



Consultation Strategy

2003-2006

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 In December 1999 the Council adopted a **Framework for Consultation**, which is attached to this strategy as Appendix A.

The **aims of the Framework** are to :

- Develop a co-ordinated process for effective consultation
- Develop best practice in consultation techniques
- Provide a central resource for developing a consultation culture
- Provide a central resource to undertake corporate consultation
- Build capacity in consultation techniques within services

- 1.2 The Framework also sets out a **Consultation Policy** for the Council, as follows:

The Council aims to deliver high quality services that respond to local needs and priorities. To help achieve this the Council seeks to encourage the community to contribute views and comments on its services and on their priorities, concerns and aspirations. The Council will use a variety of approaches to seek views and comments as part of its approach to delivering Best Value and good government.

The Council will :

- make best use of existing links with interest groups within the community and service users, in particular, elected Members and staff involved in service delivery;
- ensure that consultation is co-ordinated within the organisation;
- ensure services and partners collaborate in order to share ideas and avoid duplication;
- ensure that consultation is carried out with all relevant audiences, making special effort to include disabled people, ethnic minorities and other hard-to-reach groups
- ensure we consult members and employees effectively.

2. Aim of the Strategy

The purpose of this document is to set out the processes and techniques for achieving effective Consultation in line with the Framework, focusing on building on areas of good practice and addressing identified areas for improvement.

3. Progress since 2000

The Council adopted its first Consultation Strategy in April 2000. The aims of the first Strategy concentrated on three areas : building relationships; developing a consultation culture and developing consultation techniques. We have made progress on all three areas, but further improvements are necessary.

3.1 Current Strengths

- 3.1.1 We have considerably strengthened the capacity in the Communications and Consultation service to provide corporate research and advice and practical assistance to services. We now have in-house Formic and SPSS software and equipment, and have developed the expertise to allow us to design, scan and analyse questionnaires quickly and effectively.
- 3.1.2 ViewPoint High Peak, our citizens panel made up of 1,000 residents whose profile reflects our population, has been up and running for over two years. The panel has been the mainstay of our general research and consultation for corporate and service-level issues, assisting in strategy development and design, implementation and evaluation of services.
- 3.1.3 We are active participants in the Derbyshire Consultation Group, which is made up of all public sector organisations in the County. The aim of the DCG is to share resources and expertise and develop best practice in research and consultation across the public sector. The citizens panel was set up in conjunction with the DCG and is run in partnership with the County Council and the Police. We carry out the three-yearly BVPI corporate health survey as a partnership project, sharing resources for design, mailings, analysis and publicity of this Derbyshire-wide. We also collaborate on training and exploration of new products and techniques.
- 3.1.4 We now have a dedicated consultation area on the intranet, where information and guidance on research and consultation and the results of surveys can be accessed by all employees and members.
- 3.1.5 Consultation with internal audiences was not part of the first Strategy, but has been included in this one. Since the first Strategy we have introduced an annual Staff Survey, carried out in November/December each year. This has been effective in pointing up areas for improvement in staff relations and management and has led to an active development programme.

3.2 Areas for Improvement

- 3.2.1 We have not developed standard procedures for consulting disabled people, young people, the voluntary sector, ethnic minorities and other hard-to-reach groups. Work has already begun to address this need, by the Council and in partnership with the DCG, and it will be a main goal for work over the next two years.

- 3.2.2 User satisfaction with individual services is gathered by some services, and through the citizens panel, but we have yet to develop a method of ensuring this happens systematically in all services, providing data which can be used to improve services and ensure they are designed to meet the customer's needs.
- 3.2.3 We need to strengthen the practice of making visible the impact that consultees views have had on decision-making, and ensure this is communicated back to them.
- 3.2.4 Internally, we need to introduce new methods of consulting staff to provide more detail to the issues raised and tested by the annual Staff Survey.
- 3.2.5 We also recognise the need to introduce regular consultation with members to ensure that they have appropriate support to carry out their duties.
- 3.2.6 While recognising the progress we have made in conducting surveys, we need to broaden our toolkit of consultation techniques to include more in-depth, face to face research, with internal and external consultees.

4. Delivering the Strategy

4.1 Building Relationships

- 4.1.1 We will build on existing relationships with other public service providers to further develop expertise and opportunities for consulting 'hard to reach' groups.
- 4.1.2 We will strengthen our joint working arrangements with other public sector providers, actively seeking opportunities to share consultation exercises.
- 4.1.3 We will further develop our relationships with the voluntary sector and parish councils, to ensure we work together to consult our residents effectively.

4.1.4 Action Points for 2003-5

- (a) Identify further opportunities for joint working with other public sector providers, including research on ethnic minorities and budget priorities consultation.
- (b) Strengthen our dialogue with voluntary agencies and parish councils to identify consultation priorities and opportunities for joint working.

4.2 Developing the Consultation Culture

- 4.2.1 We will develop methods of gathering user satisfaction data within each service.
- 4.2.2 We will set up a forum to plan and discuss research and consultation plans, draw up a timetable and agree training needs.
- 4.2.3 We will develop systems to ensure the results of research and consultation exercises are included in decision-making, and results fed back to consultees and service users.
- 4.2.4 We will consult with employees and members to establish appropriate techniques for regular and effective consultation.

4.2.5 Action Points 2003-5

- (a) Investigate the possibility of the call centre carrying out 'ring back' user satisfaction surveys
- (b) Draw up options for gathering user satisfaction data and agree appropriate methods with services
- (c) Set up a cross-service forum for research and consultation which will develop and agree systems for ensuring action on consultation outcomes and feedback to consultees.

4.3 Developing techniques

4.3.1 We will evaluate consultation techniques currently in use in the Council for effectiveness and draw up a 'basket' of appropriate techniques for future use.

4.3.2 We will seek to enhance the use of electronic forms of consultation.

4.3.3 Action Points 2003-5

- (a) Through the Research and Consultation Forum, produce a consultation practice and development plan
- (b) Develop a general advice guide for effective consultation and available techniques linked to circumstances and goals for exercise.
- (c) Develop a toolkit and contacts/advisors register for consulting 'hard to reach' groups in the High Peak.
- (d) Expand the opportunities for electronic surveys, for internal and external consultation exercises.

APPENDIX A

HIGH PEAK BOROUGH COUNCIL – CONSULTATION FRAMEWORK

- ❖ **Government Policy is driving further consultation as it presses for a stronger relationship between local government and its communities.**
- ❖ **This document sets out the Council's consultation framework and guidance and is intended to support consistency, standards and help guide approaches.**

Aims of the Framework

- Develop a co-ordinated process for effective consultation
- Develop best practice in consultation techniques
- Provide a central resource for developing a consultation culture
- Provide a central resource to undertake corporate consultation
- Build capacity in consultation techniques within departments

Definition

For the purposes of this Framework, consultation includes all exercises that aim to find out attitudes of specific audiences to the Borough Council; existing services; proposed changes to existing services; or plans for new services.

Consultation Policy

The Council aims to deliver high quality services that respond to local needs and priorities. To help achieve this the Council seeks to encourage the community to contribute views and comments on its services and on their priorities, concerns and aspirations. The Council will use a variety of approaches to seek views and comments as part of its approach to delivering Best Value and good government.

The Council will :

- ❖ make best use of existing links with interest groups within the community and service users, in particular, elected Members and staff involved in service delivery;
- ❖ ensure that consultation is co-ordinated within the organisation;
- ❖ ensure services and partners collaborate in order to share ideas and avoid duplication;
- ❖ ensure that consultation is carried out with all relevant audiences, making special effort to include disabled people, ethnic minorities and other hard-to-reach groups.

General Principles of Consultation

In all its consultation the Council will apply the following twelve general principles:

1. We will clearly state the purpose of each consultation, the reasons for seeking views and how the findings will influence services.

2. We will use simple language, avoid jargon and use layouts appropriate for target audiences, eg large print for elderly people.
3. We will avoid raising expectations of change that are outside the Council's capacity or control by focusing consultation on matters we are able to respond to.
4. We will give reasonable time for response to consultation exercises.
5. We will set the level and cost of each consultation depending on the relative importance or cost of the service involved.
6. We will feedback to those consulted the findings of the consultation and the actions or decisions taken as a result.
7. We will carry out joint consultation exercises with relevant organisations where this makes sense.
8. We will make extra effort to consult relevant 'hard to reach' groups, eg young people, single parents.
9. We will make sure consultation is open to disabled people and other groups who have particular needs.
10. We will record consultation processes and findings accurately so they can be evaluated.
11. We will use every appropriate method for consultation and feedback, including electronic media, eg. website.
12. We will feed consultation findings into all appropriate management and political structures, to strengthen decision making and policy review.

Co-ordination

The Council will develop best practice in consultation techniques by central co-ordination and evaluation of consultation plans and activities. This will include all research and consultation exercises carried out within the Council.

The Public Relations Officer will lead this process and work with each department to ensure the experience gained from each exercise is fed back to departments. Any training programmes in consultation techniques will be co-ordinated centrally.

Responsibility for Consultation Exercises

Consultation will be through a range of approaches from those listed below.

Corporate Consultation

We will organise major research and consultation exercises centrally. These will include :

- ❖ Corporate-level consultation, such as regular Borough-wide opinion polls (like the MORI poll);
- ❖ issues which cut across departments, such as Equal opportunities;
- ❖ the High Peak Community Strategy;
- ❖ major issues for the community, eg. changes in key public services;
- ❖ developments affecting the environment;
- ❖ major strategies.

Best Value Reviews

We will agree consultation plans for best value reviews as part of the review outline. The Lead Officer of the review is responsible for making sure the consultation happens, working with the Communications and Consultation team. We will decide who is best placed to organise the consultation depending on the skills and resources available within departments.

Project and Issue Based Consultation

The Chief Officer, Executive or full Council, as appropriate, will determine the approach to consultation for individual projects during the normal course of each department's work, working with the Head of Communications and Consultation.

Consultees

The Council will consult :

- ! Residents
- ! Service users
- ! Businesses
- ! Voluntary organisations
- ! Town and Parish Councils
- ! Derbyshire County Council
- ! The Council staff and their representatives
- ! Members
- ! The Police
- ! Other partners in service delivery.

We will also consult other organisations which the Council is required by law to include in specific consultation exercises.

Consultation Techniques

The Council will select the technique most appropriate to each consultation exercise, having regard to cost and the scale of consultation etc.

Approaches to consultation and involvement may include :

- ❖ Publishing information in newsletters and the media.
- ❖ Providing information in a variety of forms such as audio tape.
- ❖ Holding meetings of existing forums e.g. Tenants Forum.
- ❖ Writing to specific individuals, groups and organisations on particular issues.
- ❖ User survey questionnaires.
- ❖ Service user panels.
- ❖ One-off discussion groups.
- ❖ Councillors or Council staff visiting groups, organisations or attending special meetings in the community.
- ❖ Comments and complaints procedures.
- ❖ Developing links with local groups.
- ❖ Comments books and boxes.
- ❖ Citizens Panel.

- ❖ Residents surveys.
- ❖ Roadshows/exhibitions.
- ❖ 24 hour answer phones.

Communications

Consultation will form an integral part of the Council's overall Communications Strategy. The Council will provide value for money in consultation exercises by using opportunities provided by existing communication methods , eg. mailing of Council tax demands, to carry out consultation exercises.

Resources

Each consultation exercise will be costed in terms of financial outlay and staff time.

This will be documented separately to provide a clear indication of the resources necessary to carry out the consultation.

We will carry out an audit of existing practice and staff expertise in consultation techniques. To develop best practice across the Council, we will identify gaps in our knowledge and arrange training sessions to ensure skills are increased and spread throughout the Council.

Costs of corporate consultation will be funded from the public relations budget. Consultation for best value reviews, projects and issues will be funded from the relevant departmental budget. The costs of training in consultation techniques will be funded from the central training budget.

Evaluation

The Council will evaluate this framework at regular intervals and provide feedback on its consultation activities through the Community Strategy/Best Value Performance Plan. We will agree a three year rolling programme each autumn to inform the following year's budget.

APPENDIX B

CONSULTATION PROGRAMME AND TIMETABLE 2003-2005

Techniques

The key to effective consultation is to use a mix of techniques that will give different forms of feedback. Opinion poll data will give overall perceptions, weighted to produce 'public opinion'. User surveys will tell us why people use the service and how they find it, but not why others don't use the service. Data from a citizen's panel will give us 'sounding board' data, but won't necessarily reflect public opinion. We will need to give special attention to finding out what 'hard to reach' groups (eg. single mothers, young people) need from our services.

Communicating why we are consulting, what the issues are, the results of the consultation and how we use the data to improve our services is as important as carrying out the consultation.

The techniques we will use from the outset of our programme will include:

1. Community Consultation (residents opinion survey)

Every three years we must carry out a public opinion survey on specific areas laid down by the Government. This means all Councils will start with the same year as a baseline. The first survey was carried out in 2000 and the second one is September-November 2003. These surveys include general feedback on satisfaction levels with Council services, areas to be included in community planning and cultural issues.

2. Citizen's Panel

ViewPoint High Peak has been in existence for two years. It is made up of 1,000 local residents of voting age whose profile matches that of our population. We send out four postal surveys a year and also use the panel members for one-off pieces of consultation, such as telephone surveys, focus groups on specific issues. The panel is run jointly with the County Council and the Police.

A third of the panel 'retire' each year and 330 new members are recruited, to ensure the Panel as a whole does not become too familiar with the workings of the council, and continue to provide an 'outside' perspective.

What do we use it for?

- ❖ Obtaining regular health check information between the bigger, MORI-style three-yearly polls.
- ❖ Collecting PI data on general satisfaction with Council services, information provision, accessibility, etc.
- ❖ Gauging public opinion on current year best value reviews on universal services, eg. street cleaning.

- ❖ Gauging public perceptions on issues surrounding the next year's best value reviews.
- ❖ Gauging public knowledge/understanding of different issues/services.
- ❖ Gauging opinions on one-off issues, such as 'what would encourage you to shop at markets in the High Peak'.

3. Regular contacts

These are existing mechanisms, such as : Tenants Forum and Panels, Parish Liaison meetings, Regeneration partnerships, etc. We will build on the use we make of these contacts for two-way communication and consultation.

4. Postal Questionnaires

We will make sure of existing databases within the Council, or those held by our partner organisations, to target specific groups.

5. Face to face surveys

We will use on-the-spot surveys for users of specific services, such as the markets, leisure facilities etc and for public attitudes to universal services, such as street cleaning.

6. Focus Groups

We will use focus groups to check our understanding of the perceptions and needs of user groups.

7. Internal Techniques

Inside the Council we will use an annual staff survey to gather attitudes, opinions and experience of staff. We will also hold focus groups of mixed tier and service staff, and members, to consult on issues facing the Council. Team briefings are a key means of communicating and consulting with staff and will be used increasingly for consultation. Site briefings, held with the Chief Executive and members of the Executive twice a year, will also be used to gather feedback from employees.

Council members will also be consulted regularly on satisfaction with staff/member relations and the service provided to them by employees.

HIGH PEAK BOROUGH COUNCIL - CONSULTATION PLAN 2003-6

Why needed	Information to be gathered	Method of collection	Timing	Comments
Statutory Performance Indicators	General health indicators Cultural strategy Community Plan Benefits, Planning and Housing user satisfaction	Community Consultation	Sep/Nov 2003 (then every third year)	In partnership with the County Council and others Monitored by citizens panel in years in between
Budget priorities – government requirement	Resident priorities for spending plans prior to setting budget	Workshops	Oct/Nov each year	We are discussing the possibility of joint work with the County Council
Input into council plans and strategies	Staff and member views on current issues and satisfaction and experience with the Council	Staff survey Member surveys Focus groups Team meetings	Nov Sept/Feb As necessary Regular	The team briefing system needs to be strengthened and focus group systems set up. We are considering a 'staff panel' along the lines of the citizens panel, to mirror consultation.
Best value reviews	User satisfaction (general) User group satisfaction	Citizens Panel Targeted QRs	Feb May Sept Nov each year	Panels are sent QRs 4 times a year. Questions for specific reviews will be time-tabled in as necessary
Best value reviews On-going service provision	Stakeholder views	Current contacts Postal QRs	As necessary	These links will be strengthened and streamlined to provide quality input.
Statutory PIs	User satisfaction	Postal QRs Face-to-face interviews	As required	Some PIs, such as planning, must be collected quarterly. Others, such as benefits, are collected immediately after each claim is processed.
User research / satisfaction	On-going service provision	Citizens Panel Postal QRs Face-to-face interviews Focus groups Call centre research	As and when	Research needs will be identified in advance and fitted into existing plans, where possible.