



Executive
13th February 2006

**Report from the
Director Communication and
Consultation**

For

Wards Affected:
ALL

Consultation and Engagement Strategy

Forward Plan Ref: CE-05/06-6

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report provides Members with an overview of the new Corporate Consultation and Engagement Strategy, 2006 - 09 for Brent, (appendix A). The strategy sets out the general principles of our approach to consultation and contains new strategic objectives and quality standards. The strategy also sets out how we will build on our established consultation network and strengthen our approach to consultation and engagement generally.
- 1.2 The current document replaces Brent Council's corporate consultation strategy 2001 - 04.
- 1.3 The strategy incorporates many of the recommendations of an overview task group, the Community Consultation Review Group, 27 October 2005.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Executive note the strategy.
- 2.2 That the Executive agree the key themes within the strategy, relating to the adoption of mandatory corporate consultation standards.
- 2.3 That the Executive agree the adoption of the Consultation and Engagement Strategy 2006 – 09.

3.0 Detail

3.1 Effective consultation with all our residents is now more important than ever. The new strategy reflects an increased commitment to encouraging and supporting residents and service users to take an active role in working with the council to make decisions about what is best for Brent.

Objectives and Quality Standards

3.2 The new strategy has four clear objectives. These are:

- To make consultation more inclusive by consulting more widely and enabling all our community to participate equally and fairly.
- To deliver a more coordinated and strategic approach to consultation across the organisation. We will achieve this through implementing our quality standards below.
- To encourage innovation and maximise the use of new technology in consultation. Particularly in relating the appropriateness of the methodology to the target audience.
- To standardise our approach to consultation by providing clear guidance and adhering to quality standards.

3.3 In addition the strategy proposes a set of quality standards. Adherence to these standards will be mandatory across the organisation. The standards are:

- A procedural standard requiring all proposed consultation activity to be discussed with the consultation team and logged on the 'consultation tracker', the council's on-line database of consultations.
- To explain the purpose of the consultation and how the organisation intends to take people's views into account.
- To involve the widest spectrum of the community in consultation.
- To organise consultation in such a way as to make it more accessible to more people.
- To act on the findings and improve services and the quality of life for Brent residents.
- To report back to the public on what they've told us and what we as an organisation intend doing about it.

Strengthening Consultation

3.4 Brent has a good record of consultation built on a solid network of community consultation and engagement opportunities. In building this network we have developed a better knowledge of what works. The purpose of the new strategy is to build on this record and continuously improve the ways in which we consult and engage with our community.

3.5 The strategy sets out how we will continuously improve consultation and engagement through:

- Promoting greater inclusivity.
- Improving coordination of consultation.
- Improving the quality of consultation.
- Greater involvement of members.

- 3.6 Inclusivity. The strategy will promote greater inclusivity in all the consultation activity we undertake. One of the consultation standards is to involve greater numbers of people from 'hard to reach communities'. The strategy action plan identifies specific pieces of work in relation to the area and service user consultative forums and the Brent Citizens' panel where levels of engagement with different communities can be improved.
- 3.7 Coordination. The coordination and tracking of consultation across the council has proved difficult in the past. This is partly because of the large volume of consultation activity undertaken and the fact that no individual or team has had responsibility coordinating this work within service areas. We have now set up an on-line database, 'Consultation Tracker'. In future all consultation activity will need to be logged on the database. The Consultation Team will take responsibility for maintaining and coordinating the database. Logging consultation activity on the database will mean that work is timetabled, not duplicated and that consultation findings are disseminated across the council.
- 3.8 Improving the quality of consultation. Consultation will be improved by the use of the Consultation Tracker and the adoption of mandatory standards across the organisation. The consultation toolkit will contain a checklist to enable services to comply with the standards. The action plan highlights specific pieces of work, area and user forums, the citizens' panel etc., where improvements can be made. The consultation team will support service areas to achieve improvements in the quality of consultation across the organisation. Best practice will be promoted and shared through the consultation coordination group.
- 3.9 Members. The role of elected members is central to good consultation and engagement. The 'member' role is very wide; encompassing community leadership, scrutiny and representation. Councillors are also 'enablers', they facilitate the transmission and interpretation of constituents' views and are the main conduit for a two way dialogue between residents and the council. In addition, new initiatives to deliver more locally based services and the ward working pilots further enhance the relationship between elected members and residents. Effective consultation and engagement is a crucial part of this relationship and the new strategy will reinforce this role.

Training and Support

- 3.10 An updated version of the consultation toolkit is being developed as a companion document to the consultation strategy. The consultation team have also developed 'consultation tracker', an online database of consultations for the authority.

- 3.11 The strategy, toolkit and information on how to access and populate consultation tracker will be rolled out by the consultation team across the organisation from February 2006.
- 3.12 The consultation team will provide ongoing training through consultation workshops and the Improving Brent programme. This will include training for members where necessary.

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 The costs of publishing and distribution of the strategy will be borne by the consultation team from its core budget allocation. The provision of advice and guidance is a normal functional responsibility of the consultation team. The costs of additional training will be met from the consultation team core budget allocation or the Improving Brent programme, as appropriate.
- 4.2 There are no other financial implications arising directly from this document.

5.0 Legal Implications

- 5.1 The Local Government Act 2000 confers a general power on local authorities to promote the economic, social and environmental well being of their area. In order to do this and in order to comply with its many other obligations to provide services and facilities it is recognised that the Council will need to consult with its residents and other stakeholders to ensure that the Council is taking all relevant factors into account when making decision. Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 also gives the Council power to do anything which facilitates or is conducive or incidental to the discharge of its functions. The powers must be exercised reasonably and for a legitimate purpose.

6.0 Diversity Implications

- 6.1 There are positive implications for diversity arising from the adoption of this strategy. Improving the effectiveness of consultation with all our residents is a strategic objective of the strategy. Involving the widest spectrum of the community in consultation, particularly those from under-represented, marginalised and 'hard to reach' sections of the community, is a standard for consultation in Brent.

7.0 Staffing/Accommodation Implications

- 7.1 There are no staffing or accommodation issues arising directly from the adoption of this strategy.

Background Papers

- Community Consultation Strategy – Report of the Community Consultation Strategy Review Group, Overview Committee 27 October 2005.

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