

Chorley Council

Consultation & Participation Strategy 2007/08



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Context

The Council has identified the need to consult with the public as important. Ensuring that all groups in the community feel that the Council listens to them and that they have the opportunity to influence policy direction and service delivery is a key element in increasing levels of satisfaction in Council services.

Engaging the community in what the Council is doing is difficult, not least because of the diverse nature of the community we serve. Anyone undertaking consultation should ensure they are clear on why consultation is needed and that the most suitable method is used. The Council is aware that some groups in society need more encouragement and help to take part in consultation and decision making, and so will take steps to ensure that all are able to fully participate.

There are a number of reasons why effective consultation is important for the Council. Recent legislation has placed an imperative on Councils to consult with the public on a range of topics. In addition, it is good from a managerial point of view to engage and consult with the public on issues to ensure that services can be designed and refined around the needs of the community.

Aims

The aims of this strategy are to:

1. Demonstrate the Council's commitment to consulting with the public on important issues.
2. Contribute to the continuous improvement of service delivery across the Council, by ensuring that consultation is integral to the decision making process.
3. Set standards for a consistent process when managing consultation exercises.
4. Promote mutual trust between the Council the public.
5. Ensure that everyone in Chorley has the opportunity to participate in consultation exercises.

Consultation in Chorley

Consultation is taken to mean the Council seeks, listens to and takes account of local people's views, prior to making decisions. This strategy does not replace the existing consultation that the Council carries out, but does seek to encourage a more consistent approach to consultation to ensure that it is as effective as possible.

In the longer-term, Chorley Council would like to progress to a position where more local people want to be 'participants' in local democracy, and actively develop their citizenship role. The local community, however, must be fully engaged before this can happen. One way to encourage this engagement is to ensure that we undertake effective consultation exercises that have tangible outcomes.

This strategy establishes the principles that should underpin all consultation activity carried out by the Council. A toolkit is being developed to complement this strategy. It should act as an easy to understand and use guide to consultation, helping staff decide whether consultation is necessary and, if so, how to go about it. The toolkit also includes information on how hard to reach groups can be encouraged to participate in consultation, including identifying existing groups who can be contacted.

The Role of Elected Members

The role of elected members is fundamental to local government. Councillors have a range of responsibilities, for example:

- setting policy for the Council;
- establishing priorities and allocating resources;
- scrutinising and reviewing services;
- working in their wards; and
- representing the Council on outside bodies.

Consultation should help Councillors with all these tasks by providing them with a fuller picture of the needs and aspirations of local people.

Why should we consult?

The benefits of consultation can be felt in a number of ways. The **outcomes** of consultation can inform decisions on:

- **Policy** - in formulating policies, both to guide the Council's own activities, and which form a framework that directs and regulates others. Councillors will normally consider the results of consultation about policy decisions in a formal setting such as a Committee.
- **Resources** - in establishing priorities at a strategic level for the allocation of resources, both the Council's own resources and those which may be drawn in from external sources.
- **Services** - in designing services so that they are as far as possible tailored to the needs of users; and in obtaining feedback on the quality of service delivery so that continuing performance improvements can be achieved. The results of consultation with service users and stakeholders are normally considered by managers and staff and are used to improve service delivery or standards.

Additional benefits can arise from the **process** of consultation. These include:

- **Public awareness of local government** - through continuing consultation across a broad range of topics, the public's understanding of the scope of a local authority's activities can be greatly enhanced.
- **Revealing the complexity of choices** - consultation will usually prompt a diverse range of responses. This is inevitable given the complicated issues that local government has to deal with, and the wide range of different interests and opinions within the community. Consultation processes can reveal just how difficult it can be to reach essential decisions on behalf of the community.
- **A positive relationship with local citizens** - even though the Council will ultimately not always be able to act in accordance with all the views

it receives, the process of seeking opinions, listening to them, and including them as an element in decision making helps to build a positive relationship with local people.

Principles of consultation

Consultation and engagement is not an end in itself. These activities are a means to help Chorley Council understand the views and opinions of its stakeholders. They will not replace or undermine the democratic process, but will support elected members in making informed decisions.

To ensure that consultation at Chorley is as effective as possible, we will ensure:

- **That clear objectives are set when undertaking consultation**
The scope and purpose of the consultation should be clearly communicated to all taking part, we will be clear where there are some limitations to the options, for example because of funding. We will strive to make clear how the results of consultation will be used.
- **The resources available for consultation are used as effectively as possible.**
It is important to make use of the good practice and expertise that exists within the Council. There can be opportunities to use resources effectively by ensuring that joint consultations are undertaken when the opportunity arises.
- **That we are clear about the outcomes and results of consultation exercises.**
The results of consultations should be published with an indication of the actions that followed as a result. There should also be an evaluation of the consultation that should be fed into future exercises.
- **That those people who took part are given feedback about the results.**
Everyone involved in consultation should be told about the results and about any decisions or actions that have followed. Anyone who is affected by changes should also be informed.
- **That we ensure that we consult with the whole community, taking into account the needs of sections of society who find more traditional forms of consultation difficult to engage with.**
The consultation toolkit includes information on different approaches and techniques that should be used to encourage the participation of all groups in society.

Who should be consulted?

The Council will consult with a wide range of people and organisations when undertaking consultation. Who is consulted will depend on the nature of the consultation and its objectives.

Making consultation inclusive

The Council wants to ensure that it consults as widely as possible and that it includes specific groups who, for a variety of reasons, do not tend to take part in consultation activity. For these groups, a more targeted approach is required. Some may find participation in consultation difficult because of their:

- Age
- Disability

- Race
- Gender
- Religion or belief
- Sexual orientation
- Location

To ensure these, and other, hard to reach groups are included in consultation that will affect them we must ensure that we use techniques that do not exclude them. These are discussed in more detail in the toolkit which gives, for example, a list of various groups who could be contacted if a specific group needed to be consulted on an issue. In addition, it gives other factors that might need to be taken into account when targeting a specific group such as venue choice and extra requirements.

Timing of consultations

Consultation should be carried out at a time when the results can be meaningfully fed into the decision making process.

Consultation could take place:

- At the start of the process for planning service delivery
- When options are being narrowed down
- When a preferred option is being proposed or considered
- During a review of services
- To improve service delivery
- When it is proposed that a service will be altered
- When there is a statutory duty to do so

Consultation should not take place when there is little or no room for decisions to be influenced by the outcomes. This will not encourage people to become involved in future exercises.

After consultation

After any consultation, the result should be fed back to the public, particularly those who took part. The type of feedback that is given will depend upon the type of consultation, for small events it might be appropriate to use individual feedback. Most of the time, however, it will be done through publications, such as leaflets or press releases. The feedback should include information on what consultation took place, and the outcomes of it, for instance, any changes in policy or approach.

An evaluation of the consultation should take place; it should include an evaluation of what went well, and what should be improved for future events. Without the feedback and evaluation stage, improvements made through consultation will not be long lasting and the process will be considerably weakened.

Other Developments

To ensure that the consultations that the Council undertakes are as effective as possible, it is important that consultations compliment, rather than conflict with, one another. This means that consultation needs to be clearly planned and

coordinated to ensure that any similar consultations are undertaken together and that the same groups are not asked to respond to consultations repeatedly in a short period. To enable this, a consultation database will be developed to track consultation planned and undertaken. The benefits of such a database would be:

- Opportunities for “joining up” planned consultation exercises would be more easily identified
- We should not duplicate or repeat requests for information
- Results of consultation exercises would be more easily shared with colleagues and with the public
- A link is made between consultation and decisions
- Interests in future consultations can be registered.

A toolkit is also being developed to help guide officers through the process of planning and carrying out consultation to ensure that there is a consistent and strong approach across the whole authority.

Over the next 12 months the following consultation is planned by Chorley Council:

Consultation	Directorate	Start/Finish Dates	Lead Officer	Consultation Method
New Refuse and Recycling Contract	SNED	July – September 2007	Simon Clark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening Day • Postal survey to 1,000 households • Roadshows in targeted areas
Residents Satisfaction Survey	Policy and Performance	Autumn 2007	Lesley-Ann Fenton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizens' Panel
Understanding Your Council	Policy & Performance	November 2007	Donna Hall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town Hall Open Day
Community Forum Action Plans	Democratic Services	January – February 2008	Carol Russell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Forums
Budget Consultation	Finance	January 2008	Gary Hall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening Day • Lancashire Locals • Parish Councils • Website
Sustainable Resources Development Plan Document	Development and Regeneration	mid-October to November	Julian Jackson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written and web-based
Botany/Great Knowley guiding principles	Development and Regeneration	October	Julian Jackson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents' comments and workshop
Householder Supplementary Planning Document	Development and Regeneration	November	Julian Jackson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written and web-based
Central Lancashire Core Strategy (jointly with Preston and South Ribble)	Development and Regeneration	November/December	Julian Jackson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Web-based • Stakeholder meetings
Proposed development of Flat Iron and Covered Markets	Development and Regeneration	December 2007 to January 2008	Cath Burns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder meetings
Inward Investment Branding	Development and Regeneration	December 2007 to January 2008	Cath Burns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder meetings
Town Centre Design Strategy	Development and Regeneration	January to March 2008	Cath Burns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder meetings ⁷

Consultation	Directorate	Start/Finish Dates	Lead Officer	Consultation Method
Community Management of Eaves Green Community Centre	Leisure and Culture	October 2007 to March 2008	Liz Morey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus Group
Community Management of Astley Village Community Centre	Leisure and Culture	November 2007 to February 2008	Liz Morey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postal Survey
Community Management of Clayton Brook Community Centre	Leisure and Culture	October 2007 to March 2008	Liz Morey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postal Survey
Review of Play Strategy	Leisure and Culture	October 2007 to January 2008	Liz Morey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postal Survey • Focus Group
Cultural Strategy	Leisure and Culture	June to September 2008	Jamie Carson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus Groups • Postal Survey • Web based survey