



CORPORATE CONSULTATION STRATEGY

BOB BRADY DEPUTY MAYOR

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PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To seek approval for the Middlesbrough Council Corporate Consultation Strategy and Implementation Plan.

BACKGROUND AND EXTERNAL CONSULTATION

2. Involving local people in the planning and delivery of services is at the heart of the Government's modernisation agenda. It is now widely recognised that people benefit most from public services that are based on a real understanding of their needs. This information can only be gained through effective consultation and involving people in the planning and delivery of the services that they receive. Consultation is also key to measuring and managing performance as results from surveys are used to measure public satisfaction with the services that they receive and to ensure that those services are meeting the needs of users.
3. Over recent years the amount of consultation that is carried out has increased dramatically, not only with the Council but with all organisations who are delivering public services. At any one time, numerous consultation activities are taking place in Middlesbrough.
4. The Middlesbrough Partnership's *Framework for Engaging with Communities* was produced in 2001 in response to the increasing need for consultation among all organisations who operate within the partnership. The *Framework* is essentially a manual of good practice, that aims to provide guidance on planning and undertaking consultation, to organisations operating within the Middlesbrough Partnership. It aims to help ensure that services in Middlesbrough are citizen and user focussed, through the use of effective, appropriate, inclusive and co-ordinated consultation activities.
5. The *Framework* is due to be reviewed and updated. As the Framework is essentially a good practice guide and not a document that proscribes approaches or structures for consultation, the review should not impact on the implementation of Council's Corporate Consultation Strategy.

6. The Corporate Performance Assessment (CPA) published in December 2002 recommended *inter alia* that Council should
 - *Implement effective mechanisms for identifying the specific needs of key sectors of the community. These will include harder to reach and disadvantaged young people, black and minority ethnic people and people with disabilities*
 - *Develop clear and coherent strands of policy and strategy in relation to these groups*
7. In October 2003, CMT agreed that a strategy for planning and evaluating consultation be developed and implemented in the Council. Due to a number of factors, including key staff movements, the preparation of the corporate consultation strategy to implement this decision was delayed.
8. The purpose of the Corporate Consultation Strategy is to outline the way Middlesbrough Council consults with the local community and citizens in making decisions that affect their lives.
9. The Corporate Consultation Strategy also seeks to outline how Middlesbrough Council manages its consultation program consistent with Council corporate objectives, the Local Strategic Partnership's *Community Strategy and Framework for Engaging with Communities*, best contemporary consultation practice in local government and central government requirements. Attached are copies of the Corporate Consultation Strategy (Attachment 1) and Implementation Plan (Attachment 2).

OPTION APPRAISAL/RISK ASSESSMENT

10. Option 1:
Approve the Corporate Consultation Strategy and Implementation Plan.
This will implement the CMT decision from October 2003 and provide a range of ongoing benefits as outlined in the Consultation Strategy. It will also help to ensure that the *Framework for Community Engagement* is being used effectively. This is the recommended option.
11. Option 2:
Status Quo: No change to the current way of doing things.
This will mean that an opportunity for consultation to be more effectively planned, co-ordinated and integrated within Council will be lost. The risk of duplication and community consultation fatigue will continue. Moreover, Council will be unable to ensure that the *Framework for Community Engagement* is being used effectively within Council. This option is not recommended.

FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS

12. Consultation affects all wards. The majority of the proposals in the Corporate Consultation Strategy can be delivered using existing resources. The financial implications for developing the consultation database and the consultation section on the portal will be addressed in the context of the existing budget process and budgets. There are two key areas where legal issues arise; data protection and equality, these are addressed through dedicated sections within the draft strategy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

13. That the Executive approve the Corporate Consultation Strategy (Attachment 1) and Implementation Plan (Attachment 2).

REASONS

14. The recommendation is supported by the following reasons for taking a strategic approach to consultation:
 - a) Improved planning, co-ordination and integration of public consultation across Council to ensure consultations are user focussed, open and transparent and improve communication between Council and citizens and within the Council itself.
 - b) Better 'joining up' of consultation activities to avoid duplication and reduce the risk of community 'consultation fatigue'
 - c) Improved consultation feedback to citizens and better informed decision making leading to improved services for citizens
 - d) Strengthened capacity for evaluation, better sharing of knowledge and ongoing development of consultation expertise and techniques within Council
 - e) Implements the CPA recommendation to develop policy and strategy in relation to identifying the specific needs of key sectors of the community.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

Middlesbrough Partnership Framework for Engagement with Communities (2001)

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