

Consultation and communications plans for the Vision for Leeds 2011 to 2030

The sustainable community strategy, the Vision for Leeds 2011 to 2030, is the overarching plan for other local and regional plans and will take into account how they inform one another.

The Government says that it should be:

- based on local needs;
- underpinned by a shared evidence base;
- informed by community aspirations; and
- lead to improvements in the social, environmental and economic wellbeing of the area.
- the starting point for producing a sustainable community strategy is consultation.

Aims of the consultation and communications for the Vision for Leeds 2011 to 2030

The consultation and communications plans will aim to:

- increase public awareness of the Vision and engage meaningfully with local people;
- make sure the links between the Vision and other relevant strategies and plans are clear; and
- enable a wide and diverse range of people to take part and thereby influence the Vision.

Objectives

The consultation and communications plans will enable us to:

- work with partners to avoid duplication, maximise resources and participation and increase opportunities for joint consultation;
- understand the views of members of the public and other stakeholders about the future of Leeds;
- develop an understanding of alternative, innovative methods of consultation as a basis for service improvement;
- develop accessible consultation materials that will appeal to and engage with more Leeds' citizens;
- involve under-represented groups and groups at risk of exclusion;
- share intelligence and information with respect to the consultation outcomes for all partners and key consultees;

- work with partners to make sure that other key strategies are consistent with the Vision document; and
- provide staged feedback to all consultees.

Challenges

Challenges in putting into practice the consultation and communications plans to achieve effective results include:

- persuading a broader range of people to actively engage in the consultation process; and
- working with reduced capacity and limited budget to form a large-scale consultation.

Rationale for the consultation and communications approach

In order to address the issues outlined above an invitation to tender exercise was carried out to appoint an agency to develop a public-facing look and feel to the Vision for Leeds consultation and communications. Evidence has shown that successful consultation exercises that seek to engage with the general public have adopted a campaign approach creating a separate identity rather than using the brand of the commissioning organisation.

A Leeds-based agency, Home, has been appointed to develop a public-facing campaign identity and website for the 'Vision for Leeds' consultation project – 'What if Leeds ...? Talk today. Shape tomorrow'.

The aim is to:

- create an inclusive approach to the consultation;
- create an identity which is used on all communications media (website, consultation document, questionnaire) associated with the consultation,
- be instantly recognisable to the public, and
- build up momentum throughout the campaign.

Home has had previous success with this approach for several other public-sector organisations, including 'the Great Drink Debate' campaign for the COI from an original working title of 'Attitudes and behaviour towards alcohol in the Yorkshire & Humber region – a public consultation'. For this they developed a colour palette, imagery, a typography style and a strapline of "Views on booze. What's yours?". The campaign elicited 13,000 responses in three months.

The design proposition – What if Leeds ...? Talk today. Shape tomorrow.

The invitation to engage is at the heart of the proposition - the main objective being to get a response and to get people to join in to tell us where they see Leeds by 2030.

In replacement of the working title 'Vision for Leeds', the agency has developed the concept 'What if Leeds...'. And the website www.whatifleeds.org

'What if Leeds...' aims to:

- inspire people who live and work in Leeds to think to the long term;
- provoke interest by suggesting there's more to come;
- pose a question, thus opening up the subject to debate;
- use everyday language that will appeal to a broad demographic; and
- immediately make the campaign ownable to Leeds;

The concept name of 'What if Leeds...' is then substantiated with the strapline 'Talk today. Shape tomorrow'.

'What if Leeds...' acts as a stage in the development of the new Vision for Leeds by suggesting points of view that will spark debate, for example:

- what if Leeds has the best quality of life in the UK?
- what if Leeds is the UK's most family friendly city?
- what if Leeds has the strongest and most sustainable economy in the country?
- what if Leeds ...? You tell us!

The owl design device serves as a visual representation of the campaign and gives an alternative to using images of people, which is difficult when representing a broad demographic.

A stand-alone website – whatifleeds.org – has been developed to support our consultation. The website will use social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Flickr, blogs, etc) to engage a wide demographic. Since the last Vision for Leeds was published, social media has become the most natural and conventional means of communication for a large majority of the population, and, in particular, young people. Recent research carried out by Nielsen showed that more people now communicate using social media than through email and 24 million people actively use Facebook in the UK (50% of these log on to Facebook in any given day) . Three million people are members of social networks associated with Leeds.

Online consultation has a number of other benefits:

- quick and easy responses;
- effective for large-scale consultation – able to reach a wider audience cost-effectively;
- information can be quickly updated;
- environmentally-friendly;
- 'viral marketing' can drive traffic to the site (using existing website databases, such as Breeze);
- participants can ask for more information, seek clarification and receive more immediate feedback than from traditional consultation methods;

- it encourages a two-way, more active process – people can pose their own questions rather than being the passive recipients of questions provided by ourselves;
- it gives people the opportunity to debate – something which has found a new voice in popular culture following the televised political debates for the general election;
- online tools allow for effective analysis and evaluation; and
- the website could provide a sustainable consultation platform subsequently.

Other groups e.g. Silver Surfers, and learning groups in libraries, have been approached in order to broaden participation. Guardian.co.uk/leeds is also engaged with the project.

A variety of other methods will be used in order to engage a broad range of audiences and yield both quantitative and qualitative results.

They will include:

- face-to-face (focus groups), particularly targeted at under-represented groups;
- print (newspaper, newsletters etc.) including one week of articles in the Yorkshire Evening Post with real-life case studies, and articles in a range of local newspapers;
- the communications networks of partner organisations;
- online newsletters;
- hard copies of the consultation document to be distributed to a wide range of organisations with public receptions;
- questionnaires;
- attendance at existing local community events and festivals;
- workshops for special interest groups;
- joint consultation with key strategic partners to avoid duplication;
- in-house consultation for schools, FE and HE sectors (young people and adults);
- employee engagement through staff networks (e.g. LCC, NHS); and
- presentations to a range of audiences.

Feedback will be provided to all consultees at staged intervals during the consultation process.

Key consultees will be approached to provide evaluation at the end of the consultation exercise.