



## 2004 Annual Consultation Report

### Introduction

Consultation can be defined as the systematic collection and analysis of data about the social, economic and environmental circumstances of a local authority's area and the performance of the services that the local authority provides. It is an integral part of increasing people's involvement and participation in local communities, and its purpose is to inform the decisions made by the Council.

The Council has an established track record of consultation with its local residents, using various consultation techniques that are available, 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 has been revised on a yearly basis since. The latest revision was agreed and adopted in November 2003. This revised Consultation Strategy established, for the first time, a systematic, corporate, co-ordinated and practical approach to consultation, to ensure efficient and effective performance, embracing the principle of continuous improvement, with the Council's Service Improvement Unit (the Division responsible for this area) exercising more control through an approval and quality assurance process. This reinforces the Council's commitment to engaging effectively with the local community, by listening to and responding to their needs and issues.

It is not felt (at this point in time) that the current Consultation Strategy requires further revisions, following the various changes made in November 2003. However, in November 2004 a Consultation Schedule for the next seventeen months (to April 2006) was developed, as well as an action plan to further develop consultation within the Council.

### Consultation Conducted in 2004

Thirty-four pieces of external consultation have been conducted this year. These range from statutory consultation (for example, informing the planning development process with the hospital cluster in the Borough to informing strategies that local authorities are required by Central Government to produce); consultation that supports the Council's Key Priorities (for example, the annual Residents' Survey and consultation with young people to inform the Best Value Review of Improving Services for Young People); and 'other' consultation such as a Council Tax customer satisfaction survey to a *Borough Insight* survey.

The Council has also conducted ten internal surveys over the year, ranging from an IT User Survey (targeting Officers and Councillors) to various workshops that were held with Officers and Councillors to support the Best Value Review of Cutting Bureaucracy.

## 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.

The purpose of the panel is to provide local residents with a chance to 'have a say' on issues or decisions that are important to the local community and the Council. Through the panel, the Council has the chance to consult the community regularly and also has the opportunity to go back in future years to see if attitudes have changed.

### What are the Benefits of FEEDBACK?

- It involves the community in local government.
- It enables the Council to gain a 'picture' of local views and opinions.
- It can feed information swiftly into the Council's decision-making processes.
- It provides a relatively quick turnaround of information.
- It is relatively quick to set up and maintain.
- It enables positive public relations.
- It is a cost effective method of consultation.

### History of the Panel

Since its inception in 1996, the Panel was refreshed in 2000 and then again at the end of 2003. Over 1,100 residents responded to the membership mailing, and panel membership currently stands at just over 1,000 local residents from separate households. Additional recruitment, particularly targeting young people aged between 18 and 24, has taken place to ensure that the panel is fully representative of the Borough's population.

The panel has proved to be very successful in the past, with response rates averaging 90%. Discussion with other Councils reveals that Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's Citizens' Panel is looked at as an excellent example of response rates that can be achieved.

### How Does the Panel Work?

Questionnaires are sent out to FEEDBACK members up to five times a year, normally as a postal survey. Email or web-based surveys may also be used where appropriate. Approximately 35% of the panel is communicated to via email (including survey completion), which saves on postage and data entry costs.

A modest reward is offered as an incentive for FEEDBACK members to complete and return their surveys by the deadline. These incentives are in the form of money-off vouchers, redeemable at popular high street retailers.

Those who do not reply within the given timescale will not qualify for a voucher, and will automatically lose their panel membership.

## Surveys Sent to FEEDBACK Members in 2004

Four surveys were sent to FEEDBACK members in 2004:

Survey	Month	Response Rate	Key Findings	Results Used To...
<b>Perception of Crime</b>	January	95.1%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally, respondents felt the local area is a safe place to live, with 95% stating that the local area is 'very' or 'fairly' safe in relation to crime.</li> <li>• Anti-social behaviour is seen as a bigger problem, with 12.4% stating that the local area was unsafe in this respect.</li> <li>• 88.9% stated that they had suffered from nuisance or anti-social behaviour, with the 3 most common problems being rubbish/litter, graffiti and young people being disorderly.</li> <li>• Generally, respondents feel fairly safe in the Borough during the day, though slightly less so after dark.</li> <li>• Respondents are more worried about crime towards their property (e.g. theft and vandalism) than personal crimes (e.g. harassment or assault).</li> <li>• Over half feel that there should be more visible police presence in the Borough.</li> <li>• Respondents felt having more police on the beat and improving services for young people would be most effective in tackling crime and disorder in the community.</li> </ul>	The findings of the survey were shared with the local Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership, which includes representatives from the local police as well as District and County Councils. The findings of this survey were used to feed into the statutory Crime Audit, and will be taken into account in the development of the new Community Safety Strategy that is currently being developed for 2005-08.
<b>Sports &amp; Active Leisure</b>	March	93.5%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The majority of respondents take part in some kind of physical exercise on a weekly basis.</li> <li>• However, less than a quarter take part in the 30 minutes, 5 times a week that is recommended by the Government.</li> <li>• 7.2% of respondents said they do not take part in any physical activity.</li> <li>• Generally, people tend to participate more in activities that they can do for themselves, such as walking or swimming rather than as part of a team.</li> <li>• For those not participating in sports, lack of time available was the principal factor, cited by 44% of respondents.</li> <li>• There were a number of recurring issues identified, including a lack of awareness of the activities and facilities available, the high cost involved in participating in sports and active leisure, and access to facilities and activities, both in terms of physical access and having the time available.</li> </ul>	The findings are being used to inform the Council's new Sports Development Strategy that is currently being developed.

<b>Annual Residents' Survey</b>	June	92.1%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 84% of respondents are 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied with the way the Council runs things.</li> <li>• 65% are 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied with the sports and leisure facilities in the Borough.</li> <li>• 73% are 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied with the parks and open spaces in the Borough.</li> <li>• 80.2% read the Council's <i>Borough Insight</i> publication.</li> <li>• Services provided for young people are not highly rated (an area that the Council is addressing as part of its Best Value Review of Improving Services for Young People).</li> <li>• 90.7% of respondents recycle on a regular basis. Newspapers and magazines, glass bottles and jars are the most frequently recycled materials.</li> <li>• 79% of respondents have access to a computer at home, 91% of these with access to the Internet.</li> <li>• 62% feel that the Council keeps its land free of litter and refuse.</li> <li>• 57% have visited The Ebbisham Centre within the last 12 months, with visiting the library as the primary reason.</li> <li>• Satisfaction with those who have contacted the Council's Streetcare service is high, with 70% being satisfied with the response to their call.</li> </ul>	<p>The results for individual service areas covered by this survey have been presented to Directors and service managers, and considered as part of the service planning process for the future.</p> <p>Examples of how the results have been used include the Council focusing on its provision of services for young people (to support its Key Priority in this area); and the number of times the 'kerby boxes' (recycling collection boxes) will be emptied from people's homes will move to weekly collection (from fortnightly collection) from April 2005.</p>
<b>Community Strategy Review</b>	November	86% *	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The results are currently being analysed and will be presented to the Local Strategic Partnership at the end of January.</li> </ul>	<p>These results will be used to inform the Review of the Community Strategy. The Review will be completed by the end of March 2005.</p>

\* As at the time this report was produced.

### Joining the Panel

If you are interested in joining the FEEDBACK panel, please contact Kate Cheminais or Sara Childs on 01372 732000.

## 2004 Consultation Action Plan

An action plan has been developed to further emphasise the importance of consultation within the Council.

External activities identified include:

- Undertaking booster recruitment for FEEDBACK to increase the number of 18 to 24 year olds on the panel (by mid-November 2004).
- Producing an end-of-year annual consultation report, to be made available electronically to Officers, Councillors and local residents (by end December 2004, and then annually).
- Developing a simple consultation database on the website, clearly showing current and past projects (by end January 2005).
- Considering a rolling programme of surveys to assess the value of services, on an annual basis (by end March 2005).
- Developing a consultation mechanism for undertaking consultation activity with young people (as an output of the Best Value Review of Improving Services for Young People) – by Summer 2005.
- Establishing a half-yearly Community Forum in the Borough (2005/06).

Ultimately the external actions identified will enhance communications, increase transparency, enable more proactive activity, improve processes to assess services and their value to the community, ensure inclusivity, as well as enabling us to keep up-to-date with local issues affecting the community.

Internal activities identified include:

- Developing the provisional consultation schedule into a manageable consultation programme (ongoing).
- Continuing to increase Councillors' awareness and understanding of consultation (ongoing).
- Establishing a formal Consultation Group of Officers who regularly conduct consultation activity, to share good practice, plans and experiences (end February 2005).
- Developing a business case to send more staff on a Surrey County Council capacity building facilitation training course (end March 2005).
- Holding regular meetings with service heads and divisional managers (end March 2005, then twice yearly).
- Updating the Consultation Handbook (produced in March 2004) with new information, best practice examples as well as information on how to engage with the community (end April 2005).
- Exploring the feasibility of developing a multi-purpose roadshow vehicle / trailer, to take activities out into the community (end October 2005).
- Developing a set of consultation performance indicators (end October 2005).

The internal actions identified will result in sharing knowledge and learning amongst Officers (those undertaking consultation activity), improving inter-departmental relationships and communications, as well as more advance notification being given to the Service Improvement Unit of planned activity, to enable timely input into the process.

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

## **Consultation Schedule to April 2006**

In October and November 2004, discussions took place with managers and Directors to identify potential consultation for the next seventeen months, to take us through to April 2006. This 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. This is essentially a 'wish list' that will need to be developed into a manageable consultation programme.

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

Again, a wide range of consultation activity has been identified. Examples of provisional consultation include consultation on the new website (to obtain feedback on the new format), statutory consultation to develop the Council's Local Development Framework (the Local Plan), consultation to support the two Best Value Reviews planned for 2005/06 (Customer Contact and Community Safety), the annual Residents' Survey, and consultation to establish users' and non-users' views on the social centres.

Consultation to support the Council's six Key Priorities and two continued commitments is also planned, with the exception of 'securing additional key worker, social and affordable housing', 'securing improved transport facilities for particular sections of the community' and 'cutting bureaucracy and improving cost effectiveness'. The first had a major piece of research conducted in 2004 (the statutory Housing Needs Survey), to assess and predict the extent of housing needs in the Borough. The second is partly covered by the planned Route Call research, which more appropriately sits under the Council's continued commitment to supporting the vulnerable and the elderly. The latter had consultation conducted in 2004 to support the Best Value Review of Cutting Bureaucracy, and further consultation is likely to be included in the Improvement Plan as an output from this Review.

## **Consultation Article in the LARIA Publication**

In October 2004, the Council's Service Improvement Unit (the Division under which the responsibility for consultation lies) received coverage in the Local Authorities Research & Intelligence Association (LARIA) publication, which is sent to all members on a regular basis. The Council's Service Improvement Manager, Sara Childs, was approached by LARIA in the summer with a view to writing an article detailing how the research function in one of the smaller District Councils works, as in the past they have had coverage mainly from large authorities, such as County Councils and unitary authorities.

The article covered some background information to the Council, the structure of research, the Consultation Strategy, the Citizens' Panel (FEEDBACK) as well as examples of recent consultation work.

Following the publication of this article, other authorities from around the country have contacted the Council to obtain further information on various aspects of the work done (for example, the Consultation Strategy and copies of the Consultation Handbook).