

Proposals from Consultations Review by Councillor Pavlos Kotsonis and Councillor Carole McCulloch

This report provides a broad overview of how consultations are carried out by Nottingham City Council, including limitations and areas for improvement with the current model of operations, finishing with proposals for recommendations for the Committee to consider. If the proposals are recommended by the Committee, a written response to them will be requested from the Portfolio Holder for Communities.

Reviewing Consultations

Consultations are carried out using a system called SNAP. It is a paperless system used to create online and PDF versions of questionnaires, and there are approximately 27 Council employees who are trained in using this system. The authority is currently moving away from using Survey Monkey because of issues in respect to compliance with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Most of the consultations undertaken by the Council can be found on the Engage Hub webpage and are open to the public. Consultations are also taken in paper form, and translations to questionnaires are provided on request for those who don't speak English as their first language. Consultations in respect of Planning Applications and Traffic matters are listed separately on the respective webpages.

Consultations are carried out in accordance with The Gunning Principles:

- (1) deciding when to have a consultation - when a decision is at a formative level, i.e. when proposals are still not implemented and decisions not yet taken;
- (2) making decisions on what is an adequate timeframe for the consultation (on average taking 4-6 weeks depending on the type of consultation);
- (3) deciding on the amount of detail in order for residents to be able to understand the questions;
- (4) ensuring that consultation responses are considered and that there is sufficient feedback (a "You Said, We Did" system).

For large scale projects or those for judicial review the Research, Engagement and Consultations (REC) Team is available to offer advice on how to run effective consultations. The REC consists of two members of staff, Shelley Harrod and Jon Rea who are able to advise relevant colleagues in all departments on their consultation proposals.

Issues with regards to consultations include:

- (1) the sample that is taken in consultations is usually not representative, in the sense that consultations are self-selective. Hence there will always be people who don't wish to participate in the consultation. Furthermore, due to funding, incentives can't be offered to encourage participants to complete consultations like private companies often do;
- (2) face to face engagement or focus groups is limited due to resources, but is still used when necessary;
- (3) there is no way to be 100% sure if The Gunning Principles are always followed effectively by departments;
- (4) there isn't an effective feedback loop to be able to establish a "You Said, We Did" process; this needs to be supported by managers and proper links need to be established.

Recommendations

After concluding the evidence gathering, propose that the Committee make the following recommendations:

- (1) the expertise of the REC is utilised and advice taken into account for all large scale consultations carried out by the authority (not business as usual consultations such as planning, parking and traffic);
- (2) the REC develop uniform standards and guidance for consultations for all relevant colleagues to use;
- (3) feedback of decisions taken after consultations should be included on the Engage Hub, and any other webpages where consultation has taken place, to ensure that there is a proper "You Said, We Did" process. This will make it easier to understand why a decision has been taken even if some consultation responses were against the proposals;
- (4) the Engage Hub should also sit in a more prominent location on the Nottingham City Council website, as difficulty finding it reduces the number of citizens undertaking consultations;
- (5) the Engage Hub should include links to other webpages that include consultations, e.g. planning, parking and traffic;
- (6) to ensure operational efficiency, there should be a council wide review of the per annum spending on consultations with details for spending for all departments. The review should cover, amongst other spending, the money spent by departments on external bodies such as consultancies and other private entities with purpose to undertake consultations on their behalf.