

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL
SCRUTINY
REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE
13 JULY 2009

COST EFFECTIVE METHODS OF CONSULTING WITH THE PUBLIC

1. **Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting on 11th November 2008, requested that cost effective ways of undertaking consultation be investigated.

2. **Recommendation(s)**

2.1 That members note the options and determine which, if any, of the proposed methods are to be recommended to Cabinet.
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3. **Conclusions and Reason(s) for the Recommendation(s)**

- 3.1 That Members consider the options detailed in this report to enhance our consultation process in a cost effective way.

4. **Key Issues**

- 4.1 Cannock Chase Council currently uses the following methods of consultation:-
- Citizens Panel (twice per year)
 - Focus groups
 - Website
 - Community Forums
 - Chase Matters (twice editions per year)
 - Roadshows/events specifically for consultation purposes (ie Local Development Framework)

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Section 1

Background

Options for consideration

Complaints, Suggestions and Comments

Using complaints, suggestions and comments cards have little or no cost as there is already a system set up and established.

Being aware of what is going right or wrong is a free source of detailed information about how services are working. The location of such cards is key to how successful the system will be. Locations can vary from reception areas, point of service delivery or via the council website.

Suggested location points:

- Chase and Rugeley Leisure Centres
- Prince of Wales Centre
- Museum of Cannock Chase
- Libraries

- Council Offices
- Job centres
- Hospitals, doctors surgeries, dentist surgeries
- Schools
- Church groups
- Voluntary and community organisations
- Youth clubs

Leaflets are usually the least expensive way to capture views but still reasonably effective for providing information and can include response slips that can be deposited in suggestion boxes at various locations. To complement this, posters are a good reminder medium for communicating a small amount of key information in a specific location. They are inexpensive and highly effective.

The advantage of this method is that it gives everyone the chance to have their say and also lets the public know we are listening. The disadvantage of this method is that it can result in a low response rate and if open ended questions are given it may be costly to analyse responses.

The response can also be in the form of a comments card to be placed in a secure box that is emptied at regular intervals. Also, online and email responses can be encouraged, this will save having to input the information from the cards themselves.

The most cost effective method of response is to provide an email address or web link so members of the public can respond. This does however limit the response to those with internet access, but including a freepost address will be more costly.

Use of front line and council officers

Front line officers can feed back a lot of information as they have direct contact with the public. Consultation with these officers can be by means of discussion groups, electronic or online surveys, meetings, and informal discussions. All of these methods have their costs involved with setting up the systems, recording, communicating and analysing the results.

A more cost effective approach is to invite employees to take part in e-surveys as this method does not require the employee to step away from their work for any given amount of time. An e-survey can be done at their desk and is a quicker method of consultation than group discussions and meetings.

E-surveys can be undertaken if a database of employee email addresses is provided. The cost is relatively small as there is usually no data processing involved at all unless verbatim replies are coded, but even if this is the case the amount of work is significantly reduced.

Council officers could also make themselves available at events in the district where members of the public attend, for example Slipper Swap Shops, Own Your Streets, Rugeley Charter Fair. The only cost being time of those people involved and reporting and analysing the findings.

Desk research

A cost effective method of consultation is to review the information and data that has already been collected from the public and how it can be put to use in the future, for example State of Cannock Chase, Citizens Panel, Leisure, Customer exit surveys.

Accepting what exists rather than what we need will ultimately decide if this method is cost effective and may result in cheaper future consultations.

The main cost is someone's time to carry out this research.

Telephone Research

Telephone surveys can be undertaken fairly quickly depending upon the questions being asked. This is an effective way of gathering views and opinions on a wide range of subjects. Fairly cost effective, the main cost is the telephone calls, officer time and analysis of responses which may differ depending upon verbatim responses being coded.

Online Consultation

Rather than send out paper questionnaires to members of the Citizens Panel, we could provide the opportunity for them to complete the questionnaire online. Once a database of members e-mail addresses has been set up, and they have said they wish to receive online questionnaires, they will automatically be sent a link to the survey via e-mail. This will be followed up with an email reminder if they have not responded by a certain date.

The main cost is officer time in collating and setting up an email database. It should also be considered that some Panel members may not wish to or cannot receive online questionnaires so there will still be a cost to provide paper based versions.

Utilising the Citizens Panel

It can be argued that the most cost effective method would be to utilise the panel more as it is already well-established. This includes conducting more surveys with the panel, such as postal surveys, telephone surveys and conducting focus groups. Each of these survey methods do, however, have their costs.

Face to face In-street interviewing

Face to face interviews can be conducted in busy streets with a lot of pedestrian traffic. The advantage of conducting street interviews is that it is more cost effective than conducting in-home interviews and response rates are relatively high.

Street interviews usually last no more than ten minutes and stimulus material can be shown to respondents.

Face to face exit interviews are interviews that are conducted at the location for the topic of the questionnaire. For example, if conducting research about The Chase Leisure Centre, face to face interviews can take place with people as they leave the leisure centre.

Approximate costs for undertaking street interviews for a sample of 500 people would be in the region of £6,000.

Section 2

Details of Matters to be considered

To consider the above proposals, options and information as requested.

Section 3

Contribution to CHASE

Effective consultation contributes significantly towards the council's vision and is a cross cutting priority across all five CHASE objectives. The Council's corporate plan 2007/10 promises to build an Excellent Council, known for excellent services and delivering value for money. In order to improve our services, we need to engage with and consult our residents.

Section 4

Financial Implications

There is no provision in the corporate consultation budget to undertake additional citizens panel surveys or on street interviews.

Section 5

Human Resource Implications

There are no human resource implications arising from this report. Any enhancements will be planned into the consultation process.

Section 6

Legal Implications

There are no identified implications arising from this report.

Section 7

Section 17 (Crime Prevention)

There are no identified implications arising from this report.

Section 8

Human Rights Act Implications

There are no identified implications in respect to the Human Rights Act 1998 arising from this report.

Section 9

Data Protection Act Implications

Data Protection implications will be dependant upon information intended for collection and its nature. Data Protection implications may therefore apply.

The Information Manager must be consulted regarding type and quantity of information to be collected.

The Information Manager must be consulted regarding any Data Protection fair processing notices which may be used.

Section 10

Risk Management Implications

An issue for consideration is the use of suggestion/comment boxes and ensuring the security of data collected, particularly in relation to personal data, is only accessible to relevant employees of Cannock Chase Council.

Section 11

Equality and Diversity Implications

There are no equality and diversity implications.

Section 12

Other Options Considered

None

Section 13

List of Background Papers

None

Annexes

None

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