Community Consultation, Engagement & Involvement Strategy

April 2014

Community Consultation, Engagement & Involvement Strategy

Contents

1.   INTRODUCTION

Although it is only two years since the first Community Consultation Strategy was approved there have been changes in legislation and the way the Council wants to work that has meant a review is needed.

The introduction of the Localism Act in 2012 has brought devolvement of power to the people which means working with and engaging with people so that the Council is able to deliver services that people want and that are tailored to their needs.   It is widely documented that citizen engagement is an important mechanism to drive service improvement and replace top down regulation. The Localism Act seeks to include engagement and participation and encourage more deliberation in decision-making. One important aspect is to strengthen the power and duties of Councillors to hold local public services and partners to account and take the lead on local issues. These powers support Councillors to engage communities and contribute to empowerment.

Ground-breaking new case law puts emphasis on fairness and giving decision-makers access to all the relevant information when making decisions as well as consulting all those who are affected by an issue. Having robust procedures in place ensures each consultation is recorded and all the stages are followed.

The Council has recently started the process of developing a new Melton Local Plan. The Council has learnt from its previous work in this area and is committed to taking customers and stakeholders with them by providing the opportunity for involvement through reference groups. This will then create a plan that is sustainable and community-owned.

With the current the financial climate and the Council's commitment to putting resources where they are most needed, listening to what people tell us has become an essential part of the Council's role and for this and all of the above reasons it is considered the right time to revisit the strategy and update the corporate consultation process.

The Council's vision is :

'We want to enhance the quality of life for everyone in the Borough of Melton to achieve a sustainable, prosperous and vibrant community… a place where people want to live, work and visit.'

To achieve this, it is important that we listen to our customers and stakeholders and act on what they tell us to improve the Borough and its communities.

Whenever Melton Borough Council makes a decision about improving or changing its services, it needs to be confident the decision is properly informed by public opinion.

This strategy is designed to make sure that we improve the way we carry out public consultations, involve the community in new initiatives and policy changes and use that involvement to inform decision-making.

We aim to consult on new initiatives and policy changes and whilst we cannot guarantee the public will always agree with proposals and policy changes it is

hoped there will be some public satisfaction that we have listened and considered their views before making decisions that matter to the people of the Borough.

Consultation may also be carried out to determine the public's view on corporate matters that help to set the direction of the Council such as the Council's priorities and how the Council uses its resources.

This strategy promotes the growing use and potential of the internet and social media to capture the opinions of people on local issues and encourage people who use these communication methods to get involved. **Return to Contents**

1.1   Who are we consulting/engaging/involving?

The Council is committed to communicating with those affected by Council initiatives and seeking their views on matters that affect their life through home, work, business, leisure, community, partnership and investment.   The terminology used in this strategy to describe those the Council consults is 'Customers and Stakeholders'.

For the purposes of this strategy, the term 'Customer' means all those who live, work, visit and invest in the Borough.

The term 'Stakeholder' means those who have business and social interest in the Borough as well as those who the Council works in partnership with.

1.2   What is consultation, engagement and involvement?

For the purpose of this strategy the term 'consultation' is used to collectively refer to the process of asking for people's views.   Other words used for involving people are 'involvement' and 'engagement'.   Here are our meanings of these terms in the context of community consultation :-

Consultation - provides effective ways for citizens, service users and partners to understand and influence decisions and policies that affect them

Engagement - informs and communicates with people, builds awareness of strategic issues and creates opportunities for dialogue and involvement in decisions and solutions

Involvement - describes the full range of research, consultation and participation of communities and individuals in the decision making process

1.3   3 Models of Consultation

There are 3 models of consultation and each one has a different purpose.   It is important to make it clear to people at the outset whether the Council is information sharing, consulting or encouraging participation in decision-making. The 3 models of consultation are :

- **Public Information** *'Here's what we are going to do'*
  Public information is about the Council informing people of its intentions, procedures and practices. This level of consultation will underpin more active participation and will often act as a precursor to other levels.

However, in isolation it is only appropriate where a range of options regarding the items under discussion is not available

Examples are newsletters, press releases, leaflets, website, public awareness campaigns

- **Public Consultation** *'Here are our options, what do you think?'*
Public consultation is where people are invited to express their views, usually on a range of options and on which the Council is willing to use public opinion as an important criterion for deciding upon a particular course of action.

   Examples are questions where options are given with background information as to what each option means so that informed choices can be made, can include opportunity for personal opinion at each stage

- **Public Participation** *'We want you to help us develop our options and decide our actions'*
Public participation is where people have a significant voice in the planning and decision-making process. Public participation, as a consultative measure is only appropriate either where no pre-determined decisions have been made or where the Council is willing to be led or influenced by public feedback.

   Examples are forums, partnerships and focus groups such as the Melton Local Plan Reference Groups, working with partners and customers on the co-design of the online process for Council Tax support

1.4 The Melton View

Listening to our customers on a day to day basis via social media, service feedback, compliments and complaints as well as feedback from focus groups and formal consultations provides a wealth of customer opinion. Central collation of this type of data can help to inform at the pre-consultation stage in such areas as option development and methods of engagement for different groups of people. The information can also be used to help inform how the Council works and uses its resources to best serve the people who live, work, visit, invest and have an interest in the Borough.

What we know about our community through consultation and public opinion including complaints and compliments is being collectively known as 'The Melton View'. This strategy aims to strengthen 'The Melton View' and provide a route to ensuring that information is captured every time we receive people's opinions about the Council and its services. It is also a helpful tool to ensure that there is no duplication in asking people's opinions about the same subject more than once within a reasonable timeframe.

Therefore the strategy has been updated to reflect the availability and storage of this information and to build the use of this type of intelligence, where it is available, into the corporate consultation process.

'The Melton View' follows on from the hub of information which creates the picture of Melton being produced from the hard statistics called 'The Melton Truth'. 'The Melton Truth' is mainly formed from demographic data and customer insight.

1.5   Legal position

There are no overarching pieces of legislation on how local government should consult especially since the 'Duty to Involve' was repealed with the introduction of the Localism Act although there are various duties contained in specific pieces of legislation. More often than not, it is the law which dictates the duties of consultation placed on local government - the Gunning Principles (from 1985 case law) are a good example and these are still referred to in legal cases today and provide a step by step approach to consultation as follows :-

Gunning 1: Consultation must take place when proposals are at a formative stage
Gunning 2: Sufficient reasons must be put forward for the proposals to allow for intelligent consideration and response
Gunning 3: Adequate time must be given for consideration and response
Gunning 4: The product/outcome of the consultation must be conscientiously taken into account

The issue of fairness is of paramount importance in consultation and any related legal cases and as a general rule if people are affected by a policy change then they should be consulted and the results of the consultation must be available to the decision-makers.

Consultation should be at a stage when the results of the consultation can influence the decision-making (Gunning 1 and 4).   A preferred option may be included and this must be made obvious to those being consulted. Information and reasons for proposals must be made available to allow for consultees to understand why they are being consulted as well as all the options available and what these mean (Gunning 2). With regard to timing this needs to be adequate to receive representation and appropriate to circumstances. There is no set timeframe recommended but reasonable steps must be taken to ensure that those consulted are aware of the exercise and are given sufficient time to respond (Gunning 3).   The above does not mean that decision-makers have to agree with the consultees' majority response but it would be sensible to have good reasons and if possible evidence available setting out why the majority view was not followed.

Recording the process of a consultation exercise and adopting a recognised approach such as that included in the Council's strategy and toolkit is important

evidence which could protect the Council in the event of challenge. Evidence needs to be available to show that all the stages of a consultation process have been followed and the decisions taken as to who would be consulted, how, when and why. Case law shows that courts offer weighting to cases where the ordinary person is not listened to and where there is significant public opinion as well as where there are sensitive issues at stake; this could be in emotive cases relating to healthcare as well as where equalities matters have not been taken into account.

The Gunning Principles are included within the Council's approach to consultation and are reflected in the Council's 8 Key Rules Commitment to consultation and within the corporate process.

1.6 Consultation and the Democratic Process

Councillors and officers will need to weigh the views expressed through consultation against a wide range of other factors such as legislation, government guidance, demographic data, economic, environmental and social impact.

Councillors and officers may have to make their own judgment about the weight to be given to one or other of the views expressed. They may also have to consider carefully whether the aspirations and needs of future generations - who will perhaps be most affected by any change - might differ significantly from those of today's population.

In other words, the results of consultation are never a substitute for the democratic process – and do not replace the legitimate role of Elected Representatives in decision-making.

It is important that all relevant information is provided to Councillors so that they can make balanced and appropriate decisions. This may include sub-scores or weighting applied to options, questions and results. The analysis of a consultation product may result in adverse impact to a stakeholder or other body, in such a case, it may be helpful to provide their view on the proposals to Councillors so that they have the full picture of the impact of the consultation results when making their decisions.

However, effective and consistent consultation can certainly help inform good and responsible decision-making and ensure that, as far as possible, those decisions - and the actions that flow from them - properly reflect and respond to the needs of the Borough and its people.

2. WHY IS CONSULTATION IMPORTANT …

2.1 How effective consultation will shape what we do

The Council has a policy framework that shapes how the Council works and this strategy forms part of that framework. Other documents that inform and link into this strategy are :-

- Corporate Plan and Priorities
- Communications Strategy

- Community Strategy
- Social Media Policy

The purpose of this document is to set out a consultation framework within which Melton Borough Council can :

INVOLVE customers and stakeholders in :

- identifying issues which affect their lives
- voicing their needs
- helping to identify solutions to problems
- influencing and assisting in the continuing improvement of Council services

EMPOWER our customers and stakeholders to influence the decision-making process, the strategic planning of services and the monitoring of service delivery

PROVIDE A FRAMEWORK and co-ordinate the consultation process within Melton Borough Council to enable effective consultation to take place and the information collated to be used effectively

IMPLEMENT a strategy that ensures :

- customers and stakeholders feel they have adequate opportunity to make their views known
- high customer perception of their ability to influence Council decision-making
- results of consultation exercises are shared and acted upon
- customers and stakeholders are aware that the Council actively seeks and values their views
- co-ordination and best use of resources in consultation
Return to Contents

2.2   What we will achieve

Strong communities which are able to form and sustain their own neighbourhoods, bringing people together with common concerns

Active communities where people are supported to improve quality of life

Influential communities where people feel they have opportunities to be involved in decision-making and influence public services

The Council needs to have the processes in place to consult, communicate and engage with communities and actively use their views. In order to do this we will

- build awareness that the Council is seeking community and individual views through the Council's website, use of social media, use of customer insight and mapping

- demonstrate the ability to process views once known, this can be achieved through providing feedback to communities on the impact of views once considered again through the website, use of social media as well as informing specific service users of any change as a result of views being received

- build trust and relationships with customers and stakeholders by collecting and sharing what they tell us on a daily basis to help inform small adjustments to service delivery and also using that information to develop options for change through consultation

- follow our commitment of 8 Key Rules of consultation set out at Appendix C when carrying out consultation as well as the corporate process set out at (4) below.

2.3   Potential outcomes and links to Council priorities

The outcomes to be delivered by this strategy are :

- Customers and stakeholders make their views known
- Well informed customers and stakeholders
- High customer perception of ability to influence Council decision-making
- Improved knowledge of our customers and communities
- Stronger and sustainable communities
- Community insight
- Good reputation
- Satisfied customers and stakeholders
- Increased interest in the democratic process
- Effective internal communications

The strategy contributes to meeting the following corporate priorities :

- A well run Council
- Good services that are value for money
- To provide high performing services that are efficient and meet customers' needs
- Services that meet customer expectations
- Innovate in service delivery
- People and Place Priorities are met through consulting on individual areas within these wider headings

Return to Contents

3. WHERE DO WE WANT TO GET TO ...

3.1 Sustainable communities, asking for views is the norm

Engaging with people on matters that affect their lives is the norm at Melton Borough Council. Not only will this approach mean that services are tailored to suit community needs and wishes but it will strengthen public satisfaction of the Council and build strong working relationships between the Council and the people it services.

Enabling people to have their say and feel more empowered to access services they need creates a feeling of shared ownership as well as a sustainable community. Future benefits of people knowing what services are available and how to access them means that people will be able to have more independence.

The Council is already moving towards its goal of working with people on important issues that affect them. These include developing reference groups to work on the new Melton Local Plan and in co-designing the online review process for Council Tax Support through working with partners and focus groups.

3.2 Tailored, co-ordinated approach to consultation

It is important that a co-ordinated approach to consultation across the Council is used to ensure there is a record of all the stages of consultation as well as any changes made along the way being recorded. Should any consultation be subject to challenge, evidence of a robust and well thought out process with notes of why any changes are made as well as the decision-making process would be essential.

As well as a co-ordinated approach, there is scope in the Consultation Toolkit and within the corporate framework to tailor the consultation exercise to suit those being consulted to ensure the best possible response. The consultation is to be shaped to ensure that it reaches those known to be 'hard to reach' as well as those within the protected characteristics within the Single Equality Scheme. This could mean that a consultation is accessible by post, the website, email and via social media and responses may be returned in any of these formats.

This corporate approach is achieved by :

- completing a Consultation Request Form (Appendix A) everytime a consultation exercise is proposed
- using the Consultation Toolkit (Appendix F)
- the Annual Consultation Programme (Appendix B) being updated regularly and used as a record of consultation activity
- following the 8 Rules of Consultation as set out in the MBC Commitment.doc
- publicise a Consultation Public Feedback Report (Appendix E) and issue a press release and publish this document to the Council's website at the least
- following each Consultation exercise, the Lead Officer is to complete a Consultation Summary Form (Appendix D)

3.3 Meeting the Single Equality Scheme, engaging Hard to Reach Groups and removing barriers

This strategy is committed to working within the Council's Single Equality Scheme and engaging 'hard to reach' groups by :

- Developing appropriate information channels to ensure effective communication of information such as web based methods and use of social media
- Providing guidance on making written information accessible, in other languages where appropriate and large print for people with a visual impairment and by ensuring we use plain English in all our communications

- Identifying appropriate methods such as face to face interviews to reach people who have literacy problems
- Agreeing all timescales with consultees and using realistic time scales when feedback is required
- Making every effort to ensure that the consultative process is anti-discriminatory and does not preclude participation on the grounds of any of the protected characteristics such as age, gender, race etc
- Exploring creative possibilities to enhance community consultation in terms of accessible venues, transport provision, signing and interpreting services etc.
- Choosing venues for consultative meetings carefully, not only for physical accessibility but also to ensure a welcoming and non-threatening environment
- Ensuring the involvement of people who may be under represented in consultation exercises including young and elderly people, people with disabilities and those from ethnic minority groups
- Consideration on how to ensure those with protected characteristics as identified in the Single Equality Scheme are able to participate
- Including the Equality and Diversity Monitoring Form with each consultation exercise and ensuring the principles of the Data Protection Act 1998 are followed when collating the data
- The monitoring data collected be confidentially stored and be used only to assess and ensure participation of those with the protected characteristics in the consultation exercise
- When analysing results, consideration be given to the impact on those with the protected characteristics and reference be made to this in any report to Members as well as in the publicly available Feedback and the Consultation Summary form.

3.4   Appropriate consultation with Children and Young People

The importance of how we consult with Children and Young People is being addressed via a separate Children and Young People Participation Toolkit which is being developed by Charnwood Borough Council to help Councils involve children and young people in service design and delivery. This Toolkit is being finalised as a model for use by all Leicestershire District and Borough Councils.
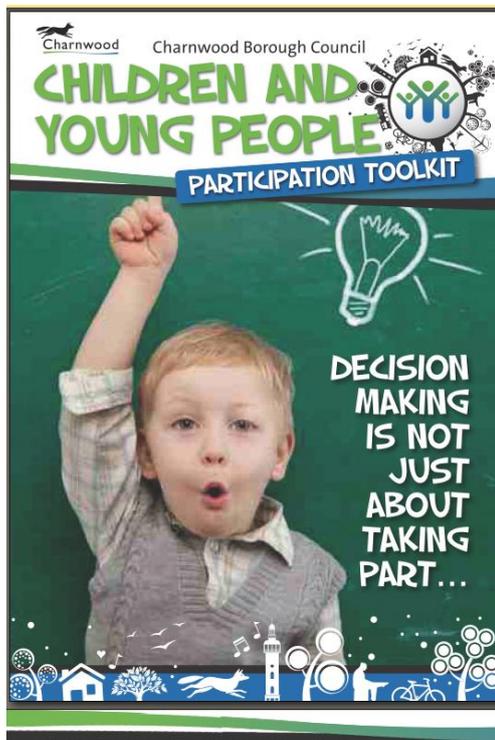
Children and young people's participation in decision-making is not just about taking part. It is the process in which children and young people are asked what works, what does not and what could work better so that their voice can influence decision-making and bring about change.

Children and young people comprise 25% of the UK population. Melton Borough Council is committed to upholding children and young people's right to be involved in decisions that affect their lives and will strive to embed a culture of participation into everyday working practice.

Many decisions taken locally, nationally and internationally are taken by adults although the choices made will have a profound impact on the current and future lives of children and young people. Their participation is vital in order to improve and develop services and respond to needs. This is acknowledged and promoted in law, policy and guidance: the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Every Child Matters, the Children's Act 2004, Youth Matters, Aiming High for young people 2007, the National Youth Agency's Hear By Right which is a nationally recognised framework used for increasing the voice and influence of children and young people within organisations.

Participation brings with it many benefits for organisations, young people, and the wider community. Involving young people in Council service design and

delivery saves time and money. Planning, Communities and Neighbourhoods, Leisure Services, Waste Management, Procurement and Communications all have examples to showcase young people's meaningful participation.

3.5 Promoting a consultation exercise

Using the local media as well as social media to promote a consultation is key to ensure that all those in the community know that the Council is looking for views on a particular subject area. It is important that any consultation exercise is promoted on the Council's website and regular user groups (listed in the Toolkit) are usually asked to participate.

There are other ways of targeting those most affected by a consultation exercise and these include mailshots, individual emails and events at local venues such as market stalls, supermarkets, schools, children's centres, village halls etc.

3.6 Planned approach and keeping people informed

Ongoing consultation which has different stages for instance the development of the Melton Local Plan, benefits from having a planned approach to a series of consultations and how and when decisions are made following each stage. The bonus of a plan is also that significant milestones and communication points are able to built in so that people who are affected at each stage are kept informed of progress and outcomes.

Press releases to local media provide the main mechanism for keeping the whole community informed.   However the website and email are useful tools for keeping people up to date with progress although when addresses are known of interested parties, there is still a place for letters especially to ensure people receive the latest information as well as for those who are not computer literate.

4. HOW WILL WE DO IT …

4.1 The Consultation Process

The Corporate Consultation Framework set out below is designed to ensure there is a structured approach to a consultation project but also allows flexibility to ensure that each consultation best meets the communication needs of those being consulted.

Stage	Responsible Person/s	Action
Pre-Consultation stages	Head of Service	Recognition of need for consultation/seeking views eg. new initiative, policy change, service improvement, developing priorities etc
	Lead Officer	Review existing 'Melton View' data to reduce duplication and understand existing customer views to help inform options, method of consultation, gaps in those who respond ie. hard to reach
		↓
	Lead Officer	Complete Consultation Request Form
		↓
	Lead Officer	Management Team to approve request. Consultation added to Annual Consultation Plan
		↓
Stages 1, 2, 3 and 4	Lead Officer	Follow 8 Key Rules and Toolkit to carry out consultation
		↓
Stages 5, 6 and 7	Lead Officer	Analyse results and report to decision-makers Decisions and feedback

		report publicised
		↓
Post consultation	Lead Officer	Complete Consultation Summary Form including any learning from the process

The Consultation Toolkit provides a step by step approach to developing the consultation product and gives ideas and hints for designing each consultation to suit its target audience. There may be several methods of consultation used to enable different types of people to be consulted and to bring different perspectives to a consultation project. For example a questionnaire may be available online which will result in anonymous, quantative opinion as well as focus groups offered on the same subject to enable a more participative forum to receive personal, qualitative views. Such different approaches bring a wider opinion base and enable more informed decision-making.
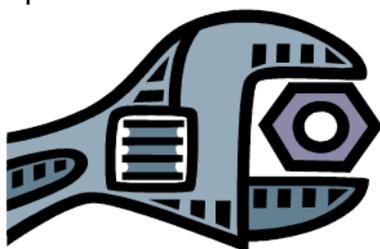
Once a consultation project has been agreed, the toolkit sets out the 7 stages of planning a consultation exercise which are as follows :-

- Stage 1 : Decide **WHO** to consult with
- Stage 2 : Decide **WHAT** to consult on
- Stage 3 : Decide **HOW** to consult
- Stage 4 : **START** the consultation
- Stage 5 : **EVALUATE** and use the results
- Stage 6 **: MAKE** decisions
- Stage 7 : **FEEDBACK** and **SUMMARY**

Clarification of the type of consultation at an early stage will avoid misunderstanding and possible disillusionment later. This refers back to whether the Council is providing information, presenting options for feedback or asking people to help us develop our options and decide actions. Any limitations upon the degree of consultation, such as legislative or financial restrictions, also need to be made known at the outset.

Identifying consultees is of prime importance when constructing a consultation and especially how to target the widest section of the community affected by a proposal. The Council is committed to consulting those known as 'hard to reach' as well as those with protected characteristics and there is guidance on how this can be achieved within this strategy as well as in the Consultation Toolkit.

Early involvement of consultees is not only desirable in terms of allowing people real input into the decision-making process but also confirms the credibility of the consultation. People will then not feel that crucial decisions have been made prior to their participation. This involvement can include input

to option development in consultation through focus groups, data from previous consultations, customer insight, compliments, complaints, data collected on a day to day basis as well as what people tell us through social networking.

Early involvement promotes interest, community engagement and ownership. Clear objectives are to be set for any consultation exercise and the nature of consultee involvement will be defined early on in the consultation process. Such involvement should be noted and included in the publicly available feedback report so that consultees are aware of customer input to the development of the consultation process.

Appropriate methods of feeding back to consultees will need to be identified and such feedback will always be undertaken.   Feedback will take place as soon as possible after any consultation exercise and within an agreed timescale identified at the start of the outset.   The feedback will use the Standard Public Feedback Report at Appendix E as the minimum standard and be available on the Council's website.

In pursuing the Council's strategic aim to deliver services digitally wherever possible, the Council supports electronic means of communication and consultation. Therefore the use of the website, other e-communication tools as well as social media are recommended to be used but not exclusively to ensure all sectors of the community may take part.

Before starting a consultation project at the pre-consultation stage thought must be given as to why the exercise is being proposed and when would be the best time to carry out it out. Consideration should also be given to previous consultations as well as other customer opinion already available ie. 'The Melton View'. This data will inform whether there would be duplication in the proposed consultation as well as help to develop options and method of consultation.   These matters need to be considered before completing the Consultation Request Form (Appendix A) and before approval is given to continue with the project.

The 8 Key Rules of Consultation set out at Appendix C are the Council's commitment in delivering a consultation exercise.

Return to Contents

4.2   Methods of Consultation

Once the principle of consultation has been decided and a Consultation Request Form approved, other criteria must be considered as set out in the Toolkit.

The Toolkit provides detailed guidance on how to reach your target audience, how to construct questions, different methods of consultation and when it is appropriate to use them.

Opportunities for e-consultation should be taken wherever possible and appropriate eg. website, email, text messaging and social media.

The Council is committed to improve its consultation processes through the identification of new and innovative ways to consult.

The main methods and channels used for consultation include

- Consultation with partnership organisations including MCP, County Council, Voluntary Sector etc
- Public/open meetings
- Use of the media (including the Melton Mail)
- Focus groups
- User surveys
- Community and business newsletters
- Questionnaires and surveys
- Residents' surveys
- Mystery shopping
- Complaints, comments and compliments
- Open days and exhibitions
- Advice leaflets and reports
- Electronic communication - website, email, text messaging
- Social Media – Facebook, Twitter etc **Return to Contents**

4.3 Co-ordination of Consultation

The Council will co-ordinate its consultation initiatives effectively in order to avoid consultation fatigue amongst people being consulted and to ensure the best use of Council resources. Internal liaison and partnership working is key to this.

The Council will produce and publish an Annual Consultation Programme, setting out proposals to consult. This will be updated to include ad hoc consultation which is responsive to public concern at any particular time.

The co-ordination of consultation exercises will :

- Allow Council staff and the public to see what consultation is taking place and when

- Ensure a co-ordinated, corporate and recorded process is followed and all stages of consultation have been considered including public feedback
- Help avoid targeting the same groups, avoid repetitive questioning and 'consultation overload'
- Ensure capture of consultation information called 'The Melton View' and that this is reviewed including 'lessons learnt' before a new consultation exercise is started
- Enable the Council to understand who participates in consultation and where there are 'hard to reach' groups as well as collect data on participation of those with protected characteristics to inform improvement in engagement as required
- Avoid unnecessary duplication of time and resources by enabling consultation exercises to be combined where appropriate
  Return to Contents

4.4 Use of electronic communications and social media

The Council is committed to keeping up with the latest communication technology and uses the website, email and the various brands of social media to communicate with the people of the Borough. This strategy reflects the growing trend towards gathering public opinion through social media and the speed that views can be expressed and responded to. Whilst the Council's Twitter and Facebook accounts are updated regularly and monitored by relevant Lead Officers, this type of communication does not replace formal consultation where different methods for feedback are provided. However it is recognised social media provides complimentary methods of communication and certain sections of the community prefer this method of fast response.

The Council offers a wide selection of consultation and feedback mechanisms including use of the website, social media and hard copy survey forms where requested and appropriate.

5. WHO WILL DO IT …

5.1 The Role of Councillors

The Localism Act seeks to include engagement and participation and encourage more deliberation in decision-making. One important aspect is to

strengthen the power and duties of Councillors to hold local public services and partners to account and take the lead on local issues. These powers support Councillors to engage communities and contribute to empowerment.

The representational and community leadership role of Councillors is crucial to the consultation process through their formal involvement in :

• Ward matters
• Local community initiatives
• Community development
• Lead Member activities

Their role as community leaders means Councillors will play a key role in the implementation of this strategy, as set out in the Council's Constitution under Article 2, Section 2.2(a)(ii) :

'All Councillors will …

… contribute to the good governance of the area and actively encourage community participation and citizen involvement in decision making'

5.2   The Role of Officers

It is the responsibility of individual Heads of Service to recognise the need for consultation in their service area and ensure the recognised approval and consultation process is followed.   The Senior Democracy Officer in the Communications Section will co-ordinate the Annual Consultation Programme and provide advice on the Toolkit and where needed.   The Senior Democracy Officer will manage the consultation feedback and how it is used in helping to form 'The Melton View'.

Heads of Service are to alert Management Team of a new policy or a review of an existing policy/initiative that would have public interest and would therefore need to be the subject of a consultation exercise.

Consultation may also be carried out to determine the public's view on corporate matters that help to set the direction of the Council such as the Council's priorities and how the Council uses its resources.

The Annual Consultation Programme (Appendix B) will be updated at least each time a new consultation initiative is agreed.

To help officers in progressing a consultation exercise, a Consultation Toolkit has been produced (Appendix G). A Consultation Request Form (Appendix A) is to be completed for each consultation exercise.

Following each Consultation exercise, the Lead Officer is to complete a Consultation Summary Form (Appendix D) followed by a Consultation Public Feedback Report (Appendix E) which at the least, needs to be published on the Council's website.

It is noted that the consultation on individual planning applications and regulatory consultation will remain with the relevant service area and this work

is recognised as being ongoing and therefore not included in the Annual Consultation Programme.

Return to Contents

6.   HOW WILL WE KNOW IF IT WORKS

6.1   Delivering Effective Consultation

Effectiveness of the consultation will focus on whether participation is representative of the target audience.   This can be informed by percentage involvement as well as there being significant quantitative and qualitative feedback and data to be informative as to people's views.   The equalities data will also help to understand if all sectors of the community have been reached.

To deliver effective consultation clear objectives must be set at the start.   Each consultation exercise will be subject to evaluation against its purpose, and any costs involved need to be built into service budgets as appropriate.

The evaluation process for decision-makers is to include :

- How the results influenced decisions and what was learnt from the process
- Sharing the results of the consultation with consultees as well as the wider community
- The number of responses the consultation exercise generated for each question or part of the exercise
- The analysis include validation of the responses received including whether the responses are considered representative of those affected

Feedback must be publicly made available to those who participated and at least this must be set out on the Council's website and include :-

- Appreciation of those who took part
- The reason for the consultation
- How the consultation exercise was developed
- How the consultation was carried out
- Who was consulted and how many responded
- The results and how they were evaluated
- How the results influenced decisions
- What decisions were made from the results and whether the majority view was used and if not, why

Return to Contents

6.2   Monitoring and Reviewing Progress

To enable results to be assessed and available centrally, following each consultation exercise, the Lead Officer is to complete a Consultation Summary Form (Appendix D) and this will be reviewed by Management Team to consider the success of the exercise and whether there are any further actions, including any lessons learnt.

The Consultation Summary Form will be added to 'The Melton View' so that the feedback is available to inform future consultation projects.

APPENDICES

Appendix A : Consultation Request Form

Appendix B : Annual Consultation Programme

Appendix C : Our Commitment – The 8 Key Rules of Consultation

Appendix D : Consultation Summary Form

Appendix E : Standard Public Consultation Feedback Report

Appendix F : Equalities Monitoring Form - available as a separate document

Appendix G : Consultation Toolkit - available as a separate document

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Sarah Evans
Senior Democracy Officer
Melton Borough Council
November 2013

Consultation Request Form

Name :	
Service Area :	
Subject of Consultation :	
Reason for Consultation :	
Other Related Consultations :	
'Melton View' info used to inform consultation :	
Target audience :	
Equalities / Hard to reach groups considered :	
Timeframe for Consultation including Date of Feedback :	
Resources (inc. financial implications) :	
Service-led or Corporate Consultation Exercise :	
Name of Lead Officer :	
Approval by Head of Service :	
Approval by Management Team :	

Please forward the completed form to :
Sarah Evans, Senior Democracy Officer
Email : sevans@melton.gov.uk
Tel : 01664 502441
Return to Contents

Annual Consultation Programme : 2013-14

Name of Consultation & method	Aim of Consultation	Lead Officer	Time-frame	Feedback available
Website improvements – pop up tick box	To determine public satisfaction at each website visit	Sarah-Jane O'Connor	July 2012 – May 2013	Informed ongoing website improvement and Transform-ation Project to move towards aim of being a digital Council
Leisure facilities - questionnaire on leisure facilities delivered to all homes in Borough/website/ Social media	To help shape leisure facilities for the Borough	Clive Breedon/ Steve Taylor	Feb – June 2013	Feedback report on Council's website
Melton Local Plan – participation in Reference Groups More info on how to get involved on website	To work with residents and reference groups to develop new Local Plan for the Borough	Jim Worley	June 2013 to Spring 2017	Ongoing programme of activity – available on Council's website
Local Council Tax Support Scheme – The Council is reviewing the Council Tax Support scheme introduced on 1 April 2013 - questionnaire delivered to users and available on website Supporting documents included booklet, overview of scheme	To help the Council decide where to make savings within the scheme due to the Government reduced funding	Martyn Bowen	Aug – Sept 2013	Results to be presented to PFA Committee on 3 December 2013
Tenant Survey External consultants	To gain views of tenants on Council	Sam Spencer	Sept – Oct	Results to be presented to

appointed to survey Council tenants on Council housing services	housing services		2013	Tenants' Forum on 2 December 2013
Business Consultation – Questionnaire delivered to businesses/ website	To identify key issues, so that we can work with our partners to formulate a series of support packages targeted at local businesses	Maria Ramshaw	Sept – October 2013	Results being analysed
Melton Country Park - New Pavilion Website questionnaire and hard copy delivery to neighbouring residents to proposed facility	To receive views as to existing use of the Melton Country Park and the introduction of a pavilion	Steven Taylor	October 2013	Results being analysed
Priorities Consultation Survey currently being developed	To receive public opinion on the importance of each of the Council's priorities	Angela Tebbutt/ Harry Rai	Nov 2013 – Jan/Feb 2014	

Melton Borough Council

**Our Commitment :
The 8 Key Rules of Consultation**

It is our aim to work within the following rules following when carrying out any consultation :

1. Consultation and the Democratic Process
- Councillors and officers will always need to weigh the views expressed through consultation against a wide rage of other factors: such as legislation and government guidance; demographic data; financial costs; environmental impact
- Councillors and officers will often have to make their own judgment about the weight to be given to one or other of the views expressed. They may also have to consider carefully whether the aspirations and needs of future generations – who will perhaps be more affected by any change – might differ significantly from those of today's population
- The results of consultation cannot be a substitute for the democratic process – and do not replace the legitimate role of Councillors in decision-making
- Results of consultation together with other relevant factors will be provided to Councillors in a format which enables openness and transparency of decision-making

2. Time consultations well and allow sufficient time to respond
- Consultations should be timed to allow the results to influence policy/proposal development
- The timing of consultations should consider the availability of target groups
- Wide scale public consultations, eg borough-wide or large parts of it, should run for a period of 12 weeks and for no less than 6 weeks
- Reasonable time will be allowed for people to respond to a consultation

3. Clearly present relevant information and encourage informed opinion
- The consultation should clearly state the proposal, why we are consulting, and how we will use the findings
- The consultation should provide enough information to enable consultees to give an informed opinion and not simply an instant reaction
- This information should be written in plain English

4. Be well targeted and reach out to seldom heard groups
- The views of those people/areas most affected by the proposal should be sought
- Attempts should be made to listen to the views of non-users, especially when service changes are being consulted on
- Attempts should be made to include the views of groups frequently excluded or overlooked

- Consultations should consider the needs of people with impaired sight or hearing or people whose first language is not English
- Consultations should take into account the protected characteristics of the Single Equality Scheme where appropriate

5. Offer genuine options and ask objective questions
- Where options are offered, they should be realistic and deliverable
- Surveys and questions should be written in an objective way allowing people to express their views

6.   Be well planned, managed and coordinated
- The Council's Consultation Toolkit contains step-by-step instructions to enable us to effectively manage consultations

7. Be well communicated
- We will publicise consultations and make attempts to let people know they are happening
- Major consultations – eg. borough-wide or affecting a large number of people – will be publicised by the Council's website, press release and in Council publications such as 'Melton Mail' and the Tenants' Newsletter

8.   Provide fair, accessible feedback
- We will publish the findings of consultations and later how they have been used

- The findings will be reported in a balanced way

Return to Contents

Consultation Summary Form

Lead Officer :	
Service Area :	
Subject of Consultation :	
Reason for Consultation :	
Consultees/Target Audience :	
List of equalities groups used :	
Timeframe met including date of public Feedback :	
Method(s) of Consultation :	
QUESTIONS	
How many questions asked (attach questions) :	
Equality & Diversity Monitoring used :	
RESPONSES	
% Response to questions (by group if appropriate) :	
% Response to Equalities monitoring questions :	
PARTICIPATION	
No. of people surveyed :	
No. of responses received :	
DECISION MAKING	
How were the results used :	
What decisions were made and by who :	
What changes were made to service delivery :	
FEEDBACK	
How was feedback made available to those consulted :	

How was feedback made available to the public :	
How was feedback internally available :	
LEARNING	
Any learning points to be shared from the consultation exercise :	
Date form completed and sent to SDO :	

This form will be reviewed by Management Team.   Please forward the completed form to :-

Sarah Evans, Senior Democracy Officer (SDO)
Email : sevans@melton.gov.uk
Tel : 01664 502441

Return to Contents

Standard Public Feedback Report
Suggested headings and how feedback is presented is in italics

Consultation Subject Heading

What you said & how we used your views …

Thanks to those who participated eg.

*First of all, thank you for your participation in this survey and we hope you find the feedback and results of the (**name**) consultation survey of interest.*

1.   Introduction

Reason for consultation and put into political, economic, environmental and social context if possible eg.

Recent changes both at central and local government have put increasing pressures on public services both in terms of performance and on budgets. There is a higher expectation to deliver more for less. With difficult decisions needing to be made around budgets it is important that the public are both made aware of these difficulties and also given an opportunity to voice their opinions. Budgets are being rapidly reduced and this will mean major changes to the way services are delivered, a public consultation raises awareness and gives the public a chance to feed into the budget setting process.

A public consultation exercise was held to receive the public's views on how the Council should distribute its budget in 2011/12.

2.   Methodology

Explain how the questions were developed, who was consulted including those who are hard to reach and those with protected characteristics, how the views were collected and how the survey was promoted, eg.

Online Survey

An online survey was developed. The questions were developed by Councillors and Officers a lot of thought went into that process until the final version was approved. The focus of the questions was to encourage constructive views on where the Council could make reductions in spending on specific areas. No options were given to increase spending in any area due to the reduction in government grant and the necessity for budgets to be reduced and not increased.

It was felt important to seek views on the public perception of whether the Council gave value for money and this question was asked at the start and at the end of the survey to assess whether there was a change in view after completing the survey.

Postcodes were requested as the only source of identification so that it could be assessed as to whether the survey results were representative of the demographic population of the Borough. An Equalities Monitoring Form was included within the questionnaire to enable assessment of whether the views received were representatives of the demographic population of the Borough as well as to consider participation of those with protected characteristics as set out within the Single Equality Scheme.

The survey was launched on ? and closed on ?.

<u>*Promotion of the Survey*</u>

*The survey was strongly featured on the Homepage of the Council's website for the duration of the consultation. The Melton Times mentioned the survey several times and gave the website link in each case. The survey was featured on the front page of this newspaper on 11 November 2010. This was a prominent full page article which was headed :- **Your Money, Your Council And Your Say.***

Include any reference to use of social media and how the survey was promoted by any other means.

There was an article in the Council's newsletter, the Melton Mail in December, which promoted the survey and encouraged people of the Borough to ensure they had had their say. This publication is circulated to all homes in the Borough. Councillors also made people aware of the survey and helped them fill in the questionnaire on their monthly Market Stall. The survey was circulated to the Melton Community Partnership and the Town Centre Partnership as well as to other user groups.

The survey was promoted in the rural areas on the Leicestershire Villages website and the Borough's Parish Councils were encouraged to assist in the promotion of the survey in their areas.

<u>*Accessibility*</u>

To ensure full accessibility of the survey to all people in the Borough, in addition to the online survey, a hard copy Plain English version was created which was posted to Council tenants and was promoted in the local press as being available at the Children's Centres, Library and by calling the Customer Service Centre.

<u>*Learning from previous surveys*</u>

If available include reference of data/information from previous surveys that had helped to inform and evidence why certain options for responses/questions/methods of consultation/specific groups of people had been targeted.

3.   Survey Response

Report on the survey responses received and the format of the views collected eg.

453 entries were made to the survey. This figure includes the 64 hard copies of the survey returned, 14 being the Plain English version. The hard copy returns were manually inputted into the survey software and the results are included within the total figure.

Many comments were received relating to the Car Parking question and the last question which requested the public's views ie. 'Consultation Approach – Your Views'. Many of these responses will help inform the budget survey for 2012/13 as well as help inform other Council initiatives and consultation projects.

Equalities Monitoring

The Equalities Monitoring data is collected for central use in helping to inform future surveys as well as other Council initiatives. This is to help us understand our customers and the level of involvement of different groups of people and therefore help us to improve involvement with under-represented groups in the future.

4.   How the views helped with making decisions

Explain how the survey responses were used and what they helped to inform and how decisions were made eg.

The survey responses were circulated to Councillors at several meetings including part way through the consultation period at the Policy, Finance and Administration Committee on 8 December 2010.

The final responses were first considered at the Budget Away Day held on 11 January 2011. This budget meeting was an opportunity for Councillors and Senior Officers to consider the responses in the context of other essential factors in preparing the Council's budget for 2011/12.

Following this meeting where the survey responses were considered along with other factors on budget setting, a report was presented to the Policy, Finance and Administration Committee on 26 January 2011 which set out proposals for the 2011/12 budget.

The above Committee's recommendations were referred to the Meeting of the Council on 2 February 2011 along with the Revenue Budget 2011/12 report. This meeting formally sets the budget which in term feeds into the level of council tax set. Here is the link to the report and its appendices for that meeting :

http://www.melton.gov.uk/council_and_democracy/committees__decision-making/2010_11_council__cttee_mtgs/meetings_of_the_council/2_february_2011.aspx

The decisions of that Council Meeting are set out at the bottom of the page at the same link.

During the budget setting process, Councillors were insistent that the residents of the Borough did not incur a rise in Council Tax in 2011/12 as directed by the Government. It was confirmed at the Council Meeting on 2 February 2011, that there would be no increase in the overall level of Council Tax in 2011/12.

5.   Survey Results & How we used your Views

Include the survey questions and the percentages responses. If appropriate give brief dialogue as to the balance of survey responses and how each response influenced

the final decision even if the decision was not in line with the public resopnse. If this is the case give the reason for the opposing view.

The survey questions and percentage responses are listed below together with a brief summary of how the Council used that information eg.

3. Street Cleaning

The Council spends £353,000 per year keeping the streets and public land free from litter and other mess. Compared with other Councils, Melton has low levels of litter but if the service was to be reduced standards would decrease. Would it be better to ...

• **Reduce the frequency of the service**	**32.6%**
• **Keep things as they are**	**65.7%**
• **Don't know**	**2.0%**

Although the public's majority view indicated to 'keep things as they are', Councillors considered that there was scope to make a service efficiency of around £15,000 by :
- *reducing the number of lesser - used waste bins in the town centre*
- *replacing smaller bins with fewer, larger, ones in residential areas*
- *reducing the frequency of cleansing in villages form 4 to 3 times a year*
- *reducing the cleansing of school routes to a term-time service*
- *eliminating town centre cleansing from days when it is least required*

4. Car Parking Charges

The Council has different charges for its long and short stay car parks and these are available on the Council's website and displayed at the car parks. The income of £500,000 is used to help pay for our services. Do you consider the charges should ..

• **Stay the same**	**46.0%**
• **Be increased**	**18.0%**
• **Be reduced – recognising this could lead to other services being reduced**	**22.3%**
• **Include a 24 hour/night time charge**	**13.3%**
• **Don't know**	**1.0%**

The Council agreed with the public's majority view and opted to 'stay the same'
However, many comments were received on car parking arrangements and these views are to be taken into consideration and fed into discussions on how we run this service in the future

12. Disposal of assets – Generating capital

Should the Council be selling properties such as unused land and vacant buildings in the current economic climate to generate capital for Council priorities ...

• **Yes**	**73.9%**
• **No**	**20.0%**
• **Don't know**	**6.3%**

The Council agreed with the public's majority view and is already committed to selling selected Council house garages to help meet other priorities.

19. Access to services

The Council is moving towards developing its website and making more information available electronically to enable greater accessibility for the community and this will also save the Council money. What is your view on this Council initiative ...

- **Agree**   **82.8%**
- **Disagree**   **10.7%**
- **Don't know**   **6.5%**

The Council agreed with this majority view and is progressing its work on electronic delivery of services.

6.   How your views will be used in the future

The Council is committed to carefully retaining customer and stakeholder views and using this information to help inform how it delivers its services now and in the future.

Listening to our customers on a day to day basis via social media, service feedback, compliments and complaints as well as feedback from focus groups and formal consultations provides a wealth of customer opinion.   Central collation of this type of intelligence ensures that we don't repeatedly ask the same questions and helps with developing questions, methods of engagement and how to reach different groups of people. The information can also be used to help inform how the Council works and uses it resources to best serve the people who live, work, visit and invest in the Borough.

What we know about our community through consultation and public opinion including compliments and complaints is collectively known as 'The Melton View'.   The Council aims to centrally store 'The Melton View' every time we receive people's opinions about the Council and its services.

Return to Contents