

Consultation and Community Engagement Strategy

2007 – 2010



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Introduction

West Lancashire is proud of its strong track record of consulting and engaging with local people to gather their views about the Council's strategies, policies, services and activities.

In 2001 the Council adopted its first Consultation and Community Engagement Strategy (2002-2004), building on its experience and making explicit its commitment to this increasingly important area. The actions and improvements set out in that strategy have been implemented successfully and the Council has increased the range and quality of its consultation activities.

Now, in this updated and revised Strategy, the Council charts the way forward to achieve excellence in consultation and community engagement and to ensure that it maximises engagement with all sections of the community and key stakeholders.

In order to help evaluate progress, assess the challenges ahead and draw up the new Strategy, the Council appointed a Community Engagement Commission, which considered a range of issues including –

- The contribution that consultation and engagement makes to achievement of the Council's vision and priorities
- The effectiveness of current methods of consultation
- Legislative requirements and Government guidance
- How the Council can continue to improve

The Strategy therefore incorporates the conclusions of the Commission's work, and sets out the context and scope of the Council's consultation and community engagement activity for 2007 – 2010. The document reviews the Council's strong record of success and the demands of legislation and Government guidance; identifies key stakeholders and methodologies that can be used to consult and engage with them; sets objectives and targets; and lays out action plans for new initiatives to ensure that the objectives and targets are met.

Local people are at the heart of the Council's consultation and community engagement activity and this Strategy puts into action the Council's commitment to listen to, inform and consult local people in all sections of the community.

2 Consultation in context

The Council's vision is to put customer services first, and build a community second to none. It is our promise that we will not only satisfy customers, but delight them. We have been rated an "Excellent Council" by the Audit Commission and are committed to continuing to improve further.

We have adopted six key priorities and identified seven values to help us deliver them. These make explicit our commitment to listening to, informing and consulting local people.

Putting the customer first means, above all, knowing our customers. If we are to delight customers, we need to know what they want. We need to find out their aspirations, their concerns, what they think is important, and what they expect from us. We need to know what they think about the services we offer and how they would like us to improve.

Consultation and community engagement activity is essential in order to provide this information. It must be wide-ranging, continuous and far-reaching in order to provide information that the Council can rely on as it makes decisions about policies and services.

As well as finding out people's views and attitudes, the Council wishes to provide opportunities wherever possible for people to play an active role in influencing decisions, to enhance people's involvement with the authority, and extend community engagement. This is central to achieving social inclusion, to enhancing the well-being of the district and to encouraging involvement in local democracy. A community development approach can assist in making community engagement successful.

In addition, the Council must conform to a range of legislation and government guidance which require it to consult and engage with stakeholders. Legislative

Our priorities

- Protecting and improving street scene and the environment
- Combating crime and the fear of crime
- Working to create good quality jobs for local people
- Improving housing and ensuring there is affordable housing available
- Delivering cost-effective services that will delight the customer and are accessible for all
- Providing opportunities for leisure and culture

Our values

- Putting customers and frontline services first
- Listening to, informing and consulting local people
- Being open and accountable in the way we make decisions
- Embracing innovation and partnership as a way of bringing about step change improvement in our services
- Promoting equality of opportunity and valuing the diversity of our communities
- Valuing and developing our employees
- Ensuring local services offer the best possible value

requirements are particularly important in relation to the Council's activities as a planning and housing authority, and its responsibilities regarding disability and equality.

Sustainable Community Strategy

The Council is committed to the achievement of the objectives of the Sustainable Community Strategy. (SCS) The Council's priorities complement the SCS objectives and set out how it can contribute most effectively towards achieving the SCS vision.

Sustainable Community Strategy Objectives

- To improve safety and ensure that people feel safe
- To build on the solid foundations of a strong voluntary and community sector and to develop community participation and pride in our neighbourhoods
- To improve health outcomes, promote social wellbeing for communities and reduce health inequalities for everyone
- To provide more appropriate and affordable housing to meet the needs of local people
- To provide good quality services that are easily accessible to all
- To contribute to sustainable development through the wise use of natural resources
- To provide opportunities for young and older people to thrive
- To create more and better quality training and job opportunities to get more people into work.
- To protect and improve West Lancashire's environment including safeguarding our biodiversity.

3 Scope and principles

Scope: This Strategy sets out a broad approach to consultation and community engagement which covers the following areas:

Research to find out the views of customers and other key stakeholders on a range of issues including Council services. The results can help the Council assess needs and aspirations and so tailor its services to meet those needs; results can also help the Council monitor its performance. Examples include: surveys through the Citizen's Panel to find out what proportion of people use the countryside parks or have access to the internet.

Consultation through two-way dialogue to give people the opportunity to give their views on specific issues of importance to them. The results influence the decisions that are made. Examples include: asking young people what they would like to see in a new play area; inviting people to comment on the draft replacement local plan.

Participation – providing opportunities for local people to get involved in influencing decisions and developing plans that affect their communities. Examples include: running a focus group of disabled service users to discuss with Council staff how leisure facilities can be improved to meet their needs; bringing together key stakeholders to work together e.g. Ormskirk Town Centre Forum and the Local Strategic Partnership.

Principles: The Council established in its first Consultation and Community Engagement strategy a set of principles to which it would work. These have been updated to take account of new requirements, and now underpin the new strategy:

- Reach out to and involve all sections of the community including groups that are sometimes regarded as hard to reach, and the 'quiet voices'
- Help people to take part by producing consultation materials in formats that meet their needs e.g. in large print, on tape or in minority languages or face-to-face
- Be clear about the extent of influence being offered in any consultation and how the results will be used
- Fairness, equality and inclusion must underpin all aspects of community engagement, which should have clear and agreed purposes, accurate and timely information, and appropriate methods
- Within resources available, provide support to the groups we regularly ask to participate
- Provide feedback to the people we consult on the results of consultation
- Meet legislative requirements, and ensure best value is achieved
- Set clear and reasonable timescales for responses to consultation documents
- Make consultation documents widely available, including on the website
- Take all responses into account and provide feedback, wherever possible, to those who took part in the consultation.

- Avoid consultation overload: co-ordinate work within the Council, and with other agencies, wherever possible.
- Value the contribution of elected members through the role as community champions

4 Responding to legislative requirements and guidance

A large part of the consultation the Council undertakes is required by law. The Consultation and Community Engagement Strategy 2001-04 set out the details of legislation in force at the time. Since that Strategy was completed, some new legislation, and other Government guidance, has been introduced and further legislation is expected.

In addition, the Council is subject to external inspections by Government agencies such as the Audit Commission, when existing activities are scrutinised and recommendations made for improvements. The Council must take account of the inspectors' recommendations and guidance.

Customer Access and Focus Inspection

The inspection, carried out in 2005, assessed the Council as providing an excellent approach to improving services through customer access and focus, with promising prospects for improvement. The inspectors' assessment involved detailed scrutiny of the Council's current arrangements for consulting with customers and researching satisfaction levels.

In relation to the consultation and community engagement issues relevant to this Strategy, the inspectors' report made the following points:

- Consultation is "widespread and well-managed" and the Council uses feedback and complaints effectively to improve access to services
- The Council has recognized the potential to use the Citizen's Panel to increase knowledge of different customer groups and analyses results by age, disability, gender and area of residence
- It is difficult for the Council to engage effectively with the ethnic minority population because of its small size, geographical sparsity and the absence of any local representative organisations. However the Council is determined to make progress and has identified resources for targeted consultation.
- The Council uses a wide range of methods to gather information about the views of customers and to consult with them, including questionnaires and tear-off feedback forms with corporate literature; e-consultation; targeted survey/focus group work with specific groups; established user groups; surveys; the Citizen's Panel, described as "well-resourced and popular."
- Partners and user groups say the Council listens and is responsive. It is trying hard to engage with Parish Councils. In some cases it shares information and consultation with partners in order to help improve services.
- There is clear evidence that the Council acts on customer feedback and has responded directly to consultation. The Council knows what matters to local people and has concentrated effort and resources in proportion. It takes care to engage stakeholders when developing future plans.

Points on which the Council needs to make improvement in relation to consultation and community engagement include:

- Awareness of take-up and satisfaction levels across different customer groups (e.g. older people, young people and ethnic minorities) is lacking in some service areas, and this issue needs attention.
- The Council needs to engage better with its ethnic minority communities and other hard-to-reach groups

Comprehensive Performance Assessment

Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA), introduced following the Local Government Act 2000, is the Government's inspection regime to examine the performance of councils. It brings together key information on how well a council is run, the performance of its services and the potential to improve. Every Council is given an overall judgement (poor, weak, fair, good, excellent) and is required to use the inspectors' findings to draw up an improvement plan.

West Lancashire District Council was first assessed under CPA in 2003 and was judged to be a 'good' council, just three points short of 'excellent.' It was assessed again in 2007 and was judged to be 'excellent.'

Consultation is a key element in CPA. In order to achieve a high score, Councils must show evidence of wide-ranging activity in terms of consulting and engaging all sections of their local community. West Lancashire District Council's strong record of consultation and community engagement contributed to its 'good' and 'excellent' results.

The report produced by the CPA inspectors in 2003 recognised the strength of the Council's arrangements for consultation, and gave indications as to where improvements can be made. These points, which have been taken into account in the development of this Strategy, include:

- The Council had only recently begun to address the specific needs of black and minority groups, the elderly and people living in rural areas.
- Priority has been given to developing consultation and communication arrangements, but in some sections of the community the Council's messages and achievements are not recognised
- Feedback on how and why the Council has responded to consultation is underdeveloped and so it is perceived in some sections of the community that the Council is not listening.

The CPA process is currently under revision and, at the time of the preparation of this Strategy, changes were expected but the detailed implications for consultation and community engagement activity remain unconfirmed.

The importance the Audit Commission places on this area of work is underlined in a special Audit Commission CPA briefing report which identifies the linked themes of user focus and citizen engagement as key drivers for improvement. It identifies five factors as critical to successful user and citizen engagement:

- Commitment to user and citizen engagement

- Understanding your communities
- Clarity of purpose
- Communicating in appropriate ways
- Delivering change and improved outcomes.

It is likely therefore that the CPA process, and other external inspections, will continue to place increased emphasis on consultation and community engagement which will again make a significant contribution to overall ratings. The Council can expect that assessors will scrutinise councils' consultation activities in the light of the key factors listed above, as well as consider how authorities have improved since their last inspection.

Best Value

The Local Government Act 1999 places a duty of Best Value on Councils to continuously improve the services they provide.

Best Value requires that, in making arrangements to secure continuous improvement, the Council consults with people who are who are likely to use our services and other people with an interest in the area. In order to fulfil these requirements the council consults with stakeholders, service users and staff as a fundamental part of service reviews, including best value reviews, in order to establish what they consider the most important aspects of the service and which are in need of improvement.

The Citizen's Panel and a range of other methods, including targeted customer surveys and discussion groups, have been used for consultation in relation to Best Value.

Performance Indicators

Since April 2000, all local councils have been required to undertake a General User Customer Satisfaction Survey every three years. The Government prescribes the questions to be asked and the methodology to be used for the survey. The questions cover a wide range of issues in relation to services and quality of life, and produce figures for a number of key Performance Indicators which the Government collects from each authority in the country and uses to compare performance. These key PIs include the percentage of citizens satisfied with the overall service provided by the authority.

West Lancashire District Council undertook this survey in Autumn 2000, 2003 and 2006. On each occasion consultants were used in order to ensure the Government's requirements in respect of methodology and response rates were met. The Council also took the opportunity, in each survey, to include some extra questions to provide additional local information.

Performance Indicator Surveys are also required by the Government for housing tenants, planning applicants and people in receipt of benefits. These involve smaller-scale, more focused customer surveys which are commissioned by the service division concerned.

Government Code Of Practice On Consultation

The Cabinet Office has produced a Code of Practice on Consultation which applies to all Government Departments. Other public bodies and local authorities are encouraged to follow the Code. The Council has considered the Code while drawing up this revised Consultation and Community Engagement Strategy. The Council's principles of consultation (section 3) and consultation objectives (section 9) correspond well with key criteria in the Government Code. However, one of the Government's criteria is that a 12 week period be allowed for written consultation. While the Council is committed to setting clear and reasonable timescales for consultation, and to ensuring that partners are given sufficient time to comment, it considers that a standard 12-week period is not essential, or feasible, for all written consultation. When giving key partners formal invitations to comment the Council has committed to a minimum of 8 weeks wherever possible (section 11: Action Plan – partners).

Disability and Equality

Legislation places important responsibilities on local authorities in relation to disability and equality. Changes to the Disability Discrimination Act, which came into force on 1 October 2004, place a duty on the Council to remove barriers that prevent disabled people from accessing Council services. The Race Relations Act places a duty on local authorities to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination, promote equality of opportunities and good race relations.

In response to the legislation, the Council has prepared an Equality and Community Cohesion Policy Statement and Strategy, and a Race Equality Scheme, covering race, gender and disability, and is in the process of implementing a Comprehensive Equality Plan which sets out practical steps to be taken to overcome barriers to equality of opportunity across all council services.

The Council is committed to ensuring that no service user or employee is discriminated against, and to improving equality practice with regard to disability, gender and race. This includes a commitment to consultation and means that the Council must consult people who are disabled, from ethnic minorities, and from all age groups. As community leader as well as service provider the Council has a duty to consult in two areas:

- The strategic direction the Council is taking in terms of implementing equality legislation
- Issues about barriers to services

The Council has achieved Level 1 of the Equality Standard for Local Government through its commitment to a comprehensive equality policy. It is committed to achieving Level 2, which focuses on assessment and consultation. In order to achieve this, it will need to prove it has implemented a range of consultation mechanisms in order to engage people with disabilities and from ethnic minority groups, and people of all ages.

Community Safety

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998, and more recently the Police Reform Act 2002, placed a duty on councils, working with the Police and other responsible and co-operating agencies, to undertake a crime and disorder audit and produce a Community Safety Strategy. The Audit and Strategy must be produced every three years and is required to take into account recorded crime statistics together with local people's views on the priorities for tackling crime. In order to ensure the strategy accurately reflects local perceptions and fears of crime, consultation is required on a regular basis. Evidence of consultation is also needed to support bids for funding in order to deliver the strategy.

West Lancashire's first Community Safety Strategy ran from 1999 to 2002 and the second strategy (2005 – 2008) is now being implemented .

The requirement for consultation and community engagement in relation to Community Safety will remain a priority activity.

Planning

The Council has prepared a Planning and Development Customer Charter setting out how it will deliver its service and giving details of a number of commitments to consultation. In addition, a Statement of Community Involvement, setting out how it will involve the local community in making planning decisions, has been prepared. This explains the Council's policy for involving communities in the preparation and revision of local development documents and considering planning applications.

a) Local Development Documents

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires the Council to produce a range of local development documents setting out a spatial planning strategy for West Lancashire. These documents will eventually replace the West Lancashire Local Plan which was adopted in 2006.

The Council has produced a Statement of Community Involvement which explains how the Council involves the local community, Parish Councils, elected members, officers and other key stakeholders in plan preparation and consideration of planning applications. The Council has always chosen to carry out widespread consultation beyond the minimum statutory requirements. This includes:

- Sending leaflets to all households and businesses at key stages of plan preparation
- Holding workshops at the earliest stage of preparation
- Using a mobile information unit to tour the District
- Arranging public meetings, special meetings with Parish Councils, involving the Local Strategic Partnership, meetings with key stakeholders and breakfast meetings for local businesses.
- Writing to local schools and colleges and organising competitions.

- Setting up a database of people and organisations interested in plan preparation.
- Copies of all documents are placed in local libraries and post offices and can be borrowed from the libraries and Council Offices. They are available to purchase with a 50% discount for local residents. An interactive version of the plan is available on the Council web-site and in CD rom format.

The preparation of Supplementary Planning Guidance has also been the subject of consultation on a targeted basis.

b) Heritage and the Environment

The Council has a statutory obligation to review from time to time the District's Conservation Areas and to consider the need for new designations. The Council is currently in a programme of appraising its 28 existing conservation areas, which involves consultation, by letter, with all the households and businesses identified in each conservation area, the relevant parish council and the holding of a public exhibition. Where local schools, groups, organisations or other bodies are involved with the area being appraised, these are also invited to be involved with the appraisal process. Comments and feedback on the appraisals is also requested through notices in the press and via the Council's website. A panel of professional organisations and interest groups meets regularly to scrutinise proposals for works that affect Conservation Areas and/or Listed Buildings. This panel also provides input into the consultation process for conservation area appraisals.

There are more than 600 listed buildings within the District. The Council has a duty to ensure that the buildings are properly maintained and that they are preserved in a proper manner.

The Heritage and Environment section currently produces a quarterly newsletter, which is sent, via direct mailing, to listed building owners / occupiers and all residents of the District's conservation areas. Copies are also available in local libraries, mobile libraries, through the website and from the Council's Customer Service Points.

The Section also produces a variety of guidance and advice leaflets and regularly adds new leaflets to this range. These are available in hard copy from all public exhibitions / meetings or can be ordered direct from the Heritage and Environment Team or Customer Service centres. The leaflets can also be downloaded from the Council's website.

Members of the Heritage and Environment Team regularly give presentations and talks to public groups, schools and other interested parties both describing the work of the section and giving advice about specific subjects. These meetings provide opportunities for question and answer sessions.

The Heritage and Environment Section carries out its own customer satisfaction survey every two years, targeting those who live within conservation areas or in a

listed building. This survey tries to gain feedback regarding ways people prefer to receive information and suggestions for improvements.

The Council is currently part-way through a 4-year review of all the District's current Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs). The process involves inspecting the trees and woodlands making up the Council's 400 TPOs in force and consulting, by letter, those residents affected by the Order. Copies of the new Orders are also sent to the owners of every house affected.

The Heritage and Environment Section is committed to increasing access to its services, the information it holds and the heritage of the District.

c) Development Control

The consideration of planning applications is a statutory process that includes minimum requirement for public consultation. The Council undertakes consultation beyond the minimum required in order to ensure that all those with an interest have an opportunity to have their say on development proposals. The Council has introduced a facility for public speaking at Planning Committee in order to provide an additional opportunity for local people and Parish Councils to make their views known before decisions are taken. Neighbour notifications, site notices and consultations with key interest groups are the main forms of consultation. The Council is continuing to increase the amount of planning information available on the website, which also enables comments to be made online.

Community Strategy

Under the Local Government Act 2000 all principal local authorities have a duty to facilitate the production of a Community Strategy to promote the environmental, economic and social well-being of the area. The involvement of key partners and local people is fundamental and therefore consultation and community engagement is vital.

The Council worked with partners to establish the Local Strategy Partnership and produce the first West Lancashire Community Strategy in 2003. A review of the Strategy is currently being carried out involving widespread consultation, including surveys through the Citizen's Panel, and written and face-to-face consultation with the public and partners.

Furthermore the Council has recently had an in-depth review of the LSP, drawing on best practice, which has resulted in strengthened engagement from a number of partners, notable: the voluntary, community and faith sector, Parish Councils; businesses; environment sector; older people; disabled people and young people.

HOUSING

Housing Strategy and Business Plan

The Authority is required to produce and consult on a Housing Strategy and Business Plan as part of the regular assessment of its plans by the Government Office North West as well as the Housing Corporation. The Council's Housing Strategy 2004 - 09 has been assessed as Fit for Purpose. The Council reviews and updates the respective Action Plans on an annual basis. This document acts as a reference tool for identifying all the various housing and housing-related strategies, policies and initiatives that are taking place, or proposed, for the District.

The regular review includes major stakeholders drawn from the following groups that are active in the area including: the Tenants' and Residents' Forum; the Housing Associations' Forum; the House Builders' Forum; Private Landlords and Estate Agents Forum; Parish Councils Liaison; Officers and elected Council members and local MPs.

Housing Services

On a day to day basis, the Council has been committed to consulting and involving tenants in the delivery of housing services for many years. Its commitment to involving tenants and residents in the way Council services are delivered is set out in the Tenant Participation Compact, which was developed in partnership with Tenant and Resident Representatives. The purpose of the Compact is to make tenants' and residents' participation more effective by:

- containing information about how tenants can participate;
- highlighting where participation can be improved in comparison to elsewhere and national standards;
- setting out what action will be taken to improve participation where it has been agreed this is needed.

The Compact document is currently being reviewed in consultation with tenants and residents to ensure good practice and continuous improvements are made.

The Council has in place a comprehensive range of participation structures for recognised Tenant and Resident Groups and uses a number of consultation methods to obtain the views of individuals. This ensures that comments and suggestions from tenants and residents are fully considered when shaping future housing policies.

A substantial amount of grant funding is made available to the Tenants' and Residents' Forum and Tenant and Resident Groups to enable them to participate effectively in discussions and negotiations with the Council and other outside agencies. This funding also allows groups to inform the tenants and residents on their estates through regular public meetings and newsletters.

Currently there are four Estate Management Boards and two Tenants' and Residents' Associations which have been formed to work in partnership with the Council in relation to housing and the community within their area: Birch Green,

Clay Brow & Holland Moor, Digmaor, Tanhouse and Ashurst. Representatives from all groups along with other tenants and residents meet every two months at the Tenants' and Residents' Forum to discuss, and be consulted on, issues of a common concern.

Currently the Housing Division is consulting with tenant and resident representatives to agree a new Tenant and Resident Participation structure. This is to ensure maximum opportunity and support for Tenants and Residents to get involved and have a say in the services provided by Housing and Property Maintenance Department and other Council Divisions. As part of this process the Council has recently appointed a Tenant Participation Officer to develop this process.

Housing Act 2004

The Housing Act 2004 introduced significant changes to the way Councils are required to assess housing conditions both in public and private dwellings. In addition, it has introduced major changes to the way Councils enforce standards in private rented properties. The Act also introduced amendments to 'right to buy' legislation, along with the requirement for homeowners to produce home information packs when they are about to sell their property. The Act requires the Council to undertake extensive consultation with stakeholders in the district involved in housing, especially private landlords and tenants.

Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Housing Policy 2003 – developing a strategic framework

The Authority has legal obligations under the Race Relations Act 1976. It is also required to have due regard to the Race Relations Code of Practice in rented housing. In response to these requirements a Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Housing Policy and associated action plan was produced in 2003, with the intention of bringing the authority in to a position of having robust statistical data and a clearer understanding of the social housing needs of our local BME community.

Since the publication of the above Policy, the Housing Division has continued to reflect Corporate direction in respect of mainstreaming BME issues in to its day to day working practices.

It was intended, in 2007 to review the policy and either provide a dedicated BME Strategy or update the existing policy. Advice from our BME consultant suggested we should not create a separate policy, but aim to undertake a health check of our compliance with the new Race Relations Code of Practice in rented housing. A health check has been undertaken and suggestions from the resulting report will be incorporated into our Divisional Action Plan. Adopting this approach further enhances the "mainstreaming" of BME issues, while allowing key BME related tasks to be included in key action plan documents.

Housing Strategy Update 2004 - 2009

This supplement to our Housing Strategy Statement, produced in 2007, provides an update on progress from the original Housing Strategy.

The Housing Division continues to develop and refine its process of engaging with partners and stakeholders. Involvement with others is seen as a continuous process that can inform quality decision-making and shape the delivery that will achieve our priorities. Some of our activity has involved:

Stock Transfer consultation and information provision 2004/05

Engaged in an extensive programme of activity, using a variety of methods to engage with our council tenants to inform them of the stock transfer process, in order that all tenants had the opportunity to make informed decisions on ballot day.

District Housing Needs Survey 2005

Issued 12,075 questionnaires to a sample of West Lancashire residents in order to determine the level of housing need in the District.

District Private Sector Stock Condition Survey 2005

Undertook full internal and external surveys on 1,043 dwellings across West Lancashire district to determine if there were any private sector stock condition issues that needed to be addressed within the District.

Housing Strategy Consultation Event 2005

Undertook a Housing Strategy Consultation Event on March 17, 2005 at the Lancashire Manor Hotel in Skelmersdale to provide input to our strategic housing direction.

Scarisbrick Housing Need Survey (Pilot 2006)

Issued 1480 questionnaires to residents of Scarisbrick in order to determine the level of housing need in the Parish.

STATUS Survey 2006

Survey undertaken and posted to all Council tenants to establish satisfaction levels with the Council Housing Service.

In addition to using consultation techniques the Housing Division also uses feedback from various strategic partnerships to help shape our future work activity.

Affordable Housing Strategy 2007 – 2012

The Council is aware that finding affordable housing can be a challenge for local residents of the District and so set about undertaking an Affordable Housing Review late in 2006. This engagement process with the local community, partners and local businesses was used to help inform the development of our first Affordable Housing Strategy.

A number of methods were used including – dedicated client group questionnaires, People Panel input, workshops, presentations, Internal Review meetings, press

releases and web based information / invitations to be involved in the review. The Affordable Housing Strategy for West Lancashire will be published late in 2007.

Wider Housing Issues

The Housing Division is aware that its role has evolved and that its work is seen as contributing to the Governments "Place Shaping" agenda.

Not only does the Division wish to engage with its existing customers, Council tenants, it has to engage effectively with the wider community in order to understand their housing needs and aspirations and then shape policy / services accordingly. Additionally, the Division is required to ensure that it takes part in sub regional and cross boundary partnership working across a number of disciplines.

The Division understands and recognises the value of consultation and community engagement in order to shape its services and also to evidence the West Lancashire housing position within the sub regional housing context.

5 Review of the Council's consultation activities: a story of success

The Council has a strong track record on consultation. It has for many years used a wide range of mechanisms and initiatives to engage local people, seek views, involve people in decision-making and develop capacity for community involvement. Consultation activity is backed by extensive and continuous communication and information-giving programmes which ensure that the people of West Lancashire are kept well-informed of the Council's services and achievements.

The Council's first Consultation and Community Engagement Strategy, for 2001 to 2004, built on an already strong foundation. It recognised that there was no one method of consultation or involvement which was suitable for all purposes and that a range of activities was required, with careful consideration to ensure the right approach was adopted for the appropriate situation. The Strategy set out a range of qualitative and quantitative mechanisms for use in future years to meet a number of targets. This included seven key initiatives which included the development of some new consultation tools, all of which were subsequently implemented.

A review has been carried out of the corporate mechanisms and key initiatives set out in the first strategy, including the new projects such as the Citizen's Panel and the Council Meeting as an Assembly. The conclusions are set out below and this covers the main areas of the Council's consultation and community engagement activity. Within these main areas, a number of individual projects are carried out and attached at Appendix A is a brief 'snapshot' setting out the main such project carried out during a recent 12-month period.

CITIZEN'S PANEL

The Council has operated a Citizen's Panel for consultation since 2001. The panel is called the People's Panel West Lancashire and currently involves around 1,250 people who have agreed to take part in surveys. An average of three surveys are carried out each year.

The Panel was recruited by selecting names at random from the edited version of the electoral register, or addresses at random from the Council's Gazetteer, ensuring that the proportion of names selected from each ward reflected the populations of the wards. Use of this recruitment method – called probability (random) sampling - means that the panel has a good standard of statistical validity. The reliability of the survey is enhanced by high response rates. The Panel is generally representative of the total adult population of West Lancashire in terms of ward populations, ethnicity and gender. However, it does not include anyone below the age of 17 and there is some under-representation of specific age groups. Therefore, to ensure that the distribution of responses is representative of the West

Lancashire electoral population as a whole, the survey results are weighted, based on age within gender population.

The People's Panel is a quantitative research method: i.e. it involves a large number of people; the results can be seen as representative of the population as a whole; and repeat surveys can be used to track changes in views over time. It is therefore an appropriate method for consultation when the Council wishes to know what proportion of people holds a certain view, and when trends over time are needed. Questionnaires are very structured; the majority of questions involve 'multiple choice' answers and it is not possible to prompt discussions, ask a series of open ended questions, or probe answers in depth.

In order for a Citizens' Panel to continue to operate successfully, 'refreshment' must be carried out regularly – retiring a proportion of members and recruiting replacements – to ensure the panel remains representative of the population. Response rates must also be kept high; replacement of members who are not regular responders will assist with this. Giving feedback to Panel members about survey results is also important in retaining high response rates. All these measures are incorporated into the management of the People's Panel West Lancashire.

The Panel is highly valued by managers because it produces statistically reliable results from an independent, random sample of local residents. It is regarded as an essential part of many divisions' consultation programmes and a number of managers use it for annual surveys to track changes in views over time. A recent development has been the analysis of results to give breakdowns by broad geographic area, age group, gender and disability. This has provided particularly useful information.

The results of consultation have been used for a variety of purposes including Best Value reviews; measuring service unit performance; assessing customer satisfaction; gathering information about quality of life issues and residents' aspirations; and providing information for funding bids

Members of the People's Panel were strongly supportive of it when asked for their views in a special survey in Winter 2002/03. Almost 98% agreed that it was important for the Council to ask local people for their views; 94% said they had appreciated having the opportunity to give their views as a panel member and 90% agreed that the questionnaires deal with issues that are important to local people. Three quarters also agreed that the information they provided had been useful for the Council.

Conclusions: The Panel has proved to be a valuable and successful method for quantitative consultation which is now central to the Council's consultation activity. However, because its membership consists of people aged 17+, it does not involve younger people. In terms of ethnicity, its membership is roughly proportionate to the general population but because of the very small numbers of residents from ethnic minorities, the Panel is not a fully effective mechanism for gathering their views. Results can be analysed to give breakdowns for geographical areas and individual

demographic groups such as older people and those with disabilities and this provides useful information about these groups.

COUNCIL MEETING AS AN ASSEMBLY

Five Council Meetings as an Assembly have been held: the first was held in November 2002 and subsequent meetings were held in January 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007. For each meeting, members of the public were asked to submit topics for discussion. Key partners are invited to attend the meetings and an open invitation is issued to members of the public.

The meetings give the opportunity for presentations on issues that are important for the whole district, and enable local people to take part in the debates. In 2007, the meeting received presentations on 'new health bodies for West Lancashire,' and 'Every child matters.' In 2006, the topics were healthy eating in schools, and the reorganisation of local health services, involving the Chief Executive of the Strategic Health Authority. The topics for 2005 were 'Integrated Transport' and 'Services for Older People,' while the 2004 meeting involved the Boundary Committee and the Chief Constable. The meetings have also involved young people in special presentations. The meetings have proved successful in attracting members of the public and have generated a large amount of press coverage.

Conclusions: The Annual Meeting as an Assembly has become established as an important and successful part of the Council's activity to consult and engage with local people, providing a very visible mechanism for 'qualitative' consultation where people can debate policies and ideas. The focus is firmly on district-wide issues and the meeting does not attempt to provide a forum for discussion about more local problems or issues relating to individual services. As with all public meetings, there is a tendency for members of established groups, and individuals with particular issues, to dominate debate at the expense of members of the public who might not have the confidence to speak out at a formal, public forum.

E-CONSULTATION

A special 'Your views' area of the web site has been set up as a 'listening shop' and wide range of consultation exercises have been carried out. These have included:

- Local Government Review
- The Council's priorities
- Self-assessment in preparation for CPA
- Review of the Local Plan
- Registering an interest in Broadband
- Licensing policy
- Extensive consultation for the Skelmersdale Vision town centre regeneration project, including a dedicated website

In addition, a range of interactive forms, including a general feedback form, give people the opportunity to send in requests and comments on any aspect of the Council's work. Email addresses are also listed on the website, providing another channel for people to make their views known.

The web site plays a particularly important role in consulting and engaging people on planning issues and each council's website is rated by the "Pendleton Criteria" – a national assessment of website quality with regard to planning and development functions. In 2006 the West Lancs website was rated as one of the best in the region, scoring 20 out of 21 on the Pendleton Criteria, and since then has been improved further.

A Web Site Improvement Plan is being implemented which includes, as one of its main themes, extending interactivity of the web site, including web-casting and e-consultation. This work links with the Communication Strategy and the E-Government Strategy as well as with the Consultation and Community Engagement Strategy.

The West Lancs website has been rated as one of the best in the country, for two years in succession, by the Society of IT Managers (SOCITM) annual survey. It has gained 'transactional' status – the highest possible four star rating.

As part of the E-government strategy work and the developments in customer services, stand-alone information stations have been installed at various locations around the district and consideration is being given to replacing these with facilities linked to the internet to enable members of the public without internet access to access Council services online.

Conclusions: A range of e-consultation has been successfully carried out and there is scope for further activity, in particular, for consultation with young people given the popularity of this communication channel with this age group. The web site provides a good forum for consultation, although its use is restricted to people who have internet access.

MOBILE CONSULTATION

Mobile consultation involves the Council literally 'taking to the road' and holding roadshows and meetings close to people's homes. For a number of years, the Council had access to the Community Safety Information Vehicle, which was owned and maintained by the Police. However in 2004 it was taken off the road because of its age and condition. The Police currently have no plans to replace it. Due to its lack of availability, an exhibition trailer has been hired for mobile consultation. A survey of managers has shown that some divisions foresee a need for mobile consultation and that the most cost-effective solution will be for the Council to hire a trailer for use when needed.

Mobile consultation and engagement has included:

- Council priorities and self-assessment for CPA
- Local Plan
- Housing consultation with tenants relating to Stock Options and Stock Transfer
- Roadshows in relation to recycling
- Consultation with young people on the Market Towns initiative

Conclusions: Mobile consultation is effective for carrying out consultation in a very visible way and engaging with people in an informal setting. It is, however, extremely demanding in terms of equipment, staff time and organisation; the Council needs to ensure it takes a high-quality product out onto the streets to engage local people. Also, in comparison to large-scale surveys like those done through the Citizen's Panel, the number of responses received tend to be significantly lower. These factors limit its use.

CONSULTATION WITH PEOPLE FROM ETHNIC MINORITIES

The Council identified in 2003 a need to engage with and consult people from ethnic minorities, who according to the 2001 census comprise 1.4% of the population (1,191 residents aged 16+). While the Council has links with organisations such as the Commission for Racial Equality it did not have any mechanism for engaging with local residents who were not involved with these formal groups. There are no faith centres or other organisations based in West Lancashire which represent people from ethnic minorities.

It was therefore decided to establish an Ethnic Minority Focus Group comprising local residents willing to attend meetings to give their views. An inaugural meeting was arranged and the main item on the agenda was the Racial Equality Scheme, on which the Council was keen to seek the views of people from ethnic minorities.

Three main methods were used to issue invitations and encourage people to attend: letters to the owners of local Chinese and Indian restaurants; letters issued via the Hospital Trust, PCT and colleges to staff from ethnic minority backgrounds; letters distributed to seasonal workers in the northern parish areas. The letters were written in English with paragraphs in Chinese, Urdu, Gujarati and Portuguese. The meeting attracted two members of the public from minority backgrounds.

A review of the meeting, taking into account the comments of the two members of the public who attended, concluded that further efforts needed to be made to attract people to get involved, and that a much less formal type of meeting was needed. However, it was not possible to carry out further work because of other priorities.

The Council has subsequently, with the LSP, hosted a conference for faith groups serving, or based in, West Lancashire, and supported faith leaders in the district in the development of a Faith Forum. It is hoped that this may provide some engagement with representatives from some of the minority faith groups in West Lancashire.

The Council has carried out some successful work, with partners including the County Council, Police and PCT, to engage with seasonal workers. The majority of these are from Portugal, Russia and Poland, with others also from other European countries. A 'welcome' pack has been produced for distribution via growers to inform the seasonal workers about District and County Council services, Health and Police services. Additionally, the Council will provide translations of this and all other publications into ethnic minority languages on request.

Conclusions: Engaging with people from ethnic minorities in an area such as our own with a small and dispersed population is a challenging area of work. There is no easy solution and it is resource-intensive. It is also a fairly specialist area of work that will benefit from the use of external consultants with experience. The Council has identified funds for a specific project, using specialist consultants.

CONSULTING YOUNG PEOPLE

The following main methods are used to consult and engage with young people:

- The Lancashire County Council Youth Forum, which includes some young people from west Lancashire
- Meeting face-to-face with young people to gather their views on specific leisure initiatives such as the development of play areas and games pitches. The Council's Play Strategy makes explicit the commitment to consult and involve young people in the provision of new facilities.

Young people are also involved in 'Planning for Real' activities as part of consultation on Planning issues. This involves face-to-face meetings with small groups, providing the opportunity for in-depth discussions of ideas and aspirations. Additionally, the Planning & Development Division produce CDROMs for schools to engage young people in discussion on planning issues e.g. concerning the Local Plan.

In addition, the Council involves young people in Local Democracy Week. A Young People's area of the web site has been established and this will be further developed. The Council also actively engages with young people from local schools, colleges and Edge Hill University to encourage entrepreneurship.

The recent review of the LSP and its thematic groups has resulted in a membership place for a young person representative from the Youth Council on the LSP. In addition, a Children and Young People's Thematic Group is to be set up, which is likely to involve young people

Working with Lancashire County Council Youth and Community Service, and other partners, a survey of high school pupils was carried out in summer 2005. The District Council part-funded the project which involved all the high school pupils in the district – more than 8,000 young people. The questions included issues relating to involving young people in decision-making; education; local services including leisure and housing; health; community safety; life style and faith issues. Other partners included the Police, PCT and the voluntary sector. Consultants were engaged to carry out the survey and results were presented to a special youth conference in autumn 2005. As a result, a number of subject-specific youth groups have been established by Youth and Community Service for ongoing consultation.

Conclusions: The summer 2005 survey was the first to involve all high school pupils and the Council's involvement in this multi-agency project was a significant extension to its activities. The survey was successful in gathering the views of a

large number of young people and brought together organisations with expertise and experience in dealing with young people (in particular the Youth and Community Service) with partners in other organisations. To date, other Council activity in involving young people has been successful, but limited; a number of divisions do not currently have a way to engage with young people and have said they would appreciate the provision of a central resource such as a young people's panel or regular surveys.

CO-ORDINATION OF CONSULTATION

Responsibility for corporate consultation has been taken on by the Public Relations Unit within the ACE Division. The unit runs the Citizen's Panel and organises e-consultation via the Listening Shop area of the web site, ensuring that, where appropriate and where resources allow, consultation via the Panel is replicated by other methods. The unit also organised use of the Community Safety Vehicle for mobile consultation and manages the tri-annual Best Value Performance Indicator General User Satisfaction Survey, which is carried out by consultants on behalf of the Council.

Managers' views on the value of providing further co-ordination are mixed. There is some support for the maintenance of a database of consultation, providing a mechanism for staff to find out about the consultation activities carried out by other divisions. There is also some support for the establishment of a corporate consultation group where members of staff from different divisions can share expertise and ideas in order to ensure consistent high standards, and to reduce duplication of effort. The importance of maintaining a strategic overview of consultation has also been acknowledged.

There is strong support for the co-ordination of corporate consultation to include provision of a central resource to consult 'hard-to-reach' groups, particularly people from ethnic minorities. In addition, partners support a co-ordinated approach to consultation through the LSP.

It is generally regarded as 'good practice' in consultation to ensure that feedback is given about the results of consultation to those who take part. This process of feedback is built into the operation of the Citizen's Panel but is not carried out consistently across all other consultation activities.

Conclusions: There is scope for further and better co-ordination of consultation, and the feedback of the results of consultation to those who take part. This will require additional resources, particularly if progress is to be made with a co-ordinated approach to additional consultation initiatives, such as the establishment of a young people's panel, and further work to consult ethnic minorities.

FOCUS GROUPS

The Council has organised Focus Groups on a number of occasions including to gather feedback on publications and the web and to assist with CPA assessment.

Many divisions also arrange meetings with service users, customers and partners which, although not all formally entitled “focus groups”, perform a similar function, enabling people to discuss ideas, policies and aspirations in some depth. Examples include breakfast seminars with people from the business community; a focus group of Planning & Development Division customers which covers all the functions of the division; specialist forums to look at particular issues e.g. licensing.

Some managers thought a corporate focus group involving customers might be useful on occasions to seek views and ideas on specific service initiatives, to engage with people who are not involved in established organisations and who do not regularly attend formal meetings.

Conclusions: The Council does use some focus groups as successful mechanisms for qualitative consultation. There may be scope for further development of work in this area, where resources allow, and this could involve volunteers from the People’s Panel.

DISABLED PEOPLE

Consultation with disabled people who use sports facilities is carried out through the Leisure, Culture and Arts Division. Also, the Planning Division consults the Access Matters group in relation to issues affecting people with disabilities. This group has also been used by other divisions including Human Resources, who are currently leading the development of the corporate Disability Equality Scheme.

The Housing Division is involved in consultation with younger physically disabled people as part of its work with the Primary Care Trust to improve service delivery in line with the new National Service Framework for Physical Disability and Sensory Impairment (PDSI). The Division is working with the County Council’s PDSI service to create a broader consultation structure. This work is now part of the County Council PD Partnership Board.

The Council uses a variety of methods to try to remove barriers and to engage with people with disabilities. These include providing literature in braille and on tape; making loop systems available in meeting rooms and a textcom service is for telephone callers. Wheelchair access is provided to the Council Offices and Chamber, and increasingly to other public buildings.

Analysis of the membership of the People’s Panel shows that approximately 15% have a limiting illness or disability. While this is less than the 2001 Census figure of 24%, it indicates nevertheless that consultation through the Panel is involving a substantial number of people with disabilities. It is not possible to ascertain how many people with disabilities have become involved in other consultation activities.

Conclusions: It is recognised that consultation with people with disabilities is an area in which the Council’s activity could be extended. Further scope is available for analysis of the views of disabled people through the People’s Panel and for further efforts to remove the barriers to involvement and engagement.

OLDER PEOPLE

Around 29% of the population of West Lancs is aged 55 plus and the requirement to consult and engage with this section of the community is increasingly acknowledged as of prime importance. The Council currently uses a variety of methods, including the Citizen's Panel.

The Citizen's Panel provides an effective tool for consultation with older people. Almost 40% of the current membership of the Panel is in the 55+ age group and survey results can be analysed by age-bands to show differences of opinion between age groups.

The Council is part of the Partnership Board for Older People, involving the Primary Care Trust and Lancashire County Council and other voluntary agencies e.g. Age Concern. This also involves the formation of a West Lancashire Older People's Forum which will involve representatives of local groups from across the district, and will provide a mechanism for consulting and engaging with older people. It is expected that these developments will take place during 2005.

Additionally, as part of the former National Service Framework for Older People, the Council has been involved, again with the PCT and Lancs CC, in consulting service users in relation to changes in services for older people.

Conclusions: There is further scope for using the Citizen's Panel to assess the views of older people by detailed analysis of results by age bands. The Older People's Forum, established in partnership with the County Council, will also provide a mechanism for consultation in relation to a range of Council services.

OTHER CONSULTATION ACTIVITY

In addition to the corporate activity, wide-ranging and varied consultation activity is carried out by individual divisions, which use a wide range of approaches to consult service users and other stakeholders. Many divisions have used some of the corporate consultation mechanisms listed above, such as the Citizen's Panel. However, because of the specific nature of the consultation that is required, which means that it has to be targeted on specific groups of service users and stakeholders, a range of other methods are also used. A few examples are:

- Customer satisfaction surveys targeted at the users of particular services
- Use of comments/complaints forms and statistics
- A wide variety of activities including surveys, roadshows and meetings to consult and engage with council tenants, and groups representing tenants, on housing issues
- 'Business Breakfasts', meetings and seminars with businesses, and with representatives of businesses, in relation to issues such as regeneration; planning matters; licensing; business rates.
- The Ormskirk Town Centre Forum, involving shopkeepers and other town-centre businesses.
- Meetings with residents' groups, individual residents and developers regarding planning applications and other planning issues.
- Allowing members of the public to speak at Planning Committee meetings

- Giving presentations and arranging discussions on specific topics at formal meetings e.g. meetings of local community and voluntary groups; parish councils; Vital Villages; Police and Community Forums.
- Meetings with organisations that represent some of the 'hard to reach' groups. For example, leisure staff meet with sports groups involving and representing disabled people and elderly people; planning staff meet the Access Matters group.
- In a recent initiative to engage with communities in Skelmersdale, 12 Community Development trainees were appointed to work closely with local people to develop facilities and services at the Community Resource Centres.
- Consultation with stakeholders involved in mental health services is being carried out by the Housing Division, working with West Lancashire Primary Care Trust, Lancashire Care NHS Trust and Lancashire County Council on the proposed reconfiguration of mental health services in the district.
- Engagement of local residents as part of neighbourhood management arrangements in Tanhouse, Digmoor and Moorside, funded by the Safer, Stronger Communities aspect of the Lancashire Local Area Agreement, including through the use of rapid participatory appraisal.
- The District Council has taken a leading role in taking forward the Market Towns Initiative for Ormskirk and Burscough. Having obtained funding from the NWDA via the Local Strategic Partnership we have set up a Community Partnership, a Steering Group and four groups for each town. These are made up of representatives from residents, voluntary groups, public and private sector organisations. Questionnaires have been sent to all residents, consultation events have been held, work has been carried out with local schools and contact has been made with many voluntary groups. Draft Action Plans are being published for both towns for consultation in winter 2007.

Consultation with 'vulnerable client groups' is being carried out as part of the Supporting People framework, which lists 14 such groups. A Lancashire-wide consultation and communication strategy is being drawn up, led by Lancashire County Council, which will introduce some new arrangements to support existing mechanisms for consulting service users. There is a clear expectation that this will flow through to Local Strategic Partnerships to ensure that consultation is carried out effectively to inform strategies and policies for all the vulnerable client groups.

Face-to-face meetings, formal and informal, with members of the public, businesses and local groups, are regarded by some managers as one of the most important forms of community engagement. There is some concern that the shortage of meeting space at the Council offices is a factor that limits this form of engagement.

Conclusions: there is wide-ranging consultation and engagement activity, and there is scope for improving still further and establishing a more consistent approach, along with wider sharing of expertise and consultation mechanisms. New developments underway as a result of the Supporting People agenda may provide

further opportunities for co-ordination and extension of consultation activity with vulnerable sections of the community that are sometimes regarded as 'hard to reach.' Consultation and engagement with businesses across the district is carried out on an ad-hoc basis and there may be potential for improved co-ordination and possibly a corporate approach to provide a resource that can be used by all divisions through the virtual Business Panel, once it is developed and operational.

CONSULTATION WITH KEY PARTNERS

The Council uses a variety of methods to consult with key partners from the public, private and voluntary sectors including:

- Meetings with individual partners or groups of partners.
- Parish Council liaison arrangements, involving parishes in district-wide issues and in relation to specific initiatives such as Market Towns.
- The Lancashire Local initiative, involving the County Council and District Council with local people in bi-monthly meetings
- Discussions at meetings of the Local Strategic Partnership and its thematic groups
- The Annual Council Meeting as an Assembly, which key partners are invited to attend
- Writing to key partners inviting them to submit their views on proposals, publications, policies and strategies.
- Meetings regarding specific projects e.g. Business Watch; West Lancashire Inspire Decision panel; West Lancashire Business Network; Women Excelling in Business Network; the ICT/New Media Cluster.

The Council is a partner in the "West Lancashire Compact," launched in April 2005 to enhance partnership working between the District Council, NHS organisations and the local voluntary, community and faith sectors (VCFs). The Compact represents one element of developing a comprehensive approach to community consultation and participation in West Lancashire. The Compact includes an undertaking that the Council will consult the VCFs on issues that are likely to affect them (subject to considerations of urgency, sensitivity or confidentiality). Such consultation must be timely and allow reasonable timescales for response, taking into account the need of VCFS organisations to consult their users, beneficiaries and stakeholders. In addition, the Compact commits the Council to develop jointly with the VCFS a code of good practice covering consultation.

Many divisions maintain their own lists of key partners and there is some concern that this involves duplication of effort as well as risk of inconsistency and inaccuracy. There is support from managers for the establishment of a central database which all divisions could use, and assist with updating.

Conclusions: The establishment of a central database of key partners might reduce duplication of effort and assist in ensuring lists are accurate.

FUTURE REQUIREMENTS FOR CONSULTATION

The Council's Community Engagement Commission has already identified that the Council needs to make additional efforts to ensure that it consults and engages with certain demographic groups including people from ethnic minorities; young people; disabled people and older people. Managers also recognise these as priority areas.

Future years are likely to bring increased requirement for consultation, particularly with regard to equality and diversity issues, and licensing. The Council will need to undertake consultation on housing strategy issues, private sector housing renewal and housing needs; the new Housing Bill will require further targeted consultation in relation to private sector housing. Similarly, following the formation of the Leisure Trust, the Council will need to continue to ensure that leisure customers are consulted.

CONCLUSIONS

A wide range of consultation and engagement activity is carried out, both corporately and by individual divisions in relation to service-specific consultation. It is likely that future years will bring increased requirement for consultation. There is scope for improvement and further work in a number of areas, specifically in relation to consultation with 'hard-to-reach' groups. Extension of activity is likely to have resource implications; therefore it will also be important to prioritize the areas for development.

6 Who do we want to consult?

The Council consults and engages with various important groups of people who have an interest in West Lancashire – its stakeholders. These fall into three main categories: residents, partners and businesses.

We recognise that within the local population there are communities with particular requirements, and that the Council needs to ensure that it consults and engages with all sections of the community, removing barriers wherever possible.

- **Residents** – the Council Tax-payers. Around 108,000 people live in West Lancashire; they are all our customers and are important stakeholders. The residents include:
 - ◆ Users and non-users of specific services: It is important to find out the views of customers who use specific services and it is also important to carry out research among people who do not use services, to establish reasons for non-use.
 - ◆ Council tenants: the Council rents out around 7,000 houses, flats and bungalows and must meet specific legislative requirements regarding consultation and engagement with tenants.
 - ◆ Older people: around 29% of the population of West Lancs is aged 55-plus (2001 Census)
 - ◆ Students, including those who live in the district for only part of the year.
 - ◆ Younger people: 23% of the population of West Lancs is aged 1 to 17 (2001 Census)
 - ◆ Disabled people: around 24% of people in West Lancs have a limiting disability (2001 Census).
 - ◆ People from ethnic minorities or faith groups: people from ethnic minorities comprise 1.4% of the population (2001 census). The census figures also show that 0.8% of the local population indicated they belonged to non-Christian religions. Also, the District attracts a large number of seasonal workers from other countries to work in the agricultural industry. The majority of these travel from other European countries and some are of African or Asian origin.

- **Partners:** e.g. parish councils, the voluntary sector, local community organisations, churches, other public organisations such as the Police, PCT, County Council.

- **Businesses** – all companies, large and small, located in West Lancashire along with potential inward investors, and people thinking of setting up in business.

7 How can we reach them?

There is no one method of consultation and engagement which is suitable for all purposes or for reaching all sections of the community. Every consultation mechanism has advantages and disadvantages, strengths and weaknesses. The Council must therefore continue to utilise a range of mechanisms, whilst ensuring that each of those mechanisms is used to greatest effect and is operated to the highest standards. It is important to choose the appropriate range of mechanisms for each consultation exercise, and to note the distinction between quantitative and quantitative research methodologies.

Quantitative research involves large numbers of people and is designed to reflect the views of the group as a whole and to find out e.g. what proportion of people holds a particular view. Generally, this involves structured questionnaires with 'tick box' responses, like the Citizen's Panel surveys. For some areas, e.g. housing, more detailed specialist quantitative work is require to assess defined local needs, such as housing demand, at parish council level.

Qualitative research gives the opportunity to give views in some depth, and in some cases can enable people to participate in decision-making. Examples include the Council Meeting as an Assembly; focus groups; public participation at Planning Committee; responses to feedback forms on council leaflets; letters to the Council, perhaps in response to media articles, setting out the views of an individual or an organisation. Care must be taken with regard to the weight attached to the views gathered through qualitative research methods such as focus groups as these involve small numbers of people and are not statistically representative, particularly when compared with, for example, the citizen's panel.

As demonstrated by the review of previous consultation and community engagement activity (Section 5 and Appendix A) a wide range of mechanisms are regularly and successfully used by the Council.

The chart overleaf summarises the methods currently used to consult and engage with the target stakeholder groups identified in section 6. It indicates that there are areas where improvements could be made.

8

Methods currently used

Methods	Citizen's Panel	Council Meeting as an Assembly	Surveys	E-consultation	Mobile consultation	Focus Groups	Meetings and seminars	Formal invitations to comment in writing	Local Strategic Partnership	Via media/ Council publications
Stakeholder groups										
Residents										
• <i>General</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓
• <i>Users and non-users of specific services</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓			✓
• <i>Tenants</i>			✓		✓		✓			✓
• <i>Older people</i>	✓								✓	✓
• <i>Students</i>	✓									✓
• <i>Young people</i>			✓				✓		✓	
• <i>Disabled people</i>	✓						✓		✓	✓
• <i>People from ethnic minorities / faith groups</i>									✓	
Partners (including community & voluntary organisations, churches, parish councils, public sector)		✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	
Businesses		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

9 Consultation objectives

Taking into account the stakeholder groups we wish to consult and engage with, and the mechanisms that are available, a number of general objectives can be set in order to ensure that the Council's activities contribute to the achievement of its vision and priorities, and meet the requirements of legislation and Government guidance.

Objectives:

- Ensure that the Council consults and engages with all sections of the community including residents in all areas of the district, people of all ages and ethnic backgrounds and people with disabilities
- Ensure that the Council consults and engages effectively with key partners from the public, private and voluntary sectors
- Ensure that the Council consults and engages with businesses in West Lancashire
- Improve and extend e-consultation via the Council's website
- Improve co-ordination of consultation across the Council and the District as a whole
- Ensure that the results of consultation are fed back to those who have been involved, are publicised widely, and are fully used by the Council to inform the decision-making processes.

Analysis of the legislative requirements surrounding consultation, the findings of inspectors, and the review of activities, has shown that the Council already successfully consults and engages widely.

However, there are areas where improvements can be made in order to address the areas highlighted by inspectors in relation to ensuring we engage with all sections of the community, and feed back the results of consultation to those who took part.

The action plans on the following pages focus on these areas, and set out recommendations for new initiatives to meet the set objectives.

10

Action plan - residents

Objective: Ensure that the Council consults and engages with all sections of the community including residents in all areas of the district, people of all ages and ethnic backgrounds and people with disabilities			
<i>Target</i>	<i>Method to be used and actions required</i>	<i>Div</i>	<i>Targets & timescales</i>
Residents - general	Focus Groups Invite Citizen's Panel members to form focus groups as appropriate for specific consultation exercises e.g. in relation to Council website; Council publications; customer access	ACE/ divs	Hold a minimum of one focus group each year
	Citizens' Jury Trial use of a Citizens' Jury for appropriate consultation exercise, possibly as part of Overview and Scrutiny Committee work	CSS ACE	One trial in 2007/08 if appropriate followed by review
	Surveys Where appropriate, carry out specific surveys (by post, telephone or face-to-face) to gather data relating to the use and non-use of services	All divs	As appropriate
Older people	E-Consultation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further development of web pages for older people incorporating on-line forms to maximise interactivity • Publicise web site to older people to attract more users from this age group and work in partnership with other agencies e.g. U3A to maximise e-usage 	ACE	March 2008 March 2008
	Focus Groups Use focus groups to carry out qualitative research among older people, possibly using People's Panel members	ACE/ divs	As appropriate

	<p>Meetings and seminars Maximise opportunities to consult and engage with older people through the work of the Partnership Board for Older People.</p>	EMHS/ Divs	Ongoing
	<p>Utilise the West Lancashire Older People's Forum for consultation following its establishment by the Partnership Board</p>	EMHS/ Divs	March 2008
	<p>Recruit older people's representatives onto the LSP Forum</p>	ACE	Completed
Students	<p>Investigate with Edge Hill opportunities to consult and engage with students</p>	ACE	March 2009
Young People	<p>Citizen's Panel Consider establishing a Young People's Panel in partnership with Lancashire County Council to provide a regular and reliable tool for quantitative research</p>	ACE	Review by March 2008
	<p>Surveys With partners, consider repeat of the survey of high school pupils carried out summer 2005, if resources are available.</p>	EMCS/ ACE	Consider 2007/08
	<p>Focus Groups Use focus groups as appropriate to gather young people's views in relation to specific issues</p>	All divs	Ongoing
	<p>Ensure Youth Council representation on LSP is maintained. Establish Children and Young People's Thematic Group involving young people.</p>	ACE	March 2008

Disabled People	Citizen's Panel: Monitor Panel membership in relation to the proportion of members with disabilities.	ACE	Annual monitoring
	LSP Recruit representatives of the Learning Disability, Physical Disability and Mental Health Partnership Boards to the LSP Forum	ACE	Completed/ongoing
People from ethnic minorities & faith groups	Focus Groups Seek a partnership approach to engage consultants to carry out consultation and establish a group involving local residents which the Council can use for future consultation	ACE	By March 2008

11

Action plan - Partners

Objective: Ensure that the Council consults and engages effectively with key partners from the public, private and voluntary sectors		
<i>Method to be used and actions required</i>	<i>Div.</i>	<i>Targets & timescales</i>
Council Meeting as an Assembly, meetings; Establish central corporate database of key partners, for use by all divisions	ACE	March 2008 Annual update.
E-consultation Provide web versions of all documents on which partners are invited to comment, along with interactive forms.	All divs	By March 2008
Formal invitations to comment Ensure partners are given sufficient time to comment (a minimum of 8 weeks wherever possible); that they understand what is expected of them in terms of providing a response, and what use will be made of their contribution; provide feedback and share results. Work with partners in the West Lancashire Compact to develop jointly with the voluntary, community and faith sectors a code of good practice covering consultation.	All divs ACE	By March 2008 By March 2009
Parish Liaison Implement the new arrangements for working with Parish Councils as set out in the Parish Charter.	All divs	As set out in the Charter

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Action plan - Businesses

Objective: Ensure that the Council consults and engages with businesses in West Lancashire		
<i>Method to be used and actions required</i>	<i>Div.</i>	<i>Targets & timescales</i>
Council Meeting as an Assembly: Ensure that key partners from the business community are invited to the annual meeting as an assembly. Monitor attendance and involvement	CSS	One meeting per year – annual review
E-consultation Provide web versions of all documents and issues on which businesses are invited to comment Develop business pages on website to incorporate information on new projects, such as Creative Industries Work with Lancashire Economic Partnership to develop further the Inward Investment website Develop and implement a Virtual Business Panel	All divs Regen & Estates Regen & Estates Regen & Estates	By March 2008 By March 2008 By March 2008 By March 2008
Formal invitations to comment in writing Ensure businesses are given sufficient time to comment (a minimum of 8 weeks wherever possible); that they understand what is expected of them and what use will be made of their contribution; provide feedback and share results	All divs	By March 2008
Local Strategic Partnership Extend involvement of local businesses	ACE/ Regen & Estates	By March 2008
Focus Groups Set up new focus/cluster groups e.g. womens' networks	Prop & Reg	By March 2009

13 Action plan: further improvements

Objectives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve and extend e-consultation via the Council's website • Improve co-ordination of consultation across the Council and the District as a whole • Ensure that the results of consultation are fed back to those who have been involved, are publicised widely, and are fully used by the Council to inform the decision-making processes. 		
E-consultation 1. Enable Citizens Panel members to complete forms online 2. Implement improvements identified in Web Improvement Plan in addition to the specific actions identified in the Residents, Partners and Business Action Plans in this strategy 3. Trial a 'consultation calendar' setting out future plans for significant consultation exercises, on website	ACE and Divs ACE ACE	Complete Targets set out in Web Improvement Plan Trial calendar in place by April 2008
Improving co-ordination Establish corporate consultation group to share expertise and improve co-ordination Benchmark consultation activity with other similar councils Explore opportunities for joint working with other organisations Explore opportunities for developing the role of elected members around engaging local communities and parish councils	ACE/all divs ACE ACE ACE & CSS	First meeting by March 08 Agree format for benchmarking by March 2009 By March 2008 March 2009
Feedback of results Ensure results of consultation are fed back to those involved and are publicised, where appropriate, via media. Produce a publicity plan to ensure messages are communicated to the public about the range of consultation activity undertaken by the Council; the results; and the use made of the information gathered	All divs ACE	By March 2008 By Dec 2007

Focus Groups Establish clear terms of reference including review dates for all groups established	All divs	Oct 2007 onwards
Training Ensure staff have access to appropriate training on consultation and partnership working as part of the corporate training plan	HRM	By March 2008

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Measuring success

The Council has collected performance indicator information in relation to its consultation and community engagement activity since 2001/02, when a People’s Panel survey was carried out to collect baseline figures for local people’s satisfaction with being listened to, and being involved in decision-making.

The Council has set further challenging targets and will continue to monitor performance.

Performance Indicator	01/02	03/04 & 04/05	05/06	06/07	Target 07/08	Target 08/09	Target 09/10
Satisfaction with being listened to	26.6% 2001/02	47% 2003/04	40.6% 05/06	43.7%	45%	47%	50%
Satisfaction with being involved in decision-making	32.1% 2001/02	56.2% 2003/04	46.2% 05/06	50.3% (07/08)	50%	53%	60%
Response rates to People’s Panel surveys	N/A	75% 04/05	83.9% 05/06	79%	80%	80%	80%
E-consultation exercises per year	N/A	4 (04/05)	12 05/06	12	15	20	25

(The first three indicators are measured through the People’s Panel West Lancashire).

Implementation of the strategy will be monitored on an annual basis and will be reported to council members. The strategy will be reviewed every three years.

Appendix A Snapshot of activity (2004/05)

Through the People's Panel -

- Survey 4: end of May 04: Community Strategy; Golf course; General Leisure inc parks ; Licensing
- Survey 5: September 2004: Community Safety; Budget; Planning; Freedom of Information
- Survey 6: December 04: Services first – priorities ; Countryside ; Contacting the Council ; CPA; Refuse Collection
- Survey 7: February 05: Community Strategy

Community Services

Leisure, Culture & Arts

- Consultation with local residents about play area in Westhead.
- Consultation with local residents about play provision in Scott Estate, Ormskirk.
- Consultation with local residents about play area in Appley Bridge, UpHolland.
- Consultation with local residents about play provision in Richmond Park, Burscough.
- Consultation with local residents about play provision in Coronation Park, Ormskirk.
- Consultation with local residents about play area in Inglewhite, Skelmersdale.
- Current Youth Consultation, for young people of the District.
- Consultation with residents about Physical Activity Strategy Action Plan.
- Community Resource Centre Promotional day questionnaires.
- Kite & Outdoor Festival Event Questionnaire. (Beacon County Park)
- GreenFayre Event Questionnaire. (Beacon Country Park).
- Consultation with residents on proposed boating lake in Ormskirk.
- Consultation with local residents on Abbey Lakes Heritage Project.
- Consultation with user groups for Beacon Park Management Plan.
- Consultation with local residents on proposed Quality Access Routes in Skelmersdale.
- Consultation with local residents on Thurston Community Garden Project. (Through Groundwork).
- Consultation with local residents on Coronation Park Nursery. (Ongoing through Groundwork).
- Customer Comments forms on all Leisure Buildings.
- Customer Comments forms at the Chapel Gallery.
- User Feedback forms for Sports Development Projects

Environmental Health

Customer Satisfaction surveys are undertaken in relation to all aspects of Environmental Health services. A similar survey is undertaken with 100% of the premises for which we issue an authorisation or permit (25 in total)

Community Safety

Best Value Review consultation Challenge Day

Best Value Review consultation event at Tarleton for Parish Councils

Police and Community Forums in Skelmersdale, Tarleton, Halsall and Scarisbrick
Web based consultation for the Crime and Disorder Audit and Community Safety Strategy.

Media publicity in local papers for audit and strategy documents.

Up Holland Vital Villages community safety group meeting-general issues

Public meeting with Old Skelmersdale residents group regarding underpasses.

Public meeting with residents from Upholland - general issues and play area.

Assistant Chief Executive's Division

- Customer Contact Challenge Day as part of the Best Value Review. It involved a mix of partners and officers as part of this review.
- Face to face consultation with Parish Councils on ways of improving partnership work and communications with the Council.
- Consultation with Parish Councils on corporate priorities - a letter.
- Consultation with LSP members on new arrangements for the LSP - consultation document and questionnaire.

Legal and Member Services

Consultation in relation to statutory procedures e.g. for parking/footpath orders or stopping up of the highway.

Housing:

- Housing Needs Survey - 12,075 sent to households across the District, and used as primary research to inform the Housing Needs surveys findings.
- Reclassification of sheltered housing - one to one consultation with independent consultants regarding proposals to declassify some Category I sheltered schemes.
- Reclassification of sheltered housing - following Cabinet approval to reclassify to general needs (40 plus) ongoing one to one consultation with residents to establish support needs to stay / request to move i.e. implement reclassification schedule.
- LSVT, including consultation at Category II schemes.
- Private sector stock condition survey
- Status survey

Planning & Development

- West Lancashire Replacement Local Plan Re-Deposit Draft and Proposed Changes and Omission Sites.
- Seasonal Agricultural Workers' Accommodation Supplementary Planning Guidance