

## Communities and Partnership Scrutiny, 29<sup>th</sup> March 2010

### Consultation Strategy

Points made by members during the meeting:-

1. There is often a feeling that minds are made up before the consultation starts, and this leads to people feeling disillusioned. People need to have confidence that their views will be listened to and the decision made accordingly;
2. A lot of good work has gone into the Strategy but it is confused in places. Consultation, giving information and engaging with people are not the same things. This distinction needs to be made clear in the introduction to the report;
3. There is a need to consult people at a much earlier stage – i.e. before an idea is “worked up”, not when a project is a long way down the road. People need to be engaged from the start, not part way through. There should be more timely consultation, especially on major issues and major planning applications;
4. There needs to be corporate buy-in to the Strategy. Mechanisms need to be established to ensure that there is a consistent approach across the Council;
5. It may be useful for officers to review the outcome of any consultation – learn lessons from it, and see how to do things better in future;
6. Would like more mention to be made of older people in the Strategy – they are a large section of the population but often are not consulted sufficiently;
7. People need feedback after consultation – they need to know what happened to their views otherwise they become disillusioned. This is important;
8. While it is important to consult user groups and stakeholders, there is a need to consult other people as well. The Council should go to where people gather, for example schools and at the school gate, and there should be greater use made of public meetings and seminars;
9. E consultation is useful – it was suggested that people could sign up to receive email notification of consultations as and when they are launched. It was noted, however, that not everyone has computer access, and the online process is not always easy. It is valuable, but has its limitation;
10. Concern was expressed about the use (or lack of use) of the Community Champions, especially those from the BME community. Several people were trained but then not used and this is a waste. They were a good idea but it needs more focus;
11. Would like something in the Strategy about working with other partners, especially the Oxfordshire PCT;
12. It is not sufficient to put long consultation documents through Area Committees as people often do not stay at the meeting to discuss them, or simply do not attend in the first place;

13. Councillors should be used more, especially when a consultation impacts on their ward or area. They are in touch with local people and local issues and their skills and knowledge should be used;
14. The Talkback Panel is a good initiative, and some aspects of consultation are very well done;
15. The success of the consultation should be taken into account when any decision is made – it should form part of the decision. Officers need to buy into the Strategy;
16. It would be useful to publish online and in “Your Oxford” (and any other relevant places) a list of all issues upon which consultation is taking place;
17. There have been several examples in the last 2 years both of effective and of flawed consultation by the Council. An appendix should list some of these and comment on them honestly. Only by doing this can we learn from the past and improve in the future.