

**COUNTY COUNCIL CONSULTATION STRATEGY (INCLUDING THE APPROACH TO BUSINESS PLAN 2017/18 CONSULTATION)**

*To:* **General Purposes Committee**

*Meeting Date:* **31st May 2016**

*From:* **Director: Customer Services & Transformation**

*Electoral division(s):* **All**

*Forward Plan ref:* **Not Applicable**      *Key decision:* **No**

*Purpose:* **To seek approval for the County Council's consultation strategy.**

**To seek approval for the general approach to be taken to the business plan consultation for 2016/17.**

*Recommendations:* **The General Purposes Committee is recommended to:**

- (i) approve the County Council's Consultation Strategy as set out in appendix one; and**
- (ii) approve the approach to the Business Plan 2017/18 consultation as laid out in section 4 of this report.**

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## 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. The organisation's consultation strategy was last updated in 2011/12. Since that time there have been a number of changes; most notably the pace at which County Council services are being transformed in response to budget pressures. Therefore there is a need to update the strategy outlining to the public what they can expect from the Council.
- 1.2. The Central Library Enterprise Centre Review by the Audit and Accounts Committee has elements in its action plan relating to confirming the Council's approach to consultation particularly in regard to timing, duration and content of consultation.
- 1.3. There is also a requirement to formally agree the outline of the County Council's approach to Business Plan (2017/18) consultation. It should be noted that the approach has been considered by the Members' Working Group on Consultation and the Strategic Management Team prior to coming to General Purposes Committee (GPC).

## 2. CONSULTATION STRATEGY

- 2.1 The full strategy document has been included in **appendix one** and lays down Cambridgeshire County Council's commitment to carryout meaningful consultation with the public and outlines when and how this will be achieved. The strategy includes a summary action plan for the year 2016/17.
- 2.2 By adopting the strategy the GPC will be using the following commitments to shape the County Council's consultation work in the future:

The County Council will:

- engage in **open and honest** dialogue with communities on issues that impact on them.
- **understand our customers**, residents and communities as much as we can, knowing what they value the most and appreciating the implications of any change to service.
- make sure that all consultation information includes **a simple to understand** summary and an explanation of any local implications.
- engage people by giving them an opportunity to voice their opinions **at a formative stage**.
- **report back** on the results of consultation and action taken . Where we have been unable to follow the course of action people wanted we will explain why.
- ensure that our consultation methods **recognise the diversity** of communities within the County.
- **avoid over-consulting** with our communities by co-ordinating our consultations in a cost effective way

- link up consultation with existing communications and seeking **innovative ways to communicate.**

2.3 The implementation of the consultation strategy will be regularly monitored by a working group of elected members. In addition the Research Group Manager (Customer Services and Transformation) will take a specific responsibility for communicating the strategy throughout the organisation and support the monitoring of the quality of consultation activity.

### **3. CAMBRIDGE CENTRAL LIBRARY ENTERPRISE CENTRE (CLEC) REVIEW**

3.1 The CLEC review made a number of recommendations in relation to County Council decision making. Recommendation 6.1 required that further guidance be made available to officers that gives additional information on the circumstances under which the Council would expect public consultation to take place, legal requirements around consultation and guidance on the duration, timing and format of consultation. Recommendation 6.2 required that the Council's approach should be laid out so the public know what to expect.

3.2 The consultation strategy has been written to respond to these recommendations.

### **4. BUSINESS PLAN CONSULTATION**

#### **4.1 Methodology**

Following discussions by the member working group on consultation it is recommended that the County Council carry out two stages of consultation for the business plan 2017/18 process.

- A paid for, household survey of approximately 1,300 residents so the results will be significant at a County level. The sample will be a stratified, random sample. That is to say participants will be randomly selected within the criteria of having a final sample that reflects the age / location structure of the County's population. The survey would be competitively tendered with a guide price of about £25,000 (increasing the survey size to be representative at a district level was rejected by the working group on the basis of potential cost £45 – £55k against additional benefit).

The timing of the consultation in order to deliver information back at the most appropriate juncture is recommended to be early September.

- As with previous years there will be accompanying digital / on-line consultation at this stage.
- As more detailed proposals emerge ready for committee, together with supporting narratives; these will be communicated to the public and a second round of consultation will begin.
- Both consultation strands will be supported by consistent

communication messages regarding the overall financial position of the County Council.

## **4.2 Content**

In line with the principles of the consultation strategy the member working group recommend that the content of the household survey be straight forward, easy to understand and relatively short. A precise wording of the content of the survey will be proposed by the member working group to be debated and agreed by GPC in July. The initial thinking is as follows:

- The first part of the survey will introduce the context.
- Three options for council tax increase will be presented to the participants; 1) 0%, 2) 2% Adult Social Care Precept (ASCP) or 3) ASCP 2% and an additional 2% increase.
- Appropriate parallels will be drawn between possible increases and cash amounts per month together with comparable items from household budgets.
- A follow-up question will ask about the respondent's reasoning behind their choice.
- Respondents will then be asked a short set of questions about the County Council services they particularly value; this information will provide further context to their thinking on council tax.
- Finally, respondents will then be offered the chance to provide their e-mail details in order to participate further in consultation on-line at a later date (if they wish).

## **5. ALIGNMENT WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

### **5.1 Developing the local economy for the benefit of all**

There are no significant implications for this priority.

### **5.2 Helping people live healthy and independent lives**

There are no significant implications for this priority

### **5.3 Supporting and protecting vulnerable people**

There are no significant implications for this priority

## **6. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS**

### **6.1 Resource Implications**

The commissioned survey would be competitively tendered with a guide price of about £25,000 (increasing the survey size to be representative at a district level would have a potential cost of £45 – £55k).

Other consultation activity proposed would be met within the County Council's existing staffing / resources.

## **6.2 Statutory, Risk and Legal Implications**

The consultation strategy outlines the legal requirements for consultation with further training materials / advice being available for Council staff.

## **6.3 Equality and Diversity Implications**

Effective consultation is one of the ways the County Council can meet its equality and diversity obligations.

## **6.4 Engagement and Consultation Implications**

This is the subject of the report.

## **6.5 Localism and Local Member Involvement**

The role for elected members in consultation is described within the consultation strategy.

## **6.6 Public Health Implications**

There are no significant implications within this category.

| <b>Source Documents</b>     | <b>Location</b>  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Draft Consultation Strategy | Attached as appendix one.<br><br>Also available in Room 015, Shire Hall, Cambridge<br><br><a href="http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk">www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk</a> |