



Agenda Item Introduction

Committee	CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Date	9 MAY 2023
Topic	CONSULTATIONS & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

BACKGROUND

At the Corporate Scrutiny Committee meeting in May 2022 a scoping document was approved by the committee for an item on Consultations and Community Engagement to be added to the workplan.

Outcomes of consulting and engaging with the public should help inform the design and delivery of services, to ensure that it can achieve excellence as a service provider and prevent unintended consequences in changes to service delivery.

FOCUS FOR SCRUTINY

- Does the Council have a current consultations and community engagement policy and does this accord with best practice?
- How does the Council alert members of the public about consultations that might affect them?
- What mechanisms are in place to advise consultees of the outcomes when a final decision has been taken?
- What processes are in place with regards to consulting with Town, Parish and Community Councils?
- Is there an annual consultation plan that helps to co-ordinate consultations across the council and outline consultation opportunities to members of the public?

OUTCOMES

- Identification of opportunities for a more corporate approach, where appropriate, to the Councils consultation/public engagement processes.
- An annual programme of consultation/public engagement that is properly resourced and linked to the development or review of policies.
- Identification of a suitable performance measure to ensure that consultations/public engagement are effective.

APPROACH

A committee report to be submitted.

APPENDICES ATTACHED

Scrutiny Report – Consultations and Community Engagement
Appendix 1 - Consultation Strategy 2011 v 6.2 Mar 2013 Master (FINAL)
Appendix 2 - Recent Engagement Activity

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Committee report

Committee	CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Date	9 MAY 2023
Title	CONSULTATIONS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
Report of	CABINET MEMBER FOR CLIMATE CHANGE, ENVIRONMENT, HERITAGE, HUMAN RESOURCES AND LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

SUMMARY

1. At the Corporate Scrutiny Committee meeting in May 2022 a scoping document was approved by the committee for an item on Consultations and Community Engagement to be added to the workplan.

FOCUS FOR SCRUTINY

- Does the Council have a current consultations and community engagement policy and does this accord with best practice?
- How does the Council alert members of the public about consultations that might affect them?
- What mechanisms are in place to advise consultees of the outcomes when a final decision has been taken?
- What process are in place with regards to consulting with town and parish councils?
- Is there an annual consultation plan that helps to co-ordinate consultation across the council and outline consultation opportunities to members of the public?

BACKGROUND

Does the Council have a current consultations and community engagement policy and does this accord with best practice?

2. The council's consultation strategy (see Appendix 1: consultation strategy, 2011), requires review to include current best practice and to reflect changes in community expectations for engagement and consultation. The review will result in an Engagement Strategy which will be considered by Cabinet later in 2023.
3. This strategy will seek to:
 - Define engagement and its various forms for delivery and utilisation in decision making.
 - Make clear what constitutes [statutory consultation](#) (Statutory provisions are legal requirements which state that a consultation must occur. They exist in several key areas, including health and social care, environment and equality).

- Set out activities for engagement to enable participation.
 - Set out best practice and processes to enable service teams to manage effective engagement with communities.
4. The ambition of the strategy will be to:
 - Improve consistency and delivery of community engagement between the Isle of Wight Council and the Isle of Wight community.
 - Enable co-production of policies and strategies.
 - Ensure everyone who is part of our island feels well informed about local issues, has opportunities to get involved and influence local decision making.
 5. The strategy is being developed in line with the Local Government Association (LGA) guide to engagement ([Consultation check list | Local Government Association](#)); and alongside the strategy will be developed a practical toolkit of advice, mechanisms and tools to support services to manage effective engagement exercises.
 6. The principles of the emerging strategy are based upon an engagement spectrum:



- Inform: To let communities know what is going on within an area of service.
 - Consult: To understand and resolve issues that the community raise and to answer questions the community ask.
 - Involve: To understand how our actions can improve communities
 - Collaborate: To settle issues that cannot be resolved by one group alone
 - Empower: Placing final decision making in the hands of the local community.
7. The strategy will also contain a toolkit, and example case studies of good local practice against the spectrum principles. The strategy is being co-produced with a range of stakeholders, including internal service teams and external parties. Work took place as part of the Age Friendly Initiative in 2022 to develop an accessible consultations toolkit, which will also form a part of the strategy and resources. Further work is also underway to review customer experience, including market research with customers and internally with staff, with a view to providing guidance to underpin customer service practices.
 8. Analysis of recent collaborative events is currently underway, with final revisions to the draft strategy, action plan and toolkit, prior to review and ratification by committee in the summer of 2023.

How does the Council alert members of the public about consultations that might affect them?

9. Consultation activity is managed by individual services. Statutory/regular/ongoing activity, such as planning applications, traffic regulation orders, etc. that require feedback on proposals are promoted in local press (Isle of Wight County Press) via 'public notices'. The requirement for a public notice is in most cases set out in

regulation; regulation normally sets the timescales for consultation periods. These are also hosted on the council website with links for individuals to provide feedback. Paper versions are also made available at council offices and feedback made possible in writing.

10. For non-statutory activity where the council is consulting or engaging with stakeholders on particular issues such as the budget, local council tax proposals, etc., this is facilitated by services supported by the communications and engagement team (comms team). The comms team provide advice and support in relation to appropriate methods for engagement with audiences.
11. Oftentimes, the solution will be an online and paper-based survey (with large print versions available on request); with paper copies available via council libraries. Consultations and engagement can be community based or targeted and where the engagement is targeted the council will utilise focus groups, to provide further and deeper engagement and discussion.
12. To support the publicity of the consultations, market research or other engagement activity, where stakeholders are known to the service, details of how to get involved are sent directly to stakeholders by letter or email. Where the audience is 'unknown', activity is supported with:
 - Website signposting
 - Press release to local media (including print media to assist in raising the profile of the engagement activity with offline audiences. This is reliant upon the story being published in print).
 - Social media
 - E-newsletters
 - Internal communication to staff
 - Circulation of engagement activity information to town, parish and community councils
 - Circulation of engagement activity via other stakeholder groups or organisations.

See appendix 2: recent engagement activity.

What mechanisms are in place to advise consultees of the outcomes when a final decision has been taken?

13. For statutory consultation activity managed solely via the service, outcomes are posted online via the digital engagement system owned and operated by services, such as planning application decisions. Individuals are not required to be responded to individually with feedback as their views are taken into account in the decision making process and included in any decision report, whether that be delegated, via specific committee or by cabinet.
14. For centrally managed engagement activity, survey feedback is, most often, anonymous. It is rare that personal data is collected within an engagement, certainly using digital channels. This may not be the case when face-to-face engagement activity is undertaken and is managed by the service. Therefore, direct feedback of consultation outcomes is not possible. When consultation closes, data collected digitally, is provided to the service for analysis alongside of any verbal or written feedback they receive.

15. Engagement activity, oftentimes, is predicated on a need to make a decision; on many occasions this will be via the democratic process and therefore, consultations feedback is included by services within democratic reports to committee. Media relations activity is undertaken in support of the majority of Cabinet and Full Council decisions, therefore, outcomes are reported through press release and/or social media, through publication of decision papers to Committee and through media coverage.
16. The [consultations portal on the council website](#) (available from the 'Council and Councillors' section of the website and from the homepage when there are active consultations) includes links to current and past consultations. This enables people to access a central source of consultations activity in which to get involved. It includes links to planning and licensing activity, as well as open consultations and information about past consultations. A piece of work is currently underway to ensure that outcomes are reflected within the portal with the need to ensure that links to decisions taken/outcomes. Currently this loop is not always closed and processes to enable more effective 'closing of the loop' will be incorporated within the emerging engagement strategy.

What process are in place with regards to consulting with town and parish councils?

17. Where activity is set by regulation, notification will take place using the formal route described in para 4.1 above. Public notices are published in the printed press and linked to the website as appropriate.
18. For more general consultation activity, which is supported by proactive media publicity, this publicity is circulated to town, parish and community councils as are all press releases issued by the council.
19. Where targeted engagement is undertaken by services, for example, in the development of the recent carers strategy, services will define key stakeholders relevant to the activity. This may or may not involve town, parish and community council representation.
20. As per the [council's Constitution – Protocol 16](#) (which is currently under review by the Monitoring Officer as part of the constitution review - feedback has already been provided on the content of this section by IWALC), IWC will ensure that communication and liaison with local councils is effective, meaningful and timely, as well as ensuring that any local councils likely to be affected by any proposals or amendments of services or functions are informed in advance of any decision being made. It is therefore, incumbent on services to consider the involvement of town, parish and community councils during the process and inform them of any wider consultation approach being taken, to capture their views and feedback on proposals.
21. As part of the development of the community engagement strategy, some early engagement with town/parish/community councils has commenced (with more to follow) to understand how best this relationship can be enhanced and information made available for wider engagement with communities.

Is there an annual consultation plan that helps to co-ordinate consultation across the council and outline consultation opportunities to members of the public?

22. There are a number of engagement activities, both statutory and non-statutory, that take place annually, including budget consultation, Local Council Tax Support consultation and the waste and recycling customer satisfaction survey. Most consultation activity, however, does not happen each year and as such, is prioritised upon receipt of a request for support and built into the communications and engagement team's workplan at the point of request. There is currently no annual calendar and no centralised mechanism to convey upcoming consultations of potential interest to interested parties. Current consultations, once active, are hosted on the [website consultations portal](#) and highlighted on the homepage of the website, to alert people who may wish to engage, of how to do so.
23. An audit of past consultations is currently underway in order to build a draft 'forward plan' for consultations, however, this will be flexible as new initiatives are identified as requiring engagement activity to be undertaken. A 'rolling' calendar will be developed and updated internal processes rolled out as part of the engagement strategy review to ensure sufficient planning by services requiring support can be programmed into schedules of supporting teams, enabling sufficient capacity is available to support their needs. A toolkit will be developed alongside the engagement strategy to support services and town, parish and community councils to approach engagement during development of proposals consistently, which will also be mapped to the central 'rolling' calendar.

APPENDICIES ATTACHED

Appendix 1: Consultation Strategy 2011

Appendix 2: recent engagement activity

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