

Agenda Item

Committee: PERFORMANCE SELECT COMMITTEE

Date: 2 August 2007

7

Title: **CONSULTATION FRAMEWORK REPORT**

Author: Paula Evans, Performance Improvement Officer, 01799 510569

Item for decision

Summary

1. This report presents a review of the development of Uttlesford's Consultation Framework. It is intended to provide an update on the status of any project activities that are fundamental to its successful implementation.
2. The implementation of the Consultation Framework will address the majority, if not all, of the issues and subsequent recommendations identified in the Audit Commission's User Focus assessment for 2005/06.
3. The responsibility for co-ordination of any consultation activities within the authority currently resides with the Performance Improvement Team and subsequently now sits within the Partnerships and Performance Division.
4. Development of the Consultation function and resources are currently being discussed by the Director for Communities with Essex County Council as part of developing two-tier working.

Recommendations:

5. That the Committee review this report and identify any required actions. These actions will be minuted and progressed accordingly.

Background Papers

- Government White Paper – Strong & Prosperous Communities

Impact

Communication/Consultation	Consultation exercises will be tailored according to the planned audience
----------------------------	---

Community Safety	There are no direct implications
Equalities	Consultation methods adopted will ensure appropriate considerations of sampling, equality and diversity and hard to reach groups
Finance	The planned consultation strategy will need to take account of any revenue implications at a corporate level for all future consultation exercises. Current planned consultation is contained within existing budgets
Human Rights	Consultation will need to take account of any human rights implications
Legal Implications	There are no direct implications
Sustainability	There are no direct implications
Ward specific impact	All, though specific consultation exercises may take place in individual wards or area panels
Workforce/workplace	Responsibility for consultation sits within the Performance Improvement Team. A dedicated resource will be identified to co-ordinate activities throughout the authority

Situation

6. Following an Audit Commission User Focus assessment for 2005/06 it was highlighted that the authority had a number of weaknesses with regards to its consultation activities. In particular it was noted that the council does not have:

- a consultation framework
- a consultation strategy
- corporate consultation guidelines
- a clear directive or approach to consultation at a corporate level (especially with regard to vulnerable and hard to reach groups)
- a consistent evaluation process with regards to the effectiveness of consultation activities

7. This document provides an update on the activities detailed in the Consultation Framework project plan which has been developed to track the status and progress of each identified activity (see Appendix A attached). This forms part of the overall Corporate User Focus and Community Engagement project plan and is reviewed regularly at corporate level.
8. The Consultation Strategy has now been sent in its draft status for consultation to both the Strategic Management Board and specific Members. Further consultation is intended with Heads of Division, Senior Officers and the general public via the Uttlesford website. A final release date for the completed strategy is planned for mid-September
9. The Consultation Toolkit is being developed by Officers from Uttlesford, Rochford District Council and Essex County Council and is now at a stage where the content has been drafted and will be sent for consultation to all other authorities that may wish to use it within the county. Promotion of the toolkit will be undertaken in the next couple of months by this group.
10. The group were successful in securing funding from a bid to the Buildings Capacity East group. Part of this funding will be used to develop the layout and look of the toolkit on the web and a meeting is to be arranged with a web developer in the coming weeks. The funding was secured on the proviso that the Toolkit will be completed and available for use by December 2007.
11. Initial training on the consultation software package, Snap will be conducted at the end of August. The training will be provided by North Hertfordshire District Council. The Officer providing the training has been involved with consultation and the Snap software package for a number of years and will be able to provide extensive advice and guidance on best use of the system.
12. A pilot of the software will be conducted during August. This will consist of a survey being developed for the Tourism group using Snap and then any returned data being captured and reported via the software. It is hoped that this pilot can then be used to promote the efficiency and effectiveness of the package during its implementation.
13. A Consultation and Communications user group consisting of key Officers involved with either consultation or communications within the authority is to be identified and quarterly meetings scheduled. The main objective of this group will be to promote best practice consultation and communication methods throughout the authority and identify areas for process

improvement. In addition, all Corporate Identity principles will be promoted via this group.

14. A consultation schedule detailing all current and past consultation activities for the authority will eventually be managed and viewed via the Consultation Toolkit. The schedule is currently still under development as details of activities are still being investigated and confirmed, but it is intended to use this document as soon as possible to communicate consultation activity and ensure we are not subjecting our community and its groups to consultation overload. The schedule in its current excel format will be made available on the Intranet in the next couple of weeks.

Risk Analysis

15. The following have been assessed as the potential risks associated with this issue.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
That consultation activities will not be co-ordinated across the authority	Low	High	A Consultation Framework is implemented and communicated to all Officers Consultation activities are managed using a toolkit and information site The Performance Improvement Team facilitate all consultation activities within the authority