

Corporate Policy Committee

Date of Meeting:	14 July 2022
Report Title:	Approach to Consultation and Engagement
Report of:	Jane Burns, Executive Director Corporate Services
Report Reference No:	CP/6/22-23
Ward(s) Affected:	All

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1.** The purpose of this report is to outline a coordinated and collaborative approach to consultation and engagement. The new approach will support all of the aims and objectives in the Council's Corporate Plan 2021-25 but will particularly support two priorities within the "Open" aim, these are: to listen, learn and respond to our residents, promoting opportunities for a two-way conversation and to promote and develop the services of the council through regular communication and engagement with all residents.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1** This report outlines a new approach to consultation and engagement, which has been developed by a cross council officer working group. The new approach seeks to achieve the aims and objectives within the Corporate Plan by driving greater consistency and information sharing within the council, increasing our external conversations and engagement activity and ultimately increasing participation and improving resident satisfaction.
- 2.2** The new approach will be refined through a refreshed approach to the consultation on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and will be supported by progression of the draft Communications Strategy and the implementation of the Customer Experience strategy and Live Well for Longer plan.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. Approve the new approach to Consultation and Engagement.
- 3.2. Note progress in developing actions to deliver the new approach and that a further update will be brought to the next meeting.

4. Reasons for Recommendations

- 4.1. The recommendations have been made to support progress against delivery of the Corporate Plan. This report proposes activities that support implementation of the priorities to listen, learn and respond to our residents, promoting opportunities for a two-way conversation and to promote and develop the services of the council through regular communication and engagement with all residents.
- 4.2. The recommendations progress a “one council” approach to consultation and engagement, promoting sharing knowledge and resources, and development of a defined and documented approach to support consistency and transparency.

5. Other Options Considered

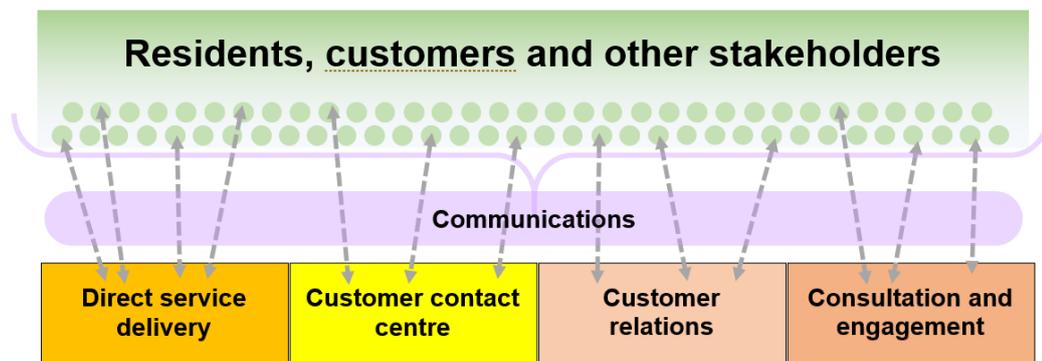
- 5.1. In terms of the new approach to Consultation and Engagement the committee could agree not to proceed and instead continue the status quo. The risk to this option is of duplication of resources in both resident and officer resource and disparate activity, which may influence the reputation of the council.

6. Background

- 6.1. In early 2022 a working group of officers was established to review the consultation and activities taking place across the council and to consider how these activities could be better aligned to achieve our corporate plan priorities. The working group is time limited, working on producing the new approach by September 2022. The first session mapped the activities that take place across the council, which include formal digital consultations, surveys, focus groups with businesses and communities and informal conversations with residents and communities. The second session has drafted a route map of activities that the group wish to undertake to achieve our priorities to listen, learn and respond to our residents, promoting opportunities for a two-way conversation and to promote and develop the services of the council through regular communication and engagement with all residents.
- 6.2. To achieve the Corporate Plan priorities the officer working group have recommended a more collaborative “one council” approach that will reduce duplication, share insight and intelligence and give greater consistency for all audiences in approach, evaluation, monitoring and further improvement. Specific recommended outputs of the officer working group are recommended to be; a Consultation and Engagement toolkit setting out a consistent process for different forms of consultation and engagement, a new

community of practice to share insight and intelligence to inform strategic developments, using the new Cheshire East Council Intelligence Network (CECIN), and a clear programme of consultation and engagement activity to support delivery of the Corporate Plan. It is proposed that these outputs are developed, approved and launched by the end of 2022. The desired outcome of this work is to ensure that the resident voice is considered in all that we do, that residents and other stakeholders feel genuinely listened to, increased participation, to ensure that there is equitable access to consultation and the ability to influence for all and that ultimately resident satisfaction levels with the council are increased.

- 6.3.** The new approach for consultation and engagement is not free-standing, it is part of a wider strategic approach for managing relationships with residents, customers and other stakeholders. The approach therefore will support progression of the Customer Experience strategy and the proposed draft Communications strategy and will support our services across these areas.



- 6.4.** The new approach recommended includes both internal and external focus. Internally, officers want to have clearer guidance for consultation and engagement activity and to be able to share insight and intelligence across the council. Externally, the new approach also focuses on connecting and increasing activity, such as more engagement with Town and Parish councillors and sharing data obtained from stakeholder focus groups, such as the Voluntary and Faith sector networks, the Business Forums and intelligence gained from the Communities team.
- 6.5.** The new approach to consultation and engagement will involve more listening activities and more informal consultation and activities. This will support improving the customer experience and building improved relationships with our residents. Through implementation of the new approach, residents will have further evidence that their views are listened to and considered, which should influence greater participation and involvement in opportunities to influence the policies and practice of the council.
- 6.6.** The Council have already undertaken activities to co-produce plans with residents. A recent example is the “Live Well for Longer Plan 2022-25” which sets as its aim “to work in equal partnership with the residents of Cheshire East to design and deliver meaningful services.” This greater degree of

engagement is particularly crucial in adult health and care as the customer base expands over the next year.

- 6.7. The direction for consultation and engagement is to undertake more participatory activities. This follows the work of Sherry Arnstein, who developed a “ladder of engagement and participation” in 1969, and her model remains widely recognised for understanding different forms and degrees of community involvement. The steps of the ladder are:

Devolving – placing decision making in the hands of the community and individuals,

Collaborating – working in partnership with communities in each aspect of decision-making, including the development of alternatives, and the identification of preferred solutions

Involving – working directly with communities to ensure that concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered, for example, through partnership boards and reference groups.

Consulting – Obtaining community and individual feedback on analysis and/or decisions, for example, surveys and focus groups.

Informing – providing communities and individuals with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding challenges, opportunities and solutions, for example, through websites, newsletters and media releases.

- 6.8. Our aim is to undertake more participatory activities with a greater degree of coproduction with residents to support improved customer experience.

- 6.9. The officer working group have produced the following summary of how the new approach may support success against our Corporate Plan priorities:

Success factors	What will be different with the new approach?
Improved resident satisfaction	Increased customer satisfaction Reduced complaints and increased compliments Improved reputation
Increased resident engagement	Residents find it easy and convenient to provide their views Co-production is considered wherever possible Residents feel listened to and can see their influence There are opportunities for all residents to be involved
A successful "One Council" approach	Councillors and officers can explain how resident views were considered for decisions A central repository for consultation findings, with appropriate consent Reduced legal challenges

	<p>A range of data and insight available from Pulse Surveys, Residents Surveys and Communications Survey</p> <p>A consistent "One Council" approach to Consultation and Engagement</p>
Consultation and engagement activity that	<p>Is accessible</p> <p>Is designed in a way that intelligence can be used more than once</p> <p>Balances quantitative and qualitative intelligence</p> <p>Provides a regular programme of activity</p> <p>Evidences increased participation</p> <p>Is locality based, rather than department or directorate focused</p>
Our staff strengths and local assets	<p>Shared objectives and greater insight to our communities</p> <p>Organisational capacity and time to integrate feedback into what we know</p> <p>Utilising cross council skills and knowledge</p> <p>Partner intelligence used to support consultation and engagement</p>
Clear feedback loops	<p>A continued "You said, we did" approach</p> <p>Feedback with explanations if the council cannot implement suggested actions</p>

- 6.10.** A key upcoming opportunity to test the new approach to consultation and engagement is the next iteration of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy in autumn 2023/24. This will inform a revised approach to the next Residents Survey in 2023/24.
- 6.11.** A separate report has been produced in relation to the proposed process for the Medium-Term Financial Strategy consultation which was considered by the Finance Sub Committee on 1 June 2022.
- 6.12.** The last Residents Survey was conducted in 2019. The survey was distributed to a stratified sample of just under 9,000 (8,749) residents. There was a 46% response rate to the survey. 3,989 responses were received (3,216 paper responses and 773 online responses). Residents had lower levels of satisfaction with regards to roads and pavements in relation to their condition and speed of repairs. There were high levels of satisfaction with the range of services provided by the council, waste and refuse services, local parks, open spaces and play facilities, street lighting and the local area as a good place to live.
- 6.13.** Due to the coronavirus pandemic, there has been no further Residents Survey conducted since 2019. Therefore, the council need to prepare for the next Residents Survey and undertake an options appraisal of how this will be structured. The testing of the new approach in relation to the Medium-Term Financial Strategy will inform and support preparation for the next Residents Survey.

- 6.14.** The Local Government Association (LGA) measure resident satisfaction with councils every four months. The LGA polling survey is conducted through telephone interviews. Their latest results are from February 2022, and the report is included within the background papers to this report. 64% of respondents were happy with how their local council runs things, compared to 56% in the last polling round in October 2021. Trust in councils is above the polling average, with just under two-thirds of respondents saying they trust their local council “a great deal” or “a fair amount”. Similarly, trust in local councillors remain high; 74% of respondents selected “local councillors” rather than “members of parliament” or “government ministers” when asked who they most trust to make decisions about local service provision. The new approach to consultation and engagement will continue to measure Cheshire East residents’ level of satisfaction and trust with the council.

7. Consultation and Engagement

- 7.1.** If the decision is to proceed with implementation of the new approach to Consultation and Engagement, Corporate Policy Committee will receive a progress update, together with a programme of planned consultation and engagement activity in October 2022.

8. Implications

8.1. Legal

Councils sometimes have a statutory requirement to consult residents in certain areas, for example for issues such as planning or redevelopment. Statutory consultations are bound by legal requirements. If there is a need to run a statutory consultation in line with legislation, there is a risk of judicial review.

8.2. Finance

The consultation and engagement task and finish group are conducting their activities within existing resource. Any additional financial implications would be subject to production of a business case and would be in line with the Medium-Term Financial strategy.

A budget for a Residents Survey exists and is within the budget of the Research and Consultation team.

8.3. Policy

This report is in line with our Policy objectives as set out in the Council’s Corporate Plan.

8.4. Equality

An aim of this report is to ensure that consultation and engagement activities are inclusive and accessible. If it is decided to implement the recommended new approach to Consultation and Engagement, the programme of planned activities will be informed by an Equality Impact Assessment.

8.5. Human Resources

It is possible that more dedicated consultation and engagement resource may be required to support our Corporate Plan aspirations, this will be considered within the ongoing restructure of Policy and Change. Policy and Change incorporates the corporate services of research, policy, consultation, performance management, business intelligence, equality, diversity and inclusion, transformation, project and programme management and service improvement.

8.6. Risk Management

Consultation and engagement activity can influence reputational risks to the council and the activity proposed is to increase resident satisfaction.

8.7. Rural Communities

If approved, the new approach to Consultation and Engagement will consider how to engage best with rural communities through its Equality Impact Assessment of the proposed programme. A stakeholder list for rural community representatives has been established to support the work of the Task and Finish group.

8.8. Children and Young People/Cared for Children

The new approach to Consultation and Engagement proposed supports a “One Council” approach. This includes the consultation and engagement channels that are led by Children’s services with children, young people and families across the borough.

8.9. Public Health

The new approach supports public health priorities. The new Cheshire East Council Intelligence Network (CECIN) was established and is chaired by public health. Under the new approach it is proposed this will be the internal mechanism through which officers share insight and intelligence. This will ensure that all findings inform our joint strategic needs assessments, where appropriate.

8.10. Climate Change

The new approach will include digital consultation and engagement channels, as preferred first options, to support reduction of our carbon footprint and to achieve environmental sustainability.

Access to Information	
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<p>Appendices:</p>	<p>Appendix 1- Summary of new approach to Consultation and Engagement</p>  <p>APP1%20Consultatio n%20&%20Engagem</p>
<p>Background Papers:</p>	<p>Background paper 1- Report to 1 June 2022 Finance Sub Committee on the Review of Medium-Term Financial Strategy Consultation process Review of MTFS Consultation Process (cheshireeast.gov.uk)</p> <p>Background paper 2- LGA Resident Satisfaction Polling- Round 31 February 2022 Resident Satisfaction Polling Round 31 (local.gov.uk)</p>