

2006 Annual Consultation Report

Introduction

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.

We offer a number of opportunities for residents to participate in decision making in the local area. We already have an established track record of consultation using such mechanisms as residents' polls, user surveys, non-user surveys, focus groups, in-depth interviews, exhibitions, workshops and open day events/evenings. We also manage a Citizens' Panel made up of over 1,000 Epsom and Ewell Borough Council residents who are sent surveys on a regular basis to collect feedback on various council services and local issues.

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. We have a successful approval and quality assurance process in place for this purpose.

An Action Plan was developed as part of this strategy, which sets out how the Service Improvement Unit will look to develop the Council's approach to consultation. Many of the actions contained in this plan are now complete and commented upon within this report, whilst others are still ongoing. To ensure that effective consultation takes place, the Service Improvement Unit is looking to add to this plan to further develop consultation within the Council over the coming months.

Consultation Handbook

The Consultation Handbook, produced to promote and improve consultation throughout Epsom and Ewell Borough Council, was revised in November 2005. 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.

Consultation Database

In April 2006 we launched an advanced consultation database on the Council's new website. The aim was to improve communications to partners and local residents on consultation taking place, and to improve the accessibility of consultation results.

The database holds information on projects which have taken place and their outcomes; work which is currently being undertaken; and consultation which is planned for the future. Where consultation has been carried out by the Council's in-house research team, a copy of the final report is also available.

Consultation PI

The Service Improvement Unit records all consultation taking place throughout the authority, and monitors outcomes, successes and areas for improvement for each project. This information is extremely useful in giving a Council-wide overview of consultation, and allows the SIU to monitor feedback given and action taken as a result of the consultation. However, in the past, it did not set targets or provide a specific checklist of criteria for each research project to adhere to.

To allow for target setting, and to adhere to best practice guidelines, the Service Improvement Unit has introduced a Consultation Performance Indicator (PI). By evaluating each piece of research against certain criteria (cost, effectiveness, response rate, action arising etc) the Service Improvement Unit can now monitor the percentage of all research that meets the required level (the indicator includes terms of reference outlining what this level is). This is vital for maintaining a level of consistency across the authority.

Consultation Conducted in 2006

Twenty pieces of external consultation have been conducted this year. These range from statutory consultation (for example informing the development of the Core Strategy (Local Development Framework) Preferred Options, or consulting on the Section 13 (Alcohol restriction) Order for Epsom Town Centre); consultation that supports the Council's key priorities (for example the Play Strategy survey, the results of which will be used to help to improve services for young people within the borough); and other consultation, such as the Environmental Action Zone Pilot Survey, or the Disability Sport Questionnaire. Research has also been undertaken with local residents to inform the Council's Best Value Review of Community Safety, to challenge the Council's performance and partnership working, and to identify possible options for Epsom and Ewell Borough Council to pursue.

The Council has also conducted eight internal surveys over the year, ranging from an IT Customer Satisfaction Survey to a council-wide Employee Satisfaction Survey.

FEEDBACK Panel Refresh

FEEBACK – the Council's Citizens' Panel – comprises a group of residents living in Epsom and Ewell, who are consulted on a regular basis about a range of local issues and council services.

Every three years the FEEDBACK panel is refreshed and new members recruited to it. This is so that the panel remains representative of the population of Epsom and Ewell at large, and that we listen to as many residents as possible. We have recently recruited just over 1,000 new members to the panel. The new panel make-up will be compared to Census figures to ensure that it is representative of the Epsom and Ewell population (age, gender, ethnicity), and booster recruitment exercises will take place in the New Year to account for any shortfall in numbers of any particular group.

This new panel will be up and running, ready for the first Citizens' Panel survey in the New Year, spring 2007.

Surveys sent to FEEDBACK Members in 2006

Three surveys were sent to FEEDBACK members in 2006:

FEEDBACK Survey – February 2006

In February 2006, we sent out the FEEDBACK survey, which asked questions about a number of different Council services. The objectives of the survey were to measure levels of satisfaction with, and identify any improvements to venues, the quality of the built environment, financial information, street care and parking. An excellent response rate of 85.5% was achieved.

Key findings...

Decriminalised Parking

- Over half of respondents were unaware that Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is now responsible for the enforcement of decriminalised parking.
- Almost two thirds of respondents (65.3%) had noticed no improvements in parking in the Borough over the previous six months. There were slightly higher levels of satisfaction in Town ward.
- The general perception in the Borough was that there was not enough visible parking enforcement. The High Street and South Street were particular areas of dissatisfaction for residents.
- In general, respondents indicated that they would like to see more parking enforcement in the Borough.

Venues

- Respondents indicated that the Council's venues were generally well used, with over 60% of respondents having visited Bourne Hall and the Ebbisham Centre.
- The most popular reason for visiting the venues was to use the libraries. Taking part in exercise also brought people to the venues, as did visiting the cafes.
- Location (31.2%) and the facilities available (32.6%) were the most important factors for consideration when choosing which venue to visit. In addition to the location, access to the venue was also important, with many respondents commenting on the availability of parking.
- It was felt that there could be improvements made to the publicity of venues and catering arrangements.

Quality of the Built Environment

- Over half of respondents believed that new development can have a positive impact on life in the Borough (54.7%). They commented that it can provide new and improved facilities and services, and boost the economy by attracting new residents and business to the area.
- The Council is good at informing its residents of new development in the Borough, but could do more consultation on proposed development.
- The most effective method of communicating development information to residents was through the local press; the least effective method was via Council noticeboards.

Streetcare

- Over 90% of respondents wanted to see enforcement against anti-social behaviour, graffiti and dog fouling. 89.7% wanted to see it against littering.
- Generally respondents indicated that they would like to see a tougher approach adopted by the Council.

Financial Information

- Over two thirds (69.4%) of residents had read the Council's Annual Report. Out of these respondents, 74.4% feel well informed about how the Council is performing, 69.9% well informed about the Council's planned improvements for services, and 84.8% well informed about how the Council spends its money.
- Over half (58.8%) had read the Council Tax booklet. Out of these respondents, 74.9% feel well informed about how the Council is performing, 73.3% well informed about planned improvements to services, and 74.9% well informed about how their Council Tax is spent.

Results used to...

- We have worked with the County Council, the Police and local businesses to improve parking enforcement in the Town Centre and residents have already commented on the noticeable improvements in the High Street and South Street, as well as many other locations.
- Comments regarding the Council Tax booklet have been taken on board. Preparations for the 2007/08 booklet are currently underway.
- The Council recognises that residents feel particularly strongly about the problem of Graffiti throughout the borough, and hosts regular graffiti clean-up days at various locations throughout the borough as part of its 'Wipe out Graffiti' campaign. The last clean-up day was held at Longmead in October 2006.
- All comments relating to the publicity of Council venues have been taken on board, and we are currently working on a marketing and PR plan to ensure that the events and facilities are promoted as effectively as possible.
- We have appointed a new caterer for Bourne Hall and The Playhouse with effect from 1st April 2007 and a much enhanced service is expected. The possibility of a tea room at Ewell Court House is still under review. The kitchen at Ewell Court House is scheduled to be fully refurbished in April/May 2007.
- Successful events hosted by Council venues include the Derby Festival (Ebbisham Centre and the Playhouse), Month of Music (The Ebbisham Centre), and history days at Bourne Hall. Each event is being reviewed to see how it can be improved and we are looking to add new events to the calendar. The Herald of Spring, due to take place in February 2007, will have more for children than previous events, for example.

Play Strategy Survey – July 2006

A survey was undertaken to inform Epsom and Ewell Borough Council's Play Strategy for the borough. The Big Lottery fund have offered Epsom and Ewell Borough Council the opportunity to access some funds for the development of play facilities in the Borough, dependant on there being a strategy to outline how this money would be spent. Questions were asked about the current provision of play equipment, and how residents

would like to see this improved. Questions were also asked regarding Community Safety. This survey supports two of the key priorities of the Council: to improve services for young people, and to reduce anti-social behaviour and the fear of crime.

Key findings from Play Strategy questions...

- The play areas within the Borough are well used by respondents with and without children.
- Respondents are most likely to use play areas near to where they live.
- Respondents like play areas to feel safe, and perceived problems include older children or teenagers using equipment for children younger than themselves, and antisocial behaviour.
- Families with young children sometimes find older children intimidating, which can prevent them from using some play areas.
- Popular options for development in the Borough include an assault course, play equipment for ages 11 plus, and an additional multi use games area (MUGA).
- There is a general perception that the facilities for ages 6 to 10 and the under 5s in the Borough are good, but there is not enough for the older age groups. Provision of some facilities for this age group could solve some of the perceived problems in other play areas.

Key findings from Community Safety questions...

- Residents were asked if they had suffered from any kinds of anti-social behaviour in their neighbourhood over the past 12 months – 58.1% had suffered loud cars/motorcycles; half (50.1%) rubbish and litter; and 47% graffiti.
- Nearly two thirds (63.1%) of residents were satisfied that the Council has kept Epsom town centre clear of graffiti; over three quarters (75.6%) were satisfied that the street in which they live is kept clear of graffiti.
- 56.9% of respondents feel very safe during the day in their neighbourhood, and 11.3% feel very safe after dark.

Results used to...

- A draft Play Strategy for the borough has been written and is currently being consulted on with key local partners. A final version of the strategy will be ready by March 2007. This will outline how possible funding from the Big Lottery, if obtained, could be spent.
- All of the comments regarding community safety will be monitored by our Community Safety team, which will help to inform the work that they do. There are currently a number of initiatives ongoing that have been introduced by the Epsom and Ewell Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership to tackle anti-social behaviour and the fear of crime. For example, CCTV in Epsom town centre, Ewell and Stoneleigh is now monitored 24 hours a day, seven days a week, by dedicated Surrey Police staff. Following concerns from Surrey Police, Council departments and local residents, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council introduced new measures to reduce the incidence of disorder and public nuisance arising from alcohol consumption in public places. The Section 13 Order took effect in Epsom town centre in July 2006 and enables a police officer to require a person to cease drinking alcohol (or anything they reasonably

believe to be alcohol) in a public place, and can confiscate and dispose of the alcohol and its container.

Epsom Town Centre Survey

In November 2006, a survey was undertaken regarding Epsom Town Centre. The survey examines what our residents really think about the town centre – what is good / bad about it? Why do residents use / not use the town centre? Is there anything missing from the town centre? The results are currently being analysed, and it is hoped that a full results report will be available and accessible on the Council's website in the New Year. The results will be used by the Council, working together with the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), in order to deliver any improvements that are identified.

Consulting with Young People

Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is committed to consulting with young people, and has established a successful mechanism to do so via the schools within the Borough.

The Leisure Developments Team, together with the Service Improvement Unit piloted a questionnaire in two schools, Epsom and Ewell High School and Blenheim High School in March 2006. To compensate the schools for the time and effort spent completing the questionnaires, individual reports for each school were offered, giving high level analysis of the results for their students. £200 towards sports equipment was also offered as a thank you.

It is anticipated that this approach be rolled out to other secondary schools in the Borough.

Youth Leisure Day 2006

On Saturday 23rd September 2006, the Ebbisham Centre was host to yet another successful Youth Leisure Day targeting young people in the Borough aged between 13-17 years of age. The day was organised to offer a programme of exciting activities organised and supervised by young people in order to encourage as wide a participation as possible.

One of the features of last year's Youth Leisure Day was the "Diary Room", where approximately 60 young people agreed to be filmed and voiced their opinions on the Council and other local issues; the results of which have been used to inform the Epsom & Ewell Youth Plan for the borough. Owing to the success of consulting with young people in this way, the now borough-famous "Diary Room" made yet another appearance at this yearly event, and generated just as much interest this time round. Jo Cole and Sarah Hogg (Research & Performance Officers in the Service Improvement Unit) led on this consultation, working with local youth group Lightrush. Question areas were developed with local partners such as Connexions, the Fire Brigade and Surrey Police.

A full results report is available on the Council website, and it is hoped that the results will be used to further improve services for young people within our borough. A meeting between EEBC Officers and local partners will take place in the New Year, to discuss how to take the results forward.

Dos and Don'ts of Consulting with Young People – Information Sharing with Local Partners

The Diary Room event at Youth Leisure Day 2005 generated much interest from our local partners following the sharing of the research findings with them earlier this year – so much so that some of our partners (e.g. Primary Care Trust, Surrey County Council and Connexions) shared an interest in learning more about the do's and don'ts of consulting with young people.

In order to respond to this, we decided to hold an information-sharing session with partners in April 2006 that focused upon all of the legal and ethical considerations that need to be made when conducting consultation with young people.

The event was well received, and a number of partners commented upon how useful it was to meet people with different levels of experience and to learn from some of the examples of work that has/is being done. Heather Gallagher from East Elmbridge and Mid Surrey PCT commented: *'The event has been invaluable in regard to the development and awareness I now have with not only the complex legal issues there are concerning Involvement/Engagement with younger people, but also the vast array of mechanisms there are available to engage with younger people.'*

Statutory Best Value Satisfaction Surveys

Every three years the Council is obliged to send out three statutory surveys: the Best Value General, Planning, and Benefits Surveys. These surveys are designed to find out resident satisfaction with services that the Council provides. Both the survey design and the methodology for conducting the survey are prescribed by the Audit Commission (an independent body that monitors the performance of local government) acting on behalf of Central Government (The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)).

Anonymised responses are submitted for national comparisons to the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Audit Commission so that national patterns of service satisfaction can be studied.

The General, Planning, and the first window of the Benefits Survey are now complete. The second window of the Benefits Survey is scheduled to go out in January.

Officers in the Service Improvement Unit are currently analysing the results, and it is hoped that a full results report for the General Survey will be ready early in the New Year, and a report for the Planning Survey shortly afterwards.

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 hold regular meetings with service heads/divisional heads regarding their requirement for consultation.
- To further publicise the benefits of being consulted via email to FEEDBACK members.
- 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.

Please note that the implementation of this action plan is dependent upon resources and capacity. The Service Improvement Unit is looking to add to this plan to further develop consultation within the Council over the coming months.

Consultation Schedule 2007 and beyond

Discussions regularly take place with managers and Directors to identify potential consultation for the following 6 months. These meetings take place every quarter, and have enabled consultation to be thought about as part of the service planning process.

There are currently a number of proposed surveys to go out in the New Year:

- Best Value Benefits Survey, 2nd Window – January 2007.
- Active Leisure Survey – January 2007
- 2007 Crime Audit – early 2007
- FEEDBACK Citizens' Panel Survey – spring 2007
- Meals on Wheels Satisfaction Survey – TBC
- Route Call Satisfaction Survey – TBC
- Rangers Service Consultation – TBC

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