

Rochford District Council Consultation Strategy

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report proposes that the Council should investigate the establishment of a wider consultation network to provide feedback to the Council on a regular basis on a variety of issues.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Council has an agreed Consultation Strategy (Min. 255/00). A great deal of consultation already takes place under the framework provided by that Strategy. Examples, include Customer Satisfaction survey, Planning users and customers survey, Housing Tenants surveys, community safety surveys.
- 2.2 Nonetheless, officers consider there would be merit in establishing a community consultation forum/citizens panel, which was used three to four times per year.

3 DETAILED CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 The requests on the Authority to consult are increasing. There are times too, when it would be extremely useful if a statistically robust structure were already in place that would be used for this purpose. For example such a structure could prove useful in terms of consultation on the Corporate Plan and Community Strategy, the Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy, how effective certain services are, in the budget making process. It would provide a litmus test around areas of greatest public support/interest. In response to these needs, a number of authorities have already set up such for a such as Maldon, and Thurrock. Essex County Council is currently developing a similar model.
- 3.2 Other public agencies such as the new Primary Care Trust, and the Police also have requirements for public consultation. In some areas public bodies have shared the resources to maximise the range and scope of the consultation activity and reduce the potential for overlap and survey overload.
- 3.3 Preliminary soundings suggest that if Rochford District Council wished to go down this route, then the cost would be in the region of £10,000 - £20,000 depending on the size of the group. This could be funded from Best Value Consultant budget of £30,000. If such an approval was adopted, then clearly some of the current consultancy exercises could be fed this system rather than be conducted as separate

exercises. However, before any further work on this issue, members are asked whether they would support the principle of such an approach.

- 3.4 If so, officers could then investigate the matter in more detail and come forward with a costed proposal early in the new municipal year.

4 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Officer time will be involved in researching the most cost effective ways of consulting the local population.
- 4.2 A budget of £30,000 is available to support Best Value consultation.

5 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Rochford District Council is required under the Local Government Act 2000 to develop a Community Plan. Guidance for the plan suggests that local communities should be allowed to articulate their aspirations and needs in preparation of the plan.

6 PARISH IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Parishes are important partners in the development of the Community Plan, being close to the communities they serve. They will have a role to play in consultation with the District Council.

7 RECOMMENDATION

It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

That Members determine whether they wish to consider in more detail the establishment of community consultation forum/citizens panel, with a report back to members with costings early in the new municipal year.

Paul Warren

Chief Executive

Background Papers: None

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