

Draft Dover District Council Consultation Policy

Recommendation:

1. That CMT adopt the revised Policy and ensure all Officers are aware of the Policy and their roles and responsibilities.
2. That all consultation is evaluated and taken into account during the Corporate Planning and Service Planning process and that timely and honest feedback is provided to all.
3. That the Communications Group is recognised as being responsible for providing support, advice and co-ordination for all consultation exercises.

Summary

- Consultation and Communication are vital in underpinning the continuous improvement of services and in ensuring the Council is a high performing organisation.
- To help make sure that our consultation is effective, efficient and consistent, it is recommended to adopt an enhanced corporate Consultation Policy. This Policy aims to support well-informed and transparent decision making and planning, by improving the quality and effectiveness of consultation undertaken by or on behalf of the Council.
- Each year the Council undertakes an enormous amount of consultation to attain feedback from the citizens of the district and all our partners and stakeholders in determining our local service delivery levels. To date this work has been very much through the SIMALTO exercises and the BV General Surveys we have undertaken. We have ensured our service planning and budget setting corporately are based on the needs and wishes of our citizens. This is none more evident than the most recent SIMALTO exercise that has seen a number of service and staffing enhancements created within the budget setting to meet those identified needs.
- The Council has adopted an Equality and Diversity Policy and values the diversity of the community and will use a range of consultation methods to ensure that we meet the needs and aspirations of the local community, by giving them an opportunity to inform and be informed about the services that the Council delivers.
- This revised Consultation Policy must therefore be underpinned by and closely linked to the Equality and Diversity Policy and the Communication Strategy.

Background

In early 2004 the Council produced a Communication and Consultation Strategy. To review this and move forward a Communication Board was formed in 2005 to look at both internal and external communications. This led to a number of actions, including more effective and co-ordinated use of the Decaux Boards within the District and a review of the Council's newsletter. In July 2006 a Communication Review Awayday was held, led by a member of Corporate Management Team and attended by a cross-section of staff. Due to personnel changes this group was re-formed in early 2007 with Terms of Reference and the Strategy for action agreed by CMT.

In light of this and also the adoption of the Council's Equality and Diversity Strategy the consultation element has now been reviewed and an updated draft Policy produced.

Attachments

1. Dover District Council Draft Consultation Policy 2007
2. Communications and Consultation Strategy 2004

Dover District Council

Consultation Policy 2007

Dover District Council's Aim

' To deliver quality services and support communities so that every resident can have pride in a District that is vibrant, safe, inclusive and accessible with opportunities for employment, leisure and culture'

Dover District Council Consultation Policy

Aim of the Consultation Policy

To provide a high standard of knowledge and priorities which will enable us to fairly and effectively make decisions. This includes:

- Improving citizen's experiences
- Highlighting and dealing with issues arising from proposed changes
- Selecting the appropriate method for reviews and their required audience.

This Policy must not be read in isolation from the Communication Strategy.

Introduction

Consultation and communication are key to the most effective and efficient delivery of the Council's vision to deliver the best customer focussed services and support to all communities.

Dover District Council is committed to making evidence based decisions that take into account the views and experiences of all those affected by them. We will seek to engage with all sectors of the community to ensure that everyone has an equal chance to have their say and that all responses, outcomes or decisions taken, are fed back to those whose views we sought.

This Policy has been developed to ensure that all consultation undertaken by the Council is effective, efficient and consistent. We aim to continuously improve on our consultation process.

This Policy provides the framework for all consultation that takes place throughout the Council.

Having in place effective consultation and communication procedures means that we are listening to our citizens, learning from the results, improving our services and informing people of this.

Purpose

This Policy aims to support a process of informed and transparent decision making and planning, by improving the quality, and effectiveness of consultation undertaken by or on behalf of the Council.

Through consultation we are seeking to:

- Strengthen our community leadership role
- Inform decision-making
- Ensure we stay in touch with the needs of citizens
- Raise awareness and understanding of services, how they are provided and the local capacity to influence and change
- Avoid wasting resources on objectives people do not want
- Share consultation results effectively and use them to inform policy development and service delivery wherever appropriate
- Maintain an open dialogue with stakeholders, while giving due consideration to the risk of consultation fatigue in sections of the community

Reflecting the purpose of the Statement of Community Involvement (one of the Local Development Framework documents, subjected to an independent examination and to which many different groups and organisations representing a number of different issues and interests contributed), we aim to involve and consult local citizens in a way that is:

- Genuine
- Accessible
- Relevant
- Open
- Efficient
- Proactive
- Timely

We are also committed to genuine evaluation and feedback in a timely manner.

Roles and Responsibilities

- Service Managers are responsible for ensuring that all Council employees understand and apply the consultation process outlined in this Policy.
- Service Managers are responsible for ensuring that stakeholders are consulted on key service and policy-making decisions and this is fed into service planning.
- The Communication Manager (working title – post to be advertised) is responsible for providing support to help apply the consultation process, for advising on the most appropriate consultation methodologies and ensuring the strategic overview and co-ordination of all Council consultation in conjunction with the Communication Group.
- The Leadership Support Unit is responsible for delivery of consultation on corporate policy and priorities
- Human Resources and Performance and Risk are responsible for delivery of consultation in relation to corporate performance and satisfaction
- All consultation exercises should be quality reviewed and approved in advance of implementation at a level appropriate to the scope and nature of the consultation. The Communication Group and Communication Manager are to advise accordingly. Managers should consider the following general rules when identifying the appropriate level of approval:
 - Consultation on department or service specific issues will be usually be approved by the department or service manager;
 - Consultation regarding more than one service or department will require approval from the appropriate Project Team;
 - Consultation relating to or affecting corporate policy should be approved by Corporate Management Team.
- All staff are responsible for interacting with customers and citizens and, where possible, acting upon to change or inform other staff/managers accordingly.
- All staff are responsible for sharing feedback and resulting changes with the whole Council.
- All staff have the responsibility to find out about other consultation outcomes and communication issues and build these into their service delivery, where appropriate and agreed.
- All consultation exercises should have an officer identified and designated as the Principal Contact. It is the responsibility of the Principal Contact to ensure that details of the consultation are submitted to the Head of Service and Management Team and that those details are updated at appropriate stages.

Methods

1. We will consult using a variety of methods to ensure that all groups can participate fully. We will further encourage participation by paying attention to timings and locations of events, the provision of information in different formats, access requirements etc.
2. Methods chosen should be appropriate to the purpose, reflecting the strengths and weaknesses of each method, and be managed with a clear understanding of the particular skills, knowledge and resources that consultation requires.
3. We will seek informed public opinion rather than instant reaction. Whenever possible, the council's communication mechanisms will be used alongside consultation to inform and stimulate public interest, and provide clear background information on the issue being discussed. This information will be presented in plain language and in formats that meet the needs of the consultees.
4. Consultation should aim to seek a representative cross-section of views. It is widely documented that some sections of the community may be harder to engage in consultation than others. Therefore, appropriate action should be taken to ensure that the views of these individuals and groups are not excluded or overlooked.

Any consultation sought through the media or feedback received via the letters pages of the local newspapers is to be channelled through the Council's PR Manager. The PR Manager shall note any mentions of the Council services and report directly back to each service.

We will seek to consult through existing networks whenever possible, by making full and effective use of, for example:

Corporately recognised Consultation Method:	How information is used:	How often:	Actions arising:
SIMALTO - 'forced choice' budget consultation. Face-to face surveys.	This is the Council's main method of consulting on budgets for service delivery. Collated by Performance and Risk and Leadership Support Team and circulated to CMT, Cabinet and Council to inform budget decisions and in turn service plans.	Conducted every 3 years.	2006 exercise has been formally fed into the 2007/08 budget setting process.
Citizens Panel – a cross-section of residents willing to be consulted regularly. Face-to –face/telephone, postal/questionnaires/intranet.	Information to be collated by the Performance and Risk Team via internal SNAP software and circulated to CMT and relevant services	To be used as and when necessary	To be revisited by Performance and Risk and Leadership Support.
Neighbourhood Forums – public meetings led by a partnership of KCC/DDC/Town and Parish Councils. Face-to face/questionnaires/intranet/press releases	Information to be collated by Leadership Support Team and circulated to CMT and Cabinet.	Each Forum meets publicly 4 times a year	Pilot to be reviewed Dec 07 by Council
Annual Town and Parish AGM – face-to-face.	Information to be collated via Democratic Support to all services.	Meeting held annually	
Best Value Performance Plan/Annual Report – intranet/letters	Information to be collated by Performance and Risk and Leadership Support, circulated to Management Team	Produced annually	Format to be reviewed by the Performance and Risk Team
Best Value Satisfaction Surveys - questionnaires	Information collated by the Performance and Risk Team and circulated to CMT and Cabinet.	Conducted every 3 years	
Local Development Framework – workshops/ questionnaires/intranet/press releases	Information collated by the Forward Planning Team and circulated to CMT, Cabinet and Council	Current consultation	
Diversity and Equality Groups – a number of groups established, following work with MORI to ensure all sections of the community are consulted. Face-to-face/questionnaires/workshops/intranet	Information collated by the Performance and Risk team to be circulated to CMT and all services.	To be used as and when necessary	To be reviewed and updated by the Performance and Risk Team

Corporately recognised Consultation Method:	How information is used:	How often:	Actions arising:
@ Your Service Newsletter – newsletter for all residents.	Information collated by PR Manager and fed back to all services	Produced quarterly	To be reviewed regularly by the Communication Group.
@ Your Service Area Offices/contact centre – face-to-face	Any feedback collated by contact centre/area office and fed direct to services	Ongoing	
Complaints and comments – face-to-face/telephone/intranet/postal	Any complaints/comments are fed directly back into services. Lessons learnt are shared on the Intranet.	Ongoing	Processes reviewed regularly by the Professional Standards Unit.
Service specific consultation and newsletters – face-to-face/questionnaires/intranet/telephone	Any feedback collated by services and Communication Group informed. Any feedback affecting policy circulated to CMT	Ongoing, overseen by Communication Group	Methods to be reviewed regularly by Communication Group
Tenant Participation Groups – face-to-face/questionnaires	Any feedback collated by Housing officers. Any feedback affecting policy circulated to CMT	Meetings take place quarterly	
‘Together’ Groups etc – community/residents groups	Any feedback to be collated by Community team and fed back to services and CMT.	Meetings take place throughout the year	
Councillors – Community Engagement role. Face-to-face/telephone/surgeries	Any feedback to be fed to services and SMT	Ongoing	Training for councillors provided.
Officers – as service providers and members of the community	Officers have the responsibility when out and about and as members of the community to report feedback on services to the relevant service.	Ongoing	
Website – questionnaire/feedback forms	All Officers are to seek approval from their head of Service to use the website. That Officer is then responsible for collating responses and feeding back to consultees, Head of Service and CMT, where appropriate.	Ongoing	Website regularly reviewed and updated.
Staff Consultation – Snapshot (in-house magazine)/noticeboards/de-briefs/focus groups/workshops/Chief Exec briefings (all staff and in small groups)	All feedback on service to be collated by HR and fed back to services. Corporate issues fed back to CMT.	Ongoing – Snapshot produced bi-monthly	Regularly reviewed by the Communication Group.

Feedback

- Accessible feedback should be provided to consultees, both on the results of consultation and on how they have been used, in order to encourage greater public participation in the future.
- In some cases the results of consultation will be outweighed by other evidence or considerations; in such cases a clear and honest explanation of the decisive factors should be included in the feedback.
- Reports should be published and distributed in an appropriate and timely fashion. This means giving due consideration to who should receive a copy of the report, and the most suitable medium for publication. Managers should consider the following general rules when identifying appropriate distribution and publication approaches:
 - Stakeholders in the consultation exercise will normally expect to receive a copy of the report; for example partners or other agencies that helped to identify sample groups, or develop questions and those who were consulted to show how their input has been evaluated and used
 - Those who approved the consultation exercise will expect a copy of the report; for example if Corporate Management Team was asked to consider the consultation exercise at planning stage, it will be appropriate for the report to be submitted to that Team.
 - Those affected by the findings of the report, or who may be expected to take action on the results, should receive a copy. This may include affected members of staff, elected members with particular responsibility for affected geographic or subject areas; or overview and scrutiny committees with relevant work-plans

Evaluation

The effectiveness of consultation should be evaluated and the results shared to encourage broader lessons to be learned. Evaluation will consider not only the number of responses received but also the quality, cost and timeliness of the consultation and the overall usefulness of the results in helping to inform decisions

The full range of views expressed during consultation will be acknowledged and attention drawn to areas of agreement and disagreement. The results of consultation will be weighed carefully together with other evidence and considerations before decisions are made

Any consultation responses that affect policy or service activity should be reported to Heads of Service and, where necessary, on to Corporate Management Team - this will ensure all views are heard and relevant service decisions and planning are effected. Our major consultations on the budget, led and informed by SIMALTO exercises are of corporate importance and must always be conducted in a timely manner to ensure our residents have contributed to the budget setting and service planning process – this informs the Council as a whole on when, where and how to deliver services for the coming years.

All consultation should be within the Corporate design standards, for further information please contact the Design Studio.

For matters relating to conducting consultation, liaison should be undertaken with the Communication Group, via the PR Manager in the first instance.

Consultation and communication are key to the delivery of Dover District Council's vision to deliver the best customer focused services and support to all communities so that every resident can have pride in our District and its heritage.

Having in place effective consultation and communication procedures means that we are listening to our residents, learning from the results, improving our services and informing people of this. These procedures are vital in maintaining our commitment to make Dover District Council fully transparent and accountable.

All officers who are responsible for producing information are expected to know what standards are applicable and ensure all documents meet those criteria.

CONSULTATION

Purpose

Effective consultation will enable us to better understand our customers, encourage the efficient use of public resources and enable evidence-based decision-making.

Through consultation we are seeking to:

- Strengthen our Community leadership role
- Aid decision-making
- Ensure we stay in touch with the needs of residents
- Raise awareness and understanding of services and how they are provided
- Avoid wasting resources on objectives people do not want

Methods

We will use a variety of methods to consult with residents and other stakeholders including:

- Citizens' Panel
- Consultation Forums
- Various surveys
- Feedback from comments and complaints and contact with Councillors and officers
- In-house consultation software to minimise costs and external agencies where appropriate

Overall aim

To provide a high standard of knowledge and priorities which will enable us to fairly and effectively make decisions.

This includes:

- Improving user satisfaction
- Highlighting and dealing with issues arising from proposed changes
- Selecting the appropriate method for each review and its required audience

For matters relating to conducting consultation, liaison should be undertaken with the Corporate Performance and Development Officer

COMMUNICATION

Purpose

The basis of any successful consultation policy is good and robust communication. This will enable us to maintain a commitment to transparency and accountability, and deliver customer focused services that residents are kept informed about.

The purpose of communication is to:

- Consult on the needs of our community
- Convey information about our services
- Encourage participation in the shaping of our policies
- Encourage debate
- Promote openness and accountability and help engender pride in the district

Methods

We will use a variety of methods to communicate with residents and other stakeholders including:

- Newsletters – for example Dover District News, the Tenants Newsletter
- Media Relations – reaching residents through the media, including responding to enquiries appropriately and issuing Press Releases and Press Statements, in accordance with the Media Relations Policy
- Publications, brochures and leaflets – for example Dover District Guide, White Cliffs Country Tourism Brochure
- Community Strategy, Performance Plan
- Telephone calls, faxes, letters and emails
- Citizens' Panel, Consultation Forums
- Website (www.dover.gov.uk)
- Details of how to comment/complain and who to contact

Overall aim

To provide good communication with everyone we provide services for or work with to deliver shared objectives.

This includes ensuring information is available to all those who want or need it in a manner that is:

- Appropriate and freely available (subject to legal restraints such as the Data Protection Act)
- Clear and easily understood
- Accurate, timely and up to date

INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS:

This is another key way of ensuring good communication is maintained. It is important to ensure that members and officers are kept informed.

This will be achieved through various methods of internal communication including:

- Staff magazine Snapshot
- Members Bulletin
- Intranet site
- Team and staff briefings
- Service Plans and Personal Performance Reviews (PPR)
- Bulletin Board

In order to maintain these communication standards, reference must be made to the documents below. Where appropriate liaison should also be made with the PR Manager.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

This Policy is underpinned by the following documents. They are all available on the Intranet under Corporate Policies or Performance Management (Reports & Papers):

- **Corporate Plan** - sets out our vision including our commitment to become more outwardly focused.
- **Media Relations Policy** - sets out how we will effectively engage and deal with the media
- **Code of Recommended Practice on Local Government Publicity** - which states the main purpose, in general, of local authority publicity is to increase public awareness of our services, policies and local accountability
- **Corporate Identity and Publication Guidelines** - states how the Council's Logo is to be presented and used in all instances
- **Corporate Powerpoint Presentations** - provides a preset style for any presentation made on behalf of the Council to ensure integrity of the corporate image.