

REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT CAMPAIGN

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek approval for a campaign to improve public engagement with the Council.

Information and Advice

2. The Local Government Association (LGA) has identified that a key indicator of success of a local authority is how engaged residents feel and whether they feel that they can have an influence on the actions of a Council.
3. This is measured as part of the Annual Residents' Survey and the results in recent years have been disappointing. On average fewer than a third of residents have agreed with the statement that they can 'influence decisions affecting their local area'. (2013: 27%; 2014: 36%; 2015: 27%)
4. The LGA also highlights this measure as one of the key drivers of overall satisfaction rates with a Council. The other two measures are how well informed people feel and value for money perceptions.
5. In order to mitigate this lack of perceived influence and increase public engagement, it is proposed that a campaign is run to encourage greater public participation. There would initially be three main strands but if it were proved to be successful there is the potential to extend the campaign further.

1: Citizens' Panel

6. The Citizens' Panel was created in 2007 to provide a network of engaged residents who were representative of the county's population. The panel currently has 4,793 members.
7. The Panel is used to consult on all aspects of service delivery and design. There are groups where the panel is underrepresented: there are only 53 people aged between 18 and 24 (1.1% of the total panel).
8. There would be a drive to recruit new members. It would be primarily targeted at younger people with the majority of promotion carried out through digital channels in order to keep costs to a minimum. It would start immediately and would run for a period of two months.

2: Residents' Survey

9. The Annual Residents' Satisfaction Survey, which began in 2012, is based on questions from the Local Government Association (LGA) to enable national benchmarking. The LGA-approved methodology uses face-to-face street interviews with 150 residents from each district, which provides a 95% confidence level.
10. The Council is currently undergoing a tender exercise for a specialist company to run the survey as the current contract has expired. It is proposed that as well as the face-to-face questions that this year's survey would include the option for online participation by all residents who are interested in responding.
11. Additional questions would also be added to the survey to find out where residents think the Council should prioritise its spending. This would provide members with timely and valuable information on which they can base decision-making when considering savings options. This approach to the first-stage of the budget consultation would not only provide good value for money as it would use an existing survey but it also would be in line with best-practice guidance.
12. The survey would be carried out a month earlier than in previous years in order to provide results at a time when they could be used to meaningfully inform the budget consultation process and allow further time to analyse and consider responses.

Stage 3: Budget Consultation

13. Each year the Council runs a consultation on the budget proposals so that members can listen to the views of residents before making decisions at the February Council meeting.
14. The consultation exercise will support the public participation message and encourage residents to participate.

Evaluation

15. Results from the 2017 survey will provide part of the evaluation of the campaign by comparing against previous years the extent to which people agree or disagree that they can 'influence decisions affecting their local area'.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

16. To encourage as many people as possible to have their say in local decision making.

Statutory and Policy Implications

17. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, the public sector equality duty, human resources, crime and disorder, human rights, the safeguarding of children, sustainability and the environment and those using the service and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

18. All costs associated with this campaign will be met through existing budgets.

Equalities Implications

19. Equalities implications have been considered as part of compiling this report. As there are no negative impacts on any protected group, an Equality Impact Assessment has not been deemed necessary.

RECOMMENDATION/S

It is recommended that members:

- 1) Approve the delivery of a campaign to improve public engagement with the Council.

Councillor Alan Rhodes
Leader of the Council

For any enquiries about this report please contact:

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Constitutional Comments (SMG 24/5/2016)

1. The proposals set out in this report fall within the remit of this Committee.

Financial Comments (RWK 26/05/2016)

2. The financial implications are set out in paragraph 18 of the report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.