

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET

10TH JULY 2012

SUBJECT:	<i>CORPORATE AND BUSINESS PLANNING CONSULTATION PROCESS</i>
WARD/S AFFECTED:	<i>ALL</i>
REPORT OF:	<i>ACTING CHIEF EXECUTIVE</i>
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	<i>LEADER OF THE COUNCIL</i>
KEY DECISION?	YES

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Wirral's emerging Improvement Plan includes a priority focus to put in place an agreed Corporate Plan that sets clear priorities reflecting a good understanding of citizens and customers' views through consultation, participation and localism.
- 1.2 This report sets out the proposed arrangements for developing a long-term corporate and financial planning framework through a comprehensive programme of consultation and engagement. The process will deliver:
- A 3-year Corporate Plan and Financial Plan for 2013 onwards, which provide the framework for the Council's key plans and strategies
 - An Equality Action Plan
- 1.3 An update of the current Corporate Plan for (2012-13) is subject to a separate report. This provides the strategic direction required in the current financial year to deliver improvements and address the critical issues set out in the emerging Improvement Plan.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 2.1 The guiding principle behind this corporate and business planning process is that it should be open, transparent, inclusive and robust, and as such each stage of the process which is outlined below will be delivered in public, with all associated documentation also available to residents, businesses, partners, community groups and all other stakeholders.
- 2.2 It is proposed to launch the consultation in July 2012, with a report to December 2012 Cabinet containing findings and recommendations. The process will run through five key stages; reviewing services, agreeing options, public consultation, results analysis and reporting back.
- 2.3 Stage One; Reviewing Services: To attempt to provide as holistic a view as possible, for the purposes of this consultation services will be grouped into themes, to enable more detailed discussion of issues. The proposed themes for review are:

- Your Family: Adult Social Services
- Your Family: Children's Services
- Your Economy
- Your Neighbourhood
- Your Council

Appropriate senior officers within each of these themed areas are tasked with producing 'service status' reports, which detail in candid terms exactly what services are being delivered, what those services achieve in terms of outcomes and results, what those services cost and what financial and other challenges they face.

- 2.4 Stage Two; Agreeing Options: The options will be developed, by Council officers, into a series of questions for public consultation. These documents will first be agreed with the appropriate Cabinet lead, and will then be validated by an external, impartial research specialist to ensure that, before consultation begins, the tools which are being used are appropriate, robust and will generate genuine and actionable results.
- 2.5 Stage Three; Public Consultation: A six-week public consultation period will commence in September 2012. This programme of consultation will involve an extensive programme of events and outreach work, as well as a detailed strategy for maximising media coverage, employee engagement, online responses and, importantly, extensive and genuine engagement with hard to reach groups, particularly those groups defined as 'protected'. As part of this process, a series of workshops with the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees will be held during early September, to further investigate the contents of the report. Scrutiny Chairs will have support from a range of co-opted members, who will be brought into the process from public, private and partner organisations and groups to offer expert guidance and opinion. The purpose of these workshops will be to challenge, investigate and develop the content of the service status reports, before submitting to the Administration their views on the options for consultation.
- 2.6 Stage Five; Analysis of Results: Using the feedback received from the consultation programme, Council officers will begin to analyse results. Again, these reports will be externally validated to ensure impartiality and accuracy and will, once that process is complete, be made available to the public through publication on the Council website and communication through the local media. The reports will then be forwarded through to the final stage of the process.
- 2.7 Stage Six; Reporting Back: Upon receipt of the findings reports Cabinet will have the opportunity to provide final comments on their contents. The reports will be presented to the Council's December Cabinet as recommendations and used to inform the Council Budget for 2013/14. They will further be used to develop the Councils Corporate and Financial Plan. Specific proposals relating to potential services changes will then require specific consultation with service users affected immediately following this process. At this stage of the process Cabinet will also be in a position to agree a three-year Corporate Plan and Financial Plan, ensuring that Council resources are targeted at agreed priorities.

2.8 TARGET AUDIENCES

This consultation is open to all residents, and we will attempt to ensure that all residents and communities have the opportunity to contribute and make sure their voice is counted. Therefore, the target audience is simple: every Wirral resident. While we will employ a number of methods to communicate this process and project to every resident, we will further target those groups who are traditionally hard to reach, and seldom feel both noticed and listened to by the Council.

Specifically, additional resource and targeted activity will be employed to encourage participation from people who share the following protected characteristics:

- Older people
- Younger people
- People with disabilities
- People from BME communities
- Gay, Lesbian or Bisexual people
- People who have undergone gender reassignment

Additionally, extra activity will take place in those geographical areas of the borough which, traditionally, produce lower than average levels of engagement in previous Council consultation exercises. These areas are generally concentrated on the East of the borough. Concentrated activity targeted at these groups and in these locations will aim to ensure that the resulting data from the consultation is as representative of the broader population as possible.

2.9 COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

2.10 This section of the report contains the various methods, channels and promotional ideas which will be designed and implemented to ensure the highest possible engagement throughout this entire project, but particularly during the period of public consultation. This section is broken down into sub-sections covering:

- Direct engagement
- Targeted activity
- Advertising and general promotion
- Local and regional media
- Online communications
- Employee engagement

Key messages for each communication plan will be tailored to suit audience and channel, but will still promote the guiding principles of the project. The following communications plan covers only 'top-level' activity, further work and ideas will be developed in the coming months as this project progresses and will be constantly added to the plan.

2.11 Direct Engagement: An extensive "Road Show" is currently in development. This will consist of up to 6-events per day, 7 days per week for the duration of the public consultation period. The events will come under three main 'types':

- Retail: High footfall, generally private sector locations to hand out questionnaires (supermarkets, shopping centres etc).
- Presentations: Community organisations, partners and other groups for a detailed presentation to groups of residents and stakeholders.
- Focus Groups: Detailed discussions on themed options, with particular interest groups such as 'Friends of the Park' etc.

- 2.12 Targeted Activity: The consultation project will specifically target a number of groups who share protected characteristics. An enhanced consultation and engagement programme will be developed and implemented to ensure no part of Wirral's community is ignored, with specific activity focussing on those groups who are generally classed as being 'hard to reach'.
- 2.13 Advertising and General Promotion: A range of interruptive, one-way pieces of advertising will complement the other communication channels for this consultation. This will be done at minimal cost, and will be used to convey our key messages and direct people to other channels where they can take part in the consultation (i.e. web, events etc).
- 2.14 Local Media: We will engage with the media and the local online community to ensure that the consultation is promoted as widely as possible. As with previous consultations, we will also make use of contacts that have been developed with local residents' associations, partner organisations, parishes and other groups that publish their own newsletters and would feature publicity about the process. This approach has proven to be very successful for previous consultations and has helped to ensure that people are aware of the opportunity to feed into the process.
- 2.15 Online Communications: The Council's website, as well as other Council owned sites, will be used to promote the consultation throughout the process, with tools such as online feedback, video and updates available on a weekly basis.
- 2.16 Employee Engagement: Our staff will be an important audience for this process, and their views and opinion will be vital to its success. Therefore, a range of engagement and feedback projects will be developed, including presentations, focus groups and meetings with the Cabinet and Leader of the Council.

3.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 3.1 A project team and plan has been established, which will meet weekly to develop and deliver a project plan, with robust risk assessment arrangements. The key risk for this project is that failure to deliver a successful consultation project will leave the Council unable to develop a Corporate or Financial Plan and make the budget savings required in 2013/14.

4.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 The approach outlined in this report responds to the independent review of Corporate Governance arrangements, the priorities for improvement adopted by the Wirral Improvement Board and the Council decisions in relation to ensuring that lawful engagement and consultation are central to all Council budget and decision making processes. Therefore no further options have been considered.

5.0 CONSULTATION

5.1 The Council has agreed with the voluntary, community and faith sector to define and strengthen relationships between these sectors for the benefit of all Wirral communities. There is a commitment to extensive consultation with local communities. The legal responsibilities regarding consultation and engagement are set out below.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

6.1 The Council with its statutory partner organisations has adopted an agreement with the voluntary, community and faith sector which is designed to define and strengthen relationships between these sectors for the benefit of all communities. The involvement of the voluntary, community and faith sector to inform the evidence base will be crucial.

7.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

7.1 Existing staffing resources will be used to develop and deliver this project, through the temporary secondment of a number of staff to join a consultation and engagement team and administration team to ensure the resources are available to complete this project within the timeframe required.

8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Recent case law has made it clear that any consultation undertaken must be meaningful, informed and reasonable. Failure to ensure this could lead to legal challenge and any decision taken which takes into account the consultation could be undermined and open to challenge by way of Judicial Review.

8.2 The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 came into force in April 2009 and introduced a duty for local authorities to involve, inform and consult with their communities. The duty is wide-ranging and applies to the delivery of services, policy and decision making and means the Council must consult relevant individuals, groups, businesses, organisations and other stakeholders that the Authority considers likely to be affected by, or have an interest in, their actions and functions.

8.3 Under engagement, the Equality Duty 2010 places a legal duty on the Council to:-

- Gather equality information to provide adequate evidence for decision making in policy and service development.
- Engage service users, residents, employees, trade unions, businesses and organisations to set equality objectives – which are most likely to make the biggest difference in tackling inequalities?
- Review progress of equality objectives.
- Publish all engagement undertaken

With this being undertaken in order for the Council to:-

- Identify particular needs, patterns of disadvantage and poor relations between groups. Protected groups can be well-placed to help here.
- Understand reasons for disadvantage, low participation rates and poor relations.

- Design initiatives to meet needs and overcome barriers for more appropriate services.
- Identify opportunities to promote equality of opportunity and foster good relations.
- Determine priorities.
- Understand the relevance of Council functions to equality.
- Monitor and evaluate initiatives, policies and programmes
- Analyse the equality impact of particular programmes, policies and proposals

9.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

9.1 An extensive programme of consultation is planned with local communities. Project management arrangements will be in place to ensure that this programme considers equalities implications at each stage of the process.

10.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

10.1 None.

11.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

11.1 None.

12.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

12.1 That the approach, timetable and communications plan for developing a three-year corporate and financial planning framework is agreed.

13.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

13.1 The recommendations respond to the independent review findings of the Council's Corporate Governance arrangements, the priorities for improvement adopted by the Improvement Board and Council decisions in relation to ensuring lawful engagement and consultation are central to all Council budget and decision making.

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APPENDICES

None

REFERENCE MATERIAL

None

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Cabinet	21st June 2012