

REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

OUTCOMES OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW OF COUNCIL CONSULTATIONS AND RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT

Purpose of the Report

1. To share with the Overview Committee the findings that have arisen from the task and finish review of Council Consultations and Resident Engagement.
2. To seek the endorsement of the committee for the recommendations from the scrutiny task and finish review of Council Consultations and Resident Engagement to be submitted to Cabinet for consideration.

Background information

3. At the meeting of the Overview Committee held on 7 September 2022 the Overview Committee's Work Programme for 2022/23 was considered and approved. For an item to be included on the Work Programme consideration was given to the following three questions:
 - Was the issue one where scrutiny could make a positive impact, or where scrutiny could make a difference?
 - Was the issue a strategic Council priority, as detailed in the Nottinghamshire Plan?
 - Was the issue one that was of interest to, or made a significant impact on residents across Nottinghamshire?
4. Members of the Overview Committee, having given regard to these questions, agreed that an in-depth scrutiny review of the Council's approach to consultation and resident engagement should be carried out. Members were keen to learn about the Council's approach to consultation and resident engagement, and how this activity could best be used to support the delivery of the Council's strategic priorities, and as such support the delivery of the best possible services to the residents of Nottinghamshire.
5. At the meeting of the Overview Committee held on 1 December 2022 members received a report and presentation that provided the Committee with an overview of the Council's budget development process. The report also provided information on the public budget consultation process in relation to the development of the Council's budget for 2023/24.

As a result of the discussion that took place, it was agreed:

“That a task and finish review takes place on the budget consultation process, giving regard to the budget consultations carried out by other local authorities.”

Scoping the Review

6. Subsequently work was carried out to “scope” the review. This work was carried out by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Overview Committee, in consultation with the Service Director - Finance, Infrastructure and Improvement and the Service Director – Transformation and Change. This work identified the key objectives for review as well as setting out the strategic context in which the issues involved would be considered.
7. As a result of the scoping work that was carried out, the key objectives that would guide the review were identified as being:
 - To examine and gain an understanding of the Council’s current approach to formal resident consultation, within the context of ongoing wider resident engagement and co-production.
 - To examine what the Council’s approach to formal resident consultation could look like in the future, across the Council, to encourage wider resident participation to ensure the most effective services and outcomes for Nottinghamshire residents.
 - A specific area of focus for the review would be the budget consultation process and other whole-council consultation activity. For example, any future consultation on the development of the Nottinghamshire Plan.

In the context of the review, it was noted that the statutory consultations that the Council was required to carry out that had legally defined rules of how they must be conducted, and consultations on employment matters that were governed by agreed policies and procedures, were not included in the scope of the review’s activity.

Once the scoping document had been completed it was circulated to all members of the Overview Committee. At this point all members of the committee were invited to express their interest in being part of the review group.

Link to Council Priorities

8. The work of the Council’s scrutiny function should always be focussed on supporting delivery of its strategic priorities, which will in turn support the delivery of the best possible services to the residents of Nottinghamshire. The work that was carried out in scoping the review identified that a review of consultation and resident engagement supported a wide range of strategic priorities, as well as the strategies and policies that underpinned them.

The Nottinghamshire Plan 2021 - 2031

9. The Nottinghamshire Plan 2021 - 2031 is an ambitious plan for the County Council that sets out the Council’s strategic vision for the future of Nottinghamshire and the local authority. The activity in the Nottinghamshire Plan is built around achieving a bold 10-year vision for a ‘healthy, prosperous and greener future for everyone’. This vision is supported by nine ambitions which will act as a framework for all County Council activity. The scoping of the review supports the following ambition set out in the Nottinghamshire Plan:
 - A forward looking and resilient Council

Consultation at Nottinghamshire County Council

10. The Consultation Institute defines consultation as: “The dynamic process of dialogue between individuals or groups, based upon a genuine exchange of views, with the objective of influencing decisions, policies, or programmes of action.
11. In Nottinghamshire, the Council has a strong history of asking people what they think about the issues and services that affect their lives. The Council regularly consults residents and other stakeholders to seek their views on proposed changes to Council services, plans, policies, and other important issues. Consultations at the Council have a specific start and end date and help to inform decisions that the Council makes. As well as consulting on specific issues, the Council also works to carry out longer term engagement. This involves working closely with communities to ensure that they are empowered, supported, and developed to be involved in decisions that affect their lives.

The Review Process

12. The members of the review group were:
 - Councillor Boyd Elliott (Chairman)
 - Councillor Glynn Gilfoyle
 - Councillor Mike Pringle
13. The review was carried out using a variety of methods, including informal meetings, and the consideration of written evidence. The different stages of the review are detailed below.
14. The first meeting of the review group took place on Wednesday 10 May 2023. At this meeting members received a presentation and links to reference materials from Dr Isobel Fleming – Service Director for Transformation and Change, that provided detailed information on:
 - “The ladder of citizen participation” and the vital role of consultation in this process.
 - The ‘Gunning Principles’ that set out the legal expectation of what is considered appropriate consultation. These include:
 - Consultation must take place when the proposal is still at a formative stage.
 - Sufficient reasons must be put forward for the proposal to allow for intelligent consideration and response.
 - Adequate time must be given for consideration and response.
 - The product of consultation must be conscientiously taken into account.
 - The aims of the Council’s “Consultation Toolkit,” that are:
 - ensuring the Council met any required statutory obligations when consulting with people.
 - adhering consistently to consultation principles.
 - providing officers with the necessary guidance and tools to undertake consultation effectively and efficiently.
 - ensuring that the quality of any consultation carried out is of a high standard

- having a consistent, co-ordinated, and joined-up approach to consultation across the council and with partners.
- How the Consultation Toolkit was used to guide the process of consultation across the Council.
- The overarching processes used in the development of outreach and consultation activity with residents and communities.
- The many ways in which consultation activity could be carried out. These included self-completion surveys, telephone interviews, face-to-face interviews, and other online engagement activity.
- How the Council’s online Engagement Hub provided the opportunity for residents to complete current consultations online, as well as providing access to information on consultations that had already been carried out. A demonstration of the Hub was provided by Ross Scott, Policy and Research Manager.
- That, unlike some other local authorities, the Council did not have a separate team that led on consultation activity across the organisation. Individual consultations were managed and led by departments across the Council when they were consulting on issues related to their own service area.
- Information on the number of public consultations that had been carried out over previous years was provided by the Communications Team.

Year	Public Consultations (open to all)	Targeted Consultations (only accessible through an emailed web link)
2023 (as of 3 May)	91	15
2022	185	64
2021	249	58
2020	193	50

15. Members of the review group also received presentations from representatives of Council departments that provided detailed information on specific consultations that had been undertaken. These presentations brought to life how these consultations had been carried out and how the feedback had been used in the development of services.

Children and Families

Members of the review group received a presentation from Lucy Peel – Service Director – Transformation and Improvement and Judith Bullimore – Project Officer, on the engagement approach to developing the Retford Family Hub.

Members of the review group were advised that the learning from this work that specifically related to consultation and engagement activities were that:

- Online consultations only worked well if the services, partners, and organisations involved could tailor promotional activity to the specific groups that services wanted to engage with.
- Simple, flexible, and targeted consultation activity received a higher response rate, and as such was more effective than an untargeted consultation posted online.
- Going out into the community, and using interactive, family friendly approaches worked well in engaging with service users.
- The “themes so far” document that simply and clearly presented the findings of a consultation was a great way of capturing feedback and presenting it in a way that all parties understood.
- Designing bespoke engagement tools for intended purposes had worked well; bringing in design expertise would have strengthened impact even more.
- Having an adequate staff and project resource to sustain and build high levels of engagement was crucial to enable meaningful consultation and engagement.

Adult Social Care and Public Health

Members of the review group received a presentation from Gemma Shelton - Integrated Group Manager Quality and Market Management that provided information on:

- The formal and informal consultation that had been carried out with the care market.
- The consultation that took place when a material change to how services would be delivered was being considered.
- The ‘Big Conversation’ consultation that had been carried earlier in 2023. This had set out to ask people who used social care and their carers about the vision, the challenges, and what they wanted in the future from service provision. Information was also provided on how it had used a wide variety of engagement activities, including in-person events and online surveys. A colourful and accessible graphic record had been used to illustrate the information gathered at the listening events and that had received positive feedback from those who had participated in the process.
- The first “Making it real” forum that had taken place in April 2023 that had aimed, through a process of co-production to ensure that the provision of Adult Care Service in Nottinghamshire was of a high quality and was also making a positive impact on the lives of residents.

Place

Members of the review group received a presentation from Joelle Davies - Group Manager - Growth, Infrastructure and Development, that provided information on:

- The wide range of services within the Place department where consultation and engagement activity had been used to gather information to inform and shape the delivery and provision of services.

- The consultation activity that had been carried out on proposals for a new cycle route on the A611 Derby Road in Mansfield. The consultation had been carried out using a wide variety of methods including targeted in-person events at Vision West Notts College and an online survey that provided the opportunity for other residents to be involved in the consultation. The consultation had successfully engaged local people in the discussions about the wider Department for Transport Active Travel programme and delivered a scheme that had been shaped by and supported by the local community.
- How social media and other publicity channels had been used in promoting the consultation.
- The follow up activity and discussion had been carried out on issues raised with those who had engaged with the consultation.

Corporate round-up

16. After receiving the information, members of the review group took the opportunity to ask questions of Dr Isobel Fleming – Service Director - Transformation, Luke Barrett - Group Manager – Communications and Marketing and the departmental representatives on the information that had been provided, and to discuss the issues that had been raised.
17. The second meeting of the review group took place on Wednesday 23 May. This meeting focussed on the Council's approach to consulting with residents as part of the Council's budget development process. At this meeting members received a presentation that provided detailed information on:
 - The Council's budget development process and how resident consultation was an integral part of this. It was noted however that whilst there was no statutory requirement to consult with residents on the development of the Council's budget, that the Council's Public Engagement Policy states that the Council will engage with the public before setting its budget. It was noted however that there was a statutory requirement to consult with non-domestic rate payers.
 - The consultation on the 2023/24 budget had been open to residents from 17 November 2022 to 2 January 2023 in advance of the draft budget being presented at Overview Committee on 24 January, Cabinet on 26 January and Full Council on 9 February.
 - The 2023/24 budget was the first to be approved under the Council's new governance arrangements introduced in May 2022. Members of the review group were advised that subsequent consideration had been given to the parts of the process that could be refined further in advance of the development of the 2024/25 budget.
 - How the responses to the consultation had been incorporated into the development the Council's 2023/24 budget.
 - How social media had been extensively utilised to raise public awareness of the consultation in advance of the consultation survey being launched.

- The public consultation had launched on 17 November 2022 with a dedicated space on the Council's website providing background information and linking through to an online survey that was open to all Nottinghamshire residents. To provide access to the consultation to those residents who are digitally excluded, printed copies were produced and distributed to all 59 Children's Centres and the 60 Libraries across the county. Paper packs were also sent to all Members for them to share in their communities. The Council's Customer Service Centre was also able to assist residents complete the survey over the phone.
- On the day that the survey opened an email bulletin was sent to all 140,309 subscribers of the council's "emailme" system, including information about the consultation and a link through to the survey. This was opened by 31% (42,414) of the subscribers, with 2% (3,170) clicking through to the website/survey. A tailored email on the survey was also sent to the 179 parish and town councils across Nottinghamshire. Various social media promotion was undertaken during the survey period, On 29 December (four days before the consultation ended) a further email bulletin was sent to 140,941 subscribers of the council's "emailme" system with a final call to take part in the survey. This was opened by 25% (34,258) of the subscribers, with 2% (2,146) clicking through to the website/survey.
- The extensive activity engaging with local media, as well as how social media had been used to raise public awareness, both in advance of the launch of the survey as well as during the period it was open.
- There had been 2,452 responses from residents to the survey. Of these, 12 responses had been made using the paper copy with the rest of the responses being submitted online. Members of the review group were advised that of the residents who had completed the survey that:
 - the most common age range of respondents was between 55-64 years of age (25.5%), with the least common age range was under 18 (0.2%)
 - respondents, aged 45 and over, represented 79.9% of respondents. This is in comparison to the Office for National Statistics' 2020 mid-year estimate of Nottinghamshire's 45+ population of 60.8%.
 - 4.3% of respondents were male, 55.7% of respondents were female, which is higher than the population split for Nottinghamshire compared to Office for National Statistics 2020 mid-year estimates.
 - responders to the budget consultation who identified their ethnicity as white/British stood at 88.6%. This was in line with the proportion of Nottinghamshire residents who identified their ethnicity as White/British according to Office for National Statistics 2020 mid-year estimates.
 - The number of completed budget consultation surveys received from residents by other County Councils. Members were advised that the response rates to these consultations should not be taken as a direct comparison against the Council's own

consultation as each authority's methodology differed and their activity may not have been supplemented with other forms of engagement activity.

County Council	Total population	No. of responses
Surrey	1,203,108	358
Oxfordshire	725,291	559
Gloucestershire	645,076	621
Cambridgeshire	678,849	1458
Kent	1,576,069	2161
Derbyshire	794,636	2431
Essex	1,503,521	2434
Nottinghamshire	824,822	2454
Suffolk	760,688	2617
North Yorkshire	615,491	2654
Hertfordshire	1,198,798	2935

- Examples of the format and questions used by other County Councils as part of their budget consultation surveys.
- The potential reasons why residents may choose or not choose to engage and complete a survey when given the opportunity.

18. After receiving the information, members of the review group took the opportunity to ask questions of the Service Director for Transformation and Change on the information that had been provided and to discuss the issues that had been raised.

19. The third meeting of the review group took place on Tuesday 30 May. At this meeting members considered and reviewed the information and discussions that had taken place over the previous meetings to formulate their recommendations.

Review activity and recommendations

20. On 31 March 2022, the Council approved the change to the Council's governance arrangements from a committee system of governance to the executive system (Leader and Cabinet model) to be implemented with effect from the Council's annual meeting on 12 May 2022. The Budget for 2023/24 was the first Budget to be approved under the Council's new governance arrangements and included a number of reports to Cabinet and Overview Committee before approval of the Budget by Full Council in February 2023. As part of the activity carried out to develop the Budget, the consultation survey with residents went live on 17 November 2022 and closed on 2 January 2023. The survey set out how the council spent its allocated budget and asked residents for their views about Council services and their priorities. Members of the review group were also advised that whilst there was no statutory

requirement to consult with residents on the development of the Council's budget, the Council's Public Engagement Policy stated that the Council would engage with the public before setting its budget as well as being recognised across local government that local people and communities, as the recipients of Council services, should have the opportunity to have their say on and to contribute to the processes on how these services were delivered.

21. Members of the review group heard how the experience from the consultation for the 2023/24 budget had indicated it would be beneficial if the public consultation on the budget occurred from September through to late October. This would enable Cabinet to consider the output from the consultation alongside the Local Government Settlement and significantly aid the planning and budgeting activity to coincide before publication of the budget report to Cabinet in January 2024. The aim was to bring forward the planning cycle and make it coterminous with the budget cycle. Members of the review group were advised that having all the necessary information, budget consultation outcomes, grant settlement announcements and taxbase information before setting both the Council's Annual Delivery Plan and Budget would ensure these activities could be completed prior to Full Council considering the proposed Budget in late February 2024.

Recommendation One

That the public consultation on the Council's budget should commence earlier in the year to enable the responses to be considered at an earlier point in the budget development process.

22. As part of the review process members received information on the different types and formats of questions that could be used during consultation and engagement activity. Members of the review group also took the opportunity to consider the questions that had been used during the 2023/24 budget consultation with residents and examples of questions used by other County Councils as part of their public budget consultations.
23. Members of the review group agreed that for the public consultation to add value to the budget development process, the questions included in the survey should be clear, concise, focussed, and accessible. Members of the review group agreed that the questions that had been included in the consultation on the 2023/24 budget had largely met these standards, and that the number of, and focus of the questions had enabled the views of residents to be gathered in way that had enabled them to be collated and analysed prior to being fed into the wider budget development process. Members agreed that having reviewed a range of questions used by other County Council's in their public budget consultations, the question used in the Nottinghamshire survey compared very favourably in terms of clarity and accessibility.
24. Members of the review group discussed the potential in future years that the questions and their format could be amended to make them even more accessible and be presented in a more interactive way. Members agreed that whilst there could be some potential benefits of large-scale changes to the format of the survey, making such changes would take considerable time, put significant demands on resources and could be difficult to deliver as the Council does not currently have a dedicated team for the management and delivery of consultation and engagement activity.
25. Members of the review group were in strong agreement that whilst some minor amendments to the questions included in the budget consultation survey may be needed each year, once

a format had been agreed, the questions asked each year should remain largely unchanged. Members agreed that consistent questions asked over several years would enable detailed analysis on how residents' priorities were changing over time.

26. Whilst it is noted that the setting of the budget consultation questions is the responsibility of the Cabinet Member for Finance in consultation with officers, members of the review group agreed that feedback from members of the Overview Committee should be considered as part of their development.

Recommendation Two

That members of the Overview Committee be given the opportunity to comment on the proposed questions for the 2024/25 budget consultation in advance of the launch of the public survey.

27. As part of the review process, members were keen to understand issues related to participation and the number of residents who had chosen to take part in the consultation around the development of the Council's 2023/24 budget. The public survey on the 2023/4 budget had been completed by 2,454 respondents. Members of the review group were advised that this level of participation was a significant improvement on that received to previous similar budget consultations, as the response rates to these had not exceeded 1,400 responses. Members of the review group agreed that whilst it was encouraging that the number of responses to the survey had increased notably, that the number of responses was disappointing to them given that the population of Nottinghamshire was over 800,000. Members of the review group also examined the response rates that had been seen by other County Council's and noted that whilst it was difficult to make comparisons due to different approaches being taken, that the response rate to the budget consultation in Nottinghamshire compared favourably to the response rates elsewhere.
28. When the public consultation process on the budget opened on 17 November 2023, an email bulletin was sent to all 140,309 subscribers of the Council's "emailme" system. The "emailme" system enables residents to register to receive email bulletins that provide news and information on Council services. This email that was sent on 17 November included information about the budget consultation and provided a link through to the survey and was opened by 31% (42,414) of the subscribers, with 2% (3,170) clicking through to the website/survey. On 29 December (four days before the consultation ended) a further email bulletin was sent to all "emailme" subscribers encouraging recipients to take part in the survey before it closed, this email was opened by 25% (34,258) of the subscribers, with 2% (2,146) clicking through to the website/survey.
29. Members of the review group noted with disappointment the low number of recipients of the email who had opened and subsequently clicked through to access the survey, especially as these were residents who had made the active choice to be contacted by and receive information from the Council. Members discussed the potential reasons why residents who had shown interest in the survey by opening the email and clicking through to the survey might then have chosen not to complete it.
30. The 2023/24 budget consultation survey was also extensively promoted using press releases and through social media activity. Between 21 September 2022 and 2 January 2023, 25 messages were posted from the Council's Facebook (13) and Twitter (12) accounts. In total these reached 19,800 residents, with 35,300 impressions and resulted in 35 likes, 38

shares/retweets, and 15 comments. Further messages were presented on the Council's Instagram account which reached 452 accounts. Members of the review group welcomed the use of social media in promoting the survey and agreed that its use played a significant role in raising awareness of and encouraging participation in the budget consultation process. Members of the review group also agreed that the "MyNotts" app (that had been downloaded 29,540 times as at the end of May 2023) offered further opportunities for promoting future budget consultations surveys.

31. Members of the review group considered in detail why more residents had not chosen to complete the survey given the active promotional activity that had been carried out around it. Members of the review group agreed that the reasons why residents may choose not to participate in the consultation were very complex, with possible reasons including lack of time, not feeling that they had enough information or that their response would not make a difference. As such, the group agreed it was difficult to identify specific activities that would increase levels of participation. Members of the review group agreed that the Council's email system as well as the Council's Citizen's Panel presented further opportunities to increase the number of responses received to the budget consultation, given that residents who actively signed up to receive communications from the Council may be more engaged and interested in Council activities than those residents who hadn't.
32. Members of the review group agreed that whilst increasing the number of responses to the Council's budget consultation should be a long-term objective, that this should not be to the detriment of the quality of the information received through the survey. Members noted that for example, a shorter survey could encourage more residents to participate, however this could negatively impact on the quality and usefulness of the information gathered to feed into the budget development process. Members of the review group agreed that ultimately the budget consultation should be focussed on gathering quality information rather than focussing purely on obtaining as many responses as possible.
33. As part of their discussion, members noted that many large public opinion companies when sending out surveys frequently advised at the start of each survey how long on average that they anticipated it would take to complete. Members agreed that including this information in communications around future budget consultations may encourage more residents to complete the survey.

Recommendation Three

That consideration should be given to whether there are any further potential areas of development to build on the existing use of, and to maximise opportunities provided by social media, the "emailme" system, the Council's Citizen's Panel and the MyNotts app to promote the budget consultation survey to residents.

Recommendation Four

That relevant communications related to the public budget consultation should clearly state the approximate time that it will take a resident to complete the survey.

34. At the launch for the public consultation process on the budget in November 2022, and to provide access to the consultation to those residents who are digitally excluded, printed copies of the 2023/24 budget consultation survey were produced and distributed to all 59 Children's

Centres and 60 Libraries across the county, with paper packs also being sent to all Members for them to share in their communities. In total, over 1,500 printed copies of the budget consultation survey were distributed, with additional spare copies also being available to be sent out on request. For residents needing support with completing the survey, there was also the option to phone the council's Customer service Centre where the customer service advisor would be able to assist and fill the survey out on the resident's behalf. Members of the review group agreed that it was essential that residents who were digitally excluded were able to access alternative ways of completing the budget consultation survey.

35. In total, of 2,452 responses from the public were received to the budget consultation, with 12 of these responses being received on paper and none being received by telephone through the Customer Service Centre. Members of the review group noted that that given the financial and environmental impacts of producing paper copies of the survey, producing over 1,500 copies may not be most appropriate use of the Council's resources. As part of their discussions, members of the review group considered whether the Council should stop producing paper copies in future years because of the low number of hard copy responses. On consideration, Members agreed that the Council should continue to produce some paper copies so as not to remove an opportunity for digitally excluded residents to participate in the survey. Members agreed that as it was not possible to determine the number of residents who had become aware of the survey by seeing a paper copy of the survey or a poster advertising the survey, but who had then decided to complete the survey online, that paper copies of the budget consultation survey should continue to be made available. Members noted that if the number of paper copies of the survey were to be reduced then alternative options could be considered for ensuring that paper copies were available to all residents who required them.

Recommendation Five

That paper copies of the budget consultation should continue to be provided, but that the number of copies printed should be reduced.

36. As part of the information gathering activity that took place, members of the review group also looked at the wide range of consultation and engagement activity carried out across the Council. Members of the review group learned that during 2023, (up to 3 May) there had already been 91 public consultations covering a wide range of topics as well as 15 targeted engagements and 86 statutory consultations on traffic regulation orders.
37. As part of the review process, members received information on specific consultations that had been carried out by departments across the Council (as detailed at paragraph 13) and learnt how they had then been used to effectively support the design and delivery of services. Members of the review group agreed that there were many excellent examples of how engagement and consultation activity had been carried out across the Council.
38. Members noted with approval the dynamic and focussed approach that had been taken by services across the Council in making their engagement and consultation activity visible, accessible, and relevant to residents and service users, and that when this had been done it had resulted in good levels of participation. Members agreed that when residents or service users had a clear understanding on the issue or service that was being consulted on, and when the processes involved in the consultation were accessible and relevant, good levels of participation were seen. Members of the review group noted that high levels of participation, when there had been a focus on gathering quality and relevant information, provided services

across the Council with the information they needed to assist them to effectively develop services.

39. Members of the review group also welcomed how departments were focussed on activities that built on the learning from previous engagement and consultation activity to further develop future engagement and consultation activity in their departments.
40. At the completion of the public consultation on the 2023/24 budget, analysis showed the greatest proportion of responses were from those between 55-64 years of age (25.5%). The age group with the lowest response rate was under 18's (0.2%). Members expressed concern at the low level of participation by young people and discussed the potential reasons why they may not have chosen to participate. Members agreed that due to the significant impact on the lives of young people that Council services had, it was important that their voices were heard as part of the budget consultation process.
41. Members of the review group acknowledged that engaging with young people on an activity such as the budget consultation could be challenging because they may not be aware of the role of the Council in their lives. Members also noted that activity to increase the participation of young people and make the budget consultation feel relevant to them may be difficult to continuously resource because due to there not being a dedicated consultation team that could lead on this work. Members of the review group agreed that despite these challenges, there should be a long-term objective across the Council to increase the number of young people participating in relevant consultation and engagement activity.
42. As already noted, Nottinghamshire County Council does not have a central engagement and consultation team. Instead consultation and engagement activity is managed within individual departments, and as appropriate is supported by the Council's Communication team. Members of the review group noted that there could be many benefits of all the Council's engagement and consultation activity being brought together under a central consultation team but agreed that due to the resource and budget demands that this could create, and with the financial pressures currently being faced by the Council, this was unfortunately not a feasible option. Members of the review group noted however, that processes should be in place to enable departments to share feedback and best practice that would support the ongoing development of high-quality engagement and consultation activity across the Council.

Recommendation Six

That work be carried out to investigate potential opportunities around how more young people could be encouraged to take part in relevant consultations.

Recommendation Seven

That opportunities should be put in place that enable departments across the Council to share feedback and best practice around consultation and resident engagement activity.

43. The Council's Consultation Toolkit sets the Council's approach to consultation and engagement activity. This document details the 12 consultation standards that should be used across Council departments to establish best practice when carrying out engagement and

consultation activity. The standards are based on the Council’s Public Engagement Policy and participation values that put the public at the heart of what the Council does.

- 44. The consultation process, as detailed in the Council’s Consultation Toolkit should include providing participants with feedback on the information that has been gathered and how it is being used. As part of the review process members received information on how these processes worked in practice and commended the clear and accessible way in which this work was carried out across the Council. Members of the review group were particularly impressed by the visual and colourful infographics that had been used by the Children and Families and Adult Social Care and Public Health departments that summarised the responses received during engagement and consultation activity in a clear and accessible way. Members of the review group agreed that providing feedback that showed how information gathered through consultation and engagement had been used and listened to, especially if done in an accessible and engaging way, had the potential encourage those who had contributed to take part in further consultation and engagement activities. Members of the review group did note however that providing this type of feedback on all consultation and engagement activity would place an additional demand on Council resources, especially as the Council does not have a dedicated consultation and engagement team.
- 45. The Council’s Engagement Hub, that is accessed through the Council’s website and easily located through web search engines, provides public access to the Council’s consultations. As well as providing access to open consultations, the hub also provides details of consultations that have closed. Members noted that whilst the hub was both easily accessible and user friendly for the public, for closed consultations information was not shown on how the responses had contributed to the delivery and design of the service that had been consulted on.
- 46. Information gathered through the annual public consultation on the Council’s budget is included in reports to Cabinet and Council that are accessible to the public through the Council’s website. Members of the review group agreed that due to the scale and importance of this consultation that the information received should be easily accessible by residents and presented in a user-friendly manner to show residents how their participation had been used to feed into the development of the Council’s budget.

Recommendation Eight

That as and where appropriate, communication activity should take place with residents to show how their responses had been used to inform the development of the area of Council activity that had been consulted on.

43. Summary of recommendations

	Recommendation	Cabinet response
1.	That the public consultation on the Council’s budget should commence earlier in the year to enable the responses to be considered at an earlier point in the budget development process.	

2.	That members of the Overview Committee be given the opportunity to comment on the proposed questions for the 2024/24 budget consultation in advance of the launch of the public survey.	
3.	That consideration should be given to whether there are any further potential areas of development to build on the existing use and to maximise opportunities provided by social media, the “emailme” system, the Council’s Citizen’s Panel and the MyNotts app to promote the budget consultation survey to residents.	
4.	That relevant communications related to the public budget consultation should clearly state the approximate time that it will take a resident to complete the survey.	
5.	That paper copies of the budget consultation should continue to be provided, but that the number of copies printed should be reduced.	
6.	That work be carried out to investigate potential opportunities around how more young people could be encouraged to take part in relevant consultations.	
7.	That opportunities should be put in place that enable departments across the Council to share feedback and best practice around consultation and resident engagement activity.	
8.	That as and where appropriate, communication activity should take place with residents to show how their responses had been used to inform the development of the area of Council activity that had been consulted on.	

Acknowledgments

44. The Chairman and members of the review group would like to express their thanks for the invaluable support provided during review process to Dr Isobel Fleming, Service Director – Transformation and Change, Nigel Stevenson, Service Director - Finance, Infrastructure and Improvement, Luke Barrett, Group Manager – Communications and Marketing and Ross Scott, Policy Manager, as well as to the officers who attended the first meeting of the review group and provided information on engagement and consultation activity in their departments.

Statutory and Policy Implications

45. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment 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

46. There are no direct financial implications relating to the recommendation of the report.

RECOMMENDATION

- 1) That the recommendations from the scrutiny review of resident engagement and consultation, as detailed in the report, be endorsed, and referred to Cabinet for consideration.

Councillor Boyd Elliott
Chairman, Overview Committee

For any enquiries about this report please contact: Martin Elliott, Senior Scrutiny Officer, Tel: 0115 9772564, e-mail: martin.elliott@nottsc.gov.uk

Constitutional Comments (KK 21/06/2023)

The proposal in this report is within the remit of the Overview Committee.

Financial Comments (PAA 19/06/2023)

There are no specific financial implications arising directly from the recommendation 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.

[Minutes of the Overview Committee 7 September 2022](#)

[Minutes of the Overview Committee 1 December 2022](#)

[Budget Report to Council Appendix G – Budget Consultation 9 February 2023](#)

[Nottinghamshire County Council Public Engagement Policy](#)

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

- All