

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: **CABINET**

DATE: **TUESDAY, 16 OCTOBER 2012**

REPORT BY: **CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

SUBJECT: **CITIZEN CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT -
STRATEGIC APPROACH**

1.00 **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.01 To seek Cabinet's approval of a set of Core Consultation and Engagement Principles and the development of a Strategic Forward Work Programme.

2.00 **BACKGROUND**

2.01 Improving citizen engagement and empowering local communities to have a voice is a priority for the Council's political leadership.

Wales Audit Office proposals for improvement (highlighted in its 'Regulatory Programme for Improvement 2012/13' report) also state that the Council should "develop an improved corporate approach to engagement with communities and users of services including arrangements to enhance the contribution of elected members."

2.02 During the period 2006 to 2010 the Council procured and made use of the services of external research company, BMG Research, to undertake biennial Household Surveys.

Whilst these surveys provided useful data in terms of residents' views, they were merely a snapshot in time, capturing isolated views and opinions without any means of further more detailed interaction or engagement with respondents.

2.03 The Council has since endorsed its support to the [National Principles for Public Engagement](#), developed by Participation Cymru on behalf of Welsh Government.

2.04 Across the organisation we have excellent examples of best practice in citizen/customer consultation/engagement, particularly with young people, older people and service users.

2.05 Since the end of the research contract, consultations on corporate issues have continued to take place, with the views of the wider public being sought on such things as the 2012/13 budget setting process and the Council's Administration Priorities. Response rates to these surveys were very low.

- 2.06 The success or failure of any consultation/engagement activity can be directly attributed to the level of investment in the planning and preparation stage, having a clear understanding of the 'What, Why, Who, How and When'. In developing a strategic approach to our consultation activity, a strategic forward plan is needed, identifying key topics with associated timescales.

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.01 To fully plan and prepare a varied range of consultation/engagement activity, the subtleties between Corporate Activity and Service Generated Activity need to be clear and well defined.

Corporate Activity – where views and opinions are sought on:

- high level, corporate initiatives, to inform strategic direction and organisational development
- high profile, high impact, high risk service initiatives e.g. housing ballot, school modernisation, Streetscene service changes, work with key inspections e.g. Estyn

Stakeholders may be the general population of Flintshire or specific targeted groups and the views of service users and non service are equally important.

The Chief Executive, his Corporate Management Team, relevant portfolio holders and other interested parties, supported by Corporate Communications, will be responsible for developing and implementing strategy and forward plans around Corporate Activity.

Service Generated Activity – where views and opinions are sought on:

- a range of service specific issues, such as customer satisfaction, service improvement and/or development, etc.

Stakeholders will primarily be service users, which depending on the nature of the service, could be the general population or specific targeted groups. The views of non service users may on occasion be sought to assist in service development and/or improvement.

Directors, Service Heads, portfolio holders and other interested parties will be responsible for developing and implementing strategy and forward plans for all their Service Generated Activity. Support is available via Corporate Communications in developing the strategy, plan and methodologies to be used.

- 3.02 To apply consistency for its citizens, the Council needs to adopt a core set of Consultation and Engagement Principles (see Appendix 1). These should be high level overarching principles, which set the context for all activity generated by the Council and clearly define the

minimum standards which can be expected by the Citizens of Flintshire.

- 3.03 Elected Members are crucial to the success of any consultation and engagement activity. They are often the people who are most closely linked to the communities we serve and often have access to networks and intelligence that would otherwise be unavailable to us. The involvement of Elected Members from inception to conclusion is crucial to the success of our engagement activity and they must be involved from the very early stages of the planning process. Corporate and Service Generated activity will ensure the agreement, support and ownership of relevant portfolio holders and other interested parties.
- 3.04 A Strategic forward plan needs to be developed and implemented identifying the 'what, why, who, how and when'. Forward planning should ensure that activity is complete, including analysis, in sufficient time to inform the decision making process.
- 3.05 Forward plans should be subject to quarterly reviews. This will build in adequate planning and preparation time at the very early stage of the process.
- 3.06 One size does not fit all in terms of consultation and engagement activity. To generate full and frank debate, methodologies need to be specifically tailored to the target audience.
- 3.07 Innovative practices should be developed and encouraged along with the use of Social Media as an engagement tool. Sharing internal and external best practice will help services understand the range of methodologies available. We need to gather best practice case studies, in an easily accessible format. We should also promote widely the [National Practitioners Manual for Public Engagement](#), produced by Participation Cymru on behalf of Welsh Government, to assist people in planning their consultation and engagement activity.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.01 That Cabinet approve the core principles attached at Appendix 1.
- 4.02 That Cabinet approve the development of a Corporate Activity Forward Work Plan (FWP), in consultation with relevant services, portfolio holders and other interested parties, for further approval by Cabinet in order to start a programmed activity of work.
- 4.03 That Cabinet approve the development of Directorate Activity Forward Work Plans, at Head of Service Business Level or Directorate Plan Level, in consultation with relevant portfolio holders and other interested parties, in order to begin a programmed activity of work.

4.04 That Cabinet approve the development of a central database/calendar of activity to identify who is doing what and when, consider potential areas for collaboration, avoidance of duplication and over consultation with specific groups of people.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.01 No identifiable implications at this stage.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

6.01 No identifiable impact at this stage.

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

7.01 No identifiable impact at this stage.

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.01 Adopting a strategic approach to consultation and engagement, along with a set of core overarching principles, will ensure the views and opinions of the diverse range of Flintshire citizens will be invited and taken into account as part of the Council's decision making processes.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.01 No identifiable impact at this stage.

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

10.01 Consultation with relevant Council officers, portfolio holders and other interested parties in the development of both Corporate and Directorate Activity Forward Work Plans.

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

11.01 Consultation on the development of Forward Work Plans will commence following the agreement of Cabinet to proceed.

12.00 APPENDICES

12.01 Draft Core Principles for Public Engagement

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

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