



2005 Annual Consultation Report

Introduction

Public consultation is fundamental to the government's modernisation programme for local government and is seen as an important element in the process of reinvigorating local democracy. New legislation requires local authorities to consult their communities more extensively than they have done in the past. The government recognises that consultation can be a powerful tool for improving both quality and cost-effectiveness of services and can bring significant benefits if consultation activities are carefully planned, well designed, competently carried out and then used to inform decision making.

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council actively seeks information from its residents regarding the services that it provides, and strives to continually improve its service offerings by involving them in the decision-making process.

The Council has an established track record of consultation with its local residents, using various consultation techniques that are available (from workshops, focus groups and surveys, to currently looking at exciting new ways of consulting with large groups of people for example public meetings, and roadshows) and has an excellent record of consulting members of its Citizens' Panel, FEEDBACK.

Consultation Strategy

The Council first produced a Consultation Strategy in 2000, which is reviewed on a regular basis, most recently in November 2005. The Strategy sets out a consolidated, centralised and co-ordinated consultation process to ensure efficient and effective consultation across the Council.

The newly revised and approved (November 2005) Consultation Strategy shows how the Council's consultation process will develop over the next eighteen months. The Service Improvement Unit (SIU) will exercise absolute control through an approval and quality assurance process to ensure that effective and efficient consultation takes place, from which the Council gains an understanding of its communities, leading to improved services and continuous improvement. The Strategy's companion document, the Consultation Handbook, contains in-depth information about the importance of consultation as well as information on methodologies.

An Action Plan has also been developed that sets out how the Service Improvement Unit will look to develop the Council's approach to consultation over the next eighteen months.

Consultation Handbook

The Consultation Handbook, produced to promote and improve consultation throughout Epsom and Ewell Borough Council, was revised November 2005 and given a 'facelift.' The content has been updated, and the layout is now much more user-friendly and will guide Officers through the consultation process step by step. It aims to assist Officers and Councillors in securing the benefits that consultation can offer, to facilitate co-ordinated and combined consultation and to get good value from the resources that we invest in.

The Consultation Handbook now has four parts:

Part 1: Consultation Explained. This section seeks to explain the meaning of consultation to Epsom and Ewell Borough Council and its function within the Council; why consultation is important and your role in the Consultation Strategy.

Part 2: The Consultation Process. This will guide you through each important step of the consultation process. Various methods for consultation are highlighted, and important references are made to the Market Research Society Code of Conduct and ethical issues that need to be considered.

Part 3: Engaging the 'Hard to Reach.' Real-life scenarios where consultation has been carried out and proved successful are included to highlight the importance of getting the consultation process right.

Part 4: Consultation Strategy. The fourth part contains a copy of the newly revised Consultation Strategy, as approved by Strategy & Resources Committee in November 2005.

A **Quick Guide to Consultation** has also been developed and is available on the Council's intranet (IRIS) to supplement the Handbook. This is useful to give Officers an overview of the whole process, and is a more practical and concise source of information.

Hard copies of the Consultation Handbook are available from the Service Improvement Unit upon request, and it is also possible to access an electronic copy on both the Council's intranet site (IRIS) and the Council's web site.

Consultation Conducted in 2005

Twenty-two pieces of external consultation have been conducted this year. These range from statutory consultation (for example, informing the development of the first year's strategic action plans and associated interventions and targets for the Community Safety Strategy 2005-2008); consultation that supports the Council's key priorities (for example, the annual Residents' survey); and 'other' consultation, such as the Building Control Satisfaction survey, or the Ethnic Minority Ladies Exercise Class Feedback Survey. Research has also been undertaken with local residents to inform the Council's Best Value Review of Customer Contact, which aims to improve the customer experience.

The Council has also conducted twelve internal surveys over the year, ranging from a Staff Active Sport survey to a council-wide Employee Satisfaction Survey. Various workshops have also been held with Officers and Councillors to support the Best Value Review of Customer Contact and also the Best Value Review of Community Safety.

FEEDBACK – Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's Citizens' Panel

FEEDBACK

Your borough, your future, be heard!

FEEDBACK – the Council's Citizens' Panel – comprises a group of residents that are representative of the local population who are consulted on a regular basis on a range of local issues and services. Panel membership currently stands at just over 1,000 local residents from separate households. Additional recruitment, specifically targeting young people between 18 and 24 took place in autumn 2005, and initiatives will continue into 2006 aimed at attracting more members aged 16 to 34 years old to the panel, to ensure that it remains representative of the Borough's population, and to attract new members to the panel to replace those residents who have participated for the last 3 years.

Surveys sent to FEEDBACK Members in 2005

Two surveys were sent to FEEDBACK members in 2005:

Open Space, Sport & Recreation Survey – April 2005

A survey was undertaken in April 2005 to inform an Audit of Open Space, Sport and Recreation. This has been commissioned to guide the establishment of an effective strategy for the delivery of accessible, high quality green spaces, civic spaces and sports and recreation facilities to meet the standards of local residents, workers and visitors to the Borough. An excellent response rate of 89% was achieved.

Key findings:

- Respondents regarded different open space types with different degrees of importance. Parks and gardens are considered to be the most important (as well as being the most used), with 98% of respondents stating that they are important. This is followed by natural green space (96%) and play spaces for children and young people (88%).
- 39% of respondents feel that there are not enough play areas for children and young people.
- 22% of respondents feel that there are not enough outdoor sports facilities.
- 75% of respondents feel the provision of parks and gardens in the Borough is 'about right'; followed by 63% with natural green space and 47% with green corridors.
- Respondents would expect to travel further to access cemeteries and churchyards, outdoor sports facilities, allotments and natural green spaces.
- When asked for the main reasons for using open spaces, respondents indicated fresh air, to take exercise and to walk. When asked why they do not use open space types, respondents cited lack of interest and lack of time.
- The top five features of the open spaces include having them clean and free of litter, having flowers, trees, shrubs, the provision of toilets, well-kept grass and nature features. Less popular features include quality soils, having an entertainment facility, having art/sculptures and access within the site.
- Factors that would make respondents feel safer when using open spaces include the reputation of the area/space, using them in daylight and having adequate lighting.
- Respondents expect to travel to sports and recreation facilities – between 10 and 19 minutes to access the majority of facilities, with 'car' being the most popular mode of transport.
- Swimming pools are most frequently used, followed by health and fitness facilities.
- Respondents would like to see more multi-use games areas in the Borough. Plans are now in place for a multi-use games area in the Longmead area of the Borough.

Results used to...

The results are being used to inform a Borough-wide review of open space and sport and recreation facilities in the Borough. The Audit has been commissioned to guide the establishment of an effective strategy for the delivery of accessible, high quality green spaces, civic spaces and sport and recreation facilities to meet the needs of local residents, workers and visitors to the Borough, along with making the prediction of the Borough's future needs through to 2017.

The results of this Audit are due in early 2006 and will be used to develop planning policies in the new local Development Framework and to inform future capital investment schemes.

Annual Residents' Survey – June 2005

In June 2005, we sent out the Annual Residents' Survey, which asked questions about a number of different Council services. The objectives of the survey were to measure levels of satisfaction with various services, and to obtain views on various services to support the Council's key priorities. An excellent response rate of 88.5% was achieved.

Key findings:

- Satisfaction with the ordinary weekly refuse collection service is very high at 90%, with approximately one third of respondents feeling this service has improved over the past twelve months.
- Awareness levels of the new weekly kerbside collection service are high at 85%; and satisfaction with this new service is very high at 88%
- The most common nuisance and anti-social behaviour problems experienced by respondents are loud and fast cars (experienced by over half of respondents), followed by rubbish and litter. Dog mess, parking problems and graffiti are also suffered by many.
- Areas respondents feel have got worse over the past twelve months include traffic congestion, anti-social behaviour and graffiti.
- Areas respondents feel have got better over the past twelve months include removal of graffiti, neatness of flowerbeds, abandoned cars and sports and leisure facilities.
- Just over two thirds of respondents (64%) are satisfied to some degree with the way the Council runs things.

Results used to...

Directors, service managers and Councillors have discussed the results, and have identified six main action areas in which the Council can make a difference. These action areas are:

(1) **Recycling & Refuse Collection** – A number of respondents have indicated that they wish to be able to recycle plastics and cardboard. Plastics only contribute around 5% of the waste stream by weight and cardboard 10 to 15%. Only certain types of plastic can be recycled (mainly bottles). Both materials are expensive to collect at the kerbside because of their bulk. We are looking into the possibility of including plastics and cardboard a bring sites, although there are operational and management issues to be addressed.

(2) **Street Cleansing** – The results of this survey were presented to Scrutiny Committee on 12th October, to feed into the review process. This is an action that is being led by Scrutiny Committee.

(3) **Community Engagement** – Councillor Eber Kington, Chair of Strategy & Resources Committee will lead the Council to produce an action plan for this area.

(4) **Communications** – Whilst it is recognised that respondents feel improvements have been made to corporate communications (how well informed they feel on various issues, including the reasons why the Council makes the decisions it does), there are still some issues regarding communication such as service delivery communications. This will be reviewed further by the Director of HR & Communications, once the new website is operational and it has been possible to judge its impact.

(5) **Venues** – There is some evidence that satisfaction with venues is falling. There is a need for Leisure and Social Committees to consider this, and to identify possible causes and to promote remedial action as appropriate.

(6) **Partnership/Community Leadership Role** – Findings from this survey (along with other surveys) need to be effectively communicated with partners, including the Local Strategic Partnership. The Chief Executive, Head of Policy & Partnerships and Councillor Eber Kington (as Chair of the Local Strategic Partnership) will play a key role here. An action plan needs to be developed to achieve this.

The Local Strategic Partnership is addressing traffic congestion – this has been identified as an area of priority for 2005/06; contacting the Council issues will be addressed as part of the current Best Value Review of Customer Contact (due to be completed at the end of this financial year); and issues relating to anti-social behaviour and levels of crime are covered in actions in existing plans (for example, actions for 2005/06 identified in the Community Safety Strategy) as well as the current Best Value Review of Community Safety.

Youth Leisure Day 2005

On Saturday 24th September 2005, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council held a Youth Leisure Day event targeting young people in the Borough aged between 13-17 years of age. The philosophy behind the day was to offer a programme of exciting activities organised and supervised by young people in order to encourage as wide a participation as possible. Approximately 1,000 young people attended the event.

Initiatives on the day included a skate ramp, basketball shooting, art and dance workshops, a seminar from Medecins sans Frontiers, a press office containing information on local clubs and activities for this age group, a makeover with stylists, DJ sessions, a catwalk fashion show and a full line-up of music with local young people playing. There was also a specially designed Big Brother-style Diary Room, giving participants the chance to tell the Council about subjects they feel are important in the Borough, and to express their views on the services and facilities provided in the Borough for their age group.

The Council worked closely with Lightrush (a local youth group organised by Surrey County Council) to help develop and film this consultation using their specialist filming equipment. The young people in this group ran the Diary Room on the day so the consultation was very much run by young people for young people. The Market Research Society was approached for advice on the relevant ethical and legal considerations, and a member of the Council's Service Improvement Unit was there on the day to ensure that these guidelines were adhered to, and to help out if required.

Crib cards were prepared containing broad question areas along with specific queries, so that the young people running the Diary Room could ask questions in a professional way. Areas of enquiry included things young people are happy/unhappy about; their views of the Council; what they do in their spare time or would like to be able to do; what sports they participate in or would like to participate in; their thoughts on public transport, parks, and the youth café held at Starbucks in Epsom each Friday night; how they would like the Council to communicate with them; what music they like; what entertainment they would like to have; and their concerns about community safety.

A video of the day, including footage from the Diary Room, was presented by the young people involved on the day to a full Council meeting in December 2005. The results of the research findings will be presented to Leisure Committee in March 2006 and findings will be used to inform future youth services in the Borough – in particular to provide direction as to what services and facilities this age group wants to see.

Consultation Article in LARIA Publication and IDeA Website

Sara Childs, Service Improvement Manager, has written an article about the Youth Leisure Day which was published in the LARIA (Local Authorities Research & Intelligence Association) newsletter in February 2006, which will be used to inform other local authorities of the success of the day and can be used as an example of best practice in consulting with young people.

A similar article is due to be published on the IDeA (Improvement and Development Agency) website, which is regularly used by Officers in other local authorities. IDeA Knowledge delivers in-depth improvement news and examples of good practice from councils across England and Wales.

Best Value Review of Customer Contact

The overall purpose of the Best Value Review of Customer Contact is to review and challenge current service standards to improve and achieve consistently high levels of customer service and accessibility across the Council. The ultimate aim is to enhance the customer experience.

Finding out at first hand from local residents what their feelings and views are regarding current customer contact and access is critical, along with gaining an understanding of what standards of care they expect to improve the customer experience. Identifying what high

standards of customer contact should be across all access channels and contact types will enable the Council to establish consistent standards of practice across the organisation through the development of a Customer Service Strategy and Customer Charter. The same applies to Member contact and the complaints process.

In July 2005, a number of focus groups and depth interviews were held with a number of residents living in the Borough. Care was taken to ensure that the residents invited to participate were fully representative of the different groups/sections of the community. Participants were asked to comment upon all aspects of the customer service experience, including contact with Councillors/the Council, their perceptions and experiences of the service, access channels, complaints, and so forth.

As a result of this work, a number of options that the Council could pursue to enhance the customer experience in the future were identified. Follow up consultation on the potential options will be undertaken in early 2006, with a view to an action plan being developed and approved by the end of the financial year.

FEEDBACK Employee Satisfaction Survey

The overall purpose of this new employee satisfaction survey was to try to establish the needs of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council staff; to gain a greater understanding of how employees perceive the Council as an employer; and to understand what it is like working for the Council. The hope was to identify areas for improvement, and any action that can be taken in order to make these improvements.

In total, 159 members of staff completed the survey generating a response rate of 50%. This represents half of the Epsom & Ewell Borough Council workforce taking an active interest in shaping the future of the Council in which they work, and demonstrating a willingness to offer information/suggestions to help the organisation to grow.

The general conclusions that can be drawn from the results include:

- Whilst a number of employees expressed that they like working for the Council, and in general do feel that the Council is a good employer overall, there are clearly areas where it is perceived to be letting itself down.
- There are often a number of limitations/restrictions in place that affect the work that employees do, the amount of work that they can do, and the quality of work produced as a result.
- Issues have been highlighted concerning communication within the Council; that there are a number of improvements that need to be made in this area in order to rule out future problems. In particular, it became evident that employees may not always feel that they are part of the communication loop within the Council largely due to the lack of management imparting information to staff.
- Whilst there are a number of managers that perform well in their roles, it would appear that there are a number of managers that are not carrying out their duties as effectively as they should be. This often has a negative impact upon their staff/subordinates.
- Most employees have a good understanding of the Council in terms of what it is striving to achieve, how it intends to go about achieving this, and how each individual working for the Council can identify with and be a part of this process.
- There are concerns over career progression and development within the Council – often employees feel restricted by the lack of opportunities currently open to them.
- Many employees have lost faith in the appraisal process, and do not benefit directly from the process as a result.

The Director of HR & Communications will lead actions to help tackle the areas of concern that have been highlighted by the results of this survey, and all results will feed into the HR Strategy, due to be implemented in April 2006.

It is proposed that the survey will be conducted annually, with shorter six-monthly surveys to be administered in the interim in order to explore further or clarify any issues raised in analysis of the main survey.

The next half-yearly FEEDBACK survey is due to go out to all staff via email and hardcopy in April 2006.

2006 Consultation Action Plan

An action plan has been developed to further emphasise the importance of consultation within the Council and to build upon the consultation mechanisms that are already in place.

Activities include:

- To develop a mechanism for consulting with young people.
- To develop a more advanced consultation database on the intranet (IRIS).
- To develop a more advanced consultation database on the Council's new website.
- To develop Consultation Performance Indicators and regularly report as part of a quarterly performance management framework.
- To hold regular meetings with service heads/divisional heads regarding their requirement for consultation.

Web-based consultation

- To investigate the feasibility of having internet-based surveys on the Council's new website to gauge the satisfaction of website users.
- To further publicise the benefits of being consulted via email to FEEDBACK members.

Increasing Officers and Members awareness of consultation

- To publicise and promote the revised Consultation Handbook.
- To produce an annual consultation report.
- To ensure Members' involvement in key consultation projects (e.g. those directly related to the Council's key priorities).
- To promote the consultation guidelines available on IRIS (using the revised Consultation Handbook).
- To establish a formal Consultation Group of Officers who regularly conduct consultation activity, to share good practice, plans and to share experience.
- To undertake lunch-time sessions run by the SIU on aspects of the research process (e.g. developing the objectives, survey methods and guidelines that need to be developed).

Developing alternative means of community engagement

- To establish a half-yearly Community Forum in the Borough.
- To explore the feasibility (costs, logistics, need and potential usage) of developing a mobile communications unit, to take activities out into the Community.

Please note that the implementation of this action plan is dependent upon resources and capacity.

Consultation Schedule to April 2007

In autumn 2005, discussions took place with managers and Directors to identify potential consultation for the next seventeen months, to take us through to April 2007. This has enabled consultation to be thought about as part of the service planning process, and to be reported in the financial year rather than the calendar year.

It is highly likely that additional consultation activity will be added to this schedule, as and when business/service needs arise.

Examples of provisional consultation include consultation on car parking, to establish views on the Council's car parks from users and non-users, and to establish residents' views on decriminalised parking; consultation to gain views on a proposed multi-use games area in the Borough; the annual Residents' Survey; and consultation to obtain feedback on the Freedom of Information process and to obtain satisfaction levels with this service.

Consultation to support the Council's six key priorities will also continue into 2006/07. For example, the key priority 'securing improved transport facilities for particular sections of the community' is partly covered by the planned Routecall research to ascertain satisfaction levels with the Routecall service. Another example includes consultation to receive feedback from relevant stakeholders on the draft Borough Youth Plan which supports the key priority 'to improve services for young people.'

The Council also has a number of statutory pieces of research such as the Best Value General Survey, Best Value Benefits Survey and Best Value Planning Survey, to ascertain residents' views on the particular service areas and levels of satisfaction; and to highlight any areas for improvement.