

# MALVERN HILLS DISTRICT COUNCIL

## COMMUNICATION AND CONSULTATION POLICY AND STRATEGY

### 1. Policy Statement

- 1.1 The District Council believes that effective internal and external communication and consultation is vital to achieving its purpose, vision and main objectives for 2003 – 2007. Indeed one of its four main objectives is 'to develop and promote effective community engagement and involvement'. In addition, the Council's constitution states that that the Council will 'support the active involvement of citizens in the process of local authority decision making'.
- 1.2 Another of the Council's four main objectives is 'to maintain a committed, motivated, safe and healthy workforce with the necessary skills to achieve the Council's objectives'. The Council recognises that effective communication and consultation is central to achieving that objective.
- 1.3 The Council also believes that effective communication and consultation is crucial to achieving its commitment to delivering quality and improving local services and its desire to increase voter turnout at elections.
- 1.4 The Council recognises and accepts its statutory duties in relation to communication and consultation which apply both at a corporate level ( e.g. Best Value, Community Planning, E: Government) and at service level. Specific statutory consultation exercises will be tailored, where possible, to achieve the maximum benefit for the Council.
- 1.5 The Council understands the importance of effective internal and external communication and consultation to delivering both the implementation of the Government's modernisation agenda and its own change and improvement programme.
- 1.6 The Council considers that effective communication and consultation with all Elected Members is crucial to the effective engagement of local people, communities and organisations
- 1.7 The Council will ensure that this policy and strategy fully supports the Council's 2002 Vision for e-government which includes a commitment to achieving 'active and involved citizens through using technology to support decision making, consultation and democracy by 2006. A specific e-participation strategy will be developed.
- 1.8 The Council will also ensure that this policy and strategy fully supports the Council's Customer Service Strategy.
- 1.9 The Council recognises the important role of the media and will maintain effective working relations with them as well as maximising the opportunities as a vehicle to achieve the improvements sought in communication and consultation.
- 1.10 The Council agreed eleven priority objectives, together with associated targets, in September 2002 for 2003 – 2007. Two of these directly reflect the Council's commitment to improving internal and external communication and consultation, namely:
  - to increase the number of residents who feel well informed about and involved in the working of the Council;
  - to improve the communication and consultation with employees.

- 1.11 As part of the Council's Performance Management Framework, priority plans and associated targets are being developed for the above two priority objectives and these plans will be based on this policy and strategy and drive the improvements sought in communications and consultation. The priority plans and associated targets will be reviewed annually.
- 1.12 The Council wishes to achieve the following results in relation to communication and consultation by the end of March 2007:
- > Increase the number of residents who feel well informed about the Council's services, current policies and future plans over the plan period.
  - > Increase the number of residents who feel that the Council takes notice of its resident's views over the plan period.
  - > Increase the number of residents who feel that the Council is good or excellent at involving the public in the decision making process.
  - > Increase the number of Councillors who feel well informed about the Council's services, current policies and future plans over the plan period.
  - > An Older Persons Forum is operating effectively, as measured by its objectives, by the end of the plan period.
  - > A Customer Panel is operating effectively, as measured by its objectives, by the end of plan period
  - > A Community Forum is operating effectively, as measured by its objectives, in the Northern Area and Malvern Area of the District.
  - > A Citizens Panel for 18-30 year olds is operating effectively, as measured by its objectives, by the end of the plan period.
  - > Increase employee satisfaction with communication and consultation year on year over the plan period.
  - > Increase the number of employees who feel well informed about the Council's current policies and future plans year on year over the plan period.
- 1.13 The Council will ensure that an inclusive approach is taken to communication and consultation. This will provide all the community, all Members and all employees appropriate opportunities to participate in consultation arrangements and ensure information reaches all intended audiences.
- 1.14 The Council will be proactive in seeking opportunities for joint external communication and consultation with partner organisations.
- 1.15 The Council will be proactive in seeking opportunities for joint external communication and consultation with partner organisations.
- 1.16 The Executive Committee will receive quarterly progress reports on the implementation of the policy and strategy by the Assistant Chief Executive.
- 1.17 The Council will receive annual progress and review reports on the policy and strategy by the Assistant Chief Executive and the policy and strategy itself will be reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee no later than Autumn 2006.

## **2. The Strategy**

### **2.1 Communication and Consultation with local people and organisations**

- 2.1.1 The Council will ensure a consistent, corporate, plain language and user - friendly approach to all Council information via the local media, publications and web – site.
- 2.1.2 Members will be kept well informed in order that they can inform others effectively and ways of improving consultation in wards by Members will be piloted.
- 2.1.3 The Council will identify those issues upon which it wishes to consult prior to the decision being taken.
- 2.1.4 The Council will encourage feedback from and seek to engage with and involve local people and organisations via the local media, reply slips on publications, the web – site, regular community forums, a customer panel, market research and surveys and a new comments, compliments and complaints procedure.
- 2.1.5 The annual visits to businesses and the annual business survey will be continued as will the Joint Councillors Area Forums. Feedback will be sought from Town and Parish Councils and local organisations via an annual survey. Maximum use will be made of other forums e.g. Housing Forum, Economic Forum for communication and consultation purposes.
- 2.1.6 The Council will make particular efforts to communicate and consult with the under 30's age group, the black and ethnic minority community, gay and lesbian community and disabled people.
- 2.1.7 District Councillors will be asked to feedback the views of Town and Parish Councils to Council in a more structured way.
- 2.1.8 The Council will examine ways of encouraging greater voter turnout at elections.
- 2.1.9 The Council will actively promote its 'Public Participation' scheme.

### **2.2 Communication and consultation with Members**

- 2.2.1 Officers will ensure that members are kept up – to – date in relation to all strategic and appropriate operational issues via correspondence, reports, Council's intranet, email and the Members briefing note. In particular officers will inform Members of current significant issues affecting their Ward.
- 2.2.2 Ward based information on quality of life issues will be developed using the data produced as part of the community planning process as a basis.
- 2.2.4 Members will be supported to review and improve ward-based communication and consultation.
- 2.2.5 The Members Information Network will continue to be supported and the Community Planning Open Forum will be broadened to a Corporate Issues Open Forum.
- 2.2.6 Officers will feedback the results of consultation to Members.
- 2.2.7 Members will be actively involved in the development of Council policies and strategies; in particular the development and review of priority plans and management plans as part of the Council's Performance Management Framework.

## **2.3 Communication and consultation with employees**

- 2.3.1 The Council will ensure that all employees are kept well informed via the employee newsletter, corporate and team briefings, the Council's intranet and a new corporate briefing publication.
- 2.3.2 The Council will encourage feedback from and engage with and involve all employees via consultation papers, focus groups, use of the Council's intranet, e: mail and employee satisfaction and attitude surveys.
- 2.3.3 All employees will be actively involved in the development and review of management plans as part of the Council's Performance Management Framework.
- 2.3.4 All managers will operate an open door policy and encourage two – way dialogue.

## **2.4 Working with partners**

- 2.4.1 The Council will proactively seek opportunities for joint communication and consultation with relevant partners.
- 2.4.2 The Council will establish a two-way information exchange process with relevant partners. The purpose of the exchange will be to keep each other well informed of objectives, priorities and current issues.

## **2.5 A corporate and co-ordinated approach**

- 2.5.1 The Council will ensure that a corporate and co-ordinated approach is taken to internal and external communication and consultation via the Strategic Management Team and the Corporate Operational management Team. Plans for communication and consultation will be widely shared and opportunities for a co-ordinated approach identified.
- 2.5.2 Any recommendations arising from best value reviews in relation to internal and external communication and consultation will be incorporated into the policy and strategy.
- 2.5.3 A six – monthly ' Learning from Consultation ' forum will be established to ensure that results from internal and external communication and consultation are widely shared and considered.
- 2.5.4 The results of all internal and external consultation will be published on the Council's web – site or intranet or both as appropriate.

## **2.6 Training and Development**

- 2.6.1 The Council will ensure that managers and appropriate employees have the relevant knowledge and skills to plan and implement effective internal and external communication and consultation.
- 2.6.2 A number of managers and employees will be trained to conduct specific consultation exercise e.g. community meetings, designing and conducting written and face to face surveys.

Author and Owner of Policy and Strategy: Stephen Leese, Assistant Chief Executive.

November 2002.