

Resources and Fire and Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee

21 January 2016

Consultation and Engagement

Recommendation

That the Resources and Fire and Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider this report outlining the process and procedure for consultations and consider areas for further scrutiny where appropriate.

1.0 Key Issues

- 1.1 The local authority has identified the need to make approximately £92 million savings by 2018. This figure has arisen from reductions in the grants we receive from government, pressures from inflation and additional pressures from our changing population. This means shaping a very different organisation into the future and to meet these challenges, Council has agreed a One Organisation Plan (OOP) for this period, and a Medium term Financial Plan as the financial expression of the OOP to balance spending need and resources over this period.

In order to continuously improve and reshape the services that we offer to citizens, Warwickshire County Council is committed to listening to the views of our partners and members of the public and to take these views into consideration. The council's vision for consultation with residents is that 'Warwickshire's residents are informed, are involved in the decision and policy making processes and are able to make their views heard.'

Consultation with our partners and members of the public is increasingly becoming a common feature of the process for developing and improving the services that the local authority offers as well as service redesign. By ensuring that the views of members of the public are taken into account, this in turn helps ensure that the local authority is operating with transparency, efficiency and is as effective as it can be.

The consultations that the authority undertakes fall into a range of categories:

- A means of collecting views on an open subject;
- A means of collecting views on the pros and cons of alternative proposals;
- A means of collecting views on a specific proposal;
- A means of developing a proposal or option.

The different types of consultation have to adhere to certain principles to ensure that the consultation is fair and will not be open to challenge:

- Consultation must take place when the proposal is at a formative stage.
- There must be adequate time given for response.
- Sufficient information or reasons must be put forward for the proposal to allow for intelligent consideration and response and
- Feedback from the consultation must be conscientiously taken into account.

1.2 In order to help meet these challenges, we have been reviewing the processes we currently use when consulting with partners and the public. Warwickshire County Council undertakes numerous consultations each year and due to the sheer amount of activity in this area, it is important that we have a clear framework to help us maintain a consistent and effective approach and meet our vision's objectives.

The consultation framework and guidance available on the authority's intranet has been developed by staff from all of the service areas involved with the support of consultation activity. This is aimed to provide colleagues with an overarching framework within which all consultation and engagement activity should be planned and conducted.

1.3 During the course of 2015, significant work has been undertaken to update and improve the consultation process and procedures for colleagues across the organisation.

- A workshop took place in March 2015 involving officers who had been involved with consultation activity. The aim of the workshop was to get feedback of what went well, what did not go so well and what officers would do differently if they could go through the consultation again. The 'lessons learned' messages from this workshop have been used to update the guidance on the intranet and has helped inform the development of training in this area of work. A further workshop has taken place in November 2015 focussing on officers who were going to be involved with consultation activity.
- A member development session took place in November last year on 'Consulting with Communities.' This development session explored:
 - Why consultation is important;
 - The benefits of consultation;
 - Legal issues;
 - Why we need to consult;
 - The principles of consultation and
 - The improvements in our processes over the last year.
- An improved process map has been developed that colleagues are able to refer to outlining the route that should be followed when embarking upon a consultation. The process map (Appendix A) details the considerations to be taken into account throughout any process. Member involvement in the different stages of the process has been highlighted throughout and is an integral part of this process map.

- An eLearning module on Consultation called 'Asking Warwickshire' has been developed and is now in the final stages of development. This module, available on WILMa is aimed to provide a high level overview of the process; an introduction to consultation, why consultation is important, planning, implementation, analysis, the approval process and evaluation. There is also the opportunity to explore scenarios for planning and delivering different types of consultation.
- Work has been carried out to enable easier access to the consultation area of the intranet. From here, colleagues can access contact information for each service involved with supporting consultation activity, the framework and guidance documentation amongst other guidance.
- To ensure a consistent approach to consultation, all guidance on the intranet and the eLearning module on WILMa have been given the same branding so that it is recognisable and associated with consultation and engagement activity.

1.4 The learning from recent legal rulings with regards to consultation has been applied and embedded in the guidance and training available.

- Following on from the judicial review involving Warwickshire County Council earlier this year and the lessons learned from the case, the Gunning Principles mentioned previously in this report on fair consultation have been added to the current guidance on the intranet:
- Landmark rulings involving other local authorities have also had an impact on the advice and guidance. The key points from these cases have been:
 - Where consultation is limited to a preferred option, in order to be fair, you may be required to make some reference to discarded alternative options.
 - A decision maker can present his or her preferred option provided it is clear what the other options are or were.
 - For alternatives to be considered, they have to be realistic and not just theoretical possibilities.

1.5 The role of the consultation leads for each Group within the authority has also been developed:

- It is proposed that Consultation Leads will work closely with the group GLTs to ensure that any current and upcoming consultation activity is identified in advance of any approaching deadlines.
- The Consultation Leads will play a key role in supporting and advising colleagues undertaking any consultation exercise.
- The Consultation Leads will be able to provide advice on who to inform and when of any proposed consultation or intention to consult.
- The Consultation Leads will help to embed the correct routing process that colleagues need to follow ensuring reports are presented to the relevant managers and committees in the correct order of sequence.
- Consultation Leads will liaise with colleagues during the evaluation period so that lessons learned can be collated and shared corporately.

- 1.7 It is intended to keep Members updated of significant consultation activity as part of a weekly digest that is being developed by the Communications team called Re-Member. This will be a brief update to keep in line with the rest of the digest and will include a link for the contact details of relevant officers if Members require further information.
- 1.8 The campaign to raise awareness with colleagues and Members of the consultation process is an ongoing programme of work and Members are asked to endorse the approach the local authority is taking.

Background papers

None

Appendix

1 Consultation Process Map

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The report was circulated to the following members prior to publication:

Councillors N. Davies, Dirveiks, Fowler, Kaur, Western

CONSULTATION PROCESS

BEFORE YOU START

Consider the following issues whilst planning your consultation:

- Why do you need to consult with the public for this service change?
- Identify what outcomes you intend to achieve from this consultation
- Is there a budget to carry out the consultation?
- Identify which services / teams, partners, voluntary organisations or other stakeholders could / should be involved
- Use Ask Warwickshire to identify what other consultations are going on across the county, to avoid duplication
- How will the results feed into your corporate and business priorities?
- The 'Asking Warwickshire' e-learning module will also provide you with some useful advice
- You can contact your consultation lead for further advice and support

A list of consultation leads is available here: <http://bit.ly/1Wsn562>

KEY POINTS

Here are some key points to consider throughout the process:

- Consultation must take place at the formative stage, you must be prepared to make changes to proposals in the light of feedback received. It is imperative that consultation and engagement activities truly add value to the way we plan and provide services.
- Consultation should be fully considered and planned before being carried out.
- There are many ways in which consultation can be conducted and which can help maximise residents' input, including the use of social media.
- You must ensure that you provide sufficient information to enable customers and or the public to give an 'informed' response. This may require you to publish a large amount of information.
- You should allow sufficient time for people to respond.
- Analysis of results should be thorough and evidenced. Feedback can be presented and delivered via a number of methods.
- Evaluation of the consultation should be conducted throughout the process, and reviewed at the end to determine lessons learned and improvements for the future.

