

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 24 April 2006

Portfolio Holder: Councillor J Knapman

Item: 8 (b)

1. PUBLIC CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY AND POLICY

Recommending:

.. That the attached draft Public Consultation and Engagement Strategy and Policy be adopted.

Report

- 1.1 The Audit Commission recently undertook an assessment of all Essex local authorities, looking at User Focus and how effectively individual councils engaged with their respective communities. Although the results of this exercise confirmed this Council's strengths in its approach to public consultation and engagement outweighed weaknesses, a number of possible areas for improvement were identified such as ensuring engagement in relation to corporate issues and with minority communities and other hard to reach groups.
- 1.2 User Focus was an important element in the methodology for the recently completed second-round of Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) for upper-tier authorities and is likely to feature significantly in the next round of second-tier assessments due to commence later this year.
- 1.3 The Council's existing Consultation Strategy was published originally in 1999 in response to the introduction of Best Value legislation, and has not been reviewed or updated since that time. As a result of the User Focus assessment, the need to develop robust consultation proposals in relation to the new Council Plan for 2006-2010, and the likely future CPA focus, the opportunity has been taken to review the current Consultation Strategy. A draft of a new Public Consultation and Engagement Policy and Strategy is attached to this report.
- 1.4 The review of the Consultation Strategy has provided an opportunity to set out an overall corporate approach to consultation and engagement. The new policy and strategy will be embedded across the Council as part of the Authority's Constitution, and seeks to address the issue of inclusivity amongst minority groups and communities that may not always be fully engaged or represented.
- 1.5 The Finance and Performance Management Overview and Scrutiny Panel support the adoption of the draft Policy and Strategy.

Statement in Support of Recommended Action

- 1.6 To address the findings of the Audit Commission's User Focus assessment and develop an overall corporate approach to public consultation and engagement in preparation for the next round of second-tier CPA's due to commence in 2006.

Resource Implications:

Budget Provision: The proposals will be met from within existing budget provision.

Personnel: None.

Land: None

Community Plan/BVPPA Reference: The Council's Customer Charter sets out a commitment to consult service users and residents.