

# **Consultation on the draft Consultation and Engagement Strategy**

## **Consultation Findings**

**May 2014  
Consultation  
Consultation & Communications**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report sets out the detailed findings from the Consultation on the draft Consultation and Engagement Strategy.

### 1.1 Views on the strategy's recommendations, best practice principles and quality standards

Residents responding to the survey were in the main supportive of the strategy, with the majority agreeing with its' key recommendations, the principles for conducting consultation, and the standards that the strategy says the council will adhere to when conducting consultation and engagement. Respondents who did not agree with these elements of the strategy were more likely to indicate that they were neutral rather than disagree.

### 1.2 Different levels of engagement and when the council consults

In terms of the different levels of engagement that the council will use and how these feed in the council's decision making process, the majority of respondents agreed (two thirds) that the information included in the strategy clearly explains the different levels of engagement; understand what each level of engagement is trying to achieve; and that the information provided in the strategy clearly explains when the council will consult with its residents. Again respondents who did not agree with these elements of the strategy were more likely to indicate that they were neutral rather than disagree.

In terms of the strategy being clear on how residents views will be considered by councillors in the decision making process, again the majority of respondents agreed (just under two thirds) that they understand how their views will be considered by councillors in the decision making process, with the remaining respondents being split between neutral, disagreeing and indicating they did not know.

### 1.3 Additional comments

Respondents were invited to give reasons for their answers, and if they felt the strategy had missed anything. Only four to six respondents answered each of these questions and these have been reported on in the detailed response in section five of this report.

## DETAILED FINDINGS

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This report sets out the detailed findings from the consultation on the draft Consultation and Engagement Strategy.

### 2. METHODOLOGY

- The consultation was open for six weeks, from the 4<sup>th</sup> March to 13<sup>th</sup> April 2014.
- The consultation consisted of an online survey. Paper copies were made available on request.
- The consultation was published on the council's engage space. <http://engage.barnet.gov.uk/>. The consultation included a hyperlink to the council's draft Consultation and Engagement Strategy.
- The survey was widely promoted through a press release and it was emailed to 900 individual residents. The consultation was also Tweeted to the council's 7,000+ followers.
- Despite the repeated promotion of this consultation there was a low response rate. However, this number of respondents is consistent with other consultations that do not appear to affect residents directly.

### 3. RESPONDENTS

- The survey received a total response of 20 responses (not all respondents completed all questions). Due to the small sample size the overall findings should be treated with caution.
- Of the 20 respondents, 15 (89 per cent) were Barnet residents, and two (11 per cent) were both Barnet residents and also from the business community. There were no responses from the voluntary sector or other public sector stakeholders.
- All respondents were over 25 years of age. 14 (82%) of the 20 respondents were aged 45-64 years old.

### 4. CALCULATING AND REPORTING ON RESULTS

- The results are based on "valid responses" only, i.e. all those providing an answer (this may or may not be the same as the total sample) unless otherwise specified. The base size may therefore vary from question to question depending on the extent of non-response.

## 5. DETAILED RESPONSES

### 5.1 VIEWS ON THE STRATEGY'S RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1.1 Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the recommendations.

The majority of respondents agreed with all of the statements.

- All of the respondents (20) agreed that “Each consultation should always give feedback to participants on conclusions and how the council has responded to the findings of consultation.
- 90 per cent of respondents (18 out of 20) agreed that “The council should publish an annual review of consultation”.
- 85 per cent of respondents (17 out of 20) agreed with the statement: “The council should advocate the use of more focus groups or face to face engagement.”
- 80 per cent of respondents (16 out of 20) agreed that “The council should publish a forward plan for consultations.”
- 75 per cent of respondents (15 out of 20) agreed with the statement: “The panel should undertake four regular consultations a year, either ‘quarterly Omni-surveys.’”
- 75 per cent of respondents (15 out of 20) agreed that: “All service consultations should be quality assured by the central Consultation Officer.”
- 70 per cent of respondents (14 out of 20) agreed with the statement: “The council should expand the Citizens’ Panel.”
- 65 per cent of respondents (13 out of 20) agreed with the statement: “The council should undertake two Residents’ Perception Surveys each year.”
- 60 per cent of respondents (12 out of 20) agreed that “The council should ensure that the development of a single customer account is undertaken with a view to fully engaging residents with the work of the council.”

#### 5.1.2 Respondents were asked to give reasons why they disagreed with any of the recommendations.

A third of the respondents (six out of 18) answered this question. Their comments are set out below.

- One respondent felt that focus groups gave only limited information about the views of the total population.
- One respondent felt that whilst they understood the importance of obtaining the views of residents, this should not be an opportunity to waste tax payers’ money.

- There was a view that two perception surveys per year were too many as attitudes do not change that often. Also that the council should not decide how many consultations run each year but that they should be carried out only when there is a policy or process to be consulted on.
- One respondent felt the council does not consult properly and goes through the motions. They felt that the council should make more effort to provide opportunities for a wide range of residents (from those who use computers to those who don't) to express their views.
- With respect to the recommendation "The council should ensure that the development of a single customer account is undertaken with a view to fully engaging residents with the work of the council" there was a view that the council assumes all residents engage with the council via the web and that focussing on the internet would mean many elderly residents who do not use the internet would be discriminated against.
- One respondent was concerned about data protection issues particularly with regard to the views of residents being stored on servers run by an external contractor.

### 5.1.3 Respondents were asked if they would like to see any other recommendations included in the strategy.

Half of the respondents (nine out of 18) said they would not like to see other recommendations included in the strategy. 28 per cent (five out of 18) said they would like to see other recommendations and 22 per cent (four out of 18) were not sure.

### 5.1.4 Respondents were invited to tell us what other recommendations they would like the council to consider and to give reasons why.

Twenty per cent (four of 20 respondents) told us what other recommendations they would like the council to consider.

- One respondent would like all consultations to be made publicly available, without passing an opinion, and that discussion and comments should be available to be made on another forum.
- Two respondents shared the view that there should be more widespread and open engagement with residents and council members, to allow discussions on areas that may need to be looked into in more depth.
- One respondent felt that trust needs to be built first. Also that uninformed views are counterproductive and that there needs to be an education programme of what the council does and how it works before the views of residents are taken seriously.

### 5.2 BEST PRACTICE PRINCIPLES AND QUALITY STANDARDS

#### 5.2.1 Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the statements about the best practice principles that have been identified in the strategy.

The vast majority of respondents agreed with all of the statements.

- 15 out of 20 respondents (75 per cent) agreed with the statement: “Overall I am satisfied with the principles that have been identified.”
- 14 out of 20 respondents (70 per cent) agreed with the statement: “The principles help me understand what engagement standards I can expect from the council.”
- 13 out of 20 respondents (65 per cent) agreed that: “The principles identified will help deliver good quality engagement.”

#### 5.2.2 Respondents were asked to give reasons why they disagreed with any of the statements.

Of the 20 respondents, four (20 per cent) answered this question. Their comments are set out below.

- There was a view that there is too much waste of money by using outside agencies when properly trained staff would be far more appropriate.
- One respondent felt the key would be whether the council uses the information constructively or as a box ticking exercise.
- One respondent commented that the definition of 'political priorities' has not been given.

#### 5.2.3 Respondents were asked if there were any other best practice principles that should be included in the strategy.

Half of the respondents (nine out of 18) were not sure if any other principles should be included in the strategy. 30 per cent (five out of 18) said they did not think that any other principles should be included, and 22 per cent (four out of 18) said they did think other best practice principles should be included.

#### 5.2.4 Respondents were asked what other best practice principles or quality standards they would you like the council to consider.

Two of the 20 respondents (ten per cent) answered this question. Their suggestions for other best practice principles or quality standards are set out below.

- One respondent felt that there should be immediate publication of the raw data as soon as the politicians start making statements about the research to avoid the risk of false statements or representations being made about the data. This would support the MRS Code of Conduct rule B61.
- Another felt that openness and honesty should be stressed and that there should be punishment of employees and councillors if misinformation is given.

### 5.3 DIFFERENT LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT AND WHEN THE COUNCIL CONSULTS

#### 5.3.1 Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the statements about the information provided in Appendix one.

The majority of respondents agreed with all of the statements.

- 12 out of 18 respondents (66 per cent) agreed with the following statements:
  - The information clearly explains the different levels of engagement.
  - I understand what each level of engagement is trying to achieve
  - The information provided explains clearly when the council will consult with residents.
- 11 out of 18 respondents (61 per cent) agreed with the following statement:
  - I understand how my views will be considered by councillors in the decision making process.

#### 5.3.2 Respondents were asked to give reasons why they disagreed with any of the statements.

Three of the 20 respondents (fifteen per cent) said they disagreed with the statements and gave further comments, which are set out below.

- One respondent said that engagement had not happened in the past and that they were looking forward to the attitudes of councillors changing.
- One respondent felt that there was a trust issue and that the council has to change first before a level of trust can be restored between citizens and the council.
- There was a view that lip service was being paid, particularly with respect to planning committee decisions.

### 5.4 GENERAL COMMENTS

#### 5.4.1 Respondents were invited to tell us any further comments they had about the strategy.

Three of the 20 respondents (fifteen per cent) answered this question and their comments are set out below.

- There was a view that existing staff in their specialists fields should be used to deal with residents' views, and not external agencies.
- One respondent was concerned about the costs of the proposals.
- One respondent felt that the council should build trust and respect for residents and their views.