

## REPORT TO CABINET

Title: **COMMUNITY CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK**

Date: 23 July 2009

Member Reporting: Councillor Mrs Bateson

Contact Officer(s): Andrew Elkington, Head of Policy and Performance  
Anne Dackombe, Communications and Marketing Manager

Wards affected: All

### 1. SUMMARY

- 1.1.1 This report reflects the Council's commitment to community consultation and engagement to ensure that the views of residents are taken into account in service planning and development. In particular, it ensures that the Council complies with the Duty to Involve which came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009. In so doing, it sets out a comprehensive framework for ensuring that consultation is at the heart of the Council's business and an action plan for setting up the structures to take it forward.

### 2. RECOMMENDATION:

**That the consultation and community engagement framework and action plan be approved.**

What will be different for residents as a result of this decision?
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Residents' views will be taken into account in the future planning, development and monitoring of local services. They will have an important voice in influencing Council priorities and how public money is spent on services that they need and want in their community.
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### 3. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1.1 The Royal Borough's Consultation Strategy 2007 – 2010 (agreed by Cabinet December 2007) sets the overarching policy for consultation and engagement and offers the opportunity for building a strong framework to take these forward in the future.
- 3.1.2 A new framework is essential to drive forward the Council's commitment to consultation and engagement, also taking into account recent developments such as the emerging complementary Communications Strategy and the growth of new technologies. In addition, the Duty to Involve (Local Government and Involvement in Local Health Act 2007), which came into being on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009, seeks to ensure that

local people have greater opportunities to have their say. As a consequence the Council needs to consider the aspects of information provision, consultation and involvement opportunities that are made available to our residents and customers.

- 3.1.3 The Council is committed to involving local people in planning its priorities so that public money is spent wisely on services that residents need and want. This responsive approach means that seeking local people's views is key to service planning and development. It is important to have a consultation framework in place that allows for rapid and flexible feedback on policy decisions as well as more lengthy fact-finding exercises. The draft framework allows for this. The draft framework also demonstrates how consultation can be moved forward to engage with residents in a variety of meaningful ways, including using new technologies to encourage increased participation.
- 3.1.4 The framework has been shared with partners in the Local Strategic Partnership and, as such, the document emphasises how consultation can be used to benefit member organisations, for example through sharing information, pooling expertise and resources and sharing opportunities to reach target audiences.
- 3.1.5 In addition the document proposes that a structure be put in to place to drive, monitor and evaluate consultation, including the rejuvenation of the The ViewPoint Panel – the borough's citizens' panel of 1,000 residents. The panel will be managed, monitored and refreshed (by one-third annually) using a specialist market research agency to ensure quality and integrity of information and robust interpretation of results.
- 3.1.6 It is essential that consultation is recognised an integral part of all Council services and based on identified business priorities. The framework sets out an internal process management system to enable quality of control and feedback to those residents that have been involved in consultation processes. Included within this are a central register for all external consultations, the re-establishment of the Strategic Consultation Group (involving key partners) and the development of consultation standards. These measures will help embed consultation throughout the organisation, resulting in enhanced links with partners and stronger relationships with our residents.
- 3.1.7 BMG Research has now been appointed as the council's market research consultant at a cost of £12,350 for the replenishment and maintenance of the ViewPoint Panel. The fees will be met within this year's corporate consultation budget (£31,340). It is not possible at this stage to predict the costs of consultation exercises during the year ahead as this will depend on service needs and will be co-ordinated through the new Strategic Consultation Group. The cost of such consultation will be met within service budgets but opportunities for cost-sharing will be explored between services and also with partner organisations.
- 3.1.8 BMG has also supplied a menu of consultation methods at fixed prices which may be used by council services as required.

## 4. OPTIONS AVAILABLE AND RISK ASSESSMENT

### 4.1 Options

	Option	Comments	Financial Implications
1.	<p>Do nothing</p> <p>Not recommended</p>	<p>Consultation will continue on an ad hoc basis without corporate overview and direction or, potentially without partnership involvement</p> <p>In addition, the council could not adequately answer the question of whether value for money is being provided in this area.</p>	<p>Consultations are funded by the individual services</p> <p>Resources regarding consultation and engagement may not be used in the most appropriate manner</p>
2.	<p>Adopt the new framework and action plan for community consultation and engagement</p> <p><b>Recommended option</b></p>	<p>This will put consultation at the heart of service planning, and development, give residents a clear voice and demonstrate the Council's openness and responsiveness to residents' needs</p>	<p>Policy and Performance holds a core budget which will enable the minimum amount of consultation, including the appointment of a market research company. Additional resources will have to be found for any further work selected from the menu of additional options provided by the appointed company.</p> <p>Cost of market research company as set out in 3.1.7</p> <p>Most of the work involved in implementing the framework is in staff time. Currently there is no additional staff resource to undertake the activities outlined in the action plan.</p>

	Option	Comments	Financial Implications
			Services areas would continue to bear the cost of their individual consultation needs. How proposals would impact on service budgets to be advised through the Strategic Consultation Group.
3.	Implement the ViewPoint Panel but leave the remainder of consultation on an ad hoc basis  Not recommended	This option would enable the Council to get residents' views on key service development issues. However, there would be no direct link between the panel outcomes and the remainder of the consultation function, nor would there be a corporate direction to link consultation with the Council's key priorities	Market research company costs as at 3.1.7  Most of the consultation work would remain on an ad hoc basis in service areas, which would bear the cost. How proposals would impact on service budgets to be advised through individual services.

## 4.2 Risk assessment

The risk of not implementing the framework and action plan would be to leave the Council without a clear direction for consultation, which would then continue on an ad hoc basis. This would not provide value for money nor would it allow elected members the opportunity to meet residents' concerns and visions for the area. There is a need for a well-thought-out corporate communication direction that makes consultation a key element of all service planning and development. Without this, the Council would be at risk of criticism in the CAA process (which puts consultation at the heart of Council provision) and would in reality leave the Council without the steer of its residents in establishing its priorities.

## 5. CONSULTATIONS CARRIED OUT

5.1.1 Consultation with partner organisations has resulted in a number of useful additions to the draft, including reference to other organisations which will be of help in engaging the community, such as parish councils, LINKs, patients groups etc. The term 'hard-to-reach' groups has been altered in the document to 'easy-to-overlook' groups, reflecting consultation feedback. Other suggestions relating to the practicalities of consultation will be addressed through the proposed Strategic Consultation Group

## 6. COMMENTS FROM THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

6.1.1 The Panel endorsed the recommendation to adopt the new framework and action plan for community consultation, subject to the following comments:

- any proposals to revamp the Council's website should be submitted to the Panel for consideration
- the report should provide some indication, in broad terms, of the staff time that would be required to implement the Action Plan
- the monthly table of consultations should be emailed to all Councillors
- the Panel would welcome the opportunity to comment on any proposal to establish an annual residents' survey.

## 7. IMPLICATIONS

Financial	Legal	Human Rights Act	Planning	Sustainable Development	Diversity & Equality
✓		✓	✓	✓	✓

Background Papers: None

