

**Update from Scrutiny Chairman to Cabinet: 14 June 2016**

This report provides an update on the following scrutiny meetings:

Scrutiny Committee – 7 June 2016

Education and Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee – 9 June 2016

**Scrutiny Committee – 7 June 2016**

1. The Scrutiny Committee met on 7 June 2016, when it considered and made recommendations in respect of the County Council’s approach to consultation.
2. The Committee heard evidence from officers of the County Council’s Communications and Business Development Teams, and considered case studies from Children and Young People’s Services and the Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service. The Committee heard that service specific consultation and engagement was usually managed within Directorates, with advice from corporate communications and business development as required. Corporate consultations, such as the residents’ survey and budget consultation were usually managed from within the corporate centre.
3. In light of the evidence received, the Committee agreed:
  - a. To endorse a review and refresh of the County Council’s corporate guidance on consultation and engagement;
  - b. To recommend officers from Communications and Business Development develop a “centre of excellence”, supported by a set of clear, concise corporate protocols for officers undertaking consultation or engagement activity, which include:
    - i. what constitutes ‘consultation’, ‘involvement’ and ‘engagement’ and the circumstances in which these should and should not be used;
    - ii. the key principles of consultation, practice and case law;
    - iii. details of the knowledge and resources available within the corporate centre, what can be provided and advice on the circumstances in which this should be referred to;
    - iv. highlighting good practice and the benefits of planning at the earliest stage, (ie deciding upon purpose, type of activity, costing delivery options and evaluation; as in the commissioning cycle - analyse, plan, do, review);
    - v. the need to consider, at analysis and planning stage, whether the exercise will be engagement, involvement or consultation in order to be clear to the public and stakeholders from the outset how their contributions will be used;
    - vi. the need to be clear, when the Council is undertaking an exercise on behalf of, or in partnership with, other organisations, who will be responsible for final decision making;

- vii. advice on how consultation activity should be costed, on a full cost basis, in order to help inform future decision making about the use of internal or external resources and to provide clarity about the real cost of consultation activities;
  - viii. advice on stakeholder mapping, including consideration of which councillors and local forums may have an interest. Notification of relevant town/parish councils, Ipswich Area Committees and appropriate bodies for Lowestoft should always form part of the stakeholder group;
  - ix. a system which requires Directorates to contribute to and update a central log of consultation and engagement activity.
- c. To recommend to the Corporate Management Team that staff training and communications should be developed to raise corporate awareness of the refreshed guidelines (once complete) and to provide officers involved in this activity with a sound understanding of the principles and pitfalls of consultation and engagement.
  - d. To request an information bulletin on the current status and membership of the Suffolk 1000, an overview of what the forum has been/will be involved in and details of how vulnerable and hard to reach groups are represented on this forum;
  - e. To endorse work taking place to improve access to County Council information for speakers of languages other than English (including promotion of plain English and use of google translate).
  - f. To ask the Head of Strategic Communications and Customer Service to give consideration to whether commercial opportunities exist in relation to consultation activity.
  - g. To seek an information bulletin on progress at its meeting on 20 December 2016.
  - h. To request that all councillors receive further information about the arrangements for public consultation/engagement on devolution proposals.
4. The minutes of the meeting are due to be confirmed at the next meeting on 29 June 2016.

## **Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee**

- 5. The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee met on Thursday 9 June 2016, when it considered items on Suffolk Family Focus, an update on Making Every Intervention Count and School Education Performance and Trends.
- 6. At the time of writing the recommendations are being prepared and will be reported in full to the next meeting of Cabinet.