

COUNCIL EXCELLENCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 7 November 2012

Present:

Councillor	J Hale (Chair)	
Councillors	A Cox	S Whittingham
	S Williams	J Williamson
	C Muspratt	P Gilchrist

33 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP

Members of the Committee were asked to declare any disclosable pecuniary and non pecuniary interests, in connection with any item(s) on the agenda and state the nature of the interest.

Members were also reminded that they should also declare, pursuant to paragraph 18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, whether they are subject to a party whip in connection with any item(s) to be considered and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of the whipping arrangement.

No such declarations were made.

34 CONSIDERATION OF FINDINGS - WHAT REALLY MATTERS CONSULTATION

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Executive which was to be presented to Cabinet on 8 November with the results of the first stage of the consultation process. The consultation results contained within the report were intended to provide a good understanding of residents', partners' and employees' views on the Council's future priorities and appropriate methods in which savings should be delivered. All of the comments provided through the consultation had been analysed and summarised within the report, and all comments would be published on the Council website during November 2012.

Subject to Cabinet approval, the report would be followed by a second stage of consultation which would begin in November 2012. This second stage would involve consultation with residents, employees and other stakeholders to gather views on a range of detailed options for achieving the necessary budget savings for 2013/14.

The Committee received a presentation from Lucy Barrow, Senior Policy Manager, in the Chief Executive's Department, on the process and findings of the consultation. Over the period of six weeks the team had spoken to just over 13,000 residents. There had been 6,921 responses to the questionnaire, of which 1,133 were staff responses. Responses were broadly geographically and demographically representative.

There was broad approval for each of the four main themes:

- Increasing income
- Alternative delivery
- Shaping Community Services
- Stopping or reducing

Charges for some services should be raised but not to disadvantage people and being careful not to create a domino effect of an overall loss of income. People were very strongly in favour of shared services, although with any service which was outsourced there was a need to retain control. The results also showed that the Council should look at consolidating services into a smaller number of buildings but without leaving any community isolated. Officer options for savings would be published at the end of week to be followed by a further period of consultation through to January and Overview and Scrutiny Committees would be meeting again in December to consider these options.

The three top priorities were ranked in order as:

- Protecting our vulnerable adults and children
- Creating jobs and attracting investment
- Tackling poverty and inequalities in health

Ms Barrow circulated consultation results broken down on a ward by ward basis.

A Member commented that the response rate for the whole of the Borough was less than 3% and with 15% of the respondees being employees, the response from the public was 2.4%. Ms Barrow indicated that initial research had shown that the response rate was higher than any other comparable exercise in the UK; the team had also engaged with thousands more people to raise awareness of the consultation. It was acknowledged that work would continue to encourage as many people as possible to take part in the next stage of the consultation. The Council now had a 7000 distribution base which could be built upon to continue to the next stage.

In response to Members, Ms Barrow indicated that stage two of the process would be undertaken over a longer period and the team would continue to try to engage with those areas where there had been less of a response rate. It was indicated that although results indicated that just under 7,000 responses had been received, the team had spoken to over 13,000 people and attended 150 events.

In relation to the Service Status reports, Ms Barrow indicated that information regarding these were made available on the website.

Peter Timmins, Interim Director of Finance indicated that outcomes from the proposals would be circulated on Friday. In terms of consultation periods this would be dependent on the nature of the proposals, some would run for six weeks other for 12 weeks.

Members felt that the consultation needed to be more specific to generate a higher response rate, for example, informing people of the cost generated, cost to the individual and the impacts highlighting what the changes are.

Members asked for the information contained within the charts in the report could be made available on ward by ward basis.

In response to Members, Ms Barrow indicated that she would feed back to members as to the make up of the 9.9% respondents describing their ethnicity as something other than White- English.

Members indicated that non-universal, optional services such as libraries should be referred to as non-statutory. Members also sought clarification the term “domino effect”

Mr Timmins indicated that work on the figures was ongoing and that the most complex savings would be given the most time before final decisions made, but there were choices in year 1. In response Members indicated that they had hoped there would be a review of this process and that less complex proposals be taken quicker to enable savings to be made more efficiently.

Members thanked all the officers involved in the consultation process.

Resolved –

- (1) That the Council Excellence Overview and Scrutiny Committee thanks everyone who contributed to the “What Really Matters” consultation and the report be noted; and**
 - (2) That the Cabinet be asked to refer to the comments made by the Committee to consider as part of the consultation process.**
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