

Briefing note for Corporate Overview and Scrutiny, 5th March 2024

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1. Continuous improvement of public consultation processes

The Research, Engagement & Consultation Team is committed to continuous improvement of public consultation processes, to a) ensure the council meets its statutory and Common law duties to consult, in line with the Gunning Principles and for the avoidance of judicial review or other challenge; and b) enable city residents and partners to share their views, experiences and ideas for change freely, to help inform the development of strategies, plans and service transformation.

The current financial and governance conditions mean that there are significant challenges to the delivery of all public consultation activity, concerning all aspects of the process: planning and design, communication, engagement, survey distribution and completion, data collation and analysis, reporting and feedback. Nevertheless, we are committed to continually improve all these aspects, and to working creatively to achieve low and no-cost solutions wherever possible.

2. Lessons learned from the 2024-25 Budget Consultation

Learning from large-scale public consultations conducted by this and other councils is an important and instructive part of the improvement process, through which we seek to improve the way we engage, facilitate and empower people so that their voices can be heard and impact on decision-making.

The REC Team is currently undertaking a survey with officers involved in the 2024/25 budget consultation process, to identify what worked well and what could be improved. This data will be reflected on, and the insight developed will inform the planning and delivery of the 2025/26 budget consultation, as well as other consultations and survey undertaken by the authority.

Some key challenges going forward that we have already identified include:

- Improved forward planning and design work earlier in the financial year with key internal partners (including Finance, Legal, Comms, HR); and early engagement of audiences including stakeholder partners and citizens
- Providing equal access to the survey for all citizens, including those without or unable to access digital media, while reducing costs through greater digitalisation of services
- Simplifying wherever possible the language and style of consultations, without losing important detail and ensuring the public is properly informed and able to share their views in such a way as they will help us develop insight; and using AI tools to facilitate translation and simplification, both in the content we create and for the respondent
- Communicating effectively with diverse audiences across multiple channels, including digital and traditional media audiences, to ensure greatest possible reach and encourage engagement from diverse range of citizens and communities
- Working with both internal and external partners to increase awareness of consultations and facilitate participation
- Engaging and encouraging more young people to take part in the survey
- Ensuring respondents feel confident that data they share with us is safe and treated in accordance with GDPR regulations

These challenges and their solutions will be included in the findings report that follows our improvement survey, and this will be used to help steer the 2025/26 budget consultation plan.

3. Second stage consultation for the 2024/25 budget consultation

Following on from the main budget consultation, a number of second-stage consultation activities are now taking place or are planned for the near future. These include consultations on the adult social care provision (Jackdawe and Barkla Close), review of library services and community centres, green space reviews and parking charges.

While there will be no substantive change to our current consultation process, we will take the opportunity to address access and inclusion concerns arising from the budget consultation to ensure there is the widest possible access. This is particularly relevant to the library and community centres as these provide both a physical as well as digital space for engagement and will therefore have an important role to play in enabling a wide range of library users to have their say on the review proposals.

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