Improving the way we consult and engage with residents

Report by Executive Head of Organisational Development and Strategic Business

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
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<td>To update Members and residents on the work that has taken place, and is planned, in order to improve the way Kingston Council engages and consults with residents, partners and service users.</td>
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<th>Recommendations</th>
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<td>To Resolve that</td>
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<td>1. the progress in improving the way Kingston Council engages and consults with residents, partners and service users, and the activities planned over the next 12 months are noted; and</td>
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<td>2. any views and comments of the Committee are considered as part of the finalisation of proposals for the Residents Committee on 4 November 2015.</td>
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<th>Key Points</th>
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<td>A. Kingston Council has a clearly stated desire to improve the quality of engagement and consultation activities across the organisation.</td>
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<td>B. An audit of current consultation activities carried out across the Council has revealed a number of issues that need to be resolved.</td>
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<td>C. Measures taken in recent months have already made significant improvements to the way the Council consults and engages, but it has not resolved all the issues; many of which are symptomatic of deep-rooted organisational culture and processes.</td>
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<td>D. Strategic Business has developed an intensive ‘package of interventions’ (including new Best Practice Guidelines) that will be implemented with service areas across the organisation over the next 12 months. This package of interventions will help service areas make significant improvements to the way they consult and engage with local people.</td>
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<td>1. Kingston Council has a clearly stated desire to improve the quality of engagement and consultation activities across the organisation.</td>
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2. In October 2014, the Residents, Health and Care Services Committee agreed that:

“The Policy & Finance Committee be requested to set up a review of all consultation and engagement methodologies used across the Council on the basis that the methodologies used by the Council for many years are no longer fit for purpose.”

3. This request was triggered by a consultation surrounding the proposed re-location of the Council’s Wellbeing Service, which was seen to be lacking in a number of areas.

4. The recent ‘All in One’ borough survey revealed that just one in four people feel they are able to influence decisions affecting their local area. This is not good enough. At a time when local government is going through great change, and difficult decisions will have to be made in coming years to meet financial pressures, it is essential that the Council engages and consults effectively with residents and that local people feel involved in the future of this borough.

Audit of current practices

5. An audit of current consultation activities carried out across the Council was completed in spring 2015.

6. This audit revealed that:
   ● there was an inconsistent approach, with some pockets of good practice but many areas where improvements were needed
   ● engagement practices across the council were disjointed
   ● the information collected from engagement activities was dispersed and inaccessible for wider use
   ● there was very little in the way of standardisation (i.e. standard letters / templates)
   ● there was an inconsistent approach and no clear protocols when deciding whether consultation and engagement was necessary/required
   ● there was a lack of corporate protocols governing how services plan and deliver their consultation exercises
   ● there was a low level of awareness of the the Council’s Consultation Strategy, published in 2006
   ● whilst the 2006 Consultation Strategy contained good advice and information, it needed updating and, at 140 pages of detailed information, was inaccessible to staff (most of whom are being asked to plan and deliver consultation and engagement activities as a relatively small part of their jobs)

Progress made to date

7. A great deal of progress has been made in improving the way the council engages and consults:
   ● a network of engagement champions in each of the service areas has been established
   ● a new online engagement platform (Objective) has been commissioned and launched. This provides residents, partner and service users with a
one-stop-shop for key consultation and engagement activities (accessed via www.kingston.gov.uk/consultations).

Users can register an account, ask for personalised alerts about consultations in areas of interest and view the results of previous consultations. Members of the Committee will benefit from a short demonstration of the new consultation platform from a resident’s perspective at the Committee meeting.

- a ‘pre-engagement questionnaire’ has been developed. This sits in the ‘back-end’ of the Objective engagement platform (i.e. visible to staff but not to members of the public). It will enable the Council, in the future, to capture all key engagement and consultations activities taking place across the organisation.

- new Best Practice Guidelines have been developed that will support council staff in improving the standard of their consultation and engagement activities. This guidance is embedded into the pre-engagement questionnaire to enable staff to use it as a useful reference point at the time they are planning their engagement exercise. Members of the Committee will benefit from a short demonstration of the pre-engagement questionnaire and the Best Practice Guidelines from a member of Kingston Council staff’s perspective at the Committee meeting. For reference, the online questionnaire and supporting guidance has been pasted into a document format and included at Annex 2 of the report.

Planned activity

8. The measures taken to date have made significant improvements to the way the Council consults and engages with the community. But it has not resolved all of the issues; many of which are symptomatic of deep-rooted organisational culture and processes.

9. To overcome this, Strategic Business has developed a ‘package of interventions’. Working with the identified engagement champion in each service area, this package will involve:

   - creating an inventory of existing processes and templates for each service area
   - training for identified service area engagement champions in the use of the ‘Community Engagement Platform’ (Objective)
   - training for service area engagement champions in consultation and engagement best practices
   - development of new templates and processes where appropriate
   - testing of the pre-engagement questionnaire with each service area to establish its appropriateness (making changes where required)
   - mapping planned consultation and engagement work for next 12 months.

10. This package of interventions will be rolled out in phases starting with the two services areas that produce the highest volume of consultations in the organisation: Parking & Highways and Planning & Transportation.

11. Early engagement has already started with these service areas. They have engaged in a positive way and this work has provided Strategic Business with an
insight into the size of the task and the challenges ahead. This has enabled a roll-out timetable to be developed (Annex 1 of the report).

Protocols and gatekeeper role

12. Once the package of interventions has been delivered, each service area will be required to complete the pre-engagement questionnaire, and follow the Best Practice Guidelines contained within it, for any consultation and engagement activities.

13. In order to be effective, the new approach must be mainstreamed and enforced. A gatekeeper role will therefore be established to assure consultation planning and assist with the delivery of high profile consultation projects. This will be established as part of the Communications and Engagement function within Strategic Business.

14. Strategic Business will advise on the design of consultation programmes to ensure that the Council is consulting in a consistent and effective manner that conforms to industry best practice.

Timescale

16. A timetable showing the roll-out of this new approach to consultation and engagement is shown at Annex 1.

Resource Implications

17. There are no direct financial cost implications of adopting this new approach to consultation and engagement.

18. Implementing the new approach effectively will have significant resource implications on Strategic Business, particularly the Communications and Data functions. This will be considered as part of the review of budgets currently being undertaken through the Outcome Based Budgeting process and the Council’s Communications review.

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john.haynes@kingston.gov.uk 020 8547 4710
## Delivery timetable

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>July-December 2015</td>
<td><strong>Parking &amp; Highways and Planning &amp; Transportation</strong> - deliver the following package of interventions:</td>
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<td>● identification of engagement champions / leads within the service area</td>
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<td>● creating an inventory of existing processes and templates for each service area</td>
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<td>● training for service area engagement champions in the use of our ‘Community Engagement Platform’ (Objective)</td>
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<td>● development of new templates and process where appropriate</td>
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<td>● testing of the pre-engagement questionnaire with each service area to establish its appropriateness (making changes where required)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● Mapping planned consultation and engagement work for next 12 months</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 2015</td>
<td>Reflect on the delivery of the interventions in Parking &amp; Highways and Planning &amp; Transportation in order to improve delivery to other service areas</td>
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<tr>
<td>January - July 2016</td>
<td>Delive the above package of interventions in the following service areas:</td>
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<td>● Public Health</td>
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<td>● Adult Social Care</td>
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<td>● Housing</td>
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<td>● Environment &amp; Waste</td>
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<td>● Culture, Leisure and Libraries</td>
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Best Practice Guidance

New Best Practice Guidelines have been developed to support staff in improving the standard of their consultation and engagement activities. This replaces the guidance contained within the Council’s Consultation Strategy, published in 2006.

Much of the guidance contained within the 2006 Strategy is of high quality and remains fit-for-purpose. However, the two internal audits conducted in recent years show that awareness of the Strategy and the guidance contained within it is low amongst staff. This is perhaps not surprising when you consider that the 2006 Strategy consists of 140 pages of detailed information. The structure of councils has changed a great deal since 2006. Today, for most of the RBK staff who are planning and delivering consultation and engagement activities, it is a relatively small part of their jobs. To expect them to familiarise themselves with 140 pages of guidance is unreasonable.

To overcome this challenge, the latest Guidelines are presented to staff as bite-size-chunks, embedded into the pre-engagement questionnaire. This will help us signpost staff to the guidance that is relevant to the particular piece of work they are planning in an interactive way. The best way of viewing the Guidance is to work through the pre-engagement questionnaire itself. For reference, the online questionnaire and supporting guidance has been pasted in below:

INTRODUCTION

This is the launch-pad for all engagement activities being carried out by the Council. Completing the questionnaire will help you:

- identify what level of engagement is appropriate / required for your project
- establish which engagement methods are most suited
- decide how you can best engage with your target audiences

Good community engagement improves service delivery, reduces complaints and objections and improves general relationships with the community.

Your responses to the questionnaire will be reviewed by the council’s corporate communications team, who will come back to you with advice and suggestions. Once submitted, you will hear back within two to four working days.

OUR KEY PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Any engagement work carried out by Kingston Council should:

- Have a CLEAR PURPOSE
- BE TIMELY - consult early in the decision-making process, while proposals are still in a formative stage
- BE PLANNED well in advance
- MANAGE EXPECTATIONS - be clear about what participants can expect as a result of their participation
- ENGAGE PARTNERS APPROPRIATELY and early so they can add value
- Seek to ENGAGE WITH ALL appropriate sections of the community
- GIVE PEOPLE A CHOICE of different ways to express their views
- ACHIEVE A MINIMUM NUMBER OF RESPONSES sufficient to have confidence in the results
- Provide FEEDBACK to those who expressed their views
- Be EVALUATED, with lessons learnt and shared amongst colleagues.
Q1. What are the aims of your engagement exercise? (tick all that apply)

- Raise awareness of a service or decision
- Research into preferred options
- Seek guidance to develop a policy
- Identify clients/users’ priorities
- Improve customer relations
- Check opinions, views and attitudes
- Set targets for a service area
- Prioritise future spending
- Shape the way the service is delivered
- Engage users in the delivery of a service
- Other

Q2. Please provide a short description of your engagement exercise


Q3. Is this engagement activity a statutory requirement?

- Yes
- No

*If ‘Yes’ is ticked...*

Q3a. Please provide details of precisely what is required by law


Q4. Is your engagement activity affecting:

- the whole borough
- specific wards

*If ‘specific wards’ is ticked...*

Q4a. **Which Ward(s)??** Not sure about the Ward names? Find out at Kingston Data

- Alexandra
- Berrylands
- Beverley
- Canbury
- Chessington North & Hook
- Chessington South
- Coombe Hill
- Coombe Vale
- Grove
- Norbiton
- Old Malden
- St Marks
- St James
- Surbiton
- Tolworth & Hook Rise
- Tudor
ENGAGING COUNCILLORS

Councillors are key links with local communities and therefore should be aware of any key engagement exercise happening in their Wards. Also, Cabinet Members will have an interest in specific subjects according to their Portfolio.

Follow the link to Find out which Councillors you should be engaging in this exercise: Your Councillors

Q5. Please describe how and when you are planning to engage relevant Councillors.

Q6. Is the engagement exercise part of a bigger project?

- Yes
- No

If ‘Yes’ is ticked...

Please describe.

HAS ANYONE DONE SOMETHING SIMILAR?

Check if similar engagement exercises have been carried out by colleagues recently.

Search our consultation database to find out: Community Engagement Portal

Q7. Who will be affected by the outcomes of your engagement activity?

- All residents
- Specific groups of service users

If ‘Specific groups of service users’ is ticked...

Q7a. Please describe who (i.e. primary school children, adults with mental health issues, young mothers etc.)

Q8. Will any of the following groups be particularly affected by the decision / outcome of your engagement activities?

- Minority Ethnic group(s)
- Specific age group(s)
- Men
- Women
- Disabled group(s)
- Specific religious or belief group(s)
- LGBT groups (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender)
- Other
- Not applicable
WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE?

KINGSTON DATA

The 'Kingston Data' team has brought together a wide range of local data and information to give you an insight into our borough and how it compares both locally and nationally.

Visit the website: Kingston Data

JOINT STRATEGIC NEEDS ASSESSMENT - JSNA

The JSNA has developed a powerful database around Health and Wellbeing in the Kingston. You can search for specific health subjects affecting people living in the borough.

Visit the website: JSNA

SCOPE OF INFLUENCE

The scope of influence defines the extent to which people, who take part in the engagement exercise, are offered the opportunity to shape the outcome/decision.

The scope of influence will define the level of engagement you aim to achieve through the exercise.

LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT

INFORM - To provide balanced and objective information so that local people understand issues, alternatives and/or solutions regarding services that affects them.

Example. A service has been changed, due to a review or central government direction, and there is a need to inform people affected by such change.

CONSULT - To provide local people with opportunities to have a direct say about decisions and services that affect them.

Example. A preferred option/solution has been identified, but there is still an opportunity for other options to be adopted or for the preferred option to be modified as a result of feedback.

INVOLVE - Work directly with the community in the process of making decisions regarding services that affect them. Ensuring their concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.

Example. Options for delivering a service have been identified but not final decision has been made. The community will have a direct influence in the final decision.

COLLABORATE - To partner with the community in each aspect of the decision making; including the development of alternatives, the identification of the preferred solution and its delivery. Partners may be capable of carrying out some aspects of service delivery for themselves.

Example. No decisions have been made. The community will be involved in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and delivery of some aspects of the option/solution.

EMPOWER - To place final decision making in the hands of the community. This may happen as a result of increased engagement between communities and public bodies or as a result of communities taking action themselves.

Example. No decisions have been made. The project will be guided by what the community needs/wishes and ownership for delivery will be placed back in the community

Q9. Please choose the ‘scope of influence’ of your engagement activity:

- Level 0 - No influence, decision has been made. INFORM
- Level 1 – The community has some opportunities to have a say. CONSULT
- Level 2 – The community has a direct impact on final decision. INVOLVE
- Level 3 – The community has a direct say and assist with delivery. COLLABORATE
Level 4 – The community identifies the issue and takes ownership of delivering the solution.

EMPOWER

METHODS OF ENGAGEMENT

There are a number of methods of engagement you could use to achieve your aim. Some methods are good for raising awareness (i.e. leaflets) while others are good for empowering people (i.e. photo diaries).

Follow the link to see our 'Quick Engagement Method Selector' and choose the most appropriate methods for your exercise (see Annex 3 for more information on the 'Quick Engagement Method Selector').

Q10. What method(s) of engagement will you be using? (tick all that apply)

- Action Research
- Appreciative Inquiry
- Citizen Juries
- Comments and Complaints
- Community Forums
- Community Mapping
- Community Panels
- Community Prioritisation Exercise
- Consultation Documents
- Exhibitions
- Focus Groups
- Interviews
- Leaflets
- Letters
- Mystery Shopping
- Newsletters
- Participatory Budgeting
- Photo Diaries
- Podcasts
- Posters
- Press Releases
- Public Meetings
- Social Media
- Steering Committees
- Surveys
- Websites
- Workshops
- Other

ENSURING YOUR ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES ARE INCLUSIVE

We have a legal duty, under the Equality Act 2010, to promote equality and prevent discrimination when we are running any engagement activities.

Follow the link to learn how you can make your engagement activities are inclusive.

Inclusive engagement – Quick guide

Q11. How are you going to monitor and evaluate the exercise?

Q12. How will the results of the engagement exercise be used?
Q13. How will you feedback the results to those who took part?


Q14. Is there a budget for the engagement activity?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Don’t know
☐ Not applicable

If ‘Yes is ticked…

Q14a. Please state how much


What is the start date of your engagement activity/exercise?


What is the end date of your engagement activity/exercise?


WHAT’S NEXT?
Once submitted, your form will be reviewed by the Corporate Communications Team. We will come back to you within two to four working days with advice on how to proceed.

ANNEX 3

Quick Method Selector

The Quick Method Selector is an interactive online document offering specific guidance on different engagement methods. The table below is a summary of the methods covered in the guide. Follow the link to see it working: Quick Method Selector

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<th>Methods / Tools</th>
<th>Good for…</th>
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<td>Inform</td>
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<td>Action research</td>
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<td>Appreciative inquiry</td>
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<td>Community prioritisation exercise</td>
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