

**Report to: Finance and Performance  
Management Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of Meeting: 14 November 2006**



**Portfolio:** Finance, Performance Management and Corporate Support Services

**Subject:** Consultation Plan 2006/07

**Officer contact for further information:** S. Tautz (Ext 4180)

**Committee Secretary:** A.. Hendry (Ext 4246)

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**Recommendations:**

**That the Consultation Plan for 2006/07, setting out those issues on which public consultation is planned to be undertaken during the remainder of 2006/07, and detailing those public consultation exercises completed during 2005/06, be noted.**

**Background**

1. (Head of Human Resources and Performance Management) During the latter part of 2005, the Audit Commission undertook a User Focus assessment across Essex, looking at how effectively councils engaged with local communities, the results of which have previously been reported to the Scrutiny Panel. Although the assessment confirmed that the council's strengths in relation to public engagement outweighed its weaknesses, the Commission identified a number of possible areas for improvement in relation to the authority's approach to public consultation, particularly in respect of ensuring engagement with minority communities and other hard to reach groups.
2. The Council's existing Consultation Strategy was originally published in 1999 in response to the introduction of Best Value legislation. 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 a likely future Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) focus, a new Public Consultation and Engagement Strategy was adopted in April 2006, setting out how the council will plan and undertake future consultation exercises. All consultation and engagement exercises undertaken by and on behalf of the council are now required to comply with the provisions of the Public Consultation and Engagement Strategy. A revised consultation toolkit is also currently being produced in order to standardise consultation approaches and methodologies wherever possible, and this document will be issued to Heads of service and relevant staff in due course.
3. As part of the new Public Consultation and Engagement Strategy, the Cabinet has requested that a Consultation Plan be developed as part of the annual business planning process from 2006/07 onwards, in order to focus consultation and engagement on priorities and operational issues to be faced in the coming year. The

Consultation Plan will also incorporate the results of consultation exercises undertaken during the preceding twelve months, through a Consultation Register that will enable members to scrutinise consultation results and processes. The Consultation Register had previously been produced for consideration by one of the former Overview and Scrutiny Committees, and will therefore now form part of the development of the annual Consultation Plan, which will be submitted to both the Cabinet and the Scrutiny Panel on an annual basis. This information will also be summarised within the annual Best Value Performance Plan.

4. The Consultation Plan for 2006/07 is attached as Appendix 1 to this report. In future this will be reported to members at the commencement of each financial year, and will set out the issues on which individual services will be consulting or engaging residents or customers during the year, the overall objective for each consultation exercise, and how each exercise will be undertaken. In establishing this approach, it is recognised that the need for some consultation exercises will arise subsequent to the development of the Consultation Plan each year, as a result of unforeseen circumstances or priority issues. In addition, it should be noted that regular on-going satisfaction surveys such as housing report cards, or consultation carried out in relation to planning applications, will not be included within the Consultation Plan.
5. The Scrutiny Panel is requested to note the Consultation Plan for 2006/07, and the details of those public consultation exercises completed in 2005 (Appendix 2) and during 2006 to date (Appendix 3). These documents were considered by the Cabinet at its meeting on 13 November 2006. Heads of Service will be in attendance at the meeting to respond to any questions raised in respect of individual consultation exercises.

**Reason for decision:**

6. To enable members to scrutinise consultation results and processes

**Options considered and rejected:**

7. None. The council has previously agreed arrangements for reporting the results of public consultation and engagement and proposals or future consultation exercises.

**Consultation undertaken:**

8. Consultation results and proposals have been reported by each appropriate Head of Service.

**Resource implications:**

**Budget/Personnel/Land:** None.

**Council Plan/Best Value Performance Plan reference:** Section 8 – ‘How we Measure Our Achievements’

**Relevant statutory powers:** None

**Background papers:** None

**Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications:** None

**Key Decision reference: (if required)** None