



COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
15 February 2012

One County One Team, Involvement and Transparency

Purpose of the report: Policy Development and Review

This report:

- updates the Committee on the development of the Council's approach to public involvement and transparency; and
- seeks the views of the Committee to inform and help shape a *One County One Team, Involvement and Transparency Strategy*.

Introduction:

- 1 As part of the annual refresh of the Council's Strategic Planning Framework, the Council is setting out its commitment and approach to being open and transparent and to public involvement through the development of a *One County One Team, Involvement and Transparency Strategy*.

Involvement and transparency

Background

- 2 The *One County One Team, Corporate Strategy 2012 – 2017* was endorsed by the Cabinet on the 31 January 2012 and presented for approval to the County Council on 7 February 2012¹. A number of supporting Strategies are being developed which are aligned to and will underpin the delivery of the Corporate Strategy. This includes the Council's approach to openness and transparency, and the way the Council involves people in decision-making, service design and delivery.
- 3 To date this work has been progressed as two distinct but related workstreams:
 - Openness and transparency; and
 - Involvement.

Openness and transparency

- 4 The Council's commitment to being open and transparent is aligned with the Government's view that transparency is a powerful tool to help reform public services, foster innovation, empower citizens and drive economic activity.

¹ This report was submitted in advance of the meeting of the County Council on the 7 February 2012.

- 5 An outline approach was discussed and agreed by the Council's Quality Board² on 28 November 2011, confirming the Council's commitment to being open and transparent. The Board discussed key principles which included ensuring the Council:
 - focuses on aspects of openness and transparency which add value for the residents of Surrey; and
 - builds on and learns from the good practice already taking place across the Council.
- 6 A cross-Council officer working group chaired by the Head of Policy and Performance has been established which has been involved in helping to develop the proposed approach (set out below) and to share examples of good practice.

Involvement

- 7 The need for the Council to develop a 'consultation policy' was identified in the Council's Annual Governance Statement 2010/11 which was presented to the Cabinet on 21 June 2011 and subsequently published with the Council's annual accounts.
- 8 This was discussed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee which, at its meeting on 13 September 2011, supported a referred motion from the County Council meeting on 19 July 2011 relating to the need for a 'clear consultation policy' based upon the 'best practice principles of consultation'. The Consultation Institute's seven best practice principles (see Annex One) are being used to inform the proposed approach described below.
- 9 The Communications Service has been working with colleagues from across the Council to help shape the proposed approach and in September 2011 launched a 12 week public consultation seeking views on how the Council involves, engages and consults the public. It generated just six responses.
- 10 Having reviewed the progress that has been made on both workstreams and the close links between them, it has been agreed to bring the two together and develop a single Strategy – *One County One Team*, Involvement and Transparency.

The proposed approach

- 11 Set out below is a summary of the Council's proposed approach which takes into account the limited feedback from the public consultation, contributions of colleagues from across the Council and wider best practice.

² The Council's Quality Board is made up of the Chief Executive, Deputy Leader of the Council, Strategic Directors, Chief Finance Officer, Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development, Head of Policy and Performance and the Chief Executive of Waverley Borough Council (as an independent member of the Board).

One County One Team, Involvement and Transparency Strategy – emerging proposed approach for discussion

⇒ Our commitment to involvement and transparency

- Surrey is stronger when we all work together - the County Council with our residents and local communities, businesses and partners.
- Key to this is increasing the involvement of our residents and communities in the decisions that affect them and their local areas. The Council will listen to ideas, consult on key decisions, provide opportunities to get involved in the design and delivery of services and explain how involvement has made a difference. We will not use a one-size fits all approach. We know that people like to have their say in different ways and the opportunities to get involved will reflect this.
- Aligned to this is our commitment to be open and transparent in the way we work. By giving access to information and making it easier for people to understand how the Council works and the decisions we take, we will build trust, encourage involvement and enable people to hold us and our partners to account for the services we deliver and decisions we make.

⇒ The rationale behind our approach

This is not just about publishing data or sending out more surveys. Our approach will focus on the things that are important to residents, informed by customer feedback, complaints and other requests for information. By doing this it will help us to:

- Improve services/outcomes for residents (eg greater resident choice, control and influence)
- Reduce waste/increasing value for money (eg easy access to information on line to reduce the number of follow up queries and greater use of the Contact Centre)
- Better support the local economy (eg a 'voice' for local businesses in key local decisions)
- Ensure greater accountability (eg residents enabled to hold the Council to account through access to information)
- Meet our legal obligations/other commitments (eg Freedom of Information Act)

⇒ A summary of our approach

To provide better services and deliver the benefits described above, we will aim to:

- provide and promote opportunities for people to get involved in a timely way and feed back the results of their involvement;
- make it easier to access information which is of value to the public in accessible and usable formats;
- take a consistent, inclusive and co-ordinated approach; and
- embed a culture where working in an inclusive and transparent way is the 'norm' for Members and officers.

⇒ How we will make it happen

Building on good practice already in place across the Council, the Strategy will:

- set out how our approach will help the Council to achieve its vision as described in *One County One Team, Corporate Strategy 2012 – 2017*, and specifically how it supports the six key areas of focus (Residents, Value, Partnerships, Quality, People and Stewardship); and
- use case studies to help bring involvement and transparency to life.

⇒ How will we know if it is working?

We will be judged on our commitment to involvement and transparency by:

- our residents - assessed through the quarterly Surrey Residents' Survey;
- our elected Members - assessed through the annual Members' Survey; and
- our staff - assessed through the annual Employee Survey.

The Council's Quality Board will regularly review progress against the implementation of the Strategy.

⇒ Supported by:

- a toolkit for officers; and
- a programme of communications and training.

Financial and value for money implications

- 12 There are no direct cost implications arising as a result of this report. However, one of the key drivers behind the approach described in this report is to help reduce waste and improve value for money.

Equalities Implications

- 13 There are no direct equalities implications arising from this report. A full Equality Impact Assessment will be developed to inform the Council's approach to involvement and transparency.

Risk Management Implications

- 14 There are no direct risk management implications arising from this report.
- 15 There are risks associated with the publication of data and information including the burden of additional information requests which may be generated and the potential use of Council information in fraudulent activity. These risks are subject to the Council's risk management arrangements and officers will assess the specific risks associated with the publication of any information before it is released.

Implications for the Council's Priorities or Community Strategy

- 16 The proposed approach described in this report is aligned to the *One County One Team*, Corporate Strategy 2012 – 2017 and will support the achievement of the Council's vision to become the most effective Council in England by 2017.

Recommendations:

- 17 It is recommended that the Committee:
- (i) Provides feedback and makes recommendations to officers regarding the proposed emerging approach to involvement and transparency.

Next steps:

- The *One County One Team*, Involvement and Transparency Strategy is finalised and presented to the Quality Board on 27 February 2012 en route to the Cabinet on 27 March 2012.
- The toolkit for staff is published on s:net and the programme of communications and training is finalised and delivered.
- Progress is regularly monitored by the Council's Quality Board.

Report contacts:

Ben Unsworth, Senior Performance and Research Manager
Pat Hindley, Campaign Communications Manager

Contact details: 020 8541 7257, ben.unsworth@surreycc.gov.uk
020 8541 8798, pat.hindley@surreycc.gov.uk

Sources/background papers: None.

ANNEX ONE – The Consultation Institute’s seven best practice principles

Principle 1 - The INTEGRITY of Consultation

The process must have an honest intention. The Consultor must be willing to listen to the views advanced by consultees, and be prepared to be influenced when making subsequent decisions. If the decisions subject to consultation have already been taken, it is a waste of consultees' time and a fraud upon all participants to undertake a purposeless exercise, and breaches the principle of Consultation Integrity.

Principle 2 - The VISIBILITY of Consultation

All those who have a justifiable right to participate in a consultation should be made reasonably aware of the exercise. For Closed consultations, this will be less demanding than for Open Consultations. Visibility is also important for decision-makers who should have full awareness of any consultation exercise which is relevant to decisions they are about to take.

Principle 3 - The ACCESSIBILITY of Consultation

Consultees must be able to have reasonable access to the exercise. This means that the methods chosen must be appropriate for the intended audience, and that effective means are used to cater for the special needs of hard-to-reach groups and others with special requirements. New technology offers an ever-wider choice of consultation mechanism, but consultors must always ensure that the Digital Divide does not disenfranchise citizens or stakeholders.

Principle 4 - The TRANSPARENCY of Consultation

Many Consultations are highly public, and rightly so. Indeed the principle of Transparency and the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires that stakeholder invitation lists, consultee responses and consultation results be published. But this should only occur with the express or implied consent of participants. Consultors who intend to publish details of respondents and their responses have a duty to ensure that this is understood by all participants. Consultation submissions will be publicised unless specific exemptions apply. Freedom of Information Act requests can now be used to disclose data previously kept hidden. Information gathered under Consultation processes, and organisations responsible for gathering, processing and storing such information must also comply with Data Protection legislation applicable in whichever country this takes place. For the UK, the Data Protection Act 1998 applies.

Principle 5 - The DISCLOSURE obligations in Consultation

For consultation to succeed, and to encourage a measure of trust between the parties, it is important to provide for reasonable disclosure of relevant information. Consultors are under a duty to disclose information which could materially influence the nature and extent of consultees' responses. In particular, areas where decisions have effectively been taken already, and where consultee views cannot influence the situation, should be disclosed. Consultees are also under a duty to disclose certain information. If a representative body expresses a view on behalf of its members, it should inform the consultor of the presence of any significant minority opinion within its membership, and be prepared to estimate the extent to which it is held.

Principle 6 - The FAIR INTERPRETATION of Consultation

Information and viewpoints gathered through Consultation exercises have to be collated and assessed, and this task must be undertaken objectively. Only in exceptional circumstances should the decision-makers themselves be involved with primary assessment of the data, and the use of external assessors has many advantages. Where consultors use weighting methods to assist in the assessment process, this must be disclosed to participants and to decision-makers relying on the consultation output.

Principle 7 - The PUBLICATION of Consultation

Participants in a consultation exercise have a proper expectation that they will see both the output and the outcome of the process. Except in certain Closed or Internal consultations, the assumption should be that publication in a form accessible to the consultee will follow within a reasonable time after the conclusion of the exercise. Where no publication is intended, it is the duty of the consultor to disclose this when initially inviting stakeholders or the public to participate