

TORBAY COUNCIL

Report No: **152/2005**

Title: **Torbay Council Consultation and Engagement Strategy**

To: Executive on 14th June 2005

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To consider the revised Torbay Council Consultation and Engagement Strategy and Action Plan for incorporation into a wider strategy covering communication, engagement and consultation.

2. Relationship to Corporate Priorities

- 2.1 Consultation and engagement with our stakeholders is a vital element in determining the Council's priorities for the future.

3. Recommendation(s)

- 3.1 That the Torbay Council Consultation and Engagement Strategy, as set out at Appendix 1 to this Report, be approved for incorporation into a wider strategy covering communication, engagement and consultation.

4. Reason for Recommendation(s)

- 4.1 To enable the outcomes identified within the strategy to be delivered through the delivery of action plan.
- 4.2 To bring together the council's strategies for consultation, engagement and communication into one coherent document in recognition that these activities are inter-linked

5. Key Risks associated with the Recommendation(s)

- 5.1 A delay in the approval of the strategy could delay the development of the wider strategy.

Likelihood	6	6	12	18	24
	5	5	10	15	20
	4	4	8	12	16
	3	3	6	9	12
	2	2	4	6	8
	1	1X	2	3	4
		1	2	3	4
		Impact			

 Low risk  Intermediate risk  High risk

The "x" in the above matrix denotes where the author has assessed the level of final risk to fall

6. Alternative Options (if any)

- 6.1 The strategy could be published as a standalone document. However this is not recommended because in order for consultation to be effective it has be approached as part of a wider strategic agenda, including communication and engagement.

7. Background

- 7.1 The Council published its first Consultation Strategy in July 2002. This new strategy sets out the future direction for consultation in Torbay and includes a detailed action plan that will enable the council to deliver on the outcomes identified.
- 7.2 The council is also in the process of developing a communications strategy. It is proposed that this document be incorporated into a wider strategy covering consultation, engagement and communications. This will enable the organisation to deliver these inte-related activities.

Clare Armour
Strategic Director

Contact Officer: Bernard Page
Telephone no. 7021

IMPLICATIONS, CONSULTATION AND OTHER INFORMATION

Part 1

These sections may have been completed by the Report author but must have been agreed by the named officers in the Legal, Finance, Human Resources and Property Divisions.

Does the proposal have implications for the following issues? If "Yes" - give details. <i>delete as appropriate</i>		Name of responsible officer
Legal	No	Bill Norman
Financial – Revenue	Yes – Activities will be funded from existing budgets, any activities requiring further resources will be the subject of further reports	Richard Thorpe
Financial – Capital Plan	No	Richard Thorpe
Human resources	No	Richard Thorpe
Property	No	Sam Partridge
Procurement and Efficiency	No	Clare Armour

Part 2

The author of the report must complete these sections.

Could this proposal realistically be achieved in a manner that would more effectively: <i>delete as appropriate</i>		
(i)	promote environmental sustainability?	No
(ii)	reduce crime and disorder?	No
(iii)	promote good community relations?	No
(iv)	promote equality of opportunity on grounds of race, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief?	No
(v)	reduce (or eliminate) unlawful discrimination (including indirect discrimination)?	No

If the answer to any of the above questions is "Yes" the author must have addressed the relevant issue/s in the main report and have included a full justification and, where appropriate, an impact assessment.

Part 3

The author of the report must complete this section.

	<i>delete as appropriate</i>	If "Yes", give details
Does the proposal have implications for any other Directorates?	Yes	All directorates are involved in consultation activities this strategy seeks to co-ordinate activities across the authority

Part 4

Is this proposal in accordance with (i.e. not contrary to) the Council's budget or its Policy Framework?		<i>delete as appropriate</i>
		Yes
1.	If "No" - give details of the nature and extent of consultation with stakeholders and the relevant overview and scrutiny body.	
2.	If "Yes" - details and outcome of consultation, if appropriate. Subject to internal consultation and consultation through the change management board, as a result of this consultation amendments have been made to strategy, in particular responding to equalities issues	

Part 5

Is the proposal a Key Decision in relation to an Executive function? (i.e. would generate expenditure or savings in excess of £100,000 or 20% of an approved budget OR affect more than 2,000 residents of the Borough.)	<i>delete as appropriate</i>	If "Yes" - give Reference Number
	Yes	X50/2004

Part 6

Wards

All Wards

Appendices

Appendix 1 Torbay Council Consultation and Engagement Strategy

Documents available in Members' Room

None

Background Papers:

The following documents/files were used to compile this report:

None

Torbay Council
Consultation and Engagement Strategy

Internal Draft 3
April 2005

This document can be made available in a range of languages, on tape, in Braille, large print and in other formats. For further information please contact 01803 207021

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In 2001 Torbay Council published its first Consultation Framework. This draft revised strategy has been prepared in the context of the Torbay Strategic Partnership's agreement of a Local compact between the Council, Police, Health and Voluntary sectors. As a first step in implementing the compact, the partnership has agreed to develop a protocol for consultation and engagement. The outcome of this could be a joint consultation strategy across agencies in the Bay. This strategy will assist in this process.

1.2 Reaching Our Population

The Council is aware of the image that Local Authorities portray. They are often seen as old fashioned 'closed shops' and the population is quite often not aware of all the different services that the Council is responsible for. Torbay Council wants to improve its image with the population. It aims to be a modern, open and transparent organisation that listens to its population. We want to develop our communications and our methods of engagement with the population to achieve this goal, including looking at our 'brand' and how we portray ourselves to the people we serve and our potential staff.

We are committed to ensure Members and staff to 'go out' to the population rather than expect them to 'come to the Council'. We aim to become better at listening to our population, taking on board their concerns and feeding back appropriate information.

2 Scope and purpose

2.1 This strategy seeks to ensure that the Council takes a holistic approach to consultation including consultation of:

- The Community
- Partnership organisations (and organisations not currently partners)
- Service users
- Personnel

The approach followed in the strategy is to:

- Identify why the Council consults
- Use of consultation toolkit
- Outline the principles of consultation
- Set out how to consult
- Set out who to consult
- Explain who should do what in this process

The why of consultation is identified in the desired outcome, namely:

- To undertake high quality consultation that will result in:
 - **High quality effective consultation** - through shared use of resources and the use of appropriate techniques
 - **Inclusive consultation** - that reaches all sections of the community including the hard to reach groups as detailed in the Torbay Charter for Inclusion.

- **Consultation that influences the Councils decisions** - thus promoting public confidence and connection with the democratic process
- **Improved services** – that meet the wider needs and priorities of all sectors of the community
- **A co-ordinated approach to consultation** – both within the council and with our partners
- **Improved communication and feedback** – of forthcoming consultations, the results of consultation that has been undertaken, and the actions that have been taken.

2.2 The Consultation Toolkit

The Consultation Toolkit gives timely guidance to prospective clients who have identified a need to carry out consultation. It outlines the 'who' 'where' and 'what' of consultation before the actual consultation starts. It is readily available and should be referred to as a first step to planning consultation whenever possible.

Its aim is to be flexible and provide simple step by step advice to those contemplating consulting with their clients / public / service users. The advice contained within the toolkit compliments the more detailed strategic approach to achieving inclusive corporate consultation given by this document. Some overlap of advice is inevitable, however, the principles involved are too important to under-state as the aim of both is to ensure that effective consultation happens and that duplication of effort and consultation fatigue are minimised. A copy of the toolkit is in the appendix to this strategy.

3. Guiding principles

3.1 The strategy has been developed with the intention of ensuring that all consultation is:

- **Inclusive**
 - Ensuring consultation methods are not simply geared towards 'easy to reach groups and that current guidance on how to consult hard to reach groups is followed. (see the Torbay Charter for Inclusion)
 - Using varied methods to gain as wide a range of views possible from all sectors of the community. This may well require the involvement of third parties/organisations/agencies as necessary.
- **Effective**
 - Ensuring consultation fits the intended purpose and that results are used to inform the Council's decision making processes.
 - Learn from consultation that has already been carried out by the Authority and partner organisations through identification of best practice as to what to do - and what to avoid.
 - Putting systems in place to ensure that any prior consulting experience is fully utilised and the results of all consultation is put to best effect.
- **Clear**
 - Ensuring that all participants feel comfortable with the process and that they understand the nature of any constraints on the outcome being sought (for example budgetary considerations).

- Clearly stating that the information gained will be used to influence eventual decision making processes.
- **Cost effective**
 - Ensuring that the consultation process is efficient, relevant and cost effective

4. Consultation in Practice

4.1 Core Procedures/Processes

The procedures set out below should apply to all consultation carried out, whatever the purpose/ target audience of a particular exercise.

- Consultation will be carefully planned to ensure the effective use of the time of participants. (see toolkit)
- Positive steps will be taken to ensure the traditional “non-joiners” can take part in the consultation exercises.
- Clear guidance will be provided explaining how the information gained will be used.
- When requested/required the confidentiality of individuals taking part in consultation exercises will be maintained.
- Where local people are involved in public participation on an ongoing basis (for example with Citizen Panels) mechanisms should be in place to ensure views are representative - particularly where people are making decisions on behalf of a local community.
- Results of the exercise will be fed back to participants wherever possible, either directly or through the use of publications (local media and Bay View Council Magazine) or on a web-site.
- Where the involvement of a particular group of people (such as specific service users or hard to reach groups) is required, the exercise should be carried out in a format, at a time, and in a location that is convenient to the target group.

4.2 Definition of Consultation - Users/Community

User Group and Community consultation describes the variety of attitudes to the ways in which the Council interacts with such people. Users of the service may be any individual who has used council services on a particular occasion or they may be regularly in contact with the Council due to other circumstances. The community refers to all those who have an interest in the activities and methods of the Council and this includes residents, businesses, visitors and other organisations and bodies. They need not necessarily be “users” as such.

This strategy defines consultation as - a process that incorporates a spectrum of activity ranging from: the provision or exchange of information on the matter in hand, to the active involvement of wider groups in not only the definition of the problem, but finding (and sometimes implementing) the solution through partnership working.

The strategy does not restrict the Council to using a prescribed set of consultation techniques, nor does it give detailed guidance on the precise procedures that should be followed for a particular consultation exercise. It is proposed that a toolkit be prepared for this purpose within the action plan and it recognises that every situation is different and any consultation will have to be designed to fit those individual circumstances.

4.3 The Dimensions of Consultation

The Consultation strategy has two basic dimensions- which are themselves inter-related. They revolve around:

- the purpose of a given consultation and ;

- who is actually consulted - the target audience.

These should be clearly identified before the exercise is undertaken. (see toolkit)

4.4 Purpose of Consultation

The Council may consult with the public because:

- it wishes to improve/develop the services it provides;
- a particular issue or set of issues which will affect the community/ service user/ employee etc have arisen; or
- as an essential element of its overall approach to Best Value; or
- As an essential element of the priority/budget setting process

The Council is a major provider of services to the public, local businesses, visitors and partnership organisations as well as having an inter-dependent relationship with them as an organisation itself.

4.5 Target Audience

There are several dimensions to this. People's views can be sought because they are:

- service users;
- non-users;
- residents within area,
- people directly affected by particular functions in partnership organisations, local businesses and other bodies;
- people with particular characteristics, e.g. ethnic groups, young people, women, disabled, carers etc;
- working within the organisation, at whatever level, providing this service; or
- knowledgeable about the issue through any links, whether personal or professional, to the particular function.

Consultation with those who use or do not use specific services will be an integral part of the Authority's approach to Best Value. It should grow to underpin the service planning cycle and be flexible and varied in its range of consultation techniques to reflect characteristics of the people for whom the service is intended.

The strategy will also respect and include the principles contained in the Torbay Charter for Inclusion as contained within the Equality and Inclusion Scheme. The charter requires the Council and its partners to work to:-

- **Promote equality, inclusion and good relations,**
- **Reduce disadvantage and poverty**
- **Eliminate unlawful discrimination**

The charter requires the Council to consider all in the community whatever their race, religion and beliefs, sexual orientation, age, disability, language, political or other opinions, or socio-economic status.

Torbay includes a wide variety of demographic and cultural diversity within a relatively compact geographical area. This has implications for internal as well as public consultation. The strategy proposes that:

- The key feature of area based consultation is that it must be conducted at a level which

is both appropriate to the issue and meaningful to staff/local people. Wherever possible, therefore, it should be based on natural communities rather than artificial geographical areas with rigorous boundaries such as political wards. The approach adapted to area based consultation should nevertheless be flexible enough to appreciate the concerns of people, whether staff or the public, in certain areas.

- Developing partnerships across the Torbay area, for example with the Local Compact Agreement means that the opportunities now exist to now carry out consultation in a co-ordinated manner across agencies. The development of a consultation protocol between agencies and the voluntary sector is essential if this co-ordinated approach is to work.
- Hard to reach groups. Within Torbay there is a diverse community with differing needs. It is important for the Council to engage with the whole community and that current guidance on how to consult with hard to reach groups is followed to ensure this happens effectively.

4.6 The Main Consultation Techniques used by the Council

The main service user / community consultation techniques are detailed below. It is not intended that the Council restrict themselves to only using the methods set out in this section. It is recognised that certain circumstances will require the use of alternative approaches. However, in the majority of instances, one or more of the techniques below will be used:

- Written material- letters/leaflets/posters
- Press and Promotions
- Newsletters
- Consultation documents, i.e. those in the Best Value Performance Plan
- Feedback systems- for comments, complaints, complements Forums- user, shared user, shared interest, non-user etc
- Public Meetings
- Road shows
- Focus groups
- Surveys, i.e. Victims of Crime, Residents Survey undertaken by MORI
- Facilitated events (e.g. IML)
- Viewpoint Panel
- Web-site / on -line
- SMS (texting via short message service) / email
- Formal and informal partnerships

The council already holds experience of most of the above consultation techniques within its Consultation & Research Team based in the Performance Policy and Communications business unit.

5 Proposed Actions

5.1 Consultation database

As it is already evident that a lot of work has been undertaken it would be useful to maintain a central council database of consultation. It would be reasonable to establish a register of all consultation carried out from 2002 onwards.

5.2 Implementation and Evaluation

A consultation database would have great benefits for the audit trail and would help reduce the danger of duplication. It would also allow for the time-tabling of consultation exercises to ensure that no sample population is exhausted. It is proposed that the details of the consultation stored on the database would include:

- Methodology and techniques employed
- Sample
- Characteristics of population surveyed
- Results
- Use and destination of results

5.3 Consultation Action Plan

The next section outlines a number of recommendations aimed at ensuring that the Council get closer to the people they serve, employ and represent through effective consultation. The table below sets out key proposals which will ensure the implementation and further development of this strategy.

Consultation Action Plan

Outcome	Action	Resources	By date	Notes
High quality effective consultation A co-ordinated approach to consultation	Publish Consultation database			
	Investigate and implement internet based IT solutions	IT, Consultation & Research Team; Policy & partnership manager	Dec 2005	
	Set up system, populate database with Torbay Council existing data and proposed activity	IT, Consultation & Research Team Directorate representatives;	Proposed activity Dec 2005 Existing data July 2006	
	Subject to Compact protocol include partner data	Compact Implementation group; Consultation & Research Team; Directorate Representatives	July 2007	Some partner details could be added at an earlier date
	Develop a rolling program of consultation across council			
	Identify proposed consultation in business plans	Assistant directors and service managers	Dec annually	
	Bring together into a coherent program/project plan using appropriate consultation techniques ²	Consultation & Research Team, Assistant directors and services managers	Feb annually	
	Collate and publish programme on internet and Best Value Performance Plan	Consultation & Research Team; Web Team; Policy & Performance	June annually	
High quality effective consultation Improved services	Communicate results of Consultation			
	Compile and publish a quarterly summary of consultation results. Publish on web site and Bay View, and through press releases ¹	Consultation & Research Team; Web Team, Press & PR	Ongoing	
	Publish annual report on how consultation results influenced decisions or improved services—to be sent to partners and published in Bay View, on web site etc	Consultation network; Consultation & Research Team; Web team;	Ongoing	

Outcome	Action	Resources	By date	Notes
High quality effective consultation	Market testing of research unit consultation			
	One general survey	Consultation & Research Team : Policy and Partnership manager	June 2007	
	One statutory survey	Consultation & Research Team : Policy and Partnership manager	June 2008/9	
High quality effective consultation	Further Development of web based questionnaires as part of e govt program			
	Publish consultation program on web	Consultation & Research Team; E-gov team/web team	Dec 2005	
	Develop interactive registration and online surveys	Consultation & Research Team; E-gov team/web team	Dec 2005	
High quality effective consultation	Develop understanding and skills within the organisation			
	Publish a consultation toolkit	Consultation & Research Team	September 2005	
	Form a consultation network across the organisation ¹		June 2005	
	Identify skills gaps and develop training program for	Consultation & Research Team & HR training (training ongoing)	2006/7	
Inclusive consultation	Develop protocols for consulting with and reporting findings to hard to reach groups			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people • People with learning disabilities • People with physical disabilities • People from BME communities • Older people 	Policy & partnership manager, Youth Parliament, Equalities Officer	Jan 2005 to May 2007 Ongoing - All consultation with hard to reach groups will follow guidance and involve specific third parties / organisations / agencies	
	Develop analysis and interpretation of results from Viewpoint and similar general surveys to identify views of hard to reach groups	Consultation & Research Team	May 2006	

Outcome	Action	Resources	By date	Notes
	Develop Local performance indicator to monitor % of HTR groups involved in consultation compared to % in population	Consultation & Research Team	April 2006	
Consultation that influences the Councils decisions	Publish annual report on how consultation results influenced decisions or improved services—in Best Value Performance Plan	Consultation & Research Team; Corporate Policy; communications team	June 2005	
A co-ordinated approach to consultation	Develop protocol for consultation across agencies developed through local compact			
	Workshop event to establish remit	Compact implementation group GOSW	April 2005	
	Draft protocol for consultation ²	Compact implementation group GOSW	July 2005	
	Protocol agreed and published	Compact implementation group GOSW	December 2005	
	Develop and implement action plan	Compact implementation group GOSW, VCS and agencies	February 2006	