

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

7TH NOVEMBER 2007

CONSULTATION POLICY AND GUIDANCE

Responsible Portfolio Holder	Roger Hollingworth – Leader of Council
Responsible Head of Service	Hugh Bennett – Assistant Chief Executive

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 To agree the revised Consultation Policy for the Council and guidance for staff in support of this policy.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet:-:

Agrees the Council's revised Consultation Policy and the accompanying guidance support of it (**Appendices 1 and 2** respectively).

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 This report sets out the revised Council Consultation Policy and supporting guidance. The policy is attached for approval as **Appendix 1** and the supporting guidance as **Appendix 2**.
- 3.2 The current Consultation Policy was developed in September 2006 and agreed at Cabinet on 04 October 2006. The revised policy uses the experience of the last year to strengthen the consultation procedure and provides greater clarity on the mechanisms available for consultation – for example two area committee pilots, the Equalities and Disabilities Fora, and devices of the Bromsgrove Partnership.
- 3.3 Central Government's agenda to modernise local government stresses the importance of getting closer to communities, not only by encouraging people to vote but by giving people the opportunity to be much more involved in Council decision making through consultation and community engagement activities. This agenda was originally stressed in the Local Government Act 2000, and is strengthened in the 2006 Local Government White Paper and in guidance for the Comprehensive Performance Assessment of councils and the new Comprehensive Area Assessment. The Council has clearly stated its commitment to consultation in its Improvement Plan for recovery from Voluntary Engagement.
- 3.4 A new Senior Policy and Performance Officer is now in post in the Corporate Communications, Policy and Performance Team, and will be leading proactively on consultation in line with the policy and guidance. This role includes re-letting the existing Customer Panel Contract and acting as a point-of contact for officers and Heads of Service wishing to undertake external or internal consultation.

Additionally, staff in the Corporate Communications, Policy and Performance team are being trained to undertake Focus groups on the authority's behalf.

4. PRIORITIES FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

4.1 The Council scored 1 out of 4 for Ambition for its first CPA. A key reason for this low score was the need to improve the Council's consultation on its ambitions for the residents of the District. The Council now has all the main elements of a good consultation framework in place with two exceptions: older people who make up a significant and growing element of the District's population and children and young people, who are corporate key deliverable within the corporate priority Sense of Community and Well Being. The Council also has two area committee pilots which are likely to be extended by one year (subject to agreement by Cabinet and Full Council). The CPA report also highlighted the need to increase the level of engagement from managers and staff (versus informing them) in the Council's improvement agenda. The Council also needs to improve the feedback from consultation exercises to the public and ensure that feedback is fed into the decision making process, as the recent Customer Panel identified that for many residents the Council remains "remote and impersonal".

4.2 Based on the above, the Council needs to continue with its current arrangements, but ensure that by the time of the next CPA (October – December 2008) it has addressed the following areas of concern:-

- Established a children and young persons annual conference (first one planned for 30 November 2007);
- Re-invigorated the District's Older Person's Forum, working in partnership with the Bromsgrove and Redditch Network (BARN), who are leading on Older People within the Local Strategic Partnership;
- Ensured that consultation is better co-ordinated, in particular, that there is clearly communicated feedback and that information is fed into the decision-making processes of the Council;
- Redesigned the staff consultation mechanisms so that they fit the Council's business cycle and that managers and staff are engaged early on in the process of decision-making and not informed near the end.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no financial implications, as the budget has already been agreed.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Not applicable.

7. CORPORATE OBJECTIVES

7.1 Council Objective 3 – Sense of Community and Well Being. Priority 7 – Community Influence.

7.2 Council Objective 2 – Improvement. Priority 4 – Customer Service.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

8.1 None

9. CUSTOMER IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The policy and guidance outlines the way in which we will consult our customers.

10. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

10.1 None

11. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Procurement Issues – None.
Personnel Implications – None.
Governance/Performance Management – none
Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime and Disorder Act 1998 – none.
Policy – a clear policy for the operation of consultation.
Environmental – none.

12. OFFICERS CONSULTED ON THE REPORT

Portfolio Holder	No
Chief Executive	At CMT
Corporate Director (Services)	At CMT
Assistant Chief Executive	Yes
Head of Service	Yes
Head of Financial Services	At CMT
Head of Legal & Democratic Services	At CMT
Head of Organisational Development & HR	At CMT
Corporate Procurement Team	No

12. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 External Consultation Policy 2007.
Appendix 2 External Consultation Guidance.

13. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

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