

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

4 SEPTEMBER 2017 - 2.30PM



PRESENT: Councillor F H Yeulett (Chairman), Councillor Mrs A Hay (Vice-Chairman), Councillor G G R Booth, Councillor Mrs M Davis, Councillor D Hodgson and Councillor D Mason

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Tanfield and Councillor Sutton

APOLOGIES: Councillor S Clark, Councillor S Count, Councillor Mrs D Laws, Councillor Mrs K F Mayor and Councillor A Pugh

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE: Jane Bailey (Member Services and Governance), Anna Goodall (Head of Legal and Governance), Carol Pilson (Corporate Director) and David Wright (Policy and Communications Manager)

OSC14/17 PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the 31 July 2017 were confirmed and signed.

Matters Arising and Updates:

- Councillor Yeulett confirmed that he has signed a letter to the LEP which outlines the responsibilities for the actions from the Overview and Scrutiny Panel Meeting they attended. He suggested that the panel may want to meet with the LEP again in the future for a further update.
- Councillor Yeulett asked for an update with regards to the panel's recommendations log. Anna Goodall confirmed that it is being finalised.

OSC15/17 DRAFT CONSULTATION STRATEGY 2017 - 2020

Members considered the Draft Consultation Strategy 2017 - 2020 presented by Councillor Tanfield.

Members asked questions, made comments and received responses as follows:

1. Councillor Yeulett stated that it is a good report. It is difficult to engage people with a consultation exercise unless it is about a subject which they feel very strongly about, the brown bins consultation was a good example of this;
2. Councillor Mason stated that the CSR consultation had a very good response rate too, 76% of the respondents were from rural areas. He asked if there was anything to learn from that, did we pick up on particular issues with the rural community. Councillor Tanfield confirmed that no particular issues were picked up with people living in the rural areas, but maybe they just felt more inclined to be involved. She stated that some of the reasoning behind that will just be the demographics of the people who complete the consultation forms, there can be many reasons behind this. Moving forward we might want to think about how we word a consultation to ensure that everybody understands what affect the outcomes might have on them with a view to engaging more responses;
3. Councillor Mason asked how we collate feedback for consultations from the Golden Age Events. Councillor Tanfield confirmed that the consultation forms are available at Golden Age Events. They are an older demographic of people so are much more likely to want to get involved in the community. Councillor Mason agreed and stated that more than a third of the people responding in the CSR consultation were between the age of 60 - 74;

4. Councillor Mrs Davis asked how we target a younger audience. Councillor Tanfield stated that we would like to be able to target a younger audience and would like to engage people in their 30's;
5. Councillor Mrs Davis suggested that a good way to target people is through the local schools, sending out information via school bags to parents. She asked if we have targeted families in this way. Councillor Tanfield stated that this is a good idea. David Wright stated that we do look at local events that are taking place and historically we have marketed leisure information via schools. Carol Pilson confirmed that this is something we are looking particularly in Wisbech around the 2020 vision, to send out good news stories which will need to be presented in such a way that it engages the audience that it is being distributed to;
6. Councillor Yeulett stated there was a good success rate with regards to the Brown Bin and CSR consultations because the subject was of interest to many people, and asked if it would be worth targeting specific audiences for future consultations. Councillor Tanfield stated that she feels this goes against what the point of a consultation is about. When we have consulted on sports we did only need to go to the sports bodies because of the type of consultation that it was, but most of the time we would want to incorporate as many people as possible, we also need to recognise that people do not have a view on some things, but would always take it case by case;
7. Councillor Mrs Davis asked when we have had a successful survey do we publicise that to engage people for the next survey. Carol Pilson confirmed that the front page of the website has a tab that links to our on-going consultations, we publish past results on some of the surveys, but that is something that we recognise that we could improve on as we have not always published the results. We want to be able to communicate results back to customers that have engaged to give confidence that we do use the information from these exercises. Councillor Tanfield stated that we started to collect email addresses from people as part of the CSR consultation and are building up that database;
8. Councillor Booth stated that consultations are sent out to all households, however he received complaints that some people did not receive theirs and suggested that a more robust process is in place to ensure that this does not happen in the future. Councillor Tanfield stated that we must be mindful to show that we want to include everybody and do not want to deter anyone that feels that they want to be involved. We could ensure moving forward that copies are provided to Town and Parish Councils and residents could be signposted to collect a form if theirs had not arrived;
9. Councillor Mrs Davis stated that anything sent out in the post must stand out and be clear so that it does not just end up in the bin. Councillor Tanfield confirmed that this is a big challenge and we are mindful about how our letter looks;
10. Councillor Booth asked how the addresses are determined. Carol Pilson confirmed that the addresses are picked up from our official list of addresses;
11. Councillor Booth stated that most of the people who contacted him were in the outlying areas and asked if there is a chance that any were missed in this way. Councillor Tanfield stated that when we next carry out a consultation those areas should be checked to ensure that they are included;
12. Carol Pilson stated that the sentiment was right as we wanted to get the consultation to all households but there were a couple of issues and it was delivered with other mail so was folded with leaflets etc. She suggested that maybe moving forward members could have additional copies so if they are approached by residents they could provide the forms;
13. Councillor Hodgson stated that with regards to the Wisbech Access Strategy which starts in a few days, the survey is available in various places for the duration of the exercise, he asked if it is better this way or to make it available just online. Councillor Tanfield stated that when the survey is relevant and local to you people are much more inclined to want to get involved. It is possible that by going around to different areas we will get more people involved in the consultation;

14. Councillor Mrs Hay stated that the use of Towns and Parishes is not included in the table of consultation methods on page 18 of the report, although it is mentioned later in the Strategy. Councillor Tanfield agreed to amend the ;
15. Councillor Mrs Hay stated that Chatteris has a quarterly newsletter which is distributed to every household as do many other Town and Parish Councils, she asked if we make use of these to inform residents about consultations. David Wright confirmed that we have used these for bigger consultations when the publications overlap with a consultation, but is something that we could build into the process moving forward;
16. Councillor Mrs Hay asked if it is a statutory requirement to conduct a consultation. Carol Pilson stated that we have a duty to consult, it is a case by case basis to what degree we should carry out the consultation, but on any major policy introduction or change we have to demonstrate that a level of consultation has taken place;
17. Councillor Mrs Hay stated that there will be some consultations that are not statutory and in those cases do we look at costs and do we learn from experience and look at previous response rates to ensure that we are not consulting for consulting sake? Councillor Tanfield confirmed that we look closely case by case and do not consult for consulting sake;
18. Councillor Yeulett stated that other authorities go out to consultation, he asked if we ever look at any other results for guidance. David Wright stated that when we delivered the Garden Waste consultation we looked at what other authorities had done, what return rates were and we used a lot of information gathered around this for our consultation methods. Carol Pilson confirmed that we try to pick up any guidance looking at the LGA for best practice gathered from councils that they work with and we also work with our partners too so if we carry out a consultation and get comments about things that are not our responsibility we will forward them to the relevant authority. She added that we work with other authorities via social media to share and re-tweet updates when they are consulting and they do the same for us too;
19. Councillor Booth suggested that something that could be added to the strategy is that the level of consultation that we undertake depends on the severity of the issue as that is not clear in the document. Councillor Tanfield agreed as the more important that a subject is to someone the more likely they are to get involved, but if the subject is not of general interest there is no benefit to consulting with everyone;
20. Councillor Booth stated that he does not feel that there is strong awareness around the parish and town publications across the district. Councillor Tanfield suggested that it would be useful to compile a list of who to contact with regards to these publications and overtime include them in the planning stages of a consultation;
21. Councillor Mrs Hay stated that local newsletters could be used to publicise good news stories about what the Council is doing across the district as these publications go into every home in the area. Councillor Tanfield agreed;
22. Councillor Mrs Davis added that all Town and Parish Councils have a website, and many people in rural areas look at this website for local updates. Carol Pilson stated that we copy our press releases to all members and these could be forwarded to Town and Parish Clerks with a message to say that if they think it will be helpful they are welcome to publish it to their website or pass on to their members;
23. Councillor Mrs Davis stated that the phrasing of the questions can sometimes make people feel that they are led into answers. Councillor Tanfield stated that this is a good point but sometimes when there are just 2 possible answers to a question we can only offer 2 options as a response and we are mindful to make it clear and simple to complete but we do not want people to feel that they are being led to a particular answer. She added that looking back at the CSR consultation process it was very difficult to ask the questions in a simple way to ensure that everybody would understand;

24. Councillor Booth referred to page 14 and the paragraph 'Consultation will enable an informed opinion' and page 22 refers to not having loaded questions. He stated that he feels that we need to make the paragraph on page 14 clearer around not asking a loaded question; previously there has not just been an option to say that you do not agree with a proposal. Councillor Tanfield stated that we are trying to engage with people to get a response and you want them to understand that there might be a benefit behind a simple question;
25. Councillor Mason stated that there needs to be a balance with regards to the questions with the possibility that respondents could make comments at the end of the survey. Councillor Booth agreed that this is a good approach. Councillor Tanfield stated that we are looking to get as many comments as we can and would hate to think that people felt the questions were loaded, she agreed that a box for comments might be useful especially with big consultations as although we cannot take on board every comment that is made we may be able to pick up a theme;
26. Councillor Mrs Hay asked if we ask for feedback on the questionnaires following a consultation and suggested a question at the end of the survey to ask how easy it was to complete. Carol Pilson agreed that is a good idea, she stated that what has worked well in the past was to ask people to provide their email addresses if they wanted to be involved in future consultations and we received 6000 email addresses. This shows that they want to stay involved with the process and we have used those addresses for any relevant consultations and continue to ask people to provide email addresses to add to that database;
27. Councillor Booth stated that page 16 shows a graph outlining the consultation methods and talks about online surveys having the highest reach. He stated that this does not take into account that we know that there is not a high take up online in Fenland compared to other parts of the country. David Wright confirmed that the graph is also an indicator against cost. Councillor Booth stated that it is slightly misrepresenting the situation in Fenland. Carol Pilson stated that a lot of Councils will just publish a consultation online but in the strategy we use multi-channels as we know we cannot rely on online responses alone;
28. Councillor Booth asked if we use OCR technology for postal surveys. David Wright stated that this is the first couple of times that we have conducted surveys in this way and we were not expecting the volume of response that we had. Carol Pilson agreed that it is something that we can investigate moving forward as it was very labour intensive;
29. Councillor Yeulett stated that people are interested in what we are doing as a Council and Councillors are stopped and asked questions all the time. Carol Pilson stated that this a key role as a Councillor, it is important that members are kept informed about consultations that are on-going and agreed this is something that should be part of the process;
30. Councillor Booth referred to the rating scales on page 23, he asked if we have a consistent approach across the Council especially around the neutral response. Councillor Tanfield agreed that we need to have a consistent approach. He added that he is happy to see that we are using net promoter technology and asked how it is working. David Wright stated that currently this is just used for leisure but is something we want to look at for other surveys;
31. Councillor Yeulett asked where the best results are received from. Carol Pilson confirmed that it tends to be the older demographic, 55+, however we have seen a response from all ages when the subject is something that they feel affects them;
32. Councillor Booth asked if we audit or perform audits with partner organisations to demonstrate that we have taken feedback on board and what we have done with it, as we have been criticised in the past for not making any changes following a consultation exercise. Carol Pilson stated that some services publicise 'You Said, We Did' to demonstrate that we are taking comments on board, and this is something that we could look into more following consultation exercises. She added that we have our Customer Services Excellence (CSE) reaccreditation and a key part of that is consultation, running them and acting on the results, so there is a form of audit through that process to some degree.

Anna Goodall outlined the following recommendations:

- Engagement with Town and Parish Councils to be specifically captured within the methodology table as they are intrinsic to successful consultation;
- Raising awareness regarding local Parish publications to ensure that we make best use of those in addition to potentially sharing good news stories;
- Sharing press releases with Town and Parish Council Clerks to enable them to be shared on the parish website;
- Considering the use of OCR technology for future surveys;
- Ensuring that members are informed about consultation as they are an effective conduit for engaging with members of the public;
- Ensuring that there is a consistent approach to rating scales.

Councillor Tanfield thanked the Overview and Scrutiny Panel for the points raised today and stated that their input is very useful.

Councillor Yeulett thanked everybody for their attendance at today's meeting.

OSC16/17 FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered the Future Work Programme 2017/18 for the Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

The Panel discussed the possibility of an additional meeting to consider the feedback from the Selective Licensing Review and to ensure that the Panel devote their whole attention to that item; they provisionally agreed to 29 November 2017.

Councillor Yeulett stated that the Overview and Scrutiny Panel have a very heavy workload and asked senior officers to take that into account when bringing items forward for consideration.

Members agreed the Future Work Programme 2017/18 for the Overview and Scrutiny Panel subject to the additional meeting outlined above.

3.30pm

Chairman