

A meeting of the **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (CORPORATE AND STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK)** will be held in the **COUNCIL CHAMBER, PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON, PE29 3TN** on **WEDNESDAY, 6 FEBRUARY 2008** at **7:00 PM** and you are requested to attend for the transaction of the following business:-

**Contact
(01480)**

APOLOGIES

1. MINUTES

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 29th January 2008.

**A Roberts
388009**

2. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

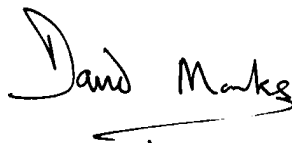
To receive from Members declarations as to personal and/or prejudicial interests and the nature of those interests in relation to any Agenda Item. Please see Notes 1 and 2 overleaf.

3. GROWING SUCCESS: CUSTOMER SERVICE, COMMUNICATIONS & MARKETING AND CONSULTATION & ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES (Pages 1 - 40)

To consider a report by the Chief Officers' Management Team on the Customer Service Strategy, Communications and Marketing Strategy and Consultation and Engagement Strategy.

**I Leatherbarrow
388005**

Dated this 7 day of February 2008



Chief Executive

Notes

1. *A personal interest exists where a decision on a matter would affect to a greater extent than other people in the District –*
 - (a) *the well-being, financial position, employment or business of the Councillor, their family or any person with whom they had a close association;*
 - (b) *a body employing those persons, any firm in which they are a partner and any company of which they are directors;*
 - (c) *any corporate body in which those persons have a beneficial interest in a class of securities exceeding the nominal value of £25,000; or*
 - (d) *the Councillor's registerable financial and other interests.*
2. *A personal interest becomes a prejudicial interest where a member of the public (who has knowledge of the circumstances) would reasonably regard the Member's personal interest as being so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Councillor's judgement of the public interest.*

Please contact Miss H Ali, Democratic Services Officer, Tel No 01480 388006/e-mail: Habbiba.Ali@huntsdc.gov.uk if you have a general query on any Agenda Item, wish to tender your apologies for absence from the meeting, or would like information on any decision taken by the Panel.

Specific enquiries with regard to items on the Agenda should be directed towards the Contact Officer.

Members of the public are welcome to attend this meeting as observers except during consideration of confidential or exempt items of business.

Agenda and enclosures can be viewed on the District Council's website – www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk (under Councils and Democracy).

If you would like a translation of Agenda/Minutes/Reports or would like a large text version or an audio version please contact the Democratic Services Manager and we will try to accommodate your needs.

Emergency Procedure

In the event of the fire alarm being sounded and on the instruction of the Meeting Administrator, all attendees are requested to vacate the building via the closest emergency exit and to make their way to the car park adjacent to the Methodist Church on the High Street (opposite Prima's Italian Restaurant).

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
(Corporate and Strategic Framework)**

6TH FEBRUARY 2008

**GROWING SUCCESS: CUSTOMER SERVICE, COMMUNICATION &
MARKETING AND CONSULTATION & ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES**

(Report by the Chief Officers' Management Team)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Panel with an opportunity to contribute to the review of three Corporate Strategies – Customer Service, Communications & Marketing and Consultation & Engagement – which will have a significant role in the achievement of the Council's overall aims and objectives as set out in Growing Success, the Corporate Plan. The Strategies are mutually supportive and are inherently connected in terms of the objectives they are seeking to promote. By presenting them collectively it provides the Panel with an opportunity to gauge their respective contributions, to ensure consistency in approach and avoid duplication.

2. SUPPORTING/BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 In June 2007 a revised version of Growing Success was adopted which articulated both aspirations for Huntingdonshire's communities and aims for the Council itself in terms of the organisation and operation of services to facilitate the achievement of the wider community objectives. Since that time reviews of a number of strategies, policies and plans have been carried out to ensure that they –
- reflect the Council's strategic approach set out in Growing Success;
 - recognise the achievements and changes implemented since they were last reviewed; and
 - are up to date, reflecting current best practice.
- 2.2 To achieve the aims and objectives for Huntingdonshire's communities, the Council recognises that we must continue to improve our systems and practices. To encourage this we have set several objectives –
- to provide high quality customer services;
 - to be good at communicating with and listening to people and organisations;
 - to improve access to our services;
 - to be clear about what we can do and aspire to achieve;
 - to enable Councillors to carry out their leadership role effectively;
 - to be part of effective partnerships; and
 - to strengthen our commitment and capacity to achieve equality, diversity and inclusion.

- 2.3 The achievement of these objectives means that the Council must be excellent at understanding the needs of the users of our services and those we represent and in organising services around those needs. This requires excellent customer service standards and practices, communications, marketing and consultation and engagement activities.
- 2.4 While the three Strategies stand alone and make individual contributions, when considered together they provide a framework which both directs and supports the Council and individual services to plan and deliver activities. Each Strategy is supported by a three year action or delivery plan and it is expected that individual services generally will include relevant supporting actions in their own service plans. This strategic approach is based on the principle that responsibility for customer service, communications and marketing or consultation and engagement must remain with individual services but that there should be a corporate approach and that services should be supported in these activities. The approach adopted in the Strategies builds on previous policies of the Council, which are consistent with national policy and accepted good practice.
- 2.5 In the last 12 months or so organisational changes have been made to enhance support for communications, marketing and consultation activities by bringing together and re-organising existing services in the Policy and Strategic Services Division. It is suggested also – in the proposed Customer Service Strategy - that overseeing and promoting customer service and specifically the arrangements for contact with customers should be the responsibility of a single Head of Service.

3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1 The purpose of the review of the Strategies is to help ensure the continued momentum to achievement in three important areas which will have a significant contribution to meeting the Council's overall aims and objectives. The review has taken account of the Council's other Strategies and policies along with good practice in other councils and organisations.

4. RECOMMENDATION

- 4.1 The Panel are invited to comment on the proposed revisions of the Customer Service, Communications & Marketing and Consultation & Engagement Strategies.

Background papers

Current Customer Service Strategy and Communications & Consultation Strategy

Contact Officers: Ian Leatherbarrow, Head of Policy & Strategic Services
☎ 01480 388005
Chris Hall, Head of Information Management
☎ 01480 388116

Customer Service Strategy: 'Customer Insight'

Purpose

Huntingdonshire District Council aims to provide excellent customer service.

Our vision is one where, for each of our services, we have a clear insight into the needs of our customers and provide services in a way which meets those needs. Specifically this means each service will;

- ◆ carefully consider who its customers are, and what services they require; and
- ◆ design service delivery around the needs of those customers.

Contribution to the Council's Corporate and Strategic Framework

The Council has many roles, but to achieve our aims and objectives in our corporate plan, Growing Success, we are committed to consistent and sustained customer service.

Using our customer insight, the Council aims to achieve the following objectives in Growing Success:

- **to provide high quality customer services** – by making it as easy as possible for customers to access our services and get appropriate information;
- **to improve access to our services** – by introducing new ways of contacting the Council including: self service via web site, mobile/home delivery of services, increase use of call centre and customer service centres;
- **to be good at communicating with and listening to people and organisations** – this will entail regular and effective communication with local residents about Council services, seeking their views on new proposals, and regularly asking them their opinions and considering what they say;
- **to be clear about what we can do and aspire to achieve** – by regularly publishing our plans and services standards and information about our performance;
- **to be a part of effective partnerships** – by continuing to take opportunities to work with others where it will meet community needs and maximise the resources;
- **to strengthen our commitment and capacity to achieve equality, diversity and inclusion** – by maintaining or establishing statutory equality schemes which consider gender, race and disability equality issues and the needs of disadvantaged groups at all levels of services, policies and practices.

The achievement of these objectives means that the Council must be excellent at understanding the needs of the users of our services, those we represent and in organising services around those needs. This requires excellent customer service standards and practices, communications, marketing, consultation and engagement skills and activities.

In addition to the objectives in Growing Success, a series of strategic policies, including the Corporate Equality Policy, Consultation and Engagement Strategy and Communications and Marketing Strategy, all contain objectives and activities which require effective customer service and/or contribute towards the approach adopted within this strategy.

These strategies and policies are mutually supportive and are inherently connected in terms of the objectives they are seeking to promote. In delivering the vision for excellent customer service the Council also has to balance the costs and value of improvements we make.

Background

Where are we now?

Huntingdonshire District Council Customer Service Strategy, approved in 2003, has been successfully achieved. In the past four years the way that customers can contact the Council, obtain services and information has been significantly improved -

- A Call Centre has been established which deals with the majority of initial calls from customers and provides a more detailed call answering service for an increasing range of services.
- A temporary Customer Service Centre has been established in Huntingdon which brought together disparate points of contact for customers, including a tourist information centre. In addition to the physical change this has facilitated a consistent approach towards customer service and improvements in the development of employees. A new permanent centre is being built as part of the Council's new headquarters.
- Satellite Customer Service Centres have been maintained in St Ives and St Neots offering payment facilities and a range of other services.
- Community Information Centres have been successfully established in Yaxley and Ramsey working closely with many external partners.
- Continuous improvements have been made to the Council's website as a means of obtaining information about services.
- The St Neots Tourist Information Centre has been maintained pending its amalgamation with an enhanced customer service centre in the town.
- A Mobile Display Unit is used extensively around the district to promote services and as a mobile office. Trials have also been conducted on mobile working, mobile information provision and flexible working for employees. These trials have provided information about the demand and costs of such activities.

In the main, face to face services have developed independently and we need to ensure we learn from existing best practice across these locations. Officers also act as 'advocates' for those customers who need more help than others, and this will continue.

Where do we want to be?

Having made these achievements and having regard to increasing customer expectation and good practice in this field the time is right to revisit the strategy.

The strategy is planned to have a life of approximately three years and includes a broad action plan required to achieve its objectives. It is intended to reinforce existing good practice and performance already present across the Council. The strategy is focussed on the initial contact we have with customers and the subsequent delivery of service.

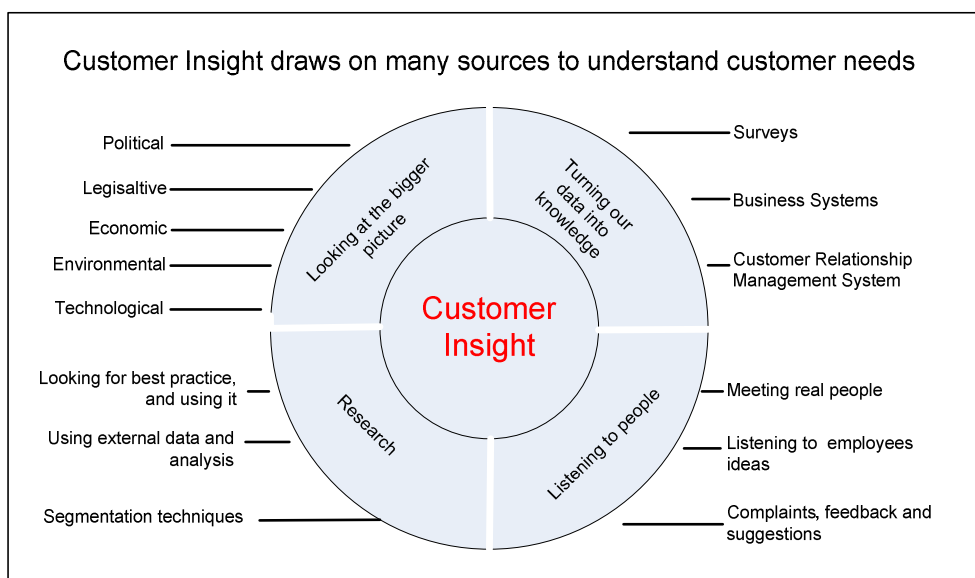
Understanding our customers better

Every potential or actual user of our services is a customer. The Council works hard to ensure customers receive excellent service, and while it knows a great deal about customers, more can always be done.

The Council wants to better understand the diversity of its communities, and deliver services which respond to different needs and aspirations. To do this, it needs to get maximum value from the information it gathers, and be able to bring different information sources together to build a richer, more comprehensive, picture of its customers.

Equality Impact Assessments are being carried out on all our services and policies and they will highlight issues that need to be addressed through customer service activities. It is important that we have a coordinated approach to the use of information from these assessments.

Each service needs to have a clear insight into the customers it serves. The following diagram highlights many of the sources of information the Council will use to develop this insight.



The services the Council provides

The Council delivers many services and for operational reasons and efficiency they will continue to be delivered in the most appropriate way. However, as our 'customer insight' develops new ways of meeting customer needs will be

identified, and opportunities will arise to bring together services to work in a way better suited to meeting customer needs.

The way the Council is structured will need to reflect the objectives of this strategy. While Heads of Service will remain responsible for the delivery of customer service within their own service this will concentrate on more complex enquiries, requiring a level of specialist expertise. Such contact may lower in volume, but require more time and resources. However, to promote the exchange of best practice, service development, improved training and consistent levels of high quality customer service it is proposed that Customer Service will become within the remit of an existing single Head of Service who will be responsible for:

- ◆ ensuring a customer perspective is at the heart of all services
- ◆ overseeing the delivery and monitoring of this strategy
- ◆ managing the first point of contact with customers including:
 - The Call Centre
 - Customer Service Centres
 - Community Information Centres
 - Visitor Information Centres

They will deal with high volume, relatively simple services. They will interact heavily with customers and will need to be experts in customer service. They will also be responsible for:

- ◆ coordinating campaigns which involve services provided by the customer service team
- ◆ providing advice and guidance to services
- ◆ ensuring managers acknowledge their responsibility for customer service in their own service.

Customer Service Skills

Customer service and customer insight are key skills for all employees. This strategy promotes high quality training and development of employees to deliver the Council's objectives.

Meeting the needs of all our customers

The Council has a duty to ensure the services it provides do not exclude any group of customers, and this remains a high priority. For example we are meeting the needs of the emerging group of customers from the new EU member states. The website now has a screen-reader function enabling access to blind customers. Other new developments are underway and will be completed during the life of the strategy. We will ensure that information and communication requirements of disabled people are considered, specifically, disabled people have asked to be better informed about facilities and funding.

Making the most of our website

Offering 24/7 access to information and services will be a key part of meeting customer needs. By doing this we actively encourage greater access to services, at a cheaper cost to the Council, and free resources to deliver services to those customers most in need.

Where appropriate as part of our everyday business with our customers, we will:

- ◆ make them aware that the information or service they require is available online, encouraging them to use the website
- ◆ include a link to the Council's home page, or other relevant pages, in e-mails
- ◆ include our website address in printed material.

We will continue to look at the design and scope of the website to ensure it meets customer needs and consideration will be given to personalising the content for particular customers. We will ensure the website provides high quality and useful information, and the number of on-line services will increase.

Developing the points of contact with customers

The Council will continue to develop ways for customers to obtain services from the Council.

- The Call Centre will remain the primary method of dealing with telephone calls and with more services will be offered over time.
- Direct dial – customers will be able to contact direct service areas. As services transfer to the Call Centre, direct dial volumes will decrease and these calls will become more focussed on the complex, specialist calls, best dealt with by service experts.
- Face to face - the Customer Service Centre at Huntingdon will be a primary point of access, but there will be Customer Service Centres at St Ives and St Neots. The Community Information Centres at Yaxley and Ramsey will continue to provide services to customers. The range of service and information between these centres will be brought together.
- Mobile or flexibly delivered services – services delivered away from the Council's premises; sometimes in a customer's home will be further developed. Work is underway to introduce more flexible ways of working. Where there is a clear business case, this has potential to provide service at locations more suited to the customer, particularly in rural locations.
- Via the internet – either from their own home, from mobile devices, or from public points of access.
- In writing - this may be within a letter, or a customer may have to apply for a service using application forms.

Getting it right first time

Ensuring we answer customer enquiries first time is important. It means the customer receives an excellent level of service, and the Council does not spend effort dealing with avoidable and repeated customer contact. The establishment of the Call Centre and the Customer Service Centre in Huntingdon has meant a greater percentage of enquiries are dealt with at the first point of contact – but more could be done.

All services can help to improve our performance. Developing a clear customer insight requires all staff to understand the needs of customers and building services around those needs will reduce costs and lead to greater satisfaction. The Council should also use data more effectively to inform day

to day contact with customers. This will increase the likelihood that the service offered fits the needs of the customers.

Encouraging customers to provide feedback, and understanding their comments allows the Council to make improvements and this is an area the Council will develop further.

Managing and responding to customer demand

The Council will also manage demand better by 'smoothing' the day-to-day peaks in customer demand. This will increase access to service, especially at busy times.

For example, collecting and publishing information showing the least busy times may encourage some customers to plan their next visit or phone call to coincide with these quieter times. In addition it will help services to plan for peaks in demand.

Making more of contact with customers

The Council has a Communications and Marketing Strategy and structure in place to promote marketing activities and many services already market themselves to customers and deliver excellent results. But the Council has identified that it can do more. Coordinated and targeted campaigns, based upon an increased understanding of customer needs and preferences, will ensure customers are more aware of services delivered by the Council.

Increasing the electronic provision of services and information

For some services currently there are limited practical alternatives to a paper application form, and some customers prefer to write to the Council. New media is becoming an increasingly preferred method for communication for many customers. This is something that must be taken into account and is being considered in the communications and marketing strategy, as more customers opt to receive electronic communications.

The Council will increase the use of e-mail and the website where possible and appropriate. This approach will reduce the time taken for the Council to respond to a customer, reduce the use of paper and reduce expenditure.

Bringing together services

While it is important that customers appreciate the distinctions between providers of services increasingly they are looking for simple or single points of contact. The Council already shares some elements of our customer service delivery for the benefit of our customers. Where practical, we will engage with partners and other agencies to try to deliver an improved service. This will mean customers can access a number of services in one location. The Council will need to share information with partners, and this will be encouraged.

Objectives

Objective	Measure
Services are provided in a way that meet customer needs	% of customers who believe services are meeting their needs

Provision of service to customers is right first time	% of transactions right first time
Services are accessible to customers	% of customers who believe services are accessible

Action Plan

This strategy is supported by a three-year action plan which will help to ensure a consistent approach across the whole of the Council. The Council's Head of Service overseeing customer service will be responsible for the monitoring and implementation of the plan and will work with other services to make sure this happens.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are critical to ensuring that we achieve the objectives.

To ensure we are making progress we will:

- monitor our performance against local (and national, if any) measures
- report performance on customer service
- collect and publish evidence of good practice throughout the Council.

This strategy and action plan will be reviewed annually so that we can set specific targets for the future. A comprehensive review of the strategy will be undertaken every three years.

Risks

The council's corporate risk register identifies a large number of risks that may have negative effects on the council.

An effective customer service strategy is imperative to ensure the risks and the possibilities of them becoming a reality are kept to a minimum or prevented altogether.

The following key risks have been identified:

- Delivering the strategy may require resources already committed to other activities and projects.
- Customers are targeted in an uncoordinated way, using resources inefficiently and lowering customers' perception of our services.
- Customer insight may focus effort onto the majority of customers at the expense of hard to reach groups.
- Shared service requires commitment from outside the Council; it may be this is not forthcoming.

Action Plan 2008-2011

Objective	Action	Measure	Target	By whom	When
Services are provided in a way that meet customer needs	Embed the concept and practice of 'customer insight' into the organisation by encouraging services to implement this strategy				
	Designate a Head of Service to be responsible for overseeing the delivery of this strategy and for the provision of point of contact customer services				
	Ensure all Heads of Service acknowledge their responsibility for the delivery of customer service within their service				
	Review training and development needs to ensure employees can deliver this strategy				
	Capitalise on the opportunities we have to make information on our services available to our customers				

Objective	Action	Measure	Target	By whom	When
	Make better use of available data to improve our understanding of customers needs				
	To provide a more rapid and cost effective service by encouraging employees and the customers to use email and other electronic media				
	Use the results of Equality Impact Assessments in the planning of customer service activities				
Services are accessible to customers	Maintain face to face customer service in St Neots, St Ives, Ramsey and Yaxley				
	Complete the development of the Call Centre and Customer Service Centre in Huntingdon				
	Improve access to services by managing, and responding to, the demand on services better				

Objective	Action	Measure	Target	By whom	When
	Ensure all customers, including those groups which are considered to be excluded or do not engage with the Council, are considered when delivering services				
	Provide information about services in a way that meets the needs of disabled people				
	Promote the use of the website to improve service and 'free-up' resources				
	Develop the website and web based services so they are more personalised to customers needs				
	Improve the delivery of mobile services around the district				
	Explore with other public services and the voluntary sector, opportunities to provide services in a way that meets customer's needs				

Objective	Action	Measure	Target	By whom	When
Provision of service to customers is right first time	Increase the prominence of St Neots customer service Centre by exploring opportunities to establish a "high street" or other prominent town centre location				
	Improve the consistency and quality of face to face service provision				
	Reduce the amount of avoidable customer contact by 'getting it right first time'				
	Ensure the revised complaints process is used to incorporate, and encourage, all forms of suggestions and feedback				
	To set and publicise the standards of service customers can expect				

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Making the Right Connections

Communications and Marketing Strategy

Purpose

The Council has many roles, but to achieve our aims and objectives in our corporate plan, Growing Success, we are committed to consistent and sustained communications and marketing.

Contribution to the Council's Corporate and Strategic Framework

"Growing Success", the Council's Corporate Plan, includes the following objectives –

- **to provide high quality customer services** – by making it as easy as possible for customers to access our services and get appropriate information;
- **to be good at communicating with and listening to people and organisations** – this will entail regular and effective communication with local residents about Council services, seeking their views on new proposals, and regularly asking them their opinions and considering what they say;
- **to strengthen our commitment and capacity to achieve equality, diversity and inclusion** – by maintaining or establishing statutory equality schemes which consider gender, race and disability equality issues and the needs of disadvantaged groups at all levels of services, policies and practices;
- **to enable Councillors to carry out their leadership role effectively** – determining Council priorities and allocating resources, scrutinising and examining relevant issues as advocates and promoting the interests of the Council and communities;
- **to be clear about what we can do and aspire to achieve** – by regularly publishing our plans and services standards and information about our performance.

The achievement of these objectives means that the Council must be excellent at understanding the needs of the users of our services and those we represent and in organising services around those needs. This requires excellent customer service standards and practices, communications, marketing, consultation and engagement activities.

In addition, a series of strategic policies, including the Corporate Equality Policy, Consultation and Engagement Strategy and Customer Service Strategy, all contain objectives and activities which require effective communications and marketing and/or contribute towards the approach adopted within this strategy.

The strategies are mutually supportive and are inherently connected in terms of the objectives they are seeking to promote.

Background

National and local experiences suggest that failure to invest in communications and marketing is likely to result in low satisfaction of local residents in the services we provide and of the Council generally. An extensive piece of research on behalf of the Improvement and Development Agency and Local Government Association for a series of reports 'Connecting With Communities' showed clearly that people who felt well-informed also felt more positive about their Council. The research demonstrated that they felt less likely that their Council was remote and impersonal or out of touch and more likely to feel they received good value for money and good overall services.

Communications

Our residents and communities have high expectations that the Council will meet their needs. There is a demand for information about services and facilities and how the Council represents the interests of Huntingdonshire and its communities, for example our leadership role on issues which affect quality of life. We also need to make sure that those people that visit the area or come to work here are also aware of services and what we provide in Huntingdonshire generally. We work in a complex environment and on occasions there are difficult matters to communicate for example decisions that may have been enforced upon us or decision that may be unpopular with some sections of our community. We aim to communicate these issues in a balanced and sensitive way.

Marketing

Increasingly the Council is required to "market" the services we provide – either because we are in competition with other providers or we need to increase the number of people using our services in a cost-effective way to meet our aims and objectives. By marketing we mean the processes we put in place to identify, anticipate and satisfy the needs of local residents and communities. We need to have a clear insight into the requirements of our customers and provide services in a way that they want from us. For example we must recognise that the needs and aspirations of young people are different from those of elderly people. In order market our services effectively we must gather and analyse information from many sources. This research will lead to more knowledge, better insight and more informed decision making.

Communications and Marketing

To be effective our communications and marketing activity must be "two-way". The way we engage with our communities and listen to them, encourage and act upon feedback, is as important as the information we give to them. We need to be clear in our communications and marketing about what the Council can do and what we aspire to achieve. The Council must take decisions about competing demands. Clear and effective communications will help our communities to understand these decisions and play an important part in the Council's leadership role.

The Council operates in an environment of democratic representation. The role of elected members as leaders of our communities and in representing local residents is vital to this process. How members undertake their roles has an impact on how the Council is perceived and ultimately our reputation.

Effective communications and marketing is essential to support members. Our system of political management also demands clear and effective communications to support the principles of transparency and accountability.

Members contribute to effective communications by collectively defining and taking responsibility for the factors that make up the overall reputation of the Council:

- ◆ our purpose, what are we here to do
- ◆ our underlying values and ethical standards
- ◆ our priorities
- ◆ the delivery of services, do we do what we promise
- ◆ our behaviour, how do we treat users of our services and residents, employees, visitors and other members.

Members are elected to represent their communities and are accountable to them and must seek to balance competing priorities in the best interests of the district as a whole. Marketing and communications support this process and helps to provide a more detailed picture to assist the development of policy and priorities.

Effective communication with our employees is essential to ensuring that we achieve our priorities. Our employees deliver services and the majority live in Huntingdonshire. If they feel informed about our services, priorities and what the Council stands for then they will be more effective in the way they do their job and the way they communicate with residents, communities, service users, visitors and our partners. They can use their knowledge of our priorities and what the council stands for in their day to day contact with customers to communicate key messages. An important part of effective communication is recording feedback from customers, particularly compliments and satisfaction with the level of service provided. An important 'spin-off' of good levels of customer satisfaction is that employee morale, and productivity is better too. Training and development opportunities are paramount to ensure officers have the key skills they need, and help us to achieve our objective that we are a learning organisation that shares knowledge.

Successful partnerships and relationships with other agencies and organisations are an important aspect of many areas of our work, particularly when we need to share resources towards communications and marketing aims and objectives. When communicating as part of a partnership, care must be taken to ensure all parties are happy and communications are consistent. Opportunities should be identified to promote and implement partnership working for campaigns and initiatives when possible.

This strategy is based on the principle that responsibility for communications and marketing must remain with individual services but that there should be a corporate approach and that services should be supported in these activities. The purpose of this strategy is to provide a framework and a consistent approach to our communications and marketing activities. It will be supported by guidance, protocols and an action plan, which will be based on the principles set out in this strategy and good practice generally. The strategy the guidance and protocols will be conditioned by and help us to follow the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity. In addition organisational changes already in place will ensure that the Communications and Marketing Service will carry out corporate activities and support services in their communications and marketing activities.

Communications and marketing are intensive and costly activities, however, high spending does not always result in good results. This strategy, guidance, protocols and action plan will ensure that our communications and marketing are effective and co-ordinated, and provide good value for the investment we make in them. Importantly effective communications and marketing about the Council and the services we provide will help to ensure that we maintain a good reputation.

Where are we now?

Local residents, the media and other groups have told us that they want clear, factual information about:

Information requirements	Examples of what we provide
◆ Our services and what they can expect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ News releases ◆ District Wide ◆ Website ◆ Publications
◆ What's on in the area, facilities and activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Publications, including visitor guide ◆ District Wide ◆ Website ◆ News releases
◆ Reasons why decisions are made and how local views were taken into account	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ District Wide ◆ Reports in print and on website ◆ Consultation
◆ Information on how the Council spends money	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ District Wide ◆ News releases ◆ Leaflets ◆ Website
◆ Planned improvements to services or our area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Exhibitions ◆ Reports ◆ News releases ◆ District Wide ◆ Website
◆ How to complain, comment or simply get in touch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Complaints policy and procedures ◆ All publications and forms ◆ Website
◆ Our priorities and how they relate to them or the district.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ District Wide ◆ News releases ◆ Website

This range of information has formed the basis of our communications to date along with specific news or information as appropriate.

In our communications and marketing we use the following methods:

- ◆ Council publications, such as District Wide
- ◆ local newspapers

- ◆ websites, e-mail and other electronic means (e.g. potential use of RSS feeds)
- ◆ leaflets and other information material
- ◆ local radio and television
- ◆ specialist publications
- ◆ face to face contact
- ◆ exhibitions, including mobile information unit
- ◆ DVDs, e.g. Huntingdonshire in Perspective
- ◆ advertising
- ◆ events
- ◆ telephone.

In selecting an appropriate medium care must be taken to ensure maximum cost effectiveness in accordance with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

New media is becoming an ever-increasing method for communications and marketing. This is something that must be taken into account in this three-year strategic document, as more customers opt to receive electronic messages.

The council website is an important channel for communications and marketing activity. Our website, driven by Government requirements and structures, is led by the web team, and each directorate remains responsible for its own pages. Opportunities to communicate with our residents and visitors and to market our services through the website need to be identified and developed to help us achieve our objectives. However, this channel may not always be the best option for the service or the customer and traditional channels still need to be made available.

Knowing our communities

The Appendix – Knowing our Communities – highlights some of the individuals or communities that will be affected by our communications and marketing and identifies some of the key issues which affect them. This “segmentation” is not intended to be exhaustive and will change as the environment in which we operate changes and as we develop better insight into the needs and preferences of our communities. It will be used to test and develop guidance, action plans and good practice. As well as identifying individuals and communities, it is important to evaluate appropriate ways to communicate with them and to market our services. We recognise that it is vital to deliver information people want using the methods which are most effective to them. Preferences will vary depending on the information to be communicated and will change over time.

As a Council we have placed a special emphasis on communications and marketing with individuals or communities who do not traditionally engage with us, such as young people, those with disabilities or minority ethnic groups. Effective involvement cannot happen without a good understanding of the make up, needs and interests of all those different groups and their capacity to engage. An inclusive approach will be used by the Council to ensure that different groups have the opportunity to participate and are not disadvantaged by our processes. Equality Impact Assessments are being carried out on all our services and policies and they will highlight issues that need to be addressed through customer service activities. It is important that we have a coordinated approach to the use of information from these assessments.

Overall the Council has a good reputation for communicating and marketing its services, but this varies because of different capacity and understanding of the effectiveness in communications and marketing of service delivery. The Council and its services provide a range of communications and marketing material but there are some areas that are better than others. In order to be effective we need to make sure we are consistent across the whole organisation.

We have a range of communications and marketing skills, but we recognise that we need to develop these skills across the Council.

Objectives

This strategy identifies the following objectives we wish to achieve from the way in which we communicate, with our residents, communities and our partners and how we market our services and how we will measure our success.

Objective	Measure
Be good at communicating with and listening to people and organisations	% of residents are satisfied or very satisfied with Council services and plans
Be clear about what we can do and aspire to achieve	% of residents feel well informed about service standards
To promote attractions, facilities and events, to local residents and visitors to the district	% of people satisfied with the information we provide
To undertake appropriate marketing of services	Number of marketing plans developed
To ensure Members are supported in their communications	% of Members who feel that they are supported in communicating with their relevant communities
Employees are well informed about the Council, its priorities and the services we provide	% of employees who feel well informed about the Council, its priorities and the services we provide
Employees share information and knowledge	% of employees who feel that we are a learning organisation

Action Plan

This strategy is supported by a three-year action plan which will help to ensure a consistent approach across the whole of the Council. The Council's Communications and Marketing service will be responsible for monitoring and implementation of the plan and will work with other services to make sure this happens.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are critical to ensuring that we achieve the objectives.

To ensure we are making progress we will:

- monitor our performance against local (and national, if any) measures
- report performance on communications and marketing
- collect and publish evidence of good practice throughout the Council.

This strategy, associated guidance and action plan will be reviewed annually so that we can set specific targets for the future. A comprehensive review of the strategy will be undertaken every three years.

Risks

The Council's Corporate Risk Register identifies a large number of risks that would damage the council's reputation, attract bad publicity or have a negative effect on staff morale.

An effective communications and marketing strategy is imperative in order that the appropriate messages can be conveyed in the appropriate manner in the event of a risk becoming a reality or to prevent it.

The following factors would adversely affect the delivery of this strategy – and therefore the ability to respond to the situation, to rebuild the council's reputation, counteract the bad publicity, or boost staff morale:

- budgetary restrictions
- staffing/resources issues
- lack of knowledge/expertise
- lack of understanding by services/partners
- lack of support by services/partners
- national government changes.

Action Plan 2008-2011

Objectives	Action	Measure	Target	By whom	When
Be good at communicating with and listening to people and organisations	Publication of District Wide	% of residents are satisfied or very satisfied with Council services and plans	70 % of residents are satisfied or very satisfied with information provided about Council services and plans by 2011	Communications and Marketing Team	Ongoing –publication currently four times a year
	Identify key messages from Growing Success to be built into all communications	% of local residents who feel the council has a good reputation	To be determined following baseline assessment after the next annual survey	Communications and Marketing Team Customer Service Teams	March 2008
	Develop communications with partners	% of partners who feel they understand the council's role and the services we provide	Baseline to be determined	Heads of Service, Communications and Marketing Team	Ongoing
	Use the results of Equality Impact Assessments in the planning of communications and marketing activities	Number of actions arising from EIA's which are used to inform communications and marketing activities	100% of appropriate actions	Heads of Service	On going
Be clear about what we can do and aspire to achieve	Publication of District Wide	% of residents feel well informed about service standards	70% of residents feel well informed about service	Communications and Marketing Team	Ongoing –publication currently four times a year

Objectives	Action	Measure	Target	By whom	When
			standards by 2011		
	Seek out and promote positive news stories on corporate initiatives	% of news releases used by at least one media outlet	70 % of news releases used by at least one media outlet	Communications and Marketing Team	Ongoing
	Support services in identifying and preparing positive news stories	% of news stories published	70% of news releases used	Communications and Marketing Team, Heads of Service, Activity Managers	On going
	Ensure the handling of reactive news inquiries is carried out in a co-ordinated and corporate way	% of news coverage that is neutral or positive	Baseline to be obtained from media analysis	Communications and Marketing Team	Ongoing
	Continued development, and updating of web-based material, e.g. the potential use of RSS feeds	% of customers satisfied that web-based information meets their needs	Obtain information from web team	Communications and Marketing team and the Web Team	Ongoing
	Support implementation of corporate identity guidelines		Attend all team meetings across the organisation by April 2008	Communications and Marketing Team, Heads of Service, Activity Managers Communications and Marketing Team, Heads of Service	Ongoing from February 2008

Objectives	Action	Measure	Target	By whom	When
	Record feedback from customers, particularly compliments and satisfaction with the level of service provided	Baseline to be determined through Customer Service Strategy			On going
To promote attractions, facilities and events, to local residents and visitors to the district	Publication of visitor and accommodation guide	% of residents and visitors with greater awareness of the attractions and facilities of the district	To be determined following baseline assessment after the next annual survey	Communications and Marketing Team	February 2008
	Publication of specifically targeted information e.g. Countryside guide	% of people satisfied with the information we provide	70% of people satisfied with the information we provide by 2011	Communications and Marketing Team working with relevant service area e.g. Countryside Services	Ongoing
	Supporting services and external partners in raising the awareness of attractions the district has to offer	Increased visitor numbers to attractions	At least one annual promotion	Communications and Marketing Team, Sustainable Economic Development Team	Ongoing
	Seek opportunities for positive news coverage in appropriate publications	Number of articles in local/national/specialist publications	Baseline to be established	Communications and Marketing Team	On going
	Recognise the growing use of new media and use where appropriate and ensure the existing information on the website is more		Baseline to be established	Communications and Marketing Team and work with Web team	On going

Objectives	Action	Measure	Target	By whom	When
	accessible				
	Review and update tourist information points			Communications and Marketing Team	Annually
To undertake appropriate marketing services of	Support services and work with partners in the provision of effective marketing opportunities using a combination of the following methods: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Printed material • Promotional launches and events • Media coverage • New media, e.g. RSS feeds, a website which contains visitor/resident attraction, leisure and culture information 	Number of marketing plans developed		Communications and Marketing Team with support from the Web team when relating to new media	On going

Objectives	Action	Measure	Target	By whom	When
To ensure Members are supported in their communications	Provide training for members to assist them in communications and marketing activities	% of members who feel they are supported in these activities	100% of members who attend training	Communications and Marketing Team	Ongoing
Employees are well informed about the Council, its priorities and the services we provide	Representation on groups such as corporate communications group and marketing group	Number of meetings attended	Corporate Communications group held four times a year	Communications and Marketing Team	On going
	To produce and improve the publication - Team News for officers and members	% of employees who feel well informed about the council, its aims and objectives and the services provided	60% of employees feel well informed about the council, its aims and objectives and the services provided	Communications and Marketing Team	Ongoing – publication currently 12 issues a year
	Publication of information and briefings or drop-ins on specific topics – e.g. new accommodation project	% of employees who understand what the council stands for and believe it has Good reputation	60 % of employees who understand what the council stands for and believe it has a good reputation	Communications and Marketing Team	On going
Employees share information and knowledge	Ensure employees know how to share and use knowledge	% of employees who believe we are a learning organisation	85% employees believe we are a learning organisation by	Communications and Marketing Team, Policy and Research Team, Human Resources Team	Ongoing

Objectives	Action	Measure	Target	By whom	When
			the next survey		
	Production of protocols and good practice guidance for communications and marketing activities			Communications and Marketing Team	April 2008
	Provide training for officers on external communications	% of officers who feel that they are supported with communications	Two courses a year	Communications and Marketing Team	On going

Knowing our Communities

The key issues identified are ones which we will need to keep evaluating to ensure we achieve the outcomes in the marketing and communication strategy.

Who do we communicate with?	Key Issues to evaluate
Local Residents	Have we established two-way communication and marketing? How do local people tell us what they think? Do we listen to our communities? Are the physical means of communication adequate? Do we know what local people think about the Council and the services we provide? Do we provide information in a way which our residents want? Do we provide information and consult with groups and communities that traditionally don't engage with the Council? Raising awareness about what is on offer in Huntingdonshire Marketing Huntingdonshire to our local residents Communities of interest Communities in place Family and friends Means of getting message across
The Media (local, regional, national and specialist)	Do we have a constructive relationship with the media? Does the media think that we have a good reputation and standards? Does the media use the information we provide to it?
Partners (The Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership and other partners)	Have we established two-way communication and marketing? Do our partners think that we have a good reputation and standards? Do we know what each other stand for and what our objectives are? Do we know where the overlaps and the gaps are?
The Business Community	Have we established two-way communication and marketing? Do local businesses think that we have a good reputation? Do they know what services we provide for them?

	Are they aware of our key messages? Potential business who may re-locate
Employees	Do we have a culture of two-way communication? Have we developed communication skills across the Council? Do staff know the key messages and do they communicate them as part of service delivery and in their communities?
Members	Do our communications and marketing support democratic representation? Do our communications and marketing support our political management system? Do members have support in enhancing their communication skills? Do our communications and marketing support our community leadership role?
Town and Parish Councils	Have we established two-way communication and marketing? Do Town and Parish Councils think that we have a good reputation and standards? Do we know what each other stand for and what our objectives are?
Governmental and non-governmental organisations (Civil Servants, Government Office, Minister, national organisations such as the Audit Commission, etc)	Do they know what the Council stands for? Do they think we have a good reputation and standards of service?
Suppliers	Do they know what the Council stands for? Do they think we have a good reputation and standards of service? Do they know what opportunities are available to them?
People who come to work in Huntingdonshire (including migrant workers from other countries)	Do they know what the Council stands for? Do they think we have a good reputation and standards of service? Do they know what opportunities are available to them? Are they aware of the services and what we provide in Huntingdonshire?
Visitors to the area	Do they know where to stay and what to see and do in Huntingdonshire? Are they aware of the services we provide to help enhance their experience?

Appendix

Further appendices to be available as part of the strategy and on the Communications and Marketing Sharepoint site to include:

- Overview of Code of Practice of Local Authority Publicity and reference to the full code
- Writing techniques for District Wide
- Handling media relations
- Writing news releases (including who gets quoted when)
- Handling broadcast interviews
- Plain English and general advice for all published matter
- Correct use of corporate identity
- Civic protocol
- Event management

Putting the community first

Consultation and Engagement Strategy

Purpose

Huntingdonshire District Council is committed to consultation and engagement to ensure that the views and needs of local residents and businesses are taken into account when planning and delivering services.

This strategy provides a framework which both directs and supports the Council's consultation and engagement activities.

Contribution to the Council's Corporate and Strategic Framework

"Growing Success", the Council's Corporate Plan, includes the following objectives –

- **to provide high quality customer services** – by making it as easy as possible for customers to access our services and get appropriate information;
- **to be good at communicating with and listening to people and organisations** – this will entail regular and effective communication with local residents about Council services, seeking their views on new proposals, and regularly asking them their opinions and considering what they say;
- **to strengthen our commitment and capacity to achieve equality, diversity and inclusion** – by maintaining or establishing statutory equality schemes which consider gender, race and disability equality issues and the needs of disadvantaged groups at all levels of services, policies and practices;
- **to enable Councillors to carry out their leadership role effectively** – determining Council priorities and allocating resources, scrutinising and examining relevant issues as advocates and promoting the interests of the Council and communities.

The achievement of these objectives means that the Council must be excellent at understanding the needs of the users of our services and those we represent and in organising services around those needs. This requires excellent customer service standards and practices, communications, marketing, consultation and engagement activities.

In addition, a series of strategic policies, including the Corporate Equality Policy, Communications and Marketing Strategy and Customer Service Strategy, all contain objectives and activities which require effective consultation and engagement and/or contribute towards the approach adopted within this strategy.

The strategies are mutually supportive and are inherently connected in terms of the objectives they are seeking to promote.

Background

Our residents, communities and businesses have high expectations and expect their views to be listened to and taken into account. The purpose of this strategy is to promote continuous improvement to the way the Council consults and engages with local residents and other stakeholders to ensure that their views are identified and used to improve and shape our decision making, policies and services. The council often has to balance differing views and has to take a balanced and proportionate judgement in the interests of all our communities. A consistent and coordinated approach is needed so that effort and resources are used effectively and not duplicated.

This reflects a detailed and increasingly prescriptive regulatory framework which has seen consultation as a key component of improving service delivery. More recently, through the Local Government and Improvement in Health Act 2007, there is a national drive towards further engagement between service providers and the communities or neighbourhoods which they serve. In response to this the Council, with partners, has instigated a neighbourhood management approach in three locations in the district – Ramsey, Oxmoor and Eynesbury – a key element of which will be to involve local communities in deciding priorities for their areas and helping them to develop and implement, in conjunction with service providers, responses to those priorities.

The Council operates an environment of democratic representation. The role of elected Members as leaders and representatives of our communities is vital to this process. Elected Members therefore have an important role to bring to the Council the needs, views and aspirations of the communities they represent and to use the information that comes from consultation and engagement exercises in order to make decisions and to plan services in a way that meets local needs. Our system of political management demands clear and effective information and processes as to how that information is used to support the principles of transparency and accountability.

This strategy is based on the principle that responsibility for consultation and engagement must remain with individual services but there should be a corporate approach and services should be supported in these activities. The purpose of this strategy is to provide a framework and a consistent approach to our consultation and engagement activities. It will be supported by guidance, protocols and an action plan, which will be based on the principles set out in this strategy and good practice generally. In addition organisational changes already in place will ensure that the Policy and Research Service will carry out corporate activities and support services in their consultation and engagement activities.

Consultation and engagement are intensive and costly activities; however, high spending does not always produce good results. This strategy, associated guidance, protocols and action plan will ensure that our activities are effective and provide good value for the investment we make in them.

Where are we now?

A broad approach to consultation and engagement recognises that a number of different activities will be relevant to different situations and circumstances:

Activities	Examples
Communicating information	Good quality communications, such as District Wide, website and service based information
Market research and obtain opinions	Annual surveys and service specific user satisfaction surveys
Consultation – seeking views on or support for a choice between options	Seeking views on formal policies and strategies
Deciding together – sharing views, developing options, agreeing a course of action	The development of the Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Development Framework Planning for Real exercises Participation exercises with children and young people
Acting together – working with others to make decisions and carry through the action agreed	Neighbourhood management in Oxmoor, Ramsey and (emerging) Eynesbury
Supporting communities – supporting groups and communities to develop and implement their own solutions	Parish planning Neighbourhood management approach

While the Council can demonstrate activity and success across this spectrum, the majority of the consultation and engagement activities have been concentrated on communication information, market research/obtaining opinions and consultation.

As a Council we have placed a special emphasis on consultation with individuals or communities who do not traditionally engage with us, such as young people, those with disabilities or minority ethnic groups. Effective involvement cannot happen without a good understanding of the make up, needs and interests of all those different groups and their capacity to engage. An inclusive approach will be used by the Council to ensure that different groups have the opportunity to participate and are not disadvantaged by our processes. Equality Impact Assessments are being carried out on all our services and policies and they will highlight issues that need to be addressed through consultation and engagement activities. It is important that we have a coordinated approach to the use of information from these assessments.

Objectives

The Council has identified the following objectives:

Objective	Measure
To ensure that consultation and engagement is appropriate, effective and meaningful	% of local people who feel that the council listens to and considers the views of local residents
To ensure that there are the same opportunities for all local residents and business to be involved in consultation and engagement	% of local people who feel that the council listens to and considers the views of local residents
That elected Members are supported in their role to consult, engage and represent local communities	% of Members who feel they are supported in their role to consult, engage and represent their community

	% of Members who attend consultation and engagement training
That the results of communication and engagement activities are used in the planning and design of services	% of local people and businesses who believe that council services meet their needs

Action Plan

The action plan appended to this strategy details how we intend to deliver against the objectives over the next three years.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are critical to ensuring that we achieve the objectives.

To ensure we are making progress we will:

- monitor our performance against local (and national, if any) measures
- report performance on consultation and engagement activities
- collect and publish evidence of good practice throughout the Council.

This strategy, associated guidance and action plan will be reviewed annually so that we can set specific targets for the future. A comprehensive review of the strategy will be undertaken every three years.

Risks

The council's corporate risk register identifies a large number of risks that may have negative effects on the council.

An effective consultation and engagement strategy is imperative to ensure the risks and the possibilities of them becoming a reality are kept to a minimum or prevented altogether.

The following factors would adversely affect the delivery of this strategy:

- Failing to communicate effectively and taking action on the key issues from consultation will lead to falling levels of customer satisfaction.
- Without a corporate lead there will be consultation overload and potentially a waste of resources.
- Low levels of customer satisfaction will affect our reputation.
- Any revenue squeeze may result in financial constraints to implementing consultation and engagement development.
- Lack of engagement with selected/targeted groups.
- HDC employees fail to use the guidance.

Action Plan 2008 – 2011

Objectives	Action	Measure	Target	By whom	When
To ensure that consultation and engagement is appropriate, effective and meaningful	Ensure employees use the Consultation and Engagement Strategy as good practice guidance		On-going	PSSD (Policy & Strategic Services Division)	
	Establish and promote a database to record information about current and planned consultation and engagement exercises		July 2008	PSSD	
	Establish consultation calendar		July 2008	PSSD	
	Better use made of consultation and research section of website (database and calendar)		Post July 2008	PSSD to update and promote All to use	
	Ensure a strategic planned approach to make best use of resources, avoid duplication and review existing information and data before carrying out any new consultation or engagement exercises				

Objectives	Action	Measure	Target	By whom	When
	Ensure that the results of Equality Impact Assessments are coordinated at a corporate level			PSSD	
	Use the results of Equality Impact Assessments in the planning of consultation and engagement activities			HoS	
	Effective use is made of the Joint Consultation Framework (a joint contract between Cambridgeshire Councils, PCT, Police and Fire and Rescue Service with MRUK – a consultation consultancy		On-going	PSSD	
	Training and development course for relevant employees in consultation and engagement techniques		July 2008	PSSD/HR	
	Establish and publicise consultation guidance (methods and accessibility)		April 2008	PPSD	

Objectives	Action	Measure	Target	By whom	When
	Investigate the setting up of e-panels and the use of ICT for consultation and engagement		April 2009	IMD & PSSD	
	Work with Parish Plan groups to engage partners in the preparation of community questionnaires to incorporate more strategic issues and avoid duplication of work		On-going	Planning Services	
To ensure that there are the same opportunities for all local residents and business to get involved	Training in specific areas relating to equality e.g. awareness training for disability, gender, race, age, religious belief, sexual orientation and children and young people			HR & PSSD	
	Establish and publicise consultation guidance (methods and accessibility)		April 2008	PSSD	
	Establish a contact list of community/voluntary groups within the district that represent the needs of hard to reach groups		September 2008	PSSD	

Objectives	Action	Measure	Target	By whom	When
That elected members are supported in their role to consult, engage and represent local communities	Training course for Members to support them in their role to consult engage and represent local communities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Through training and guidance ○ Support for Members to undertake specified consultation and engagement activities e.g. focus groups, workshops or conducting face to face or telephone surveys 	% of Members who feel that they are supported in their role to consult engage and represent their community % of Members who attend consultation and engagement training	July 2008	Democratic Services & PSSD	
	Consider a pilot initiative relating to the 'state of district' debate		Consideration by Cabinet	Democratic Services and Overview & Scrutiny working party	
That the results of consultation and engagement are used in planning and design of services	Develop an annual process for reviewing the outcomes from key consultation and engagement activities		June 2009	PSSD	
	Consider incorporation of consultation and engagement within report checklist		December 2007	PSSD	
	Establish process to ensure that local research		September 2008	Planning Services	

Objectives	Action	Measure	Target	By whom	When
	undertaken through the Parish Plan process is disseminated across services and to partners				
	Ensure the results of consultation, engagement and research are communicated and used to inform the development of policies, decision making and provision of services	<p>% of local people who feel that the council listens to and considers the views of local residents</p> <p>% of local people and business who believe that council services meet their needs</p>			

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