

To: Regeneration & Economic Development
Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee

From: Mike Hill, Cabinet Member for Customer and
Communities
Amanda Honey, Corporate Director of Customer and
Communities

Date: 23 September 2011

Subject: Connecting with Communities – 2010/11 Annual Report
on Consultation, Engagement and Involvement Activity.

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary:

The purpose of this report is to update Regeneration & Economic Development (R & ED) POSC Members on the activities that took place between 1 April 2010 and 31 March 2011 to consult, engage and involve all those who are interested in or involved with our services.

FOR INFORMATION AND COMMENT

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide information on the main aspects of consultation, engagement and involvement within KCC during the financial year 2010/2011. It also informs Members on both existing and future work and highlights the changes the Council intends to make to further embed and extend engagement processes.

1.2 Whenever KCC makes a decision about improving or changing its services, it needs to be confident the decision is properly informed by public opinion. The reduction in budget allocation for public services means that it is likely that all residents will be impacted upon in some shape or form. At this time, more so than any in the recent past, it is important that the public has the opportunity to have a say about the services they receive. Public opinion should be viewed as an important tool for Councillors - the local decision makers - in making difficult decisions about where and how to reduce or redesign services.

2 KNOWN INFORMATION

2.1 It is important that we target our information and use our resources in the most cost efficient way. KCC has used customer insight to ensure that we provide information in a way that suits people best.

2.2 This area of work is driven by the information and data we hold about residents of Kent, including the feedback we get from customer comments and complaints. KCC also makes use of a number of data and information sources including 'MOSAIC' to provide insight into the background and lifestyles of residents across the whole of Kent.

2.3 Getting an insight into how customers are interacting with KCC, what they want and who they are is crucial to improving access to services. This insight can help KCC to predict what people will want and need in future. We can also find out who is or isn't interacting with the Council as well as over/under provision and over/under utilisation.

2.4 The Research and Intelligence Unit has corporate responsibility for all of the research and data areas outlined below:

- Demography
- Deprivation
- Economy and the labour market
- Land use:
 - Commercial
 - Housing
- Retail and town centres
- Customer Insight (MOSAIC).

2.5 The Unit collects, collates, processes, analyses and maps data for a wide range of projects across the whole of Kent County Council and beyond. All of the latest data and publications on these topics can be found on the Research and Intelligence website www.kent.gov.uk/research

2.6 This information is used before we go out to consult with the public. The knowledge gained through consultation is then fed back across KCC.

3 THE WAYS IN WHICH WE'VE INVOLVED LOCAL PEOPLE IN 2010/11

3.1 There are a number of different opportunities for residents, service users and other interested groups to influence decision-making and service delivery across all our functions. The main objectives for these consultation and involvement activities are:

- To find out what customers think about the services they have received or want to receive
- To find out what particular groups or audiences think about a given theme
- To find out what interested or affected people think about a particular proposal, policy or plan

- To include groups of interested or affected people in a decision-making or policy-making process
- To include groups of interested or affected people in service design and delivery, in order to improve those services
- To include groups of interested or affected people in the assessment or evaluation of services
- To involve residents in the recommendations of member community grants

3.2 There are also a variety of methods and tools that are used to meet these objectives, as shown below:-

Satisfaction Surveys: As well as measuring satisfaction levels and monitoring them over time, surveys often include other questions which enable the services to act on the information provided to fix problems or take opportunities. The surveys are usually carried out using questionnaires (paper, email or online) or are done over the phone. They target service users and tend to be carried out by units with high levels of frontline customer contact.

Forums, groups and panels: The purpose of this sort of activity is to examine issues in greater depth and begin to explore solutions to problems or to identify new opportunities. They are 'qualitative' methods and the forums, groups and panels we run are generally groups which meet regularly to talk about a particular service. They typically involve around 5 to 15 people per group, and may be organised around a particular service, location or issue.

Participative events and processes: The main purpose of this sort of activity is to exchange views, opinions and ideas, and often making decisions together.

Market research: Main purpose of this sort of activity tends to be to generate actionable information about people, communities and groups who are, or who could be, using a service which we provide. We use it to identify opportunities for developing certain areas of our businesses.

Participatory Budget events (You Decide): The main aims have been to engage a wide section of the local community in the grant decision-making process.

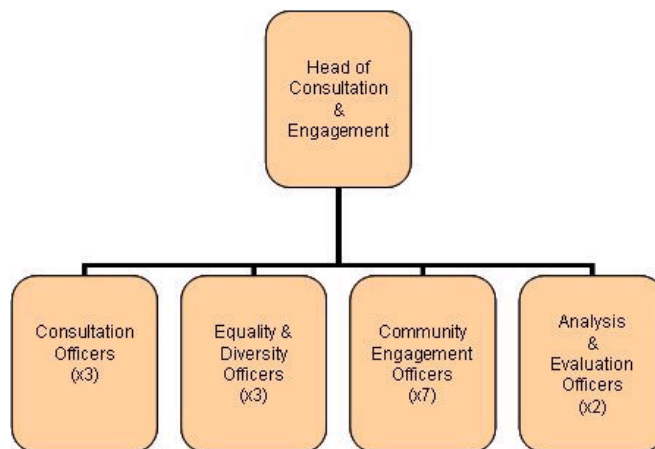
4 WHAT WE HAVE DONE

4.1 Detail of the consultation, engagement and involvement work carried out by Regeneration & Economic Development during 2010/2011 is presented in the Appendix to this report together with contact details of the lead officer for each project.

5 OUR PLANS FOR A NEW WAY OF WORKING

5.1 The current team of Community Engagement Managers transferred into the Communities directorate in April this year, and as part of KCC's need to make substantial savings over the next three years, the division in which they are part of (Communications and Engagement) has been undergoing a restructure.

5.2 As officers are appointed to new roles within the restructure, the Consultation and Engagement team will be working in a different way, and will be structured as follows:



5.3 The new team will have fifteen officers with different specialist areas all working much more seamlessly to support Consultation and Engagement.

5.4 Though good progress has been made there is still scope for further improvement and consistency in consultation and engagement practice across the Council. From September 2011 there will be a central resource to ensure:

- KCC does not target the same audience segment by age/interest/geography at the same time with two different consultations
- All questions asked are constructed in an appropriate and unambiguous method to ensure answers that are relevant to the topic and to an agreed accuracy
- A log of all consultations is kept so that there is visibility of the contact being made by KCC with its customers – and its impact.

5.5 The corporate responsibilities are for setting and supporting coherent standards, giving advice, challenging the business need and creating the opportunity for working with partners to share costs and findings.

5.6 We still need to make it even easier for local people to have their say and we also need to use their views and suggestions more effectively and - crucially - ensure we publicise what difference those views made when a final decision was taken. We will continue to explore how digital technologies could be better deployed to make engagement work, cheaper, quicker, more responsive, more relevant and more convenient for residents and businesses.

5.7 Participatory Budgeting (PB) events are a useful tool for engaging with communities where residents see that they can have an impact on the decisions to be made. The grant allocation process was a helpful starting point and PB has shown it has the potential to be a valuable tool across a wider range of discretionary service decisions.

6 CONCLUSIONS

6.1 The examples in the Appendix indicate the extent to which KCC is using information from service users and other interested groups to influence its decision making. This is in keeping with the statutory **duty to involve** (even though the Coalition Government has indicated this is due to be repealed, the same duty will remain but become non-statutory), the Equality Act 2010 and with the culture being fostered across the Authority.

6.2 Twin pressures are influencing our consultation, engagement and involvement work. Firstly there is pressure to improve the quality of the work we do, which arises from problems that other authorities have had when they have been judged to have acted incorrectly or inappropriately. This pressure concerns what we consult about, when we consult and how much detail we use to inform the consultation process and the ultimate decision making.

6.3 The second pressure arises from our budget position and the need to reduce significantly the overall amount of our resource committed to consultation, engagement and involvement.

6.4 Because some consultation work, for instance, must be done and must be done to a particular standard and timescale, the outlook for the future can be summarised as **doing less work overall but doing the work we do better and more efficiently and effectively.**

6.5 This work will continue during 2011-12 and three particular priorities will be:

- Undertaking a rigorous and mandatory assessment of all consultation, engagement and involvement proposals at a very early stage, in order to identify those projects that are not a priority and will not be pursued and also those that are a priority and don't just need to be done but need to be done in a demonstrably exemplary manner.
- Exploring how digital technologies could be better deployed to make engagement work cheaper, quicker, more responsive, more relevant and more convenient for residents and businesses.

- Using every opportunity to keep down the costs of consultation exercises; minimise duplication and to make best use of the analysis and information that is collected.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Members of the Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to **NOTE** the contents of this report and **COMMENT** on the priorities identified in section 6 above.

Director: Jill Rawlins
Title: Interim Director of Communications and Engagement

Contact Officer: Nick Warren
Title: Consumer Monitoring Manager
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APPENDIX

Title of consultation Cyclopark local access consultation

Name of lead officer Laurence Tricker

e-mail address of lead officer laurence.tricker@kent.gov.uk

Lead officer's telephone number 01474 338813

What we wanted to find out

Local residents' views on local access issues and options for resolving conflicts.

What we asked and the methodology used

At an open meeting in June, 43 local residents (700 were invited) were asked what they thought about the various formal and informal accesses to the Cyclopark. No consensus was reached, so a letter followed to 700 residents presenting four access options and asking for residents' preferences.

What we found out (copy of a report, or summary)

200 questionnaires were returned and the analysis showed that a majority of respondents showed support for options 1 and 2.

How we used this information? How did it inform the decisions we made?

How we reported this back to those who took part and to the public?

The analysis of the questionnaires and other information was supplied to local Members in order to inform their decision. The results of the consultation and the Members' decision were circulated to local residents.

How much did it cost in addition to KCC staff time? (include cost of any publications, software or third parties commissioned to undertake any survey/analysis work)

Officer time was significant but not recorded. External fees estimated at £2,200 for delivery of the questionnaire and preparation of option plans.

Title of consultation Greening the Gateway

Name of lead officer Val Hyland

e-mail address of lead officer Valerie.Hyland@kent.gov.uk

Lead officer's telephone number 01622 221373

What we wanted to find out

The views of stakeholders, groups and local Members on how to take the ambitions for Green Grid forward

What we asked and the methodology used

A new Community Forum ('Caring for our Towns and Countryside') has been developed for north Kent (Gravesham and Dartford). The Forum met in Dec 2010 in Dartford, and will meet quarterly.

What we found out (copy of a report, or summary)

*How we used this information? How did it inform the decisions we made?
How we reported this back to those who took part and to the public?*

How much did it cost in addition to KCC staff time? (include cost of any publications, software or third parties commissioned to undertake any survey/analysis work)

This is being managed by the Greening the Gateway Kent and Medway Initiative; a partnership project hosted by Medway Council with KCC on the Steering Group, so there is no direct cost to KCC.

Title of consultation Discovery Park, Ashford
Name of lead officer Val Hyland
e-mail address of lead officer Valerie.Hyland@kent.gov.uk

Lead officer's telephone number 01622 221373

What we wanted to find out

Development of ideas and projects for taking forward Discovery Park, Ashford

What we asked and the methodology used

There was a stakeholder workshop (included local residents and other interested parties) on 22nd July, hosted by Ashford Borough Council.

What we found out (copy of a report, or summary)

A copy of the report of the workshop held on 22 July is available at http://www.ashford.gov.uk/pdf/101019_CHILMINGTON_GREEN_REPORT_lo_wres.pdf

How we used this information? How did it inform the decisions we made?

How we reported this back to those who took part and to the public?

The project is currently on hold pending decisions on taking the development forward.

How much did it cost in addition to KCC staff time? (include cost of any publications, software or third parties commissioned to undertake any survey/analysis work)

Title of consultation Kent Design Guide: 'Safer Places,
Building out risk – Building in safety'

Name of lead officer Katherine Putnam, Kent Design
Manager, Business Strategy & Support

e-mail address of lead officer katherine.putnam@kent.gov.uk

Lead officer's telephone number 01622 696958

What we wanted to find out

This informal consultation sought the views of key stakeholders on content, accuracy, general usefulness and any areas not covered in the first draft document which provides technical guidance to the Kent Design Guide, and provide more specific detail and guidance on how to address the reduction of risk from fire in Kent's future built environment. Safer Places will act as a reference point for developers, planning consultants, architects and local authority officers responsible for all forms of development, at the early stages of the planning process. It will also serve more widely as a useful information source on this subject.

What we asked and the methodology used

Key stakeholders were asked seven specific questions and given the opportunity to add any further comments in a consultation that ran for eight weeks from 28 February 2011 to 25 April 2011

What we found out (copy of a report, or summary)

A copy of the ten detailed sets of comments and how they were addressed is available on request.

How we used this information? How did it inform the decisions we made?

How we reported this back to those who took part and to the public?

The consultation period for this document has only very recently ended. Therefore changes to the document/response comments have not yet been formed. We are due to amend the document and reply to the comments on 13 May 2011.

How much did it cost in addition to KCC staff time? (include cost of any publications, software or third parties commissioned to undertake any survey/analysis work)

Officers' time only

Title of consultation Kent Design Guide: 'Kent Farmstead Guidance' and 'Kent Downs AONB Farmstead Guidance': consultation draft

Name of lead officer Katherine Putnam, Kent Design Manager, Business Strategy & Support

e-mail address of lead officer katherine.putnam@kent.gov.uk

Lead officer's telephone number 01622 696958

What we wanted to find out

This informal consultation is seeking the views of key stakeholders on the 2 draft guidance documents. produced by English Heritage – the Kent Farmstead Guidance and the Kent Downs AONB Farmstead Guidance to help develop and determine sound and sensitive development proposals for historic farmsteads in Kent and the Kent Downs AONB.

What we asked and the methodology used

Key stakeholders (Local Planning Authorities, Planners, Conservation Officers, consultants, agents and landowners) were asked their opinions on content, accuracy, general usefulness and any areas not covered in the two guidance documents, including their answers to 5 key questions in a consultation period that ran for eight weeks from the 29 March 2011 to 24 May 2011.

What we found out (copy of a report, or summary)

A copy of the four detailed sets of comments and how they were addressed is available on request.

How we used this information? How did it inform the decisions we made?

How we reported this back to those who took part and to the public?

The consultation period for this document has only recently ended and changes to the document/response comments have not yet been formulated.

How much did it cost in addition to KCC staff time? (include cost of any publications, software or third parties commissioned to undertake any survey/analysis work)

Officers' time plus £5,000 to date.

Title of consultation Asset Management Review & Kent Design
Guide Review Consultation on a standard palette of materials for use in public
realm schemes

Name of lead officer Bob White, Development Planning
Manager, Enterprise & Environment

e-mail address of lead officer Bob.White@kent.gov.uk

Lead officer's telephone number 07715455956

What we wanted to find out

Austerity measures require “more for less”. Maintenance costs need to be reduced without degrading the overall quality of the public realm, recognising the value of the “Total Place” approach. The opinions of key stakeholders were sought on the proposal that a standard range of materials (the so called palette) be used in new construction intended to be adopted for maintenance at public expense on completion.

What we asked and the methodology used

Developers, scheme promoters and maintenance engineers need to know which materials they can use to create good quality paths, streets, roads and public places without incurring additional costs to support maintenance. The consultation document set out the standard palette of materials for use in Kent (but not Medway), recognising that there are local materials that may be used in context, and allowing for the enlarging of the palette when other suitable an eight weeks consultation with local authority and development company representatives in Kent between January and March 2011

What we found out (copy of a report, or summary)

A copy of the responses to the 9 consultation questions and Kent Highways Services' comments on those responses is available on request.

How we used this information? How did it inform the decisions we made?

How we reported this back to those who took part and to the public?

The closing date was not rigorously applied. Subsequent communication with the Chair of the Kent Developers' Group indicates that the Group may wish to offer a view. Ten different consultees responded, and a consultation report is currently being finalised. This will lead to some changes to the main document. The matter will be reported to POSC at a suitable time in the near future.

How much did it cost in addition to KCC staff time? (include cost of any publications, software or third parties commissioned to undertake any survey/analysis work)