

REPORT OF THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION SCRUTINY PANEL

12 February 2004



LONDON BOROUGH OF WALTHAM FOREST

Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

NOTE TO READERS: This report was approved by the Overview and Scrutiny Commission on 12 February 2004 and forwarded to Cabinet for decision in March 2004.

Contact Officer:

Andrew Knox - Scrutiny Officer

Waltham Forest Council Forest Road London E17 4JF

020 8496 4721 www.lbwf.gov.uk

A translated summary of this document into community languages, Braille or audio tape can be requested by contacting the Scrutiny Unit on 020 8496 4887.

Contents

Section		Page number
1	Membership	2
2	Acknowledgements	2
3	The Panel's recommendations	3-5
4	Introduction	6-7
5	Consultation in Waltham Forest Council	8-21
APPENDICES:		
	1. Summary of Government guidance	22-25
	2. Other Organisations' Consultation Processes	26-32
	3. Case Studies of consultation exercises carried out at Waltham Forest Council	33-36
	4. Waltham Forest Council's Residents Panel	37-40
	5. Waltham Forest Residents Panel Size and Make-up	41-42
	6. Results of Resident Panel surveys	43-45

Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

1. Membership

Councillor Matthew Davis

Conservative Member for Hale End and Highams Park Ward

Councillor Paul Devaney

Labour Member for Wood Street Ward

Councillor Robert Sullivan

Liberal Democrat Member for Leyton Ward

2. Acknowledgements:

The Panel would like to thank all the Council officers that have been involved in the Panel's work. The Panel would particularly like to thank Mary Walker, Head of Policy & Equalities at the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham for her contribution.

3. The Panel's Recommendations

Recommendation 1: (see page 11)

That a Corporate Consultation Manager be appointed within the Corporate Communications Unit, to drive forward corporate standards for consultation with the Council's Multi-agency Consultation Working Group. This officer would have responsibility for final approval of all external consultations, monitoring, reviews, evaluations, and training on consultation.

Overview and Scrutiny Commission to receive an update on this proposal in July 2004.

Recommendation 2: (see page 12)

The Panel endorse moves to re-establish the Multi-agency Consultation Working Group and recommend elected Member involvement in the group to provide it with political drive. The Panel recommend that the Councils political leadership has a direct involvement in this group.

Overview and Scrutiny Commission to receive an update on the work of the group in July 2004

Recommendation 3: (see page 13)

That the group ensures that the Council representatives on the board seek to fully implement the Councils Consultation Toolkit in their respective service areas, and that the group performance manages and measures the effectiveness of consultation undertaken. (See Recommendation 8)

Overview and Scrutiny Commission to receive an update in July 2004.

Recommendation 4: (see page 15)

The Panel endorse the need for a consultation database to aid officers in undertaking consultation. This database should have high functionality, with relevant search fields including information about response rates, geographical area covered by a consultation, community groups involved, in order that it can be used effectively and efficiently. The Panel feel that software employed by Bristol City Council should be investigated. (See also appendix 2, regarding Bristol City Council)

Overview and Scrutiny Commission to receive an update on the database in July 2004

Recommendation 5: (see page 15)

Elected Members need to be informed about consultations and their results at all times, to ensure they are fully aware of the views of residents. To achieve this a single regular consultation report should be provided to elected Members.

Overview and Scrutiny Commission to receive an update in July 2004.

Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

Recommendation 6: (see page 17)

The Council should ensure that all its consultations are fair and balanced, and must avoid asking biased, leading, or restrictive questions. This should be one of the key principles that governs how the Council consults. The Corporate Consultation Manager and Multi-agency Consultation Working group should monitor this.

Overview and Scrutiny Commission to receive an update on how the principle is being implemented in July 2004.

Recommendation 7: (see page 17)

The Corporate Consultation Toolkit is an important step forward for the Council, but the document should be summarised in order that it is more user friendly, and it should include a checklist that is easy to use.

Recommendation 8: (see page 17)

The Panel felt it was essential that the Consultation Toolkit be implemented by the whole Council and that the implementation of the toolkit be enforced primarily by a corporate consultation manager, but with relevant officers from each Directorate and the Multi-agency consultation working group.

Recommendation 9: (see page 17)

That the Council encourage partners on the Multi-agency Consultation Working Group to adopt and use the Consultation Toolkit.

Overview and Scrutiny Commission to receive an update and the completed toolkit for review in July 2004

Recommendation 10: (see page 18)

Consultation is a two way process. The Council must always seek to feedback and disseminate results of consultation to participants, in as many ways as possible, to ensure they are aware of the impact of the consultation.

Overview and Scrutiny Commission to receive report in July 2004 detailing how results from consultation exercises are fed back to participants.

Recommendation 11: (see page 19)

That the Council establish what it annually spends on consultation and that an SAP code is created in the Councils financial system to monitor the Council's spending on consultation.

Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

Recommendation 12: (see page 19)

That specific and measurable performance indicators are developed at a corporate level to monitor the effectiveness of the Council's consultations, and that a mechanism is developed that flags up what changes or improvements have occurred because consultation results have been taken on board by the Council.

Recommendation 13: (see page 21)

That the Council ensures that equalities work feeds into the work of the Multi-agency Consultation Working Group. The Multi-agency Consultation Working Group must effectively engage with the Council's Equalities Board thereby ensuring that the acknowledgement and appreciation of equalities is integral to the Council's strategic and operational approach to consultation.

Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

4. Introduction

1. This is the report of the Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel. The Scrutiny Panel membership consists of:

Councillor Davis (Conservative Councillor for Hale End and Highams Park Ward);

Councillor Devaney (Labour Councillor for Wood Street Ward);

Councillor R Sullivan (Liberal Democrat Councillor for Leyton Ward).

Why is public consultation an issue of concern to the Borough's community?

2. The Scrutiny Panel was set up because Scrutiny Councillors were concerned about the effectiveness of the Council's public consultation processes. They wanted to establish how well Waltham Forest Council was consulting its community and how such consultation was informing the services and policies of the Council. The Panel considered effective consultation to be a vital element to ensuring a better performing Waltham Forest Council.
3. Indeed a central basis for Waltham Forest Council's Recovery Plan is the consultation carried out with residents through the annual satisfaction survey. The programme for change and improvement in the Council is intended to directly address the key concerns of residents and service users. Effective consultation is therefore critical to the reputation of the Council and essential to developing services that involve users and stakeholders.

What did the Panel do to address these concerns ?

4. In the course of its investigation the Scrutiny Panel agreed its objective as:

To ensure the Council better reflects the needs and aspirations of its citizens in its services and policies by improving the public consultation methods used in the Council.

5. To deliver its objective, the Panel carried out the following activity: researched good practice and guidance on public consultation, spoke to Council Departments regarding how public consultations were carried out and contacted other Councils who had a good track record of effective public consultation. Via its research and investigations, the Panel sought to:

- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">(a) Establish an overview of current arrangements and implementation of the Council's public consultation policy and practice. In particular to examine why response rates to, and public confidence in, consultation are so low and to make proposals for improvements. |
|--|

Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

(b)	Research best practice examples of public consultation at other councils and organisations such as MORI.
(c)	Establish a written framework and methodology for Public Consultations to ensure they are balanced, fair and unbiased. For example by considering the need for centralised resources, or a centrally managed approach on Public Consultation which can engender corporate standards, foster the use of best practice and monitor public consultation activity.
(d)	Establish a Council-wide mechanism for demonstrating how effectively results of Public Consultations are addressed and how they influence services and policies.
(e)	Evaluate methods for ensuring corporate sharing of Public Consultation so that duplication is avoided. For example by considering the need and functionality of a centralised Consultation Database for Council-wide use.
(f)	Establish that the Council is focused on ensuring genuine resident involvement takes places in its day-to-day business activity.

6. This Scrutiny Panel Report is presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission for its consideration and approval of the Panel's recommendations.
7. The Scrutiny Panel has sought to establish actions and policy suggestions for improving the effectiveness of the Council's public consultation process, thus making Council services more responsive and in-tune with its communities. This in turn will contribute to the continuous improvement of the Council's performance.
8. This investigation has been designed to reflect the research and deliberations of the Scrutiny Panel in a straightforward manner. The Report has been written by laypersons for a lay audience.

Councillor Davis, Devaney and R Sullivan
Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

5 Consultation & Waltham Forest Council

9. Consultation is a key element in delivering public services. Involving citizens and users in service delivery is a central part of the Government's change agenda for public services. (See appendix 1). Public involvement is also a central part of the reforms of the National Health Service. As suggested in paragraph 3 (page 7) effective consultation is essential to ensuring Waltham Forest Council delivers services that involve users and stakeholders.
10. Despite efforts of the organisation to improve consultation the Members of the Panel were concerned that effective, particularly **fair and balanced**, consultation was not practised throughout the Council. While there were pockets of good practise, these were not consistently shared throughout the Council. Indeed the Audit Commission's recent Comprehensive Performance Assessment progress report on Waltham Forest Council specifically highlighted the need for learning to be shared more effectively across the organisation:
'The ability of the council to maintain positive progress in relation to improvement is dependant on all parts of the council demonstrating the ability to learn effectively. Where lessons are captured corporately they are not yet consistently shared across all directorates'¹.
11. Council Members had also received considerable negative feedback from constituents about the nature of consultation in Waltham Forest, and as part of the investigation and report the Panel hoped to assist the whole organisation in developing a more co-ordinated and best practise approach to consultation.
12. The Panel met with a number of officers from the Council, including the Head of Corporate Communications. In addition the Panel sent a questionnaire to each of the Council's Executive Directors to find out about consultations undertaken by each Directorate and if there were any ways in which consultation could improve.
13. The Panel sought to review how the Council consulted with a view to making recommendations to help guide the organisation in consulting effectively. The Panel initially considered the Council's Corporate External And Community Engagement Strategy, which the Council agreed in 2000.

¹ London Borough of Waltham Forest, Cabinet Agenda 16th December 2003 Item 7b p46

Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

CORPORATE EXTERNAL AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

14. The Panel were advised of the Corporate External and Community Engagement Strategy. The Strategy sets out what consultation means for the Council. It suggests that:

“Consultation is the process of seeking the advice and comments of local people about the services that are or could be provided by the Council. In developing policy and setting service priorities and standards the Council should take account of the views expressed by local people and community groups. It must be an open and accessible process, and one in which the Council actively encourages the participation of all sections of the Community.”²

15. The Strategy also makes the following Statement of Intent: “Asking; Listening; Responding; Involving”.

The strategy aims ‘to give a clear indication of Waltham Forest’s commitment to fully engage the community including local business, stakeholders, hard to reach groups and other residents’³

16. The strategy document also suggests that:

‘Following an extensive internal audit of existing consultation practices it is apparent that Waltham Forest generally has a good record of consulting widely and frequently. However, there is a tendency in the Borough to target special needs and existing users and to consider specific service issues rather than the wider concerns. Also, the methodologies used tend to be formal, written, and quantitative ie. With limited opportunities for the community to express their opinions.’⁴

17. The Panel were advised that since the strategy was prepared, that there has been a drive towards more in the way of qualitative consultation and community engagement. However the Panel remained concerned that consultation in the borough focused on special interest groups, and not the general (mainstream) population.

18. The Strategy also identifies that Corporate Working was an important area of development for the Council. It suggested that in order to bring together key personnel with key resources/skills, a network should be established with clear links to a Members body. It also suggested that it may be considered necessary to bring staff working on consultation together more effectively.⁵

² London Borough of Waltham Forest Corporate External And Community Engagement Strategy http://www.lbwf.gov.uk/government/ce/bv/revised_consultation_strat1.pdf p3

³ Ibid p1-2

⁴ Ibid p3

⁵ Ibid p6-7

Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

19. To deliver this aim a Multi- Agency Consultation Working Group was set up, to deliver greater co-ordination, and share information about consultation, not only across the Council but also with the Council's partners, such as Waltham Forest PCT, Whipps Cross Hospital, the Metropolitan Police.
20. A further important method of improving the standard of consultation and co-ordination is by having dedicated staff to provide support for consultation.

Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

DEDICATED SUPPORT FOR CONSULTATION?

21. Discussions with the Head of Corporate Communications highlighted the fact that while there were a number of staff in the organisation that provided services relevant to public consultation activity, there was no resource to provide specialist corporate support on consultation.
22. The Panel considered the approach that other Local Authorities have to consultation, particularly the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham (See Appendix 2). This council employs corporate consultation officers whose specific role is to advise on consultation and ensure that all consultations undertaken by the Council of an agreed corporate standard.
23. The Panel felt that a dedicated officer would clearly help to facilitate a more co-ordinated consistent approach to consultation across the Council. The Panel also felt that as there is considerable emphasis placed on consultation by government and the Audit Commission that it would be particularly important to create a specific dedicated post for consultation.
24. While any co-ordinating body (the Multi-Agency Consultation Working Group see later) would provide a degree of focus to ensure that consultation is co-ordinated both internally and externally, this would be assisted through employing a specific consultation manager.
25. In addition a number of responses to the Panel's questionnaire to staff in the Council highlighted that many officers felt that greater corporate support for consultation could be provided for consultation (see appendix 3). A dedicated post for consultation would provide some support and guidance for officers, although would need to work closely with link officers in each Directorate.
26. A consultation officer would ideally facilitate the development of corporate standards for consultation, and help to drive through general guidance, to ensure that the Council ensures that all consultations have an agreed framework and approach irrespective of the issue or the service being consulted upon.

Recommendation 1:

That a Corporate Consultation Manager be appointed within the Corporate Communications Unit, to drive forward corporate standards for consultation with the Council's Multi-agency Consultation Working Group. This officer would have responsibility for final approval of all external consultations, monitoring, reviews, evaluations, and training on consultation.

Overview and Scrutiny Commission to receive an update on this proposal in July 2004.

Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

MULTI-AGENCY CONSULTATION WORKING GROUP

27. The Multi-agency Consultation Working Group exists to develop a joint approach to Consultation across differing local organisations and agencies. The Members of this group include representatives from each of the Council Directorates, the Chief Executive's Department, Waltham Forest Primary Care Trust, Whipps Cross University Hospital, Policy, Learning and Skills Council and O-Regen, but unfortunately no elected members or ordinary residents.
28. This body was formerly a sub-group of the Council's Best Value Board. It became a sub-group of the Local Strategic Partnership Excellence in Public Services (EPS) Thematic Group. The Panel was advised that the Excellent in Public Services Group would be responsible for the providing the steer and future work programme for the consultation group, with particular focus on achieving the Community Plan targets.
29. The Panel was also advised that Seth Brook, Head of Corporate Communications, had taken over the Chair of the Working Group and that he was seeking to review the terms of reference of the working group to make it more business focussed, by increasing the use of definite and measurable tasks. The Panel remains open minded on whether this working group will actually achieve any real improvement in public consultation.
30. Responses received from questionnaires sent to Council Officers on the Panel's behalf, highlighted a general need for greater corporate co-ordination of consultation. It was suggested that a central reference group of officers with experience of successful consultations should be developed, to pool information and offer practical help to less experienced officers. The Panel felt that this should be an obvious part of the role of the Multi-Agency Consultation Working Group, and that its role should be widely communicated to the Council.
31. The Panel considered the model developed by Hammersmith and Fulham Council, which had a Consultation Board, made up of representatives of all Council services, in addition to key partners. This body, which the Deputy Leader of the Council had a significant involvement in, acted as a co-ordinating body through which **all** Council consultations would processed and signed off, with the support of corporate consultation officers. The body ensured that all consultations were of an agreed standard and had a common approach. (See later section regarding Hammersmith and Fulham – appendix 2)

Recommendation 2:

The Panel endorse moves to re-establish the Multi-agency Consultation Working Group and recommend elected Member involvement in the group to provide it with political drive. The Panel recommend that the Councils political leadership has a direct involvement in this group.

Overview and Scrutiny Commission to receive an update on the work of the group in July 2004

Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

Recommendation 3:

That the group ensures that the Council representatives on the board seek to fully implement the Councils Consultation Toolkit in their respective service areas, and that the group performance manages and measures the effectiveness of consultation undertaken.(see Recommendation 8)

Overview and Scrutiny Commission to receive an update in July 2004.

Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

CONSULTATION ANNUAL PLAN & CONSULTATION DATABASE

32. The Panel was advised that for the past two to three years the Council has produced an annual Consultation Plan. This plan provides details of ongoing and regular consultation.
33. Members were advised that producing the document took extensive amounts of time, as it required chasing up service areas about consultation. The Panel was advised that the Plan is used by the Consultation Working Group to determine whether there is scope for joined up working.
34. It was hoped this information would be developed into a database, which all key officers could access, in order that they are informed and aware of consultation being undertaken across the Council. This would help to avoid council officers duplicating the work of colleagues in other service areas, and help the Council to avoid overloading organisations or residents with consultations and avoid 'consultation fatigue' (see appendix 3, page 36). It would assist the Council in rationalising the number of consultations it undertakes.
35. The Panel was also advised not only of the danger of consultation overload and fatigue, but of the danger of missing key stakeholders when undertaking consultation. The Council does not have a central database of stakeholders that officers can use for consultation. For example the Panel was advised that officers often have to reinvent mailing lists when undertaking consultation (See appendix 3).
36. A number of local authorities employ a database system for consultations in order that information and results from consultation are disseminated across the organisation, and in order that differing officers can find out successful approaches that may have been employed by other parts of the Council. The Panel particularly considered the software used by Bristol City Council as particularly useful. (See appendix 2, page 33).
37. A consultation database which elected Members would have access to would clearly provide Members with much more information about consultations being undertaken in their ward, and any issues that they may need to be aware of arising from consultations. Indeed the Panel felt that elected members need to be informed about consultations and their results at all times, to ensure they are fully aware of the views of residents. This could be achieved by producing a single regular report on consultation for Members.

Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

Recommendation 4:

The Panel endorse the need for a consultation database to aid officers in undertaking consultation. This database should have high functionality, with relevant search fields including information about response rates, geographical area covered by a consultation, community groups involved, in order that it can be used effectively and efficiently. The Panel feel that software employed by Bristol City Council should be investigated. (See also appendix 2, regarding Bristol City Council)

Overview and Scrutiny Commission to receive an update on the database in July 2004

Recommendation 5:

Elected Members need to be informed about consultations and their results at all times, to ensure they are fully aware of the views of residents. To achieve this a single regular consultation report should be provided to elected Members.

Overview and Scrutiny Commission to receive an update in July 2004.

Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

CORPORATE CONSULTATION TOOLKIT

38. An important part of the work of the Multi-Agency Consultation Working Group has been the development of a Consultation Toolkit for the Council. This draft Consultation Toolkit replaces previous guidance.
39. The Panel gave consideration to the draft Consultation Toolkit, and felt that its development was an extremely important step forward for the Council. The Panel felt it was the beginnings of a shared and consistent approach to consultation for the entire Council.
40. The Panel was particularly encouraged to note that the Toolkit highlighted the need for the Council to clearly consider why it is undertaking a consultation and also when consultation should be undertaken. The Toolkit suggests:
- 'Consult **before** the decision is taken
It is paramount to the success of the consultation to be honest and transparent about why the consultation is occurring. Do not consult for the sake of it. If you not need or are unlikely to use the response, then ask yourself if you should be doing it at all.'*⁶
41. The Panel also strongly felt that the Council should always ensure that its consultations are fair and balanced, and that it should avoid asking biased, leading or restrictive questions, and that consultations should be monitored to ensure this. The Panel felt this should be one of the key principles that should govern how the organisation carries out all its consultations.

Transport for London (TfL) and Consultation

42. During the course of its enquiries the Panel learnt of the renewed emphasis that Transport for London (TfL) had placed on consultation. As outlined in Appendix 2 TfL has set up a new Consultation Unit within its public affairs section. The Unit has accountability for consultation on major projects with lead responsibility for other projects devolved to the relevant service departments. The unit has also written a Consultation Toolkit to aid staff in meeting TfL's new Consultation Policy in a standardised and auditable manner. The Toolkit includes templates of 'a Consultation Form' and Consultation Planner both of which are available to staff via the intranet. The Panel felt that the developments in TfL were similar to those that the Council may wish to develop.
43. The Panel felt that while Waltham Forest's (draft) Consultation Toolkit was an important step forward that the document needed to be shorter, and more accessible in order that officers would find it straightforward and easy to use. The Toolkit would need to include a prominent concise checklist to which Council officers could easily refer.

⁶ London Borough of Waltham Forest. Draft consultation toolkit. p8

Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

44. The Panel also felt that it would be vitally important for the guidance and key principles underpinning the toolkit (once fully agreed) to be fully implemented by the Council. The Panel felt it was essential that a Corporate Consultation Manager with relevant Members of the Consultation Working Group effectively police the implementation of this guidance, ensuring that the guidance is put into practice.

Recommendation 6:

The Council should ensure that all its consultations are fair and balanced, and must avoid asking biased, leading, or restrictive questions. This should be one of the key principles that governs how the Council consults. The Corporate Consultation Manager and Multi-agency Consultation Working Group should monitor this.

Overview and Scrutiny Commission to receive an update on how the principle is being implemented in July 2004.

Recommendation 7:

The Corporate Consultation Toolkit is an important step forward for the Council, but the document should be summarised in order that it is more user friendly, and it should include a checklist that is easy to use.

Recommendation 8:

The Panel felt it was essential that the Consultation Toolkit be implemented by the whole Council and that the implementation of the toolkit be enforced primarily by a Corporate Consultation manager, but with relevant officers from each Directorate and the Multi-agency consultation working group.

Recommendation 9:

That the Council encourage partners on the Multi-agency Consultation Working Group to adopt and use the Consultation Toolkit.

Overview and Scrutiny Commission to receive an update and the completed toolkit for review in July 2004

Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

FEEDBACK ON CONSULTATION

45. Another important area of consultation procedure and process that the Panel considered was the dissemination of the results of consultation, and feeding back of results to participants. This issue is highlighted within the Council's draft Consultation toolkit, which states:

'It is essential that feedback is given on the outcomes of consultation and the resulting decisions'.⁷

46. The Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultation, also highlights the need for the results of consultation to be widely available:

'responses should be carefully and open-mindedly analysed, and the results made widely available, with an account of the views expressed, and reasons for decisions finally taken'.⁸

47. Indeed the Panel felt that it was vitally important that following a consultation exercise, participants are advised of the outcome of the consultation, and outline why the Council has taken a certain course of action. This will ensure that participants are advised that their views have been listed to, and that their views matter. It may well be the case that the Council decides a course of action based on a range of evidence, including the results of consultation. The Council clearly needs to inform participants why it is taking a decision, especially if that decision is contrary to results of consultation.

Recommendation 10:

Consultation is a two way process. The Council must always seek to feedback and disseminate results of consultation to participants, in as many ways as possible, to ensure they are aware of the impact of the consultation.

Overview and Scrutiny Commission to receive report in July 2004 detailing how results from consultation exercises are fed back to participants.

⁷London Borough of Waltham Forest draft consultation toolkit, November 2003 p15

⁸ <http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/regulation/Consultation/code.rtf>

Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

MONITORING AND EVALUATING CONSULTATION

48. From the responses the Panel had received to its questionnaires and enquiries, it appeared that there was not a great deal of performance information readily available on consultation activity. Furthermore it appeared that there was no central record of the response rates to consultation activity or the total amount of money spent annually by the Council on consultations.
49. The Panel felt it was extremely difficult for the Council to ensure that it was improving the quality of its consultation, without monitoring the effectiveness of consultations (to what extent it informed Council policy), and also whether it was achieving best value, if it was unaware of the total spend on consultation.
50. For example, the Panel had found that the Residents Panel had cost £100 000 for eleven surveys over the last three years (see appendix 4). With such large amounts of expenditure there was a need to establish what such surveys were delivering in terms of improving the Council's performance or knowledge of the public's needs.
51. Monitoring the effectiveness of consultation by using relevant performance indicators, such as reviewing response rates for consultation would be a key role for a corporate consultation manager (see recommendation 1) and the multi-agency consultation working group (see recommendation 3).
52. The Panel were interested to note that as part of a scrutiny exercise into consultation methods in Maidstone, that Members recommended that that Council should establish a central fund for consultation that would be available, on request, to co-fund exercises by individual sections. It was suggested that this would not involve any additional funds, but merely a re-allocation of existing funds. This could be something Waltham Forest Council may wish to consider, as a way of ensuring consultation is consistent across the Council.
53. More specifically the Council could use the accounting package SAP to determine what the authority spends on consultation.

Recommendation 11:

That the Council establish what it annually spends on consultation and that a SAP code is created in the Councils financial system to monitor the Council's spending on consultation.

Recommendation 12:

That specific and measurable performance indicators are developed at a corporate level to monitor the effectiveness of the Council's consultations, and that a mechanism is developed that flags up what changes or improvements have occurred because consultation results have been taken on board by the Council.

Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

EQUALITIES AND CONSULTATION

54. The Panel met with the Council's Corporate Equalities Officer to discuss issues around equalities and consultation.
55. Members gave consideration to the need for the Council to effectively consult with all stakeholders in Waltham Forest. The Panel are of the view that equalities issues should be integral and at the forefront of the Council's consultation strategy. The Panel were unconvinced that equalities were effectively factored and integrated into all consultation of the borough.
56. There is a wide range of differing communities and groups in Waltham Forest. In order to effectively communicate and consult with all communities a wide range of methods need to be used.
57. There are a number of statutory responsibilities that the Council must fulfil in terms of equalities, specifically in relation to race equality. The Race Relations Act 1976, as amended by the Race Relations (Amendment Act) 2000 gives public authorities a general duty to promote race equality to over 40,000 public authorities including LBWF.
58. The Councils Race Equality Scheme outlines the specific duties which the Council must adhere to. One of these is the arrangement for assessing and consulting on proposed policies. It suggests that:
- 'We will assess the likely impact of our proposed plans, policies and strategies on the diverse communities of London Borough of Waltham Forest before they are adopted. We will make sure that the policies we proposed to introduce promote equality of opportunity and good race relations, and do not lead to direct or indirect discrimination.'*⁹
59. The Panel felt that it was vitally important for equalities issues to be integral to how the Council plans and delivers consultation and community engagement. The Panel felt that equalities did not currently have sufficient profile in the organisation and were not sufficiently factored into consultation in the borough. For example the Council's draft Consultation Toolkit did not make any reference to the Council's Race Equality Scheme. There appeared to be a lack of joined up working to ensure that consultation and equalities were integrated.
60. While the Panel has not exclusively focused on equalities issues, they are encouraged to note that the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Commission has commissioned a panel to look specifically at equalities issues. This panel hope that the Equalities Panel can scrutinise to what extent equalities are integrated into the work of the Council.

⁹ London Borough of Waltham Forest, Race Equality Scheme p10.
http://intra1/community/res/LBWF_race_equality_scheme.pdf

Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

Recommendation 13:

That the Council ensures that equalities work feeds into the work of the Multi-agency Consultation Working Group. The Multi-agency Consultation Working Group must effectively engage with the Council's Equalities Board thereby ensuring that the acknowledgement and appreciation of equalities is integral to the Council's strategic and operational approach to consultation.

Appendix 1 – Summary of Government guidance on consultation

1. Public consultation is increasingly viewed as a key element of delivering effective public services. It is a central plank of the Government's vision for Local Government. Public Involvement is also a key part of the NHS plan, of which Health Scrutiny is an important part.
2. Indeed Government guidance suggests that engaging the public:
'can be a rewarding experience which enhances both the legitimacy of decision-making and the value of what is produced. Effective participation can bring a better policy direction, improved services, a new imaginative way of tackling an issue, better understanding and more broadly a sense of hope and a shared commitment to change'¹⁰.
3. The Government produced a guide to consultation in Local Government 1998 entitled, *Enhancing Public Participation in Local Government*. It outlined some of the central issues associated with involving the public in decision making and judgements of the local authority.
4. There are different purposes identified for consultation and different methodologies required for different issues.

Purpose of consultation ¹¹	Participation technique
Provide Information to the public on the workings, policies, proposals of the Council	Consultation Documents, Media Coverage, Exhibitions, Public Meetings, Question and Answer Sessions.
Gain Feedback from the public on performance and policies.	Complaints/Suggestion Schemes, Service Satisfaction Surveys, Citizens' Panels, Advisory Referendums, Co-option, Focus Groups.
Direct Democracy where debate and decisions are taken to ground level, for example delegate decisions to local forums or even hold referendums where required by law.	Interactive Websites, Citizens' Juries, Vision Exercises, Area committees with decision making capacity, Referendum.

¹⁰ Guidance on enhancing public participation: a summary.
http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_localgov/documents/source/odpm_locgov_source_023831.doc p1

¹¹ Ibid. p4

Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

Consulting with the public –Common misgivings

5. The national Government Guidance states that people are put off participation by¹²:
- assumptions that the Council will not respond;
 - a lack of awareness of consultation activity/opportunities;
 - a perception that participation is dominated by certain groups or views;
 - some community groups are particularly hard to reach, ie young people and ethnic minority groups.
6. The Guidance identified the misgivings of Councillors and officers about consultation exercises. These common misgivings were: the danger of raising unrealistic expectations, worries about the 'representativeness' of those who participate and a concern that the authority's decision-making responsibilities might be usurped.

Consultation – how do you effectively deliver it ?

7. The Guidance also suggests that the main message coming out of its research is
- “the need for local authorities to develop a more systematic and strategic approach to their attempts at deliberately stimulating participation”***¹³
8. The Guidance further states that Councils prefer
- “ad hoc initiatives with respect to participation, often relying upon the support of key individuals. A lack of formal strategy can reduce the legitimacy and robustness of public participation activity, leaving initiatives vulnerable to political and personality-based changes. Effective public participation needs to become the responsibility of all councillors and senior officials and not just left to the preferences and commitment of a few”***¹⁴.
9. In terms of developing a more systematic and strategic approach to participation, the Guidance identified four key sets of activities:
- Improved comprehension – ie knowing the purpose of the consultation and using methods which are fit for purpose
 - Better communication
 - Building capacity
 - Strengthening connections

¹² Guidance on enhancing public participation: a summary.

http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_localgov/documents/source/odpm_locgov_source_023831.doc p2

¹³ Ibid p3

¹⁴ Ibid. p1

Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

10. The Guidance states that people:

- are most likely to participate in initiatives which address their stated priorities;
- mobilise and work through local leaders;
- welcome being actively recruited or invited to participate.

Government's Good Practice Guidance

11. The Cabinet Office has issued a Code of Practice on Written Consultation which suggests the following criteria:¹⁵

1	Timing of consultation should be built into the planning process for a policy (including legislation) or service from the start, so that it has the best prospect of improving the proposals concerned, and so that sufficient time is left for it at each stage.
2	It should be clear who is being consulted, about what questions, in what timescale and for what purpose.
3	A consultation document should be as simple and concise as possible. It should include a summary, in two pages at most, of the main questions it seeks views on. It should make it as easy as possible for readers to respond, make contact or complain.
4	Documents should be made widely available, with the fullest use of electronic means (though not to the exclusion of others) and effectively.
5	Sufficient time should be allowed for considered responses from all groups with an interest. Twelve weeks should be standard minimum period for a consultation.
6	Responses should be carefully and open-mindedly analysed, and the results made widely available, with an account of the views expressed, and reasons for decisions finally taken.
7	Departments should monitor and evaluate consultations, designating a consultation coordinator who will ensure the lessons are disseminated.

Good Practice from the Audit Commission

11. Given the ever increasing, sometimes statutory, requirement for Councils to use consultation to identify their users needs and shape the delivery of their services to respond to those needs, the Audit Commission has published a Consultation Guide '*Connecting with users and citizens*¹⁶' which looks across the full range of public service sectors and encourages cross-fertilisation of ideas from local government, health and criminal justice. The Consultation Guide identified the key characteristics of successful approaches to communication, consultation and involvement. These were:

¹⁵ <http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/regulation/Consultation/code.rtf>

¹⁶ <http://www.auditcommission.gov.uk/reports/accessable.asp?ProdID=F1B75570-9AA7-469E-8BA6-3354AA457D61#sect74>

Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

Commitment and culture – the impetus to prioritise service users and public involvement needs to be part of the organisation's culture.

Support and structure – consultation and involvement should be supported by cross-organisational structures and systems, including planning, strategic funding and training of staff.

Diversity and representation – the people who are being consulted or involved should reflect the demographic profile of the community or parts of the community being served.

Handing over control – giving users the opportunity to make real decisions.

Learning from experience – and changing and developing approaches over time.

Real results – achieving changes which are recognised and valued by users.

12. The Audit Commission Consultation Guide flags up a common finding of much research on public consultation (it is also an often quoted experience of Council staff on the frontline of public consultation activity) namely that many organisations feel that a good standard of public involvement is hard to achieve because the public is not really interested in taking part in consultation. That is to say, it is not always a case of poor consultation methods, it can also be that the issue being consulted upon is not of interest to the consultees.

Learning from CPA

13. Following from the Comprehensive Performance Assessments of Local Authorities in England, the Audit Commission has produced a series of documents outlining what has been learnt from the assessments. One of the documents is 'User focus and citizen engagement'. Five key factors are highlighted for effective consultation:

- Commitment to user focus and citizen engagement focus
- Understanding your communities
- Clarity of purpose
- Communicating in appropriate ways
- Delivering change and improved outcomes

14. The Panel felt that one of the more important messages stemming from this report was the need for effective corporate co-ordination of consultation. The Panel felt this could be an important message for Waltham Forest Council:

'The consistency and co-ordination of approach is important both between different bodies and within the same body – the most successful councils ensure that there is a corporate approach to consultation.....the more successful councils ensure that consultation is integrated and systematic'.

Appendix 2 Other Organisations' Consultation Processes

The Panel looked at examples of good practice at other Councils and similar large organisations in the country.

TRANSPORT FOR LONDON (TfL)

The Panel had become aware that Transport for London was in the midst of completing a substantial piece of work on a consultation toolkit.

Transport for London's research has shown that whilst some of their consultation activity is of a high quality, the public and stakeholder groups felt there was scope for better listening by Transport for London. There had also been some criticism from local councillors, London Assembly members and residents groups about particular, specific consultation exercise, with some of their complaints taking the form of petitions and appeals to the Ombudsman.

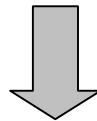
Therefore in order to improve its consultation activity, Transport for London set up a new Consultation Unit within its Public Affairs section. The Unit has accountability for consultation on major projects with lead responsibility for other projects devolved to the relevant service departments.

The Consultation Unit is responsible for co-ordination, standard-setting, monitoring and providing a range of specialist support services to the rest of the organisation with regard to any consultation matters.

Managing Consultation at Transport for London (TfL)

Consultation Unit

- sets corporate aims and standards
- produces guidance for staff
- takes a corporate approach to key stakeholders on major strategic issues
- develops a corporate performance and evaluation regime



Business Unit (ie service departments)

- Carry out the consultation
- Research the public's needs and expectations
- Deal with the public's complaints and suggestions
- Managing and staffing the consultation process
- Collaborating with other departments to deliver more integrated consultation
- Coordinating links with key stakeholders on specific local issues
- Disseminating the toolkit and training staff to use it
- Monitoring performance and drawing up an action plan to improve it

Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

The Consultation Unit has written a Consultation Toolkit to aid staff in meeting the TfL's new Consultation Policy in a standardised, and thereby auditable, manner. The Consultation Unit's intention is that the Toolkit will set a new standard for public consultation ensuring Londoners' views on Transport for London schemes are taken into account and will help the organisation make better informed decisions when considering the introduction of new schemes and initiatives.

The Toolkit, therefore, is a substantial document giving practical information on how to consult. It covers the different consultation methods, legal obligations, format guidelines, complaints, how to write letters, consulting via the internet, contact details for key officers, etc. The Toolkit also includes templates of a 'Consultation Form' and 'Consultation Planner' both of which are available to staff via the intranet.

Whilst the Toolkit is a very large document aiming to give detailed guidance to Transport for London (TfL) staff, the actual Consultation Policy Statement itself is a succinct, short (3 page) document stating the 5 key principles TfL consultation –

- Focused and timely;
- Accessible and targeted;
- Informative and Accountable
- Timed appropriately;
- Honest and fair.

LONDON BOROUGH OF HAMMERSMITH AND FULHAM

Hammersmith and Fulham was judged to be 'excellent' in the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment. It is the only Council to achieve a full 48 out of 48 in their assessment.

The Panel met with the Head of Policy and Equalities at Hammersmith and Fulham, Mary Walker. One of the central responsibilities of her post is managing how the Council consults.

The Panel gained a significant amount of information from the meeting, in particular how that organisation ensured that there was a corporate standard for consultation, and that consultation was corporately co-ordinated, rather than a series of different departments or services undertaking consultation without an agreed shared vision.

The Panel was advised that Hammersmith and Fulham had several mechanisms to ensure corporate co-ordination of public consultation, the three most important parts of which were:

- a corporate Consultation Database
- a Consultation Board
- and the Consultation Forward Plan

Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

Hammersmith and Fulham's operational process for consultations

The Panel noted that at Hammersmith and Fulham any consultation involving the public must be proposed using the consultation database. The database runs over the Council's corporate filing system so that key Council officers have access.

A consultation proposal must give a brief description of the project, officer contact details, proposed methods, proposed consultees and a brief timetable for the work. The proposal is then assessed by various Officers, including the Corporate Consultation Officers, who will recommend any amendments (eg methodology or project management). The proposal is then put to the Consultation Board for approval.

After the Board's approval the consultation proposal is incorporated into the Consultation Forward Plan. The Consultation Forward Plan is basically a timetable detailing the activities related to each consultation project and, like the Database, it runs over the corporate filing system.

As all Officers have access to the Consultation Database and Forward Plan, it is possible for project leaders to see what other consultation exercises are currently programmed and (where appropriate) combine consultation exercises. Having completed the consultation project, the exercise is then evaluated. The evaluation also appears on the Database.

With regard to the reporting of Consultation outcomes, that is entirely dependant on the specific consultation exercise. All headline results of each consultation are passed by the Consultation Board and also placed on the Database. Additionally several consultation project reports or results have been placed on the Council's website. On larger scale surveys, reports are sent to relevant scrutiny or leadership committees. Reports from, for example, Best Value reviews are considered by the appropriate committee or departmental management team. Hammersmith and Fulham are additionally also looking at making use of the magazine they send to each Borough household as a means of feeding back results (and the actions deriving from them) to residents.

In conclusion, at Hammersmith and Fulham, officers planning a consultation exercise can look at previous consultation exercises and find areas of good practice. For example, a consultation exercise may have been done on a similar theme a couple of years previously and the project team may find useful results on which they can build upon for the new project. Alternatively they might find projects in which different methodologies have been used and find information about which techniques work best under which circumstances. Additionally the feedback to residents of consultation results and effects on Council policy is relatively well established on the web and Database but needs further, more effective dissemination, perhaps via the Council magazine.

Hammersmith and Fulham's resources for consultations

The Consultation Board is made up from representatives of each department. It is chaired by the Director of Environment and the Deputy Leader of the Council also sits

Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

on it. The Board co-ordinates consultation by planning consultation projects some way in advance, approving consultations after proposals and is also involved in the evaluation of consultations that have taken place. The Panel were advised that two Corporate Consultation officers are employed that advise on consultation, and ensure any proposed consultations are to the agreed Council standard and approach.

Hammersmith and Fulham's Consultation Strategy

Hammersmith and Fulham do not have a Consultation Strategy at present, however within the next couple of months it is hoped that both a consultation policy and accompanying technical guidance will be in place.

Hammersmith and Fulham's Website:

Hammersmith & Fulham's Website clearly directs the public to sections covering different kinds of public participation – whether information about agendas or inviting the public to feedback.

The central principles that underpins how the Council manages consultation are:

- Corporate Consultation
- An agreed corporate standard
- Central resources for consultation
- An effective functioning cross departmental group that co-ordinates consultation

Additionally, under its Consultation Section the Hammersmith & Fulham Website lists current and past consultations by the public, Councillors and Officers.

BRACKNELL FOREST BOROUGH COUNCIL

Bracknell Forest Council's approach to tenancy consultation

The Panel contacted Joanna Flaxman, Policy & Commissioning Officer (Consultation & Participation for housing services), regarding Bracknell's approach to consulting tenants, as it had heard Bracknell was achieving 90% response rates to its consultations of tenants.

Bracknell Forest in fact did not have an above the national average rate to its consultation. For example, Bracknell's response rates for Rent Consultation were:

2000 - 14%
2001 - 29%
2002 - 28%

In 2003 Bracknell did not do the Rent Consultation (as Government now sets the levels) but did a general Satisfaction Survey and got a 14% return.

Bracknell's suggestions ideas for upping response rates were:

3. Send reminders and another questionnaire to those who don't respond

Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

4. Have a prize draw or other incentive for those who respond (we also had a housing roadshow this year and gave everyone who attended a free energy saving light bulb and have a draw for a kettle!)
5. Do a telephone survey (warn people first!), this is not self selective and a better cross section is achieved.

Bracknell Forest Council's Development of a Corporate Consultation Strategy

Bracknell Forest's Social Services and Housing Departments are developing a public involvement strategy in partnership with the local Primary Care Trust and Voluntary Sector which will set out how they will all involve and consult.

This partnership development should provide more of a steer than the Council has corporately at present, although it is primarily being driven by Housing and Social Services which are the two Council Departments that consult extensively.

BEXLEY COUNCIL

The general public can feedback to the Council via two options:

- General feedback
- Specific responses to current Consultations

The Panel contacted the Communications Team at Bexley Council. Bexley has established good practice with its the Residents Panel, which is run in-house.

However Bexley has no Annual Plan of Consultations and has not got systems in place to identify what consultations are happening, ie no corporate/central control of process or data.

Feedback from Bexley Officers, who are involved in a London Boroughs Network for Consultation Officers, was that public consultation remains a difficult issue with much scope for improvement. However there has been no significant improvement in the last two years. Through contacts with other London authorities, Bexley Officers believe most authorities are experiencing similar problems regarding effective and involving public consultation activity, and do not believe any one authority has excelled in this area as yet.

Bexley website:

The website gives access to information and Officer contacts for the current consultations. The Public can also give general feedback (general enquiries, website feedback, complaint, compliment) via an online form. The interactive and search element is not as highly developed as the Bristol website.

Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL

Bristol City Council has a highly interactive website on Consultation matters. The advanced development of the consultation website reflects a robust approach to consultation. The website gives full public access to the following:

- 1 The public can search an online consultation database by:
 - By Ward
 - By Area of interest (eg Satisfaction, Older People, Traffic & Transport)
 - By Status of consultation (eg open, closed, recently closed, proposed)
- 2 The public can search information on the Citizen's Panel in order to:
 - Access questionnaires sent out to the Panel.
 - Access Results of questionnaires received back from the Panel.
 - Access online copies of the Feedback Newsletters sent to the Panel.
 - Find out how to become a member of the Panel.
 - Panel members can actually complete questionnaires online.
- 3 The public can access the Consultation Strategy.
- 4 The public can access Consultation Training Seminars.
- 5 External organisations can access details on Consultation Consultancy Services (a chargeable service which Bristol Council will deliver to external organisations).
- 6 Professional individuals and organisations can register their CV/company profile if they are seeking to sell their services to Bristol City Council.
- 7 The public can access and register for the Youth Panel.

Bristol City Council have been working to develop their consultation for use by other organisations. Bristol have been liaising with an IT company and will potentially be able to market the software for upwards of £3500 plus annual maintenance of around £900 per annum. The company undertaking the development is a niche company specialising in electronic consultation and community activities in general.

HACKNEY COUNCIL

Hackney have sought to establish corporate standards and co-ordination for their public consultation activity.

Hackney's principles for public consultation activity

Hackney's first step has been to draw up a Consultation and Public Information Strategy which sets out definitions of the various kinds of consultation the Council will carry out. This is because Hackney wants to be very clear about whether its 'consultation' activity is about:

- informing the public,
- researching the public's views,
- involving the public by enabling results to heavily influence decision/policy,
- working in partnership with others to make a joint decision,
- or, whether it is full-fledged consultation where consultees views on a proposal are taken into account when the decision is made.

Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

Hackney has also drawn up a Public Consultation Charter which sets out the six standards that will underlie all its public consultation activity. All public consultation activity will:

- say what category of consultation and why it is happening
- say who is being consulted
- say how the consultation will be carried out
- say how the results will be published - including response rates
- say how the results influenced decisions/policy
- say how the consultation was inclusive.

Hackney's corporate control of public consultation activity

Hackney have sought to co-ordinate consultation activity across the Council and the rest of the public sector. They have achieved this via the Hackney Strategic Partnership, which has agreed to fund a Public Consultation Officer within Hackney Council's central Communications Team. This Public Consultation Officer will:

- advise on best practice
- advise departments on implementation
- advise departments on appropriate stakeholders for consultation
- co-ordinate and record all consultation activity within the Council and its strategic partners
- draw up Annual Consultation Plan
- maintain a list of statutory consultations
- work closely with Hackney Strategic Partnership and neighbourhood committees
- monitor implementation of Hackney's Consultation Charter
- ensure that the results of consultation activities are published widely.

Appendix 3 –

Case Studies of consultation exercises carried out at Waltham Forest Council

Case Study One: Consultation on the creation of Community Councils

What?

The purpose of the consultation was to inform the public about Community Councils and also from their feedback to establish the geographical boundaries of the proposed Community Councils.

Why?

Consultation on this issue was important as Community Councils are a new kind of public forum which brings political decision making closer to local people and enables them to influence decisions. Therefore Borough wide consultation was seen to appropriate to inform structure and remit of the proposed Community Councils.

How?

The most important factor taken into consideration when planning the consultation was to ensure everyone could respond if they wanted to. Therefore the easiest method was a questionnaire (done via Mailing Company). Phones do not provide as convenient accessible regarding translations etc) whereas a questionnaire is posted through every door and allows for translation.

Specifically tailored questionnaires were also sent to partner organisations, voluntary organisations (selected Local Strategic Partners, NOW Forum, SRBs, SureStart – ie sent to geographically defined decision-making organisations - and some other borough wide groups such as Agenda 21 and other environ groups.

Additionally 3 Public meetings were held. Also a stand was organised at the Mela festival as there was concern about the response rate from community groups; generally questionnaires not always the best way to consult with black and minority ethnic community groups.

Response Rate:

Over 3500 responses were received. In comparison to other consultations, officer experience has found higher response rates for contentious issues like Council tax, whereas this was not a contentious issue. Nevertheless the response rate provided a good view on 'natural neighbourhoods' – would not get this information via focus groups or conferences and samples. This was subjective, key information that was brought to light via the questionnaire.

Influence of consultation:

Neighbourhoods boundaries were influenced by the responses.

Additionally the results could be useful for other departments who deal with regeneration issues

Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

Issue flagged up:

- A How successfully are black and minority ethnic community groups engaged with their neighbourhood and borough. What is the most effective avenue for accessing these groups? The issue is a live one that needs addressing. Are these communities being contacted about the right issues or are the methods chosen not suitable ie could be about cultural preferences between oral or written contact.
- B Current system of Borough-wide distribution needs to be audited and evaluated eg housing estates repeatedly do not get mailings from the Council, etc.
- C No young people responding.
- D Knowledge sharing: the consultation revealed that people do not identify with the whole borough as they are chiefly concerned about their own walking distance area – borough wide issues may only be focussed on issues such as hospital services. This consultation brought out new ideas of community – eg ideas which would be useful to Regeneration Teams setting up scheme such as Sure Start or to health agencies. Consultations will always fish up information additional to what is being sought and this information needs to be shared within and without the Council for example, Whipps Cross Hospital.
- E Need corporate system for questionnaires such as Snap. Snap allows users to analyse data in house according to individual users' criteria. Snap places datasets on intranets so other multiple users can analyse the same datasets according to their criteria.
- F Audit or Legal departments should be part of consultation group – ie expertise needs to be developed.
- G There should be a prioritisation/hierarchy on who gets consulted and on what. Voluntary sector get a lot of issues coming from different sources. Officer experience shows that external organisations face a consultation overload from the Council as various departments and initiatives consult from within their 'silos'. (Need for greater corporate co-ordination)

Case Study Two: Housing Services

What?

The Group Manager for Housing Policy 60% of the consultation activity that takes places in Housing Services [Consultation carried out by the Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) and by the Homelessness Unit do not fall within his remit].

Why?

Regular consultation activity is required by statute and because of the Service's aim to identify its users needs. In relation to the ALMO there is a Management Board requirement for "autonomy", this will result in a greater take up of ALMO driven consultation.

How?

Housing hold an annual Stakeholder Forum, a Private Sector (private landlords and accommodation agents) Forum three times a year, the statutory Annual Tenants Satisfaction Survey, Leaseholder Satisfaction Survey.

Consultation activity is supported by the usual practical facilities such as translation services, disabled access, crèche facilities, minibus service, varied venues, etc. This area will no doubt expand with requirements placed upon the ALMO.

Response Rate:

Over 14 000 invitations are sent for the Stakeholder Forum highlighting the key issues that will be dealt with. Invites are sent to all tenants, leaseholders, housing associations, councillors, etc. Response rate is 3% (400 responses).

Leaseholder Survey has a 50% response rate – the survey is carried out on a sample size of 750 (half the database) covering all property types and areas. The survey target is to get 500 responses so incentives are used (£50 vouchers).

Influence of consultation:

Neighbourhoods

Issue flagged up:

A The main issue was the low response rates for the Stakeholder Forum.

B The response rate was additionally poor because whilst the gender mix was balanced there were insufficient responses from those under 40 years of age and those from black and minority ethnic groups. Services do not have the specialist consultation expertise to tackle under representation, such issues are more effectively addressed via a centralised consultation resource. For example Housing Services holds data on the ages of tenants – a centralised consultation unit could use this database to more effectively target relevant consultation activity at younger tenants than is the case at present.

B Housing Services felt a need to build up a regular consultation forum along the principles of a Residents Panel so that higher and more representative response rates could be achieved. For example some of Housing Services consultation would

Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

best be done with the wider Borough population, eg consulting on how to spend private sector renewal and repairs funds (totalling £3million per annum).

- C Housing Services felt that there may be scope for greater planning of consultation activity so that workloads could be better managed
- D An internal corporately managed support for consultation activity was required. For example, there are two housing officers part of whose work involves consultation activity. However their professional expertise is based on housing matters not consultation best practice. Therefore such service officers require specialist consultation support from a centrally managed resource which can provide them with guidance and templates on consultation best practice. **(See Recommendation 1)**
- E A centralised, corporate approach to consultation activity should mean more than a written Consultation Strategy, it should include practical help from a dedicated Consultation Officer(s). Some of the practical resources could be as simple as having a centrally maintained list of stakeholders – currently Officers reinvent mailing databases and collate contact details from multiple sources in multiple IT formats. Additionally Officers felt there must be scope for having a uniform template for certain consultation documents ie have a 'consultation brand logo/style'. **(See Recommendation 8)**
- F Greater consideration should be given to targeting groups and to the appropriateness of venues. Housing and ALMO would like to move away from the traditional venues such as Lloyds Park build a greater fresh capacity for cross housing issues. With the same database of attendees and the use of the same venue it is difficult to generate fresh enthusiastic participation by Tenants and Residents alike.

APPENDIX 4

WALTHAM FOREST COUNCIL'S RESIDENTS PANEL

1	<p>How long has the Panel been running? How was it set up (how do residents get on it, how is it funded, etc):</p> <p>The Waltham Forest Residents Panel was established in 1999 to seek the views of local residents on local services. The Panel is made up of 1,500 residents and is currently managed by Bostock Marketing Group Limited (BMG), which have held the contract for the last 3.5 years.</p> <p>Over the last three years the Council has spent approx £71,000 on all Panel related surveys.</p> <p>Participation in the Panel is on a voluntary basis. As part of the recruitment survey, residents are invited to join the Panel based on an area sample calculated by the consultants. This area sample is based on the 1991 census information and is updated using mid-year population estimates.</p>
2	<p>Size and 'make-up' (gender, age, etc):</p> <p>Panel size: 1698 (44% male, 56% female). Panel set up with reference to the 2001 demographic profile of the Borough. The company running the Panel uses the demographic information to establish the representative percentages of the Panel membership with regard to which wards they live in, age, ethnicity and gender. (See Appendix 5).</p>
3	<p>List the types of consultation carried out (e.g. questionnaires, phone interviews, focus groups). What are the costs of such consultations:</p> <p>£102 400 spent on surveys between August 99 - May 03 on 11 surveys. NB. The recruitment survey is usually the most expensive exercise because a larger sample size is used in order to meet the benchmarks for sample categories. In 1999, two recruitment exercises were undertaken: the initial door-to-door survey followed by a postal survey. This second survey bolstered the Panel and helped to improve response rates to subsequent surveys.</p> <p>All postal surveys. Response rates vary from 28% to 62%.</p>
4	<p>Process Officers must go through to submit a consultation to the Panel. What guidance are Officers given:</p> <p>The Residents Panel Officer sends a notice via the Multi-agency Consultation Working Group of a forthcoming residents survey. The members of the Consultation Working group are as follows:</p> <p>Seth Brook (Chair*) London Borough of Waltham Forest +6 officers from across the authority. Inspector Colin White, Metropolitan Police Andrew Attfield, O-Regen Neil Collins and Enrique Saenz, Voluntary Action Waltham Forest</p>

Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

	<p>Ola Kanu and Phillippa Keruish, Waltham Forest Primary Care Trust David Hart, North London – Learning Skills Council Jane Davies, Whipps Cross University Hospital, NHS Trust * Jayshree Boot previously held the Chair before leaving the authority in July 2003.</p> <p>Officers are invited to discuss with the Residents Panel Officer how best to use the Panel to meet their consultation needs. Once this has been identified interested parties are able to submit topics/questions which are used to commission a Panel survey or focus group.</p> <p>Officers are also encouraged to put forward requests for surveys / focus groups. Guidance is always given in helping to identify how the work would best meet their needs.</p>
5	<p>Who ensures the Panel is representative of the Borough population:</p> <p>The census information is used by BMG to set the benchmark for the recruitment of the Panel. Every effort is made to maintain a representative sample of the population. (See Appendix 2 for further details).</p>
6	<p>Who evaluates how feedback of the Panel influences services/policies. Are there performance indicators or other measurements that can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the Panel/such kinds of consultation:</p> <p>A mechanism for such evaluation at a corporate, overview level is not in place. Consultation with the Panel is in response to specific service and policy review, and the use of the Panel and its results are therefore identified when service areas present their proposals for service improvements.</p> <p>Performance indicators or more subjective measures could be developed to assess the impact of consultation (see also question 13 below on development of the Panel).</p> <p>Recommendation 12 of the Panel (see page 19): Progress update to be made to the Scrutiny Commission in July 2004.</p>
7	<p>Details of past consultations (numbers, titles, costs, response rates):</p> <p>Detailed in Appendix 6.</p>
8	<p>How did responses of past Panel consultations influence services/policies:</p> <p>Consultation with the Panel is in response to specific service and policy review. All Best Value consultation is done through the Panel which has a direct impact on the recommendations and action plans that come from the review.</p>

Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

	The Panel has also contributed to wider policy issues including Community Safety and Council Tax priorities.
9	<p>How accessible are the results of past consultations (where are the results kept, are they available electronically, how are the results feedback to Panel/Officers/public, can data be manipulated, etc):</p> <p>Results of all consultation exercises can be found on the Internet and intranet on the Residents Panel pages. This includes a written report and the full data table all in accessible, downloadable formats. Officers and Panel members are also invited to a presentation by BMG who feed back results following each consultation exercise.</p> <p>The public have access to consultation via the internet and Corporate Plan. In addition a Residents Panel Newsletter is circulated to all Panel members.</p>
10	<p>How is the Residents Panel publicised internally and externally:</p> <p>The Panel is publicised internally through the Best Value Consultation Working Group, through the representatives on the Consultation Working Group. The Panel also has its own newsletter that is sent out to Panel members.</p>
11	<p>Do external agencies/partners use the Residents Panel, if yes, how do they access and pay for it:</p> <p>External agencies sit on the Multi-agency Consultation Working Group and are able to put forward questions and have access to all results.</p> <p>Partners are: The Metropolitan Police O-Regen Waltham Forest Primary Care Trust Community Investors Development Agency Voluntary Action Waltham Forest Whipps Cross University Hospital, NHS Trust</p> <p>Payment by external agencies and partners for additional questions is based on an assessment of whether the questions will contribute to the improvement of Council services. If the questions do not fit this criteria, the partner/external agency pays for the questions included in the survey. The Residents Panel Officer makes this assessment.</p>
12	<p>Do external agencies/partners use the results of Residents Panel consultations:</p> <p>External agencies and partners can access the results for their use.</p>
13	<p>Are there any plans for developing the Residents Panel (expansion, setting up a second Panel):</p>

Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

	<p>The management of the Panel is being moved from the Performance Management Team to the Communications Team in September 2003. It is expected that a new Panel will be constituted once the handover has taken place.</p> <p>Issues such as communication, publicity and evaluation of the Panel should be developed with the new Panel.</p>
14	<p>How does the Residents Panel composition address hard-to-reach groups, can it be tailored for 'booster samples' (gender/ethnicity/ward):</p> <p>The categories used to constitute the Panel are very extensive therefore the Panel can be tailored for "booster sampling". (See Appendix 2).</p>
15	<p>Are there other Residents Panels operating in the Borough, for example run by other agencies, which the Council could share data or co-ordinate with:</p> <p>No</p>
	<p>Service's comment to the Scrutiny Panel:</p> <p>The Residents Panel is a key tool for consulting with residents. It has shown that when given the opportunity, residents are interested in making their views heard. The Panel has provided this opportunity for residents to participate in the decision making process, as well as providing a readily available group of residents for consultation purposes across the authority and for its partners and other agencies.</p> <p>A Residents Panel is recognised by authorities and research professionals as a way of meeting the need to consult with residents on service issues. It is seen to give a council a flexible, cost effective way of consulting with residents on a regular basis. It is also acknowledged that it is not an exact science. Although the recruitment questionnaires ask for demographic information in an attempt to match the composition with the profile of the local area, some hard to reach groups like homeless people or people with disabilities would not be best served by a panel.</p> <p>The present Panel has reached its optimum life and this has been recognised. Steps are being taken to recruit new consultants and re-establish the Panel. Work has been done to analyse how representative of the population responses have been to individual surveys. The lessons learnt from this exercise will inform the approach taken to establish a new panel.</p> <p>As the Residents Panel is currently being re-established, the Scrutiny Panel did not look in detail at the Residents Panel. The Scrutiny Panel await the re-establishment of the Residents Panel and how it will be utilised in future, before scrutinising it in detail..</p>

APPENDIX 5: Waltham Forest Residents Panel Size and Make-up

Panel Size 1698

	Gender	Panel Membership		Panel Benchmark		Demographic Profile 2001
	Male	44%		49%		48%
	Female	56%		51%		52%
	Age					
	16-24	10%		18%		14%
	25-34	23%		18%		
	35-44	23%	77%	22%	66%	69%
	45-54	19%		15%		
	55-64	12%		11%		
	65 plus	13%		16%		17%
	Ethnicity					
	White	74%		70%		64%
	Others	26%		30%		36%
	Ward					
LEYTON	Cann Hall	5%	36%	5%	34%	36%
	Cathall	5%		4%		
	Forest	5%		5%		
	Leyton	6%		4%		
	Grove Green	5%		4%		
	Lea Bridge	5%		5%		
	Leytonstone	5%		7%		
WALTHAMSTOW	Hale End	3%	33%	3%	35%	39%
	Higham Hill	3%		3%		
	High Street	5%		6%		
	Hoe Street	6%		5%		
	Lloyds Park	5%		6%		
	St James	6%		6%		
	Wood Street	5%		6%		
CHINGFORD	Chapel End	5%	30%	7%	32%	25%
	Chingford	5%		6%		
	Green					
	Endlebury	4%		3%		
	Hatch Lane	5%		5%		
	Larkswood	6%		6%		
	Valley	5%		5%		

NB The Benchmark is the percent of residents to be recruited from each category. The Benchmark is based on the 2001 demographic profile information supplied to the consultants by the authority.

Source: Bostock Marketing Group (2003) GLA 2000/2001 Demographic Figures5

Survey	Questionnaire Topics	Date	Cost	Number of returns	Response rate	Notes
1. Recruitment Questionnaire	Panel Break Information Health Questions Length of residence in Waltham Forest Use of services in 1998-99 Work status Type of survey use Personal Safety Concern Thoughts on WF Council Opinion of Council Services Waltham Forest Today Contact with Council 1998-99	Aug 99	£36 500	1 770 approx	100%	Door-to-door recruitment survey
2. Recruitment Questionnaire	Reducing crime: CCTV, Personal Safety Local Services: Personal Concern Delivery of Services: Personal Concern Local Concern: Public Concern Delivery of Services: Public Concern Public Toilets Communication/Internet Use Leisure Activities	Oct 99	Cost included in the above	Number not known	Number not known	First postal survey
3	Communication: Newspapers Spending Your Council Tax Communication: Council Information Benefits	11 Nov	£5000	496	28%	
4	Clarence Hotline Parks Trees Allotments Weedbusters	Apr 00	£3 300	493	56%	Non responding

Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

	Consultation					
Recruitment Survey	Postal recruitment survey. Panel size= 1800 approx	Jun 00	£12 000	980 approx	NA	
5	Thoughts On WF Council Opinion Of Council Services Opinion Of Public Services Councils Key Priorities: Importance Contacting the Council Payments to the Council Communication: Council Website Personal Concern	Jun 00	£6 600	1026	55%	
6	Council Tax: Priority on spending for 01 Air Quality: Communication Local Air Quality Management Reducing Crime: CCTV, Personal Safety Voting	Oct 00	£6 500	1085	58%	
7	Community Planning Street Cleansing Road & Pavement Maintenance Complaints Advice Services	Feb 01	£6 750	1144	62%	
8	Leisure: Shopping Concerns about Crime Experience of Crime Refuse Collection Service Internet: access to services Trading Standards and Environmental Health services	May 01	£6 750	1086	62%	
Panel size reduced to 1 752 – natural wastage						
9	Quality of Life of Local Area Council Tax	Aug 01	£6 750	1086	62%	

Public Consultation Scrutiny Panel

	Thoughts on WF Council Library Services					
Panel size reduced to 1 698 – natural wastage						
10	Transport in Waltham Forest Parking Crime and Community Safety Fire Safety Smoking Libraries The Waltham Forest Residents	May 02	£7 000	934	55%	
11	First Stop Shops	May 03	£5 250	635	37%	

This report was approved by the Overview and Scrutiny Commission on February 12th 2004

Contact Officer:

Andrew Knox - Scrutiny Officer
Waltham Forest Council
Forest Road
London E17 4JF
020 8496 4887 www.lbwf.gov.uk