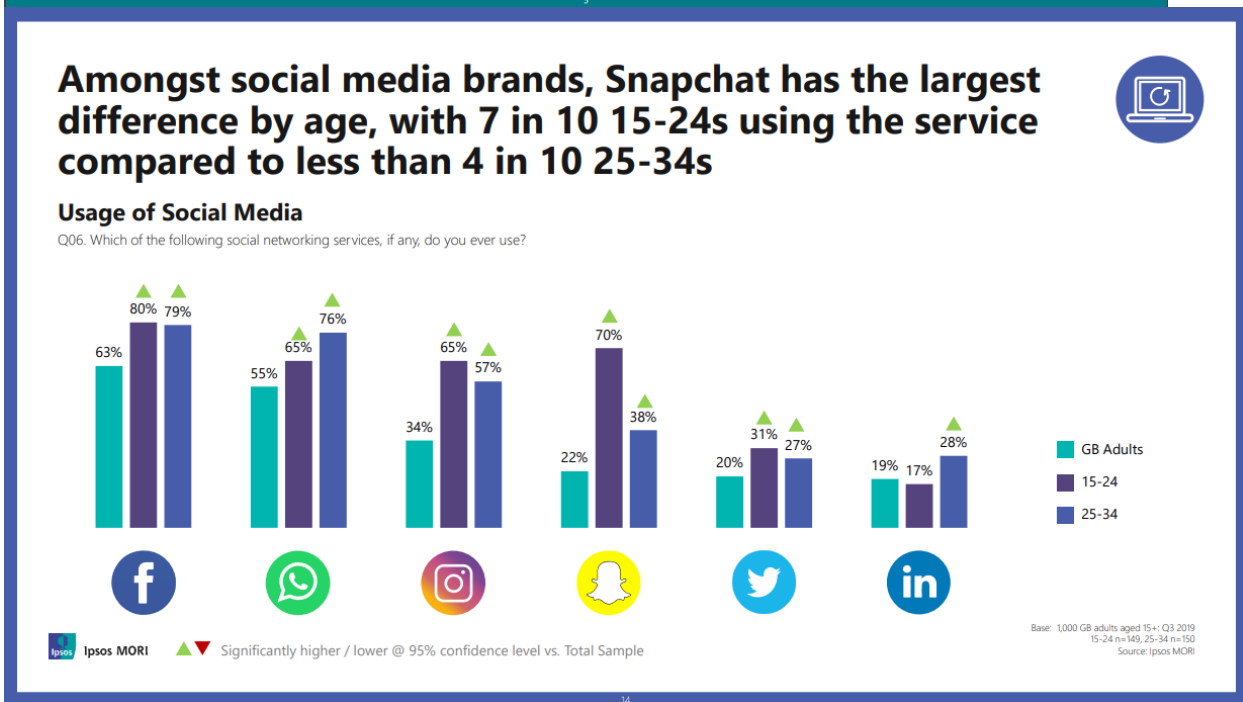
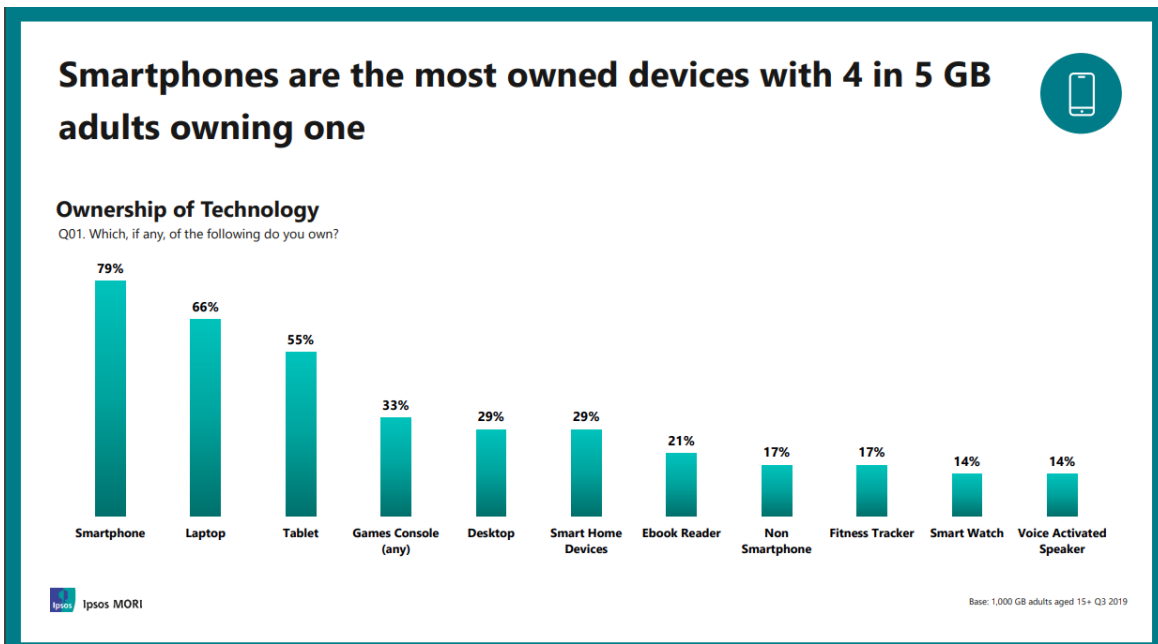
2.22



2.23 The Residents' Survey was an in-home survey of 2,098 residents between July and December 2019. There was a minimum of 80 residents per ward and there were quotas based on age, gender and work status. The key issues and questions which were covered in the survey were perceptions of local area; safety; community involvement; the local economy; health and wellbeing; the Council and its services; and events, festivals and markets. Analysis of the survey responses included tracking performance and compiling the story at a locality level. The survey responses were also used as a benchmark against national datasets.

Industry Developments

2.24



Innovative Methods

2.25 Ipsos Mobile has been developed as a quantitative and qualitative application. The application includes diaries, and geo-triggered surveys. Online Communities also provide a group of individuals who are willing to participate in focus groups, forums, diaries, surveys, and concept testing. Offline contact has been used to 'push' people to go online. Social listening is another method and search queries can identify relevant social media with information that is data-time-stamped and has a geo-location. Augmented Reality layers 2D or 3D digital content over a hard copy. This can be used for data visualisation, triggering surveys, text analysis, ethnography, and digital observation. Facial coding, virtual reality and IRT are also options.

2.26 Letters which were issued to members of the public regarding the residents' survey included reassurance that Ipsos MORI have complied with GDPR regulations. A unique website link to access the survey online for two members of each household was included in these letters.

2.27 Members were informed about the process for the Stockton residents' survey. Interviewers were each given 300 addresses and had to complete enough surveys to ensure that they had captured a wide range of responses. Members were informed that the sample size for the Stockton residents' survey was robust enough to evaluate the results across the different wards.

Impact of Covid-19

2.28 Public Consultation was initially scaled back to focus resources on those services that protect the most vulnerable. As the Public Consultation team stepped services back up, they were supporting online consultations and providing remote support for all services and virtual meetings. The team had been exploring alternative engagement opportunities for face-to-face consultation, including digital, virtual, and online engagement.

Viewpoint Panel

2.29 Viewpoint is the Council's voluntary, residents' consultation panel which seeks the views of residents using regular surveys that cover a range of council services. The current membership consists of 193 residents from the Borough. Members can have their say on key council services. Members are sent 10 short surveys and 2 standard surveys per year. Short surveys are online and take 5 mins to complete. Standard surveys can be completed either online or by paper questionnaire and take no longer than 15 mins. Surveys are convenient and can be completed anytime, anywhere via tablet, mobile or PC. A health check is reviewed annually and refreshed every 3 years.

Visual Identity

Stockton-on-Tees BOROUGH COUNCIL My Views

0% 100%

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council would like to improve the way it presents the materials it uses to communicate with residents and businesses.

We are in the process of developing a refreshed visual identity and would welcome your views.

The Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council logo is inspired by the River Tees with the blue ripples symbolising communications between the Council and its local communities.

Please tell us on a scale of 1-5 the number that best represents your opinion (1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-don't know, 4-agree, 5-strongly agree).

Do you agree the current logo remains relevant and does NOT need updating?

1 2 3 4 5

Stockton-on-Tees BOROUGH COUNCIL

The Council provides lots of services within the local community.

Please tell us on a scale of 1-5 the number that best represents your opinion (1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-don't know, 4-agree, 5-strongly agree).

To what extent do you agree that grouping services like this would help us explain what the Council does more effectively?

1 2 3 4 5

Our People People are
Our Places A place that is

Safer Stockton Partnership Plan 2020-2023

0% 100%

Crime and anti-social behaviour

The Safer Stockton Partnership (SSP) is your local community safety partnership and works together to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour in the Borough of Stockton. The partnership is a collective of agencies and organisations brought together under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, including Cleveland Police and Cleveland Fire Brigade.

Every three years the Safer Stockton Partnership (SSP) undertake a Crime and Disorder Audit and, following public consultation, produce a Community Safety Plan which sets out how agencies within the Partnership intend to achieve targets in crime reduction. The last public consultation was carried out in March 2017 and the priorities have formed the basis of the Community Safety Plan 2017 - 2020.

Top four crime priorities were:

- Reduce Re-offending
- Protecting Vulnerable People
- Tackling Drug and alcohol related misuse
- Community Safety and Protection

We are now wanting to seek the views of the public, to understand what you feel that partnership should be focusing on during the next period from April 2020 until March 2023.

Your responses are important and will help to shape the focus of the partnership's work over the next three years. Please ensure your responses are returned to us by Sunday 15 March 2020.

We also want to assure you that your responses to this survey are completely anonymous. No personally identifiable information is captured unless you voluntarily offer personal or contact information in any of the comment fields.

Thank you

SAFER STOCKTON PARTNERSHIP

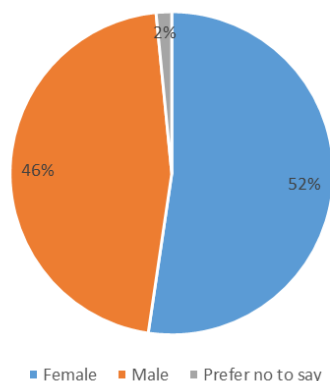
Have you been a victim of crime in the last 12 months?

I have been a victim of crime

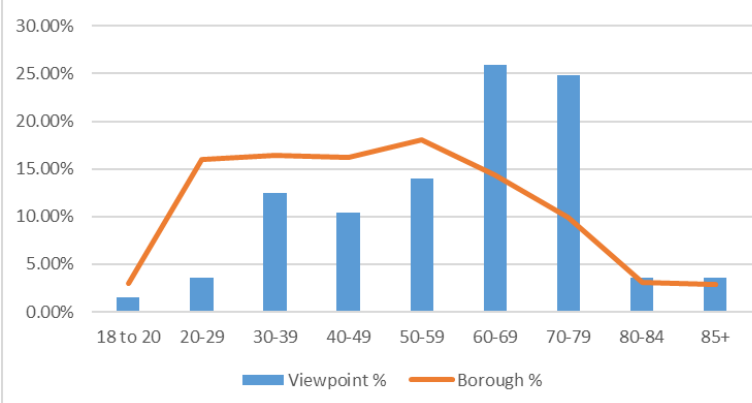
I have not been a victim of crime

Current Viewpoint membership profile 2.30

Viewpoint - gender profile



Viewpoint - age profile



Membership by group

2.31

- Asian background, <3.5% of Borough – 0% Viewpoint
- Black/Black British background, <1% of Borough – 0.5% Viewpoint
- Mixed/Multiple ethnic background, <1.5% of Borough – 0% Viewpoint
- White background, 95% of Borough – 96% Viewpoint

Viewpoint response rate

2.32

2019/20	Viewpoint	Subject	Response %
June	Viewpoint 45	Family Hubs	51.81%
July	Short Survey Poll	Compliments, Commendations, Comments & Complaints	21.76%
August	Short Survey Poll	SIRF19	40.41%
September	Short Survey Poll	Care Home Development	32.64%
October	Short Survey Poll	Adult Strategy	22.28%
November	Viewpoint 46	Festivals, Events & Specialist Markets	49.22%
December	Short Survey Poll	SIRF20 poll	23.32%
January	Short Survey Poll	Safer Stockton Partnership	73.58%
February	Short Survey Poll	Visual Identity	33.16%

38.69%

Bright Minds Big Futures (BMBF)

2.33 The Select Committee received evidence from a representative of Bright Minds Big Futures. Bright Minds Big Futures is a program dedicated to giving young people within the Borough of Stockton-on-Tees a voice within the Local Authority.

2.34 BMBF engage with Stockton Council in the following ways:

- Annual Big Plan
- Six monthly report to Cabinet
- Youth Question Time
- Councillors attending each second Big Committee meeting
- Planned Youth Viewpoint
- Survey to produce first Big Plan
- Publicising SBC surveys
- Department heads communicating with non-Committee members

2.35 Examples of recent consultation activity with BMBF included encouraging youth participation in the 'Let's talk about our towns', Stockton Town Centre survey. BMBF have also publicised the Safer Stockton Partnership on their social media pages. A further example was BMBF worked with Public Health on the creation and publicity of a youth survey on Sexual Health Services.

'Let's talk about our towns' Stockton Borough Council Consultation

2.36 The Select Committee received evidence from an officer from Stockton Council's Economic Growth and Development Services. The main issues from their presentation were as follows:

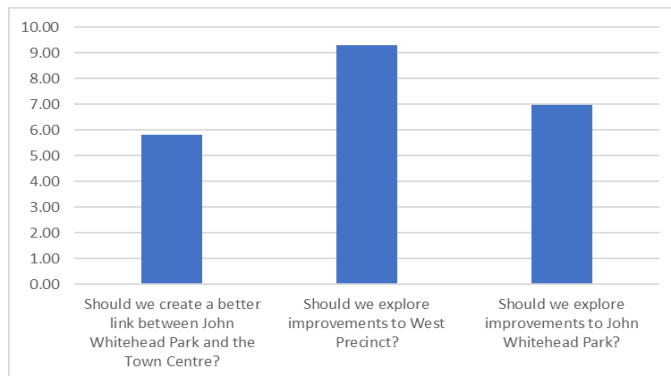
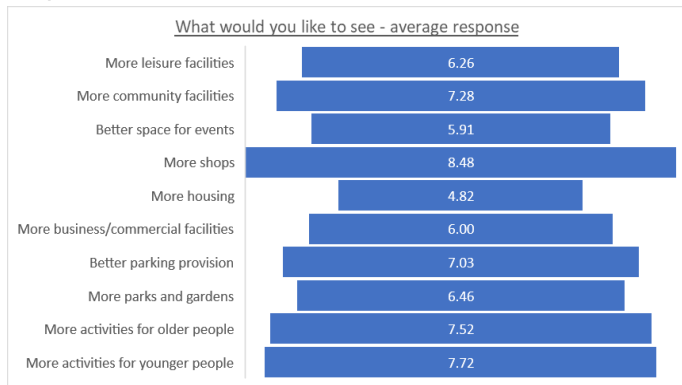
2.37 There were five different 'Let's talk about our towns' documents. The consultation started in early January and lasted for 6 weeks. The consultation sought views on the future of the five centres and what was important to residents. Online surveys, face-to-face sessions and printed questionnaires were utilised during the consultation. Summary documents were drafted for each town centre. The results were published to the public in an article in Stockton News.

Billingham Town Centre	311 responses
Ingleby Barwick Town Centre	462 responses
Norton Town Centre	285 responses
Thornaby Town Centre	349 responses
Yarm Town Centre	208 responses
TOTAL	1,615 responses

2.38 Billingham

Support for a 'mixed use' development and improvements to West Precinct More shops, community facilities and activities for older and younger people. Improvements to leisure and green

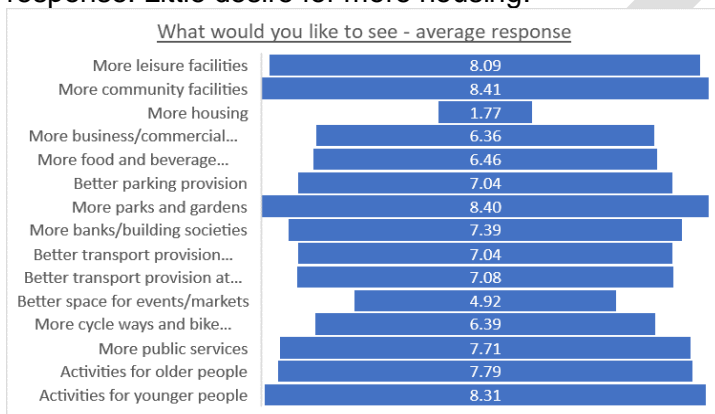
spaces.



There was little desire for more housing as part of the development for the town centre.

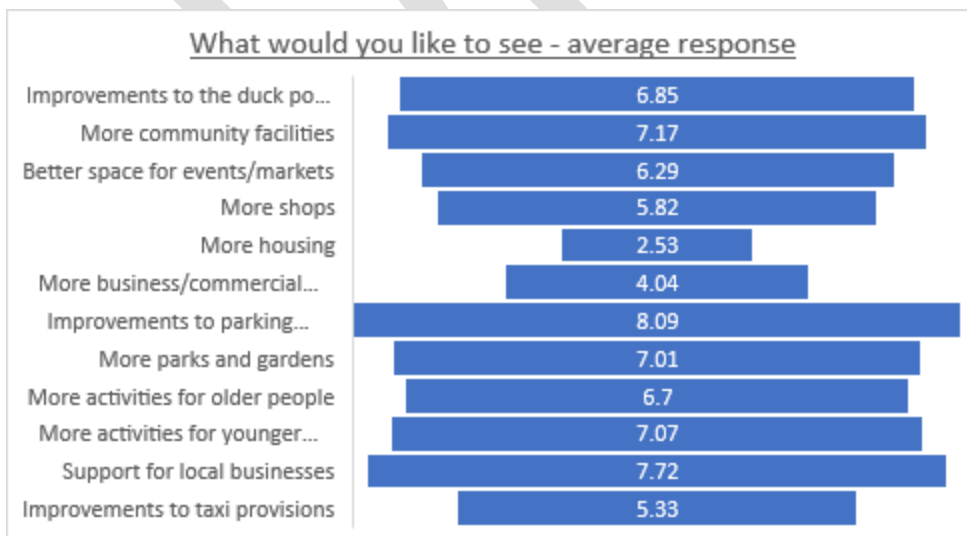
2.39 Ingleby Barwick

More leisure and community facilities, and more parks and gardens scored particularly highly as did activities for younger people. Better space for events/markets attracted a fairly neutral response. Little desire for more housing.



2.40 Norton

Improvements to parking provision scored particularly highly along with support for local businesses. There was little desire for more housing and more business and commercial facilities as part of any development.

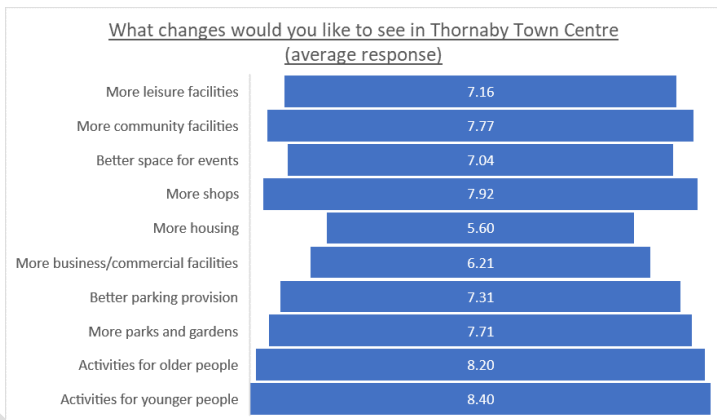
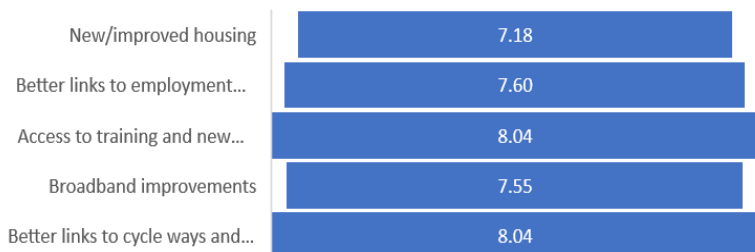


2.41 Thornaby

More activities for younger and older people scored particularly highly, along with more shops and community facilities, parks and gardens. More housing attracted a low response. More business and commercial facilities attracted a neutral response.

What should be the priorities for the future of Thornaby?

(average response)



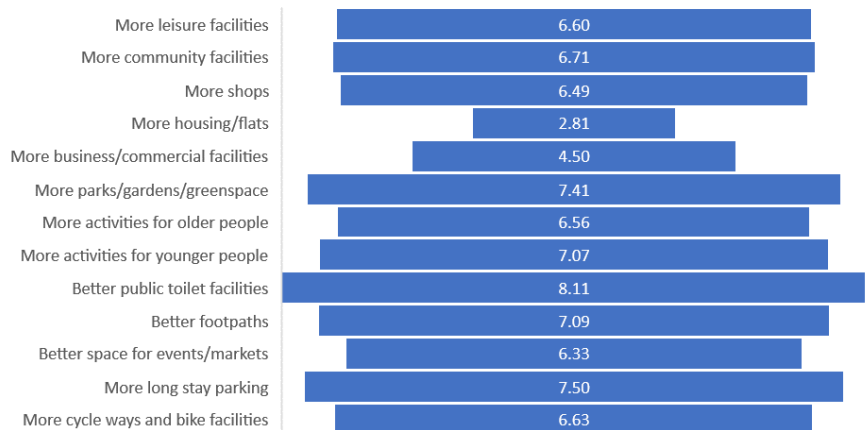
Should we explore improvements to the Golden Eagle Hotel and neighbouring Phoenix House sites?

9.15

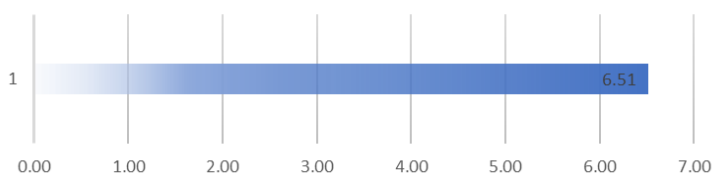
2.42 Yarm

Support for better public toilet facilities, improvements to long stay parking and more greenspaces. There was little desire for more housing, with more business and commercial facilities also attracting a low response.

What would you like to see - average response



SHOULD WE EXPLORE THE REDEVELOPMENT OF YARM TOWN HALL AS A POSSIBLE VISITOR ATTRACTION?



Next Steps

2.43 Following the consultation, detailed designs and costings for schemes were being formulated. It was expected that these plans would be available to share by early September. There would be a further public consultation on proposals. Cabinet approval would be sought to proceed with the schemes and secure funding in autumn 2020.

Stockton Borough Council – Social Media

2.44 Members received information from a representative from Stockton Council's Social Media Department. The main issues were as follows:

2.45 The aim of the social media posts is to attract people to click through to the consultation page. Some people click through to the consultation page. Some people like or share the post (which helps it reach more people). Some people comment on the post – the team encourage them to complete the consultation; of course, some people don't engage at all.

2.46 The Social Media team repost the consultation information and links several times throughout the day to engage with as many people as possible. There was a vast difference in online engagement depending on the subject matter. Members of the public were very responsive to the Town Centre Consultation. However, the Sexual Health consultation received a significantly smaller number of responses.

2.47 The Media Team have always corrected factual inaccuracies in public comments on social media posts. Although there have been very few abusive comments, the Media Team have always hidden any comments which have fallen into this category. For example, comments which have contained bad language. This protocol is replicated by other public bodies.

2.48 Members thanked the Media Team for their Covid-19 bulletins. Members commended the Media Team on their assistance with members of the public who have commented on social media posts with an unrelated query. The Media Team commended the work of the Customer Services Team in this area.

Stockton Borough Council – Planning Portal

2.49 Members received information from a representative from Stockton Council's Planning Department on the Council's Planning Portal. The main issues were as follows:

2.50 There are around 1,500 planning applications each year that are consulted on. Since the early 1990s, members of the public have been encouraged to engage with planning applications online. The Planning Portal is a public access platform. Information about planning applications is available through the Stockton Council website and members of the public can request the service through the website. Between May and November 2019, there were 33,000 hits on the Planning Portal. The Application Summary Page displays comments and approved plans.

2.51 The Planning Department write to every resident affected by an application. Around 14,00 letters are sent to residents each year. Site notices are also displayed.

2.52 The system is provided by IDOX and Stockton Council have little ability to change this. However, the five-year contract with IDOX expires in 2022. The Planning Department are looking at other platforms and assessing the ones which provide the best user accessibility and value for money.

North Tyneside Council

2.53 Members received information from a representative of North Tyneside Council on the Council's approach to consultation. The main issues were as follows:

2.54 North Tyneside Council continuously engaged with residents. Examples of engagement initiatives were the Resident Survey, the Community Conversation, and the State of the Area events.

2.55 The impact of Covid-19 on residents and experiences of the pandemic has featured heavily in the engagement programme in 2020. Methods of engagement mentioned included focus groups, visits to voluntary sector organisations, and 'out and about' conversations with residents. In 2020, engagement has also occurred over the phone due to the pandemic. Resident issues and priorities were fed into the Council's Action Plan.

2.56 There were over 200 members of the Council's Residents' Panel. If a policy was reviewed or new services were introduced the panel were encouraged to get involved by submitting their views. Residents were involved in the scrutiny panels for housing.

2.57 The Council have tried to ensure that all engagement activities were directed through the central Engagement Team. Anyone who was interested in carrying out public consultation was advised to contact the Engagement Team for advice and support with surveys. An online 'Consultation Hub' contained links to the Residents' Panel and allowed anyone in the Borough to interact with consultation.

2.58 Online engagement increased in importance because of the coronavirus pandemic. However, this did not stop other forms of engagement from occurring and the Engagement Team have still communicated with residents by telephone and post. Online engagement has allowed those who would not normally interact with consultations as often to get involved. This included young people and those with families/children.

2.59 A Young Mayor and a Young Cabinet were elected each year. There were also forums for young people including those for children in care and children with learning needs and disabilities. Elections for the Young Mayor and Young Cabinet were conducted through schools. Youth Council volunteers were given positions in the Young Cabinet. The Young Mayor had a yearly pledge. Youth representatives were able to take part in Council meetings. During the ongoing pandemic, the Youth Mayor and the Youth MP had promoted help and support for young people.

Bluegrass Research Limited

2.60 Bluegrass Research is a North East-based full-service Marketing Research agency, working extensively on visitor economy projects, including events, visitor attraction and economic impact research. Since 2015, Bluegrass Research has been working with Stockton Borough Council to provide visitor research across a programme of yearly events.

2.61 Bluegrass have a flexible framework to facilitate benchmarking over time, and across events, to give vital insight when reviewing their performance. The key objectives of the research are to:

- Provide an understanding of event audience profiles.
- Measure satisfaction with and perceptions of various aspects of the events.
- Understand how the events impact on perceptions of Stockton amongst residents and non-residents.
- To provide an estimation of visitors' expenditure and the Direct Economic Impact on Stockton.

2.62 Interviews are conducted at each event (typically around 15 six hour shifts per event). These are scheduled in agreement with the Council to reflect the nature of the events, with a mix of times / days / sampling points to ensure a representative sample of visitors to each event is achieved. Interviewing is undertaken at locations of high footfall, but where no bias could be inferred.

2.63 Experienced market research interviewers approach visitors to take part in a face-to-face interview. The interview lasts approximately 8 minutes and follows a set questionnaire, pre-loaded onto a tablet. A standardised question set is used across the events programme to facilitate comparisons, with some tailored, event-specific questions which are designed alongside the client team in advance of each event. The minimum sample target is 300 interviews per event, with the number of interviews achieved per shift closely monitored throughout the fieldwork period. Where an event includes a ticketed element, an online version of the survey can be dispatched post-event to the database of attendees.

2.64 Quality is of utmost importance -we work to the Market Research Society Code of Conduct, a framework to safeguard standards, promote confidence and champion professionalism.

2.65 Bluegrass Research Ltd ensure high quality and ethical research through the following measures. All data handling is in accordance with GDPR and Bluegrass are registered with the Information Commissioner's Office as data controllers. Participation is at the discretion of individuals and information is processed anonymously. Interviews are only undertaken with individuals aged 16 or over. A random sampling approach is taken with care taken to interview a cross section of visitors i.e. every Nth person, regardless of age, gender, appearance, disability or ethnicity. All interviewers are fully briefed prior to fieldwork on project objectives and methodology; protocols for engaging with the public; and reporting to event organisers. 10% of interviews are quality checked by an external moderator, to monitor accuracy and ensure that interviews have been conducted in a professional and appropriate manner.

2.66 Bluegrass is now working with COVID-safe methodologies with clients to continue to deliver research in a flexible and responsible way.

2.67 Bluegrass quality checks and tabulates research data in SNAP Surveys software. Statistical testing is undertaken to a 95% confidence level, to identify differences in results between this and previous years' results and demographic subgroups within the data.

2.68 Headline findings are delivered within one working week of an event. A full report is delivered within three working weeks, which include an executive summary, followed by charts, tables and a narrative outlining the research findings:

- Audience profiles, with specific reference to socio-demographics, visitor origin and visit history
- Motivations, evaluating key drivers and triggers for attendance
- An overview of the event experience, considering perceived strengths and weaknesses of the event and the extent to which expectations were met
- The impact of the event on perceptions of Stockton and Stockton Borough Council and the likelihood of visiting the event / Stockton again
- Spend data across key expenditure areas, calculating the economic impact following **event IMPACTS** principles

2.69 In calculating Direct Economic Impact of the events, Bluegrass follows the principles of 'event Impacts', a methodology endorsed by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) and UK Sport among others, applying the following process:

- Allowing for standard economic measures such as additionality, leakage and displacement, calculating the proportions of the audiences whose expenditure 'qualifies'

to be included in the impact -not all expenditure by the audience can be included, as some of it:

- Would have occurred anyway (only residents who would actively go out of the region to another event in the absence of the given event qualify for inclusion)
 - Is not attributable to Stockton Sparkles (only non-residents whose presence is specifically attributable to the given event qualify for inclusion).
- Applying accurate proportions of audience type (from the primary research) to the actual audience size (from the organisers), to arrive at an approximation of the numbers of each type occurring in the actual crowd.
 - Multiplying these numbers of each type occurring in the actual crowd by the average individual spend to provide an estimated expenditure by audience type.
 - Adding other known expenditure in the Stockton area attributable to the event (e.g. staff bed nights) to the audience expenditure figures to arrive at an estimate of Direct Economic Impact.

2.70 Random sampling was conducted at events to gain an accurate representation of that event's attendees. Some events would have attracted attendees from different age categories and genders. Other events might have largely attracted attendees from the same age category and gender. This depended on the type of event.

2.71 When calculating economic impact, outliers from the sample would have been removed from the final analysis. An example of an outlier would be a person who visited Stockton from another area to attend an event and spent a vast amount of money on accommodation, food and beverages etc.

3.0 Key Findings

3.1 The Town Centre Consultation was praised for its wide reach. The availability of paper consultation forms, as well as online forms, and public meetings meant that residents who did/could not complete the consultation online were still able to contribute their views.

3.2 Members have suggested that public consultation questions or links to current consultations could be added to the start-up screens of public computers in libraries across the Borough.

3.3 All consultation activity is already included within Stockton News. This section is entitled 'Your Views Matter'. This section could be feature more prominently in the future.

3.4 Some consultations were open to all residents in the Borough. These consultations were advertised in various forms. For example, in the press, on the Council website, in libraries, and through residents' groups. In other instances, some consultations have focussed on services which might affect specific groups and so information has been sent to them as a closed group.

3.5 There was a higher response rate on issues residents felt most passionate about and were most affected by.

3.6 With regards to the Viewpoint Panel and the Town Centre Consultation, the category which engaged the least was young people.

3.7 Following the example of other Councils, there is an interest in increasing Stockton Council's involvement with young people. This could be achieved by expanding the Council's engagement activities with Bright Minds Big Futures.

3.8 In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has resulted in a need to increase digital/online services and reduce face-to-face meetings, the Residents' Panel could be utilised more effectively in future as a means of engagement outside of formal consultations for a wider cross-section of people.

3.9 The promotion of the Viewpoint Panel, the Residents' Panel, and 'Your Views Matter' could be increased via social media platforms (Facebook and Twitter) to increase engagement with those who prefer to communicate their views online.

3.10 It would be useful to review consultation platforms. The current system requires training provided by officers to each new member of staff which can be time consuming. It would be beneficial to investigate alternative platforms which are available to Councils.

Conclusion

Public Consultation is a valuable and effective means of engaging with all residents across the Borough. In addition, the Public Consultation team lead on employee consultation across all Directorates. Both online and face-to-face methods are utilised by the team. External market research organisations have also facilitated larger-scale consultations, such as the Residents' Survey and visitor research of yearly events.

The Committee supported a re-evaluation of the current consultation platform, and an exploration of alternative platforms, following this review. The Committee also recognised the importance of retaining paper consultation forms, and improving print coverage of consultation activity, where appropriate. It was also acknowledged that engagement with young people should be increased.

Recommendations

1. That, building on the success of the Town Centre Consultation, paper consultation forms and public meetings are retained in future for large-scale consultations, where appropriate, to allow residents who cannot access online consultation to contribute their views.
2. That the Council improve the quality of the information on the consultation pages of the website and in Stockton News, including both activity and feedback. This will help to raise awareness of consultations to all residents and foster trust.
3. That engagement with young people be increased, through the use of engagement activities with Bright Minds Big Futures.
4. That promotion of '*Your Views Matter*', *The Residents' Panel* and regular feedback via social media platforms, including Facebook and Twitter, be increased.
5. That, as per normal practice, the current consultation platform continued be reviewed regularly to determine if alternative consultation platforms are available to SBC.
6. That links to current consultations be embedded into the start-up screens of public computers in libraries across the Borough.
7. That *The Residents' Panel* be used more effectively as a means of engagement outside of formal consultations and we provide regular feedback to the panel.

*Activities carried out in relation to recommendations are subject to Covid 19 guidelines and restrictions.