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Consultation Strategy

2011-2014

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Appendix C

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Date adopted	

Introduction

Consultation is all about listening to and working with residents, local businesses and visitors to make sure they receive a high quality service.

Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act, places a far greater duty on us to involve local people in what we do and be involved in the decision-making process. Therefore we have developed this strategy to ensure we do this.

To help achieve this we have also developed a toolkit which will work alongside this strategy to provide an easy and clear approach to consultation.

Our Mission

To provide through partnership and consultation innovative, accessible and responsive services that ensure the district of Harborough is a healthy and happy place to live, work and visit.

Our Aim

We want to hear what best meets the needs of our residents, local business and visitor and we are committed in achieving this.

Over the past four years we have supported a Citizens' Panel, made up of local residents across the district, who have been involved in shaping service delivery, such as budget setting and development of the Local Development Framework, to make sure our services reflect the needs of those who use them – but we know there is more to be done.

Consultation and engagement with the community has never been more important if we are to raise standards further to we need to listen and learn from our local residents and users. We need to be mindful of resources and efficient methods of consultation and at the same time engage in dialogue with many different audiences and help them choose from a variety of methods.

Our strategy aims to involve and empower local people but also introduce a framework for consultation within the council and clear standards that of what you can expect when taking part in any council consultation activity.

What is consultation?

It is about Harborough District Council communicating with its residents, businesses and other stakeholders and listening to what they have to say and ultimately taking some action. We realise the perception of local government can be affected by poor consultation activity so this strategy is about improving on how we consult and value engaging with our local communities.

We consult through a variety of ways including:

- Large scale survey / Citizens' Panel (postal and on-line)
- Community Forums and open meetings
- Large/Small or one to one specific issue meetings

If consultation works, people should be able to see how their views have influenced the council, or why a certain approach was taken in favour of another. We already undertake some consultation but recognise we need to do more.

What are the benefits of consultation?

- Opportunity to shape and influence council services
- Helps set priorities and identify opportunities
- To make sure we provide the services our residents need and want
- Builds a firm relationship between the council and public
- Helps show people the council is committed to being open and accountable
- Shows residents we take notice of their views and we take action
- Monitors and evaluates performance
- Tests value for money
- Generates feedback for services
- Allows the council to understand the needs of the local community and adapt services to meet those needs

Our commitment to consultation

- We will ensure that everyone who is being consulted is clear on what they are consulted on
- We will ensure that a wide range of people as possible are consulted and that we do our utmost to target hard to reach groups and specialist groups.
- We will ensure that a range of techniques and methods are available to fit the right consultation
- We adopt a co-ordinated approach to consultation which will involve using the Citizens' Panel and the consultation toolkit.
- We will ensure that results are fed back and people are informed how their views have impacted on decisions

The Strategy

This consultation strategy aims to improve how Harborough District Council consults and engages with residents and businesses in the district in the future. Every service within the Council will adopt the principles and aims within this document and progress will be monitored and published, making sure we feedback the results of the consultation to everyone who has taken part. We aim to engage and encourage interest in local issues in ways that meet our principles and encourage greater public involvement.

We will strengthen and widen the role of the Citizens' Panel to ensure it reflects the views of young people and those hard to reach/specialist groups.

Principles

The strategy seeks to deliver:

1. Effective consultation with all communities, including those hard to reach groups and businesses.
2. The use of quality consultation across the authority which is innovative and creative.
3. A more focused use of resources, skills and experience to provide a calendar format for consultant which will reduce consultation fatigue and overload.
4. Clear guidance and standards for all those involved in consultation including staff, partners and stakeholders.
5. Evidence which shows how consultation has influenced service delivery and future plans.
6. Improved communication about our commitments to consultation within the council, in the community and across all our partners.

Objectives

When any consultation is undertaken the following should be taken into account:

- A co-ordinated, systematic and balance approach to consultation across the council, using innovative and creative methods and where possible use the Citizens' Panel.
- Methods are used which respect diversity and are sensitive to the need of the local community and are consistent with our equalities policy.
- Choose approaches which are fit for the purpose and incorporate methods from monitoring and evaluation.
- Co-ordinate an action plan to ensure best practice and reduced consultation overload.
- Secure value for money
- Demonstrate the Council's commitment to consultation

There are statutory requirements for consultation covering a wide range of services including budget and planning policy, which must be conducted in accordance with the relevant legislations and council protocols.

Tools to support and improve consultation

A good practice guide, or Toolkit, has been developed to help staff and partners through the process of consultation. This toolkit is attached and it should be used to ensure the most appropriate methods are used in the most effective and efficient way.

This toolkit will give ideas, advice and tips to help staff and partners work their way through consultation.

The Role of Members

The representational and scrutiny role of members is essential to the consultation process in terms of their involvement in:

- Local community initiatives
- Community planning
- Improving standards through service reviews

Their role as community leaders gives members a major input into the consultation process and members will play a key role in the implementation of this strategy through:

- Instigating consultation initiatives
- Feedback from their involvement in local groups, partnerships and forums
- Their unique relationship with residents
- Direction, where appropriate, for consultations which by their nature need to be committee/member led.

Methods to co-ordinate consultation

Using the portfolio plans, which are produced annually, an action plan for consultation will be drawn-up in order to avoid consultation fatigue with the local community and to ensure value for money.

We will produce an annual calendar which will set out our proposals to consult and involved communities and it will identify ways/methods in which we will seek the views of the community.

It will:

- Ensure that staff, members and partners are informed about forthcoming consultation events
- Avoid unnecessary duplication of time and resources by allowing consultation exercises to be co-ordinated and to be combined where appropriate.

- Set clear objective for any consultation initiative which are Specific Measurable Agreed Realistic Time-bound (SMART)

Co-ordination is vital if we are to ensure everyone undertakes effective consultation and examples of excellent practice is shared. The following are ways in which we will co-ordinate consultation:

- The Communication and Consultation Manager will carry out corporate consultations, assist the Management Board and third tier managers with projects as and when required and be a helping hand to all staff.
- Ensure managers and staff use the toolkit and put all events on the consultation calendar.
- The consultation calendar will be available on the intranet and accessible to all staff.
- A dedication area for consultation and results will be set up and published on the Council's Website.

Getting involved – Citizens' Panel

To achieve improved services that meet the needs of our community we actively encourage our residents and business to get involved with the way we run things by joining our Citizens' Panel. By building stronger partnerships with our residents will develop the district of Harborough a great place to live work and visit.

Action Plan

Action	Outcome	Timescale	Resources
Promote this strategy widely with staff and partners and imbed across the council.	Clear guidance and standards for all those involved in consultation including staff, partners and stakeholders.		
Ensure the Equality Monitoring form is used whenever consulting with residents	Meet with the Council's Equality Policy and will build an database of evidence concerning the demographic make up of our community		
Development of an in-house Citizens' Panel	A strategic platform for council to consult with which in-turn will build relationships between the council and its residents by demonstrating		
Alongside the Citizens' Panel develop methods to consult with hard to reach groups and young people	Effective consultation with all communities, including those hard to reach groups and businesses		
Using the Councils Portfolio plans produce an annual calendar for consultation and publicise on the intranet	Will avoid unnecessary duplication of time and resources by allowing exercises to be co-ordinated and combined where appropriate		
Development of a database to capture and analyse information			
Develop an area on the website to promote and house the consultation calendar, how to get involved in consultations and feedback results/information.	A more focused use of resources, skills and experience which will reduce consultation fatigue and overload		
Look at other methods to consult and feedback information/results such as social networking	Improved communication about our commitments to consultation within the council, in the community and across all our partners		

Monitor consultations and share good practice	Help set priorities and the councils understanding of local community needs. Test value for money.		
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