

14 March 2017		ITEM: 6
Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Consultations in 2016		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-key	
Report of: Karen Wheeler, Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Services		
Accountable Head of Service: n/a		
Accountable Director: Karen Wheeler, Director of Strategy, Communications and Customer Services		
This report is public		

Executive Summary

The council undertakes a number of different consultation exercises each year. Feedback from residents and other stakeholders is vital to inform the development of key strategies, improve service delivery and gauge resident and service user satisfaction.

This report highlights those consultations that the council has undertaken in the last year, their cost and their response rates as requested by the committee in November 2016.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 To note and make any comments on the consultation undertaken in 2016 in Appendix 1.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee in November 2016 requested a report outlining the consultations carried out by the council over the past twelve months including details of cost and the level of response.

2.2 The council has an online consultation portal overseen by the Community Development team within Adults, Health and Housing. This is the primary tool for all consultations and surveys. The portal's main use is for online

consultation with members of the public, however, the portal can also be used for the following:

- Stakeholder database – customers choose topics that they want to engage in and can be emailed opportunities based on their preferences
- Ability to view all past, current and upcoming engagement through the portal
- Surveys – these are the most commonly used type of engagement
- Polls – basic polls can be generated for online completion
- Discussion boards – used to generate discussion. Similar to most online discussion boards you can post new threads or comment on existing threads.
- E-petitions – anyone can start a petition through the portal which is monitored by Democratic Services
- Reports – generated through the system and can be filtered as needed. They can then be exported either to excel or as a PDF report including graphical analysis.

2.3 Subscription to the consultation portal costs approximately £7k per annum for use across the council. In 2016, the portal was used for:

- 19 public consultations or surveys (available on the website)
- 17 consultations for targeted groups (available via direct web link)
- 9 other engagement events (e.g. links to consultations that effect Thurrock residents hosted elsewhere such as Essex Fire and Rescue Consultation)

2.4 A list of all consultations, including those using the council's on-line portal is attached at Appendix 1 along with details on response rates.

2.5 Depending on the consultation and target audience, hard copies of the surveys are also circulated or made available on request. Assistance is also offered to support residents to complete the online version.

2.6 Communication of the consultation is carried out in a variety of ways, again dependent on the scale of the consultation e.g. when borough wide for all residents or targeted to a specific service user. A range of communication tools are used including press releases, social media, advertising in the local media, sharing through user groups and partners such as the voluntary sector and businesses.

2.7 The consultation portal provides an effective means for collecting quantitative data against set questions. Larger consultation exercises – often impacting the whole borough, or likely to result in a change in service offer, also include face to face engagement to understand how people feel about proposals. Community engagement helps to raise awareness about a formal consultation, and supports a more qualitative approach to understanding impact. This is especially important when considering our duties under the Equality Act.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

In addition to the consultation listed in Appendix 1, there were three key, large-scale public consultation exercises undertaken during 2016: Local Plan, Health and Well Being Strategy and Resident Survey. A summary of each of these is provided below.

3.1 Local Plan

3.1.1 As part of the formal plan-making process, the council is required to consult the local community, businesses and stakeholders on the content of the Local Plan. On 24 February 2014, Council authorised a six week public consultation on the Thurrock Local Plan Issues and Options (Stage 1) Document and other related documents which is one part of the engagement required.

3.1.2 During the consultation period the draft documents were made available on the council's website with comments being encouraged through the council's consultation portal and on comment forms which were available on request at the Civic Offices and in libraries across the borough.

3.1.3 A number of different engagement activities have been utilised including roadshows, community forums and community events such as the Orsett Show.

3.1.4 The cost of the consultation was approximately £22,000 including venue hire, all the consultation documents and campaign materials such as pop-up banners.

3.1.5 A full detailed report was presented to Council in September 2016 and can be found at:

<https://thurrockintranet.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&MIId=5021&Ver=4>

3.2 Health and Well Being (HWB) Strategy

3.2.1 Consultation and engagement was carried out on the initial priority areas and Outcomes Framework throughout the development of the HWB Strategy. This included:

- An on-line survey to test initial areas of focus
- Face-to-face contact with residents on the survey – primarily through Healthwatch, engage and Thurrock Coalition
- Attendance at community meetings e.g. community forums, commissioning reference group, Youth Cabinet
- Discussions at staff forums
- Discussion with partner organisations and committee meetings e.g. Children and Young People's Partnership Board, HWB Overview & Scrutiny (O&S) Committee, Children's Services O&S Committee, HWB Board, Clinical Engagement Group, Head Teachers' Forum

- Development and input via HWB Strategy Steering Group members
- 3.2.2 The number of completed surveys during the period 21 November 2015 – 22 January 2016 totalled 539.
- 3.2.3 Specific and collated responses were also received from different voluntary sector organisations – namely SERICC and Thurrock Coalition.
- 3.2.4 There were no direct financial costs associated with the consultation on the HWB Strategy. It was carried out via the consultation portal, through our partnerships with Healthwatch and Thurrock Coalition and by attending events which were already taking place.
- 3.2.5 A full detailed report was presented to Council in March 2016 and can be viewed at:
<https://thurrockintranet.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&MIId=4804&Ver=4>

3.3 Resident Survey

- 3.3.1 Best practice for large scale resident consultation is to commission a market research company to carry out the survey on the council's behalf. This ensures independence and a statistical robustness to the results. Also the research company conducts the survey, collates the results, analyses the data and reports back on the outcomes.
- 3.3.2 BMG Research carried out 1,000 telephone interviews with Thurrock residents on the council's behalf between late November and early December 2016, achieving a representative sample of the population across the borough.
- 3.3.3 This is the first survey since 2010 and is an important opportunity to capture local people's experiences and perceptions of the place, their community, the council and its services, that can be considered representative of the wider Thurrock population.
- 3.3.4 Through the survey, the council can establish a new baseline for perception levels to inform areas of focus across the borough and in specific wards as well as our approach to service delivery and communication and engagement with residents. The results will also inform the key performance indicators (KPIs) used going forward to reflect the issues of most concern to residents as well as provide evidence to help with policy direction and decision-making.
- 3.3.5 The majority of residents are satisfied with Thurrock as a place to live with many feeling a sense of belonging, where people from different backgrounds get on well together. In summary, the most positive results about the place were:

- 69% of residents satisfied with their local area as a place to live
- 70% feel that they belong strongly to their local area
- 61% agree that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together
- 89% feel safe when outside in their local area during the day

3.3.6 The results clearly show that the issues of most importance to Thurrock residents are the maintenance of roads such as fixing potholes, waste and recycling collections, and parks, playgrounds and green spaces. The most common neighbourhood issue is rubbish or litter lying around. Tackling these issues has already been identified as a priority as part of the clean it, cut it, fill it approach.

3.3.7 Satisfaction with these services has room for improvement, although waste and recycling services is the most well regarded with 70% of residents satisfied. Areas for improvement include:

- 23% of residents satisfied with the maintenance and upkeep of roads (61% dissatisfied)
- 45% satisfied with street cleaning
- 46% satisfied with parks, playgrounds and open spaces
- 50% satisfied with the grounds maintenance service
- 55% satisfied with the way the council runs things
- 56% feel safe when outside in their local area after dark

3.3.8 Cabinet, on 8 March 2017, will be considering the results and proposed action to be taken including on service delivery, communication and customer services. The report from BMG Research is available should the committee wish to consider it in more detail at a future meeting.

3.3.9 55% of residents were satisfied with the way the council runs things and 13% think that there has been an improvement in the last 12 months with 53% thinking that it has stayed the same. Addressing the issues in the themes identified above should have a positive impact on residents' perceptions of the council overall. This will be measured by carrying out another survey in September 2017.

3.3.10 The Residents Survey cost £19k from within existing budgets with a budget available in 2017/18 to repeat the survey.

3.3.11 A resident survey of this kind is only one source of data and information, which focuses primarily on services and issues impacting on or delivered to the majority of residents. The council provides many other services such as through adults and children's social care that are not included. The survey results and action taken in response should be considered in that context.

3.4 Local Council Tax Scheme

- 3.4.1 The council undertook a public consultation on possible changes to the Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) scheme for 2017/18. The consultation, which ran for six weeks from mid-August until late September 2016, was run in conjunction with Essex councils through the Essex Insight website with a link directly from the council's website and consultation portal.
- 3.4.2 The council participates in a pan Essex LCTS project group. This is to take advantage of the economies of scale of joint working including consultations. The LCTS consultation was run at no cost to Thurrock Council.
- 3.4.3 The Thurrock element of the consultation attracted 254 'hits' to the website and 37 responses were received. There are just over 6,500 LCTS claimants. The response was comparable with other Essex authorities. The authority with the highest response was Uttlesford – who in addition to an online survey included the consultation in their magazine with a reply paid envelope for return.
- 3.4.4 The response rate could be explained by the longer and more technical questions in this year's consultation, which were necessary due to the legislative nature of the changes impacting the schemes. 54 responses were received in 2015.
- 3.4.5 The approach to future LCTS consultations will be reviewed ahead of the process for this year.

3.5 Customer Satisfaction Surveys

- 3.5.1 A number of services undertake their own customer satisfaction survey including the contact centre, housing repairs and adult social care to gain feedback on day-to-day operational service delivery.
- 3.5.2 In addition, Housing use a specialist external company to survey 20% of council tenants over the course of a year (approximately 167 people each month) on a variety of issues relating to their experiences as a tenant living in the borough. The tenant satisfaction surveys cost approximately £1,400 per year.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 This update was requested by Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee. There is no decision to be made but the committee may wish to comment on the consultations that have taken place and results of the Residents Survey.
- 4.2 A review of the council's Engagement Strategy is underway to refresh the approach and toolkit. This will use the results of the Residents Survey and be developed alongside a Communication Strategy for the council.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

5.1 This is an update report. There is no decision on which to be consulted.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

6.1 Consulting with members of the public and other stakeholders helps inform the council's policies, priorities and performance alongside the use of other quantitative and qualitative information. The data is used to inform the development of key strategies and to improve service delivery and gauge resident and other user satisfaction.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Laura Last**
Management Accountant

The details of the costs of individual consultations are contained within the body of this report. There are no other direct financial implications arising from this report.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **David Lawson**
Monitoring Officer

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**
Community Development and Equalities Manager

Consulting with residents and other stakeholders helps inform the council's policies, priorities and performance alongside the use of other quantitative and qualitative information. It is a recognised way to give people a voice.

The three key consultation exercises highlighted in the report have all received feedback from a wide selection of the community. The resident survey was undertaken in such a way that the cross section of those surveyed replicated the diversity profile of the borough as a whole.

The data is used to inform the development of key strategies and to improve service delivery and resident and other users satisfaction.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

N/a

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- None

9. **Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1: Consultation exercise response rates

Report Authors:

Sarah Welton, Strategy & Performance Officer

Natalie Warren, Community Development Manager