

**STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**Cabinet**

**6 December 2022**

<b>TITLE:</b>	<b>Consultation and Engagement Policy</b>
<b>PORTFOLIO:</b>	<b>Councillor Ross Ward – Portfolio Holder for Communities</b>
<b>OFFICER:</b>	<b>Linden Vernon – Head of Democratic Services</b>
<b>WARDS:</b>	<b>Non specific</b>

**Attached: Appendix A - Consultation and Engagement Policy**

**1. Reason for the Report:**

- 1.1 To propose a revised approach to conducting consultation and engagement across the Council following feedback from the Local Government Association's Corporate Peer Challenge.

**2. Recommendation**

- 2.1 That the Cabinet approves the Consultation and Engagement Policy and the proposals made at section 8 of the report with regards to the conduct of a Residents' Survey.

**3. Executive Summary**

- 3.1 To make good decisions the Council needs to understand the views, needs and priorities of the local community and, recognising that our community is diverse, we need to understand the perspectives of the different groups of people within our community.
- 3.2 In order to ensure there is a high level of quality and consistency in consultation carried out across the Council corporate support will be provided by Democratic Services. A consultation checklist has also been built into the council's report management system for all major decisions which requires a formal sign off from the Democratic Services team prior to report publication.

- 3.3 The revised framework for corporate consultation and engagement takes into account the recent feedback from the Local Government Association's Corporate Peer Challenge (LGA CPC). In the CPC Joint Action Plan the Council committed to conducting a planned biennial Residents' Survey which will inform the corporate plan setting process.
- 3.4 The Consultation and Engagement Policy will work alongside the Council's Communications Strategy (to be revised shortly) to inform and stimulate public interest and provide clear background information on the issues being discussed.

#### **4. How this report links to Corporate Priorities**

- 4.1 Effective consultation will support the achievement of all the Council's Corporate Priorities.

#### **5. Options and Analysis**

- 5.1 That the Cabinet approves the proposed focus for corporate consultation and the revised Consultation and Engagement Policy (recommended).
- 5.2 That the Cabinet does not approve the proposed focus for corporate consultation and the revised Consultation and Engagement Policy (not recommended).

#### **6. Implications**

##### **6.1 Community Safety - (Crime and Disorder Act 1998)**

The development of positive relations with communities is understood to be a component of community cohesion and so contribute to community safety.

##### **6.2 Workforce**

There are no specific implications. Staff will receive support in relation to the new policy.

##### **6.3 Equality and Diversity**

The proposals are designed to improve the ability of the Council to fulfil its equality duty.

##### **6.4 Financial Considerations**

The proposed focus for corporate consultation is designed to be delivered within the current service budget. Specific consultation exercises will be designed to be delivered within approved budgets.

#### 6.5 Legal

The proposals are designed to ensure the Council meets its legal obligations and avoids legal challenge.

#### 6.6 Climate Change

No Implications.

#### 6.7 Internal and External Consultation

No implications other than those described in the body of this report. The proposed approach is consistent with the LGA Guide to Engagement.

#### 6.8 Risk Assessment

No specific risks identified. Risks, reputational and other, will be considered when designing individual consultation exercises.

Mark Trillo

**Executive Director (Governance and Commissioning)**

#### **Web Links and Background Papers**

Appendix A - Consultation and Engagement  
Policy attached

#### **Contact details**

Linden Vernon – Head of Democratic Services  
Linden.vernon@staffs Moorlands.gov.uk

#### 7. **Detail**

7.1 To make good decisions the Council needs to understand the views, needs and priorities of the local community and, recognising that our community is diverse, we need to understand the perspectives of the different groups of people within our community.

7.2 To avoid costly legal challenge to its decisions the Council must also be able to demonstrate that it has consulted local communities appropriately and taken account of their feedback. Failure to fulfil the Council's equality duty under the Equality Act 2010 is also an area of potential challenge and risk for the

Council. Understanding, consulting and engaging with groups identified in the Equality Act as having 'protected characteristics' is an essential element of the Council's work to fulfil its equality duty. Consultation and engagement will frequently provide the critical intelligence required to undertake effective Equality Impact Assessments.

7.3 There is a need for consistency in approach to consultation across all areas of the Council, ensuring that the importance of consultation is always understood and planned well enough in advance.

7.4 Under the Policy, the Democratic Services Team will have three main roles in relation to consultation:

- It will take direct responsibility for commissioning/undertaking a regular residents' survey.
- It will provide support to Heads of Service to undertake service specific consultation.
- It will oversee the operation of the Policy and forward planning.

7.5 In order to ensure there is a high level of quality and consistency in consultation carried out across the council a consultation checklist has been built into the Council's report management system for all major decisions. This also requires a formal sign off from the Democratic Services team prior to report publication.

7.6 The Council is investigating the use of new innovatory software that will enable it to quickly issue tailored consultation and engagement exercises and achieve best value for money when conducting such activity. This software would also provide the ability for the Authority to understand what issues people are talking about in the community via social media channels with regards to the delivery of council services.

7.7 The Consultation and Engagement Policy will work alongside the Council's Communications Strategy (to be revised shortly) to inform and stimulate public interest and provide clear background information on the issues being discussed.

## **8. Residents' Survey**

8.1 The revised framework to corporate consultation and engagement across the Council takes into account the recent feedback from the Local Government Association's Corporate Peer Challenge (LGA CPC). Recommendation 2 from the CPC suggests that the Council undertakes regular residents' surveys as part of a wider communications and engagement strategy. In the CPC Joint Action Plan the Council committed to conducting a planned biennial Residents' Survey which will inform the corporate plan setting process.

8.2 It is proposed to complete the first survey ahead of the pre-election period for the all-out Council 2023 elections. This will take place online but other methods will also be used to ensure the views of hard to reach groups are captured. The survey will incorporate national questions used by the LGA to

facilitate benchmarking. The timeline will enable the results to be analysed in readiness for the review of the Council's Corporate Plan in Summer next year.

- 8.3 Given the significant investment in undertaking an exercise such as the Residents' Survey it is proposed that a main survey takes place every four years. This would be a single piece of work to identify community views, priorities and satisfaction (including general satisfaction/perception of the Council). A second shorter survey, focused on measuring ongoing resident/tenant satisfaction only, would then take place half way through a political administration.

## **9. Benchmarking results with other councils**

- 9.1 To help councils understand the views of their communities the LGA has developed "Are You Being Served?" – a set of free guidance notes and questions that all councils can use.
- 9.2 The methodology has been developed in partnership by the LGA and Ipsos MORI and includes questions on six key themes, all of which can impact a council's reputation. The six themes are:
- Satisfaction with the local area
  - Satisfaction with the way the council runs things
  - Trust in the council
  - Responsiveness of the council
  - How informed residents feel
  - Their perception of the value for money the council provides.
- 9.3 The questions have been designed to be flexible to suit local circumstances and reduce the cost of collecting data. Once collected results can be uploaded to the LGA's online performance database and compared with other local authorities. Once the data has been uploaded the Council will receive benchmarked results in a ready-made report.