



Report of the Chief Officer, Executive Support

Scrutiny Board (Children's Services)

Date: 12 October 2006

Subject: The development of corporate consultation and engagement

Electoral Wards Affected: All

Specific Implications For:

Ethnic minorities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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Women	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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Disabled people	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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Narrowing the Gap	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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Executive Summary

Effective consultation enables the council to make well-informed decisions about the future of services by asking the public what services they want and what they think about the services we are already providing them with. The more effectively the council consults, the better informed the decision-making processes can become and ultimately the services that we provide can be improved.

This report outlines the work that is ongoing to improve the way the council consults and engages, particularly with children and young people, and the processes and procedures that are being adopted by all departments, to meet the needs of our customers.

1.0 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report provides the Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) with an update on the development of a more co-ordinated, corporate approach to consultation, with particular reference to children and young people.

2.0 Background information

- 2.1 Leeds City Council aims to create a city where all of the people have the opportunity to participate and take active roles in delivering a better quality of life for themselves and others. A commitment to addressing inequality and building a sense of fairness, inclusion and cohesion within all communities underpins the developments identified in this report.
- 2.2 The council views listening to the public, researching, evaluating and addressing their needs as critical to its work. We aim to learn as much as possible about public needs and expectations and to respond to them effectively. The dialogue between citizens and the council must be continuous, open, inclusive, relevant, clear, secure and reliable.
- 2.3 The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership have a charter which sets out the key principles to be observed when consulting with young people and these have been adopted in the toolkit and shared as best practice.

3.0 Main issues

- 3.1 The Council's Corporate Communications Strategy 2005 – 2008 (reviewed by Scrutiny Board in September 2005 and approved by Executive Board on 21 October 2005) states that:
- council consultation and engagement must strive to be effective, meaningful and directly improve services
 - communication requirements must be taken into account in the planning, management and evaluation of consultation and citizen engagement activities
 - open and responsive communications are critical to the success of public consultations, as is factual information presented to participants in plain English.
 - managers responsible for consulting the public should work collaboratively with communications staff, who prepare and help to implement communication plans and strategies.
 - a corporate approach to engagement should be developed to deliver effective consultation and engagement across the authority.
- 3.2 The Corporate Communications Strategy action plan consists of the development of the following;
- Corporate engagement policy
 - Corporate engagement toolkit
 - Council engagement network
 - E-co-ordination of community engagement

The policy and toolkit are currently out to final consultation and due to be presented to Executive Board in November 2006.

4.0 Corporate engagement policy

- 4.1 The corporate policy clearly articulates the council's approach to consultation and engagement. The policy reflects the council's aspirations and commitment to ensure that the Council understands the views, needs, desires and preferences of its citizens, including those from vulnerable, minority and not yet reached groups. It provides a foundation to ensure that the way we consult and engage is consistent, co-ordinated and able to respond to change. The policy will:
- ensure that there is a clear understanding and commitment to a corporate approach to community engagement.
 - establish a strategic approach that will ensure co-ordination, consistency and effective community engagement systems and processes.
 - ensure that community engagement is carried out to the highest possible standards, from the early planning stages right through to feedback and evaluation.
 - increase the number and range of people active in their community and participating in democratic and decision making processes.
 - increase the number of opportunities for everyone to be fully engaged, particularly those who are described as 'not yet reached'.
 - ensure that community engagement activity impacts on decision making and service delivery and that a direct link can be seen between the two.
 - help to guide and deliver services, strategies and policies that truly reflect the needs of the citizens of Leeds.
- 4.2 This policy has already, and will contribute to, the development of a Leeds Initiative strategy on community engagement - set out as an aspiration in the Vision for Leeds 2004 – 2020. The Vision for Leeds 2004 – 2020 makes a commitment to develop a more strategic approach to community engagement. As a partner of Leeds Initiative, the council makes a commitment to develop a more systematic and co-ordinated approach to community engagement. The council has actively contributed to the development of Leeds Initiative's Community Engagement Strategy and the Action Plan for 2004 – 2007.
- 4.3 A copy of the policy is included in Appendix 1.

5.0 Community engagement toolkit

- 5.1 The corporate community engagement toolkit has been designed to help Leeds City Council staff put the principles of the council's community engagement policy into practice. It supports the policy by providing guidance and good practice, focusing upon 'how we engage with people in Leeds'.
- 5.2 Whereas the policy sets out the principles of community engagement, the toolkit identifies the different ways that the council can communicate with, consult, involve and empower its communities. The toolkit provides practical advice on how to put the principles outlined in the policy into practice. This toolkit has been available for departments to use as an interactive PDF document from July 2006. A comprehensive communications and training strategy is planned for later this year and next year.
- 5.3 Section 4 of the toolkit provides specific guidance on consulting with children and young people. It includes the key principles to be observed when consulting and outlines how effective engagement can be best achieved. The toolkit has also had

input from the Children's Participation Expert and from The Project (the West Yorkshire Youth Association). A copy of this section of the toolkit is attached in Appendix 2.

6.0 Council engagement network

- 6.1 A key user group from a network of key consultation contacts has been set up within Leeds City Council to co-ordinate consultation and market research activity, and share information. The purpose of the network is to :
- develop a consistent and co-ordinated approach to consultation across the council by 'reporting' on departmental activity
 - provide updates on current activity for the purpose of information sharing
 - share best practice, guidance and act as a source of advice
 - aid forward planning
 - act as a sounding board and pilot group for the development of new initiatives

7.0 Development of a web electronic consultation interface

- 7.1 The development of a seamless electronic consultation and engagement interface between the council, its partners and the public is well underway for implementation towards the end of 2006. From a customer perspective, this web based programme will contain the following:
- Searchable information store of all consultation activity and results (for the council and its major partners in the city).
 - Facility for citizens to express interest in consultations & engagement
 - Facility for citizens to participate in consultation & engagement
 - Facility for citizens to receive feedback on consultation and engagement
 - Facility for citizens to be notified by email, SMS or text on all above facilities.
 - Searchable information store of forums, groups and panels
 - Potential to set up an e-citizen's panel, e-forums and other functions.

8.0 Implications for council policy and governance

- 8.1 The Council has a statutory responsibility to consult with citizens, users groups and communities under Schedule 3 of the Local Government Act 1999. Consultation ensures that citizens, user groups and communities are receiving best value services.
- 8.2 The Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment and the Local Public Service Agreement with the government also supports the importance of consultation and the increasing need for Leeds to demonstrate a more co-ordinated and significantly improved approach to community engagement.
- 8.3 The Vision for Leeds 2004 – 2020 makes a commitment to develop a more strategic approach to community engagement. As a partner of the Leeds Initiative, we must make a firm commitment to develop a more systematic and co-ordinated approach to city wide consultation. Our policy supports and links in with the LSP's city-wide Community Engagement Strategy.
- 8.4 The Leeds City Council Corporate Plan 2005/08 makes specific reference to community consultations and improvements required. This plan states that we will improve consultation and engagement in delivering all aspects of delivering services and put a corporate engagement strategy into practice. This will include working

with our partners across the city to improve the quality and co-ordination of consultation and engagement.

- 8.5 The Council Plan for 2004/05 and 2005/06 highlighted the need to improve and develop the council's overall consultation function as a means of effective two-way communication and involving citizens, groups and communities in decision making as a key improvement area.

9.0 Legal and resource implications

- 9.1 As well as a legal requirement to consult with residents, a co-ordinated approach to activity as part of the assessment under CPA and residents views should form an integral part of how services are delivered by the council.
- 9.2 The development of consultation activity, along with the implementation of the policy and development of the toolkit will be led by the consultation officer within Corporate Communications, working with colleagues across the council.

10.0 Conclusions

- 10.1 Development of the council's use of consultation and engagement activities has required improved coordination and the development of a policy and toolkit to guide the council's work.

11.0 Recommendations

The Scrutiny Board (Children's Services) are asked to:

- 11.1 Comment on and note the progress made on the co-ordination of consultation and engagement to date.