RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL CONSULTATION STRATEGY 2005 - 2008

JUNE 2007

"…it is important to improve the quality of consultation rather than the quantity of consultation and to have a clear and robust strategy to this end."

"…a process of dialogue (i.e. two way) that leads to a decision. It can be a powerful tool for improving the quality and cost effectiveness of services and for ensuring that policy makers stay in touch with the citizens." [1]

[1] The Audit Commission

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 In 2000 the Council agreed its first Consultation Strategy, which outlined the Council's approach to consultation. The strategy was last reviewed in March 2005. This revised strategy emphasises the importance of consultation and also helps to inform the Council's Communication Strategy.

1.2 The Audit Commission defines consultation as:

> *"A process of dialogue (i.e. two-way) that leads to a decision. It can be a powerful tool for improving the quality and cost effectiveness of services and for ensuring that policy makers stay in touch with the citizens."*

1.3 The two-way process reflects the importance of reporting back the results of consultation. The most important part of consultation is that local people have the opportunity to express their views, and have those views considered, in advance of decisions being made.

Requirements

1.4 The new Comprehensive Performance Assessment 2005/08 stresses the need to take customers' views into account in the way services are delivered. This point was reinforced in the Local Government White Paper, Strong and Prosperous Communities (October 2006), which stated:

1.5 *"…authorities will be required to take steps, where appropriate, to ensure the participation of local citizens in their activities. In doing this, authorities will need to give consideration to engaging with hard to reach groups such as disabled persons. Authorities will be required to take steps to ensure participation by other key bodies, such as voluntary or community groups and local businesses."*

1.6 Ribble Valley Borough Council now consults more than ever at corporate and service levels as we strive to improve our services.

1.7 In 2003/04 the Council and the Audit Commission, as part of Comprehensive Performance Assessment, looked at the Council's consultation mechanisms. Emphasis was placed on the importance of consultation and many suggestions for improvement have helped inform this strategy. The principal conclusion was:

> *"The Council undertakes a variety of consultation activity with local people, parish and town councils, key partners and councillors, but it is not systematic in the way it approaches consultation or how it uses the findings to inform its priorities. In formulating its priorities, the Council has drawn on a wide range of information sources. However, some of this information… is not up to date. The Council has recognised this and has identified the need to review its arrangements for engaging with the local community as an issue to tackle within its improvement plan .The Council has also attempted to engage with 'hard to reach' groups, such as homeless people and young people. … attempts to*

consult and engage with 'hard to reach' communities have met with limited success."[2]

1.8 Community Leadership requires the Council to redefine its role, to develop a shared vision for the community and to ensure that its decision-making processes allow all groups in the community to be heard. This Consultation Strategy is central to effective Community Leadership and Engagement.

2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STRATEGY

2.1 This Consultation Strategy provides a framework for all consultation carried out by the Council, as well as establishing the processes by which it will be managed and evaluated. A companion 'document', the on-line interactive Consultation Toolkit, has been developed. This contains advice on some of the methods that can be used and guidelines for those carrying out consultation.

2.2 Detailed below are the objectives of the strategy. They will be reviewed annually.

I. Implement a Consultation Programme for the organisation

II. Re-launch the Consultation Strategy in order to promote and publicise its use

III. Promote the systems that have already been developed to ensure the efficient co-ordination, management and evaluation of consultation – The online 'Consultation Diary'

IV. Provide support and advice to officers involved in consultation

V. Provide a training programme on consultation, research methods and SNAP survey software for officers

VI. Ensure that consultation is carried out effectively and that the requirements placed on the Council arising from Best Value legislation are fulfilled

VII. Identify and address (through research and consultation) the key strategic information needs of the organisation

VIII. Develop a central 'resource' where officers and members can access the results of consultation carried out within the organisation, as well as copies of the questionnaires and other materials used - the online 'Consultation Diary'

IX. Ensure that the results of consultation and research are effectively used

X. Ensure that the results of consultations are publicised and that feedback is given, both internally and externally

XI. Examine the role that the Internet and the Council's website can play in consultation

[2] The Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment Report – May 2004

3 IMPORTANCE OF CONSULTATION

Community Leadership and Consultation

3.1 The active involvement of local people in decision-making is important to this Council.

3.2 To do this, we need to:

- have an outward focus - continue to develop policies and services that meet the needs and wishes of local people
- be open in style - an approach which encourages and seeks the participation of local people in decision making
- move beyond the management of in-house delivery to examine and tackle the wider issues affecting the community

3.3 In addition we will:

- identify needs and select priorities
- work in partnership with other organisations and stakeholders
- provide visible leadership to complex problems

3.4 Good community planning helps us embrace this leadership role by identifying the major issues facing the community and forging alliances with local people, interest groups and key organisations to tackle them.

3.5 The Ribble Valley Community Strategy:

- develops a vision for the Community
- allows local communities to articulate their aspirations, needs and priorities
- provides a focus for partnerships

3.6 Consultation ensures that the Community Strategy delivers, with our partners:

- a shared assessment of immediate and future needs and aspirations
- a shared vision for the Borough
- an agreed set of activities
- partnership to achieve effective implementation

3.7 However, the process by which the Community Strategy is developed and implemented is as important as the outcomes it secures. Community Leadership is a team effort, with the Council working alongside other public, business and voluntary sector organisations to pool resources and develop ‘joined-up’ solutions that meet community needs.

3.8 The Council will, in partnership with others, champion the best interests of the

Borough, remaining alert to opportunities that will improve the well being of its citizens, protect their environment and respect their heritage. It welcomes, encourages and values public participation in its activities and will inform, advise and listen carefully to people in developing its key strategies, policies and programmes.

3.9 Through consultation, and more informed decision-making, the Council will achieve its ambitions:

- To make people's lives SAFER AND HEALTHIER
- To PROTECT AND ENHANCE the existing ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY of our area
- To MATCH the SUPPLY OF HOMES in our area with the IDENTIFIED HOUSING NEEDS

3.10 The Council welcomes, encourages and values public participation in its activities and will inform, advise and listen carefully to people whilst developing our key strategies, policies and programmes. It believes that equality of opportunity, access and fairness should underpin all its activities. The Council has recently adopted a Disability Equality Scheme which ensures that all of our services are accessible to people of all abilities.

Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA)

3.11 Consultation guidance from the Audit Commission on the next round of CPA refers to the corporate assessment methodology, which has been strengthened to measure how well local councils understand their local communities, and how this understanding translates into ambitions and priorities for communities.

3.12 This reflects the Government's modernisation agenda and the new role for local authorities as community leaders.

3.13 The Audit Commission is proposing to develop an annual performance assessment for district councils covering their major service areas. The service assessments will take a stronger user focus, taking account of the quality of direct service delivery to the customer. Assessments will focus on current performance in the service area rather than on improvement. The following principles regarding community engagement and consultation have been agreed by the Audit Commission, and together they form the greater part of the way future assessments will be constructed:

- inspections should take account of, and report on, the views of users and of particular communities, including those groups of users who may be hard to reach
- inspections should examine the processes and models that are in place for understanding the service users and communities, and for gathering service users' views, and judge whether those processes are effective and appropriate

- inspections should make use of any valid, existing information from recent consultations with individuals, communities or groups carried out within or by the inspected body
- if inspectors judge that insufficient information on users' or particular communities' views is available, inspections should incorporate arrangements to gain those views where appropriate
- inspections should examine whether the outputs of local consultation and other user feedback, for example, complaints, influence decision making about how services can be improved and whether they result in appropriate changes to service delivery

Best Value: Statutory Duties

3.14 The Council already has statutory duties to consult on some issues. The Best Value regime placed a duty on the Council to consult about its services. The directive on Best Value Performance Indicators contains a series of satisfaction indicators which require local authorities to research local views about their services. This strategy addresses these legal requirements. The Council is required to conduct Best Value surveys every three years, with our last set of surveys taking place in 2006.

3.15 In addition, successful consultation programmes both improve and support decision-making processes as:

- services can be targeted more closely by providing people what they want and need
- user satisfaction can be monitored over time, providing useful benchmarks for assessing the quality of services
- problems arising from changes to services can be pinpointed in advance
- the results of consultation can be used to inform decisions about policies and priorities
- local people can be involved more in decision-making, rejuvenating the local community and the democratic process
- we can strengthen our role in Community Leadership

3.16 A key objective of this process is to allow people to have greater influence over the decisions which affect them.

3.17 This strategy and the accompanying 'Consultation Toolkit' are intended to improve the quality of the Council's consultations, and to open up its decision-making to as wide a range of people and organisations as possible.

4 MAKING CONSULTATION WORK - THE CORE VALUES

Intentions

4.1 There is no perfect way to carry out consultation because every situation and service is different. This strategy provides some guidance - with particular regard to the Audit Commission's briefing paper "Listen up - effective community consultation" - on the important issues to be considered when undertaking consultation. Staff wishing to carry out consultation should also refer to the East Lancashire e-Partnership Consultation Toolkit available online at: www.feedbackonline.org.uk

4.2 Ribble Valley Borough Council's Consultation Strategy is intended to:

- INVOLVE all stakeholders in:
  - identifying issues which affect them
  - voicing their needs and concerns
  - identifying solutions to problems
  - setting and monitoring targets for the continuing improvement of council services
- EMPOWER all stakeholders to gain a voice within the decision-making processes and to play a key role in the strategic planning of services and in the monitoring of service delivery
- FORMALISE the consultation process so that all involved understand the competing priorities and constraints under which the Council services are delivered
- IMPLEMENT the Consultation Strategy to ensure that consultation is:
  - **inclusive** - involving all sections of the community (where possible information should be available in a choice of formats on request)
  - **open** and responsive to the views of all stakeholders
  - **impartial** - it should not lead local people to a response
  - **informative** - people must be informed to make reasoned decisions
  - **understandable** - plain English must be used
  - **appropriate** - to reach all groups there must be a mix of quantitative and qualitative research
  - **strategic** - to avoid 'tick box tiredness' consultation should take account of the Council's partners' consultation exercises
  - **joined up** – it may be appropriate to combine consultation exercises
  - **resourced** - sufficient staff and financial resources will ensure it is rigorous and reaches all relevant parties

- **professional** - there must be confidence that the results are real and not 'massaged' to produce the outcome favoured by the Council
- **timely** - it should be produced at times people are likely to participate (i.e. avoiding public holidays such as Christmas)
- **listened to** - it must be owned by Members and the results must provide them with real information on which to base decisions
- **reported** - feedback on the results and how they have informed the decision will build confidence that views are listened to and acted on

4.3 In order to ensure that consultation processes are meaningful and effective we are committed to:

- identifying ways of involving groups of people often excluded from consultation exercises (*see 'Who to Consult?', paragraph 4.4)*
- using a variety of consultation methods in order that as many people as possible have the opportunity to become involved and give us their views *(see 'How to Consult?', para. 4.11)*
- ensuring that the nature of any consultation initiative is clear and that an appropriate level of consultation is undertaken *(see 'What to Consult on?' para. 4.10)*
- ensuring adequate feedback to consultees takes place *(see 'Analysis and Feedback', para. 4.14)*
- stating clearly what the purpose of the exercise is. Consultees should be made aware of what they can and cannot influence, and what the constraints are surrounding the issues that they are discussing. This needs to be clearly set out so that unrealistic expectations are not raised – only to be dashed! *(See 'The Role of Members', para. 5.1)*
- reducing barriers to consultation and communication (*see 'e-consultation', para. 8.1)*

Who to consult?

4.4 Who to consult should be carefully thought through. This will differ according to the issue, the service and what you want to achieve from the exercise. However, consideration should always be given to the following groups:

- people who will be most affected by the decisions
- people whose views are often overlooked or under represented

4.5 Our possible audiences may include all or some from the following groups:

- direct service users
- indirect service users
- potential service users

- the local community
- the local business community
- staff
- partner organisations
- and don't forget about the hard to reach groups...

4.6 Some sections of the community are easy to consult with - others can prove more difficult to get in touch with. It can be relatively simple to target those that are already organised into representative groups, or to get service users to participate in simple forms of feedback such as short surveys at service delivery points.

4.7 It can, however, be much more difficult to consult successfully on more controversial issues or to find ways of reaching all sections of the community. People who are least likely to give their views - or to be asked - include:

- young people (under 18)
- people with physical or mental disabilities, with special needs or people who may have difficulty in reading or writing
- people from ethnic groups or whose first language is not English
- other disadvantaged groups

4.8 It is too easy to assume that if a community group does not respond to a consultation exercise, this indicates a lack of interest or concern about the subject. These assumptions about their indifference can be false.

4.9 Consultation exercises should be monitored to identify groups within the community that are under-represented and highlight any barriers which prevent responses to these exercises, e.g. language barriers. Steps should then be considered how best to overcome these obstacles.

What to consult on?

4.10 Determining what service users' needs are - both current and expected - is essential in identifying areas for improvements in service delivery. The areas for questions to be asked can include:

- **reliability** - is the service consistent and on time?
- **responsiveness** - is it flexible to meet the changing needs of users?
- **competence** - do staff have the expertise to deal with a range of user needs?
- **accessibility** - do users have easy access to what they need?
- **courtesy** - are staff polite and friendly?
- **communication** - is the user kept informed in ways they can understand?

- **choice** - do users have alternatives if what they require is not immediately available?
- **cost** - is it cost effective?
- **appropriateness** - is the service appropriate for the needs of the user?
- **surroundings** - is the service provided in pleasant surroundings?
- **strengths and weaknesses** - what are your strengths and weaknesses as the service provider?

How to consult - methods of consultation

4.11 Knowing what you want to achieve in any consultation exercise is essential if results are to be accurate and useful. Consultation should not be carried out for the sake of it - it should have a clear purpose and agreed outcomes.

4.12 Asking the right questions is crucial in arriving at the right result. Successful consultation depends on the wording of the questions and the manner in which questions are asked.

4.13 The most appropriate method of consultation should be selected according to the nature of the issue, the size of the sample and any time or budget constraints. There are many techniques available and these are identified and discussed in the Consultation Toolkit. The following are included:

- Citizens' Juries
- Focus groups
- Citizens' Panels
- Public Meetings
- Surveys
- Electronic Polling
- Complaints and suggestions

Analysis and feedback

4.14 Any information is only as good as the analysis done on it, so it is vital to spend time reviewing what has been discovered and how it fits into the Council's strategies.

4.15 Providing feedback is also a vital part of the consultation process. This will help provide accountability and gives the opportunity to publicise our successes and achievements. Giving feedback also shows that we value the views of our users, listen to what they say, and act on their suggestions.

4.16 Methods for feedback can include sending personal letters, newspaper articles or press releases, or by an article in our own council newspaper.

4.17 Feedback should provide users with a clear idea of successes and, where appropriate, how we intend to resolve our weaknesses. This can also be an opportunity not only for promoting successes but to tell people what cannot be done and why.

4.18 The following key areas should be included in feedback as a basic minimum:

- what consultees thought
- what the present satisfaction levels are
- how these will be improved
- how consultees comments have contributed to the improvements

4.19 In time this could begin to legitimise or justify the exercise in the minds of consultees, and hopefully make people feel that their contribution has been heard and is worthwhile.

5 THE ROLE OF MEMBERS

5.1 Elected members have an important role to play in the consultation process. It is recognised that councillors have always represented the various views they have heard from their electors - but not everyone has the opportunity to speak to their councillor on a regular basis. Consultation will give people another chance to be heard.

5.2 The Audit Commission states that:

> *"…it is rarely possible for members to be aware of the views of all the people whom they represent on every local issue. Effective consultation can therefore help members make good decisions by giving them a detailed, balanced view of local people's views on a particular service or policy."*

5.3 Consultation is one of a number of factors that must be considered as part of the decision-making process. It is the role of councillors to respond to conflicting views of consultees.

5.4 They will also need to balance the results of consultation against statutory requirements, available resources and the opinions of partner organisations before changing decisions or making new policy statements.

5.5 The Council is not bound to go along with the majority of what consultees want. However, if it feels that the right decision differs from the results of the exercise, members will need to give careful consideration to this and ensure that they provide clear justification for any decisions that are contrary to the results of the consultation, and communicate this to the public.

5.6 For consultation to be useful and cost-effective, the results of consultation exercises must inform the decision-making process. An Audit Commission survey found that a common problem is the failure to link consultation with decisions, particularly regarding resource allocation. A high priority should be to ensure that consultation results are used.

5.7 Effective community involvement can help to develop interest in local issues, and promote more active citizenship, which in turn, enhances local democracy and increases public accountability.

6 INVOLVING STAFF

6.1 Staff need to be included in consultation. Staff bring a wealth of experience and knowledge of the issues affecting users which can be used to improve services. Our approach to consultation will ensure that, where appropriate, the views of staff are sought and taken into account as part of the managerial and decision-making processes of the authority.

7 INCLUSIVE CONSULTATION

7.1 To help remove barriers to communication and consultation this council is committed to:

- developing information channels to ensure effective distribution of information
- making written information accessible, not only in terms of appropriate language, large print for the visually impaired, and the use of '*plain English',* but also by making information available on the Council's website
- making every effort to ensure that consultation does not preclude participation on the grounds of age, race, disability or gender
- exploring creative possibilities to enhance community consultation in terms of venues, signing and interpretation services, transport provision, crèche facilities etc.

7.2 Guidance for Best Value states:

> *"Issues of social exclusion and isolation will be important ones for many authorities, and a service cannot be effective under best value unless it addresses equity considerations. Reviews should consider the way in which services impact on all sections of the community, and set targets to redress disparities in the provision of services to those that are socially, economically or geographically disadvantaged."*

7.3 The detailed research needed to meet this requirement will have an impact on the method of consultation employed - a postal survey is unlikely to obtain the views of people who cannot see, or those who cannot read or write.

7.4 'Hard to reach' groups include the homeless, young people, travellers and ethnic minorities. Some people have less spare time, some feel culturally isolated, some feel alienated, some are geographically isolated and some simply are just not interested. All consultation should take steps to ensure that people within these 'hard to reach' groups are included wherever possible.

8 E-CONSULTATION – THE PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

8.1 The Cabinet Office code of practice on written consultation includes consultation criteria for electronic and printed documents.

8.2 The East Lancashire E-Partnership (ELeP) was formed in 2001. The partnership includes the five district councils of Burnley, Hyndburn, Pendle, Ribble Valley and Rossendale, and was initially supported by Deloitte(MCS) Ltd.

8.3 A number of clear and valid drivers for such a partnership soon became apparent, including:

- a shared need to modernise service delivery, and in particular, 'e-enable' services by 2005 to meet the national BVPI 157 target
- a shared identity – the East Lancashire footprint being widely understood and recognised by citizens, businesses and Government

8.4 The original Business Plan for ELeP governed the delivery of three foundation projects, which included Consultation.

8.5 What has the consultation project achieved so far?

- a virtual citizens' panel operating across the five Local Authorities. This panel has over 3,000 members currently from across the sub-region, with almost 500 in Ribble Valley.
- consultation with the local community on preferred consultation and e-consultation methodologies, with particular reference to 'hard to reach' groups, and investigating ways of piloting innovative e-consultation methods other than the virtual citizens' panel
- an e-solution to aid effective consultation and to enhance the dissemination of the findings of consultation activities to partners, participants and the general public, and which will be replicable for other North West Authorities – the online Consultation Diary
- common software (SNAP) was jointly purchased to aid the design and analysis of surveys. This software is used across the partnership, facilitating the sharing of questionnaires, the development of a question bank and the benchmarking of findings between organisations. In addition, the software enables the authority to produce electronic surveys carried out via the Internet. Use of the Internet could boost the voice of young people, the disabled, remote communities, and other less visible communities.
- an interactive online toolkit has been developed to help partners explore the different methodologies in existence. This toolkit will be populated by case studies and contact points over the coming year to promote the sharing of best practice. The toolkit is housed on a joint website. It is interactive, allowing practitioners to search for the best methodologies with which to consult specific groups.

- development of broader collaboration across the region: we have already undertaken research in partnership with the Community Safety Partnerships, Elevate, the Housing Market Renewal pathfinder and East Lancashire Together (the Community Cohesion pathfinder).
- sharing learning has been a priority for the project, and already our work has been presented at three national conferences, including at the annual conference of the Local Authority research body LARIA
- to facilitate sharing of best practice and dissemination, the partnership has developed a shared consultation website which hosts online surveys, the consultation toolkit and an interactive consultation diary.

Electronic Consultation

8.6 One way in which the Council can explore rapid and cost effective consultation is via technology. The Gershon Report advocates electronic consultation as a means to communicate with a good proportion of citizens. Findings from the East Lancashire project also show that responses are derived from a good cross-section of the community. Online questionnaires, touch pads, voting handsets and PDA's all offer ways in which the Council can capture citizen feedback almost instantaneously. Whilst these methods cannot completely replace the panel or qualitative activities such as focus groups, they do offer an effective solution to complement these methodologies.

9 CORPORATE & SERVICE LEVEL CONSULTATION

9.1 Consultation encompasses the needs and views of stakeholders at all stages of service delivery, from corporate priorities and objectives, to service plans.

9.2 At the corporate level the Council consults annually on the Corporate Plan, which informs the development of corporate policy.

9.3 At service level, the Council has a duty to consult on planning policy, planning applications and licensing etc, also for Best Value Service Reviews, and as a means of developing service policy.

9.4 We consult with our customers on a day-to-day basis in many different ways. Examples of this consultation are:

- tenant satisfaction with housing repairs
- customer satisfaction with Environmental Health services

Co-ordination

9.5 It is vital that consultation exercises are co-ordinated to avoid duplication and consultation fatigue. Co-ordination is important:

- to set high and consistent standards of consultation geared towards meeting overall organisation objectives

- to share best practice on approaches to consultation so that departments can learn from each other
- to share common data between services
- to provide common services where this is more cost effective, e.g. through the citizens' panel
- to programme different consultation exercises so particular groups and individuals do not suffer 'consultation overload'
- to co-ordinate consultation with other agencies
- to monitor and encourage year-on-year tracking of attitudes and awareness of services

9.6 Successful consultation will maximise the use of our scarce resources. Within Ribble Valley the Corporate Services section co-ordinates consultation, and a consultation diary is available through the East Lancashire e-Partnership's Feedb@ck website (www.feedbackonline.org.uk). This will act as the liaison point for other agencies and partners. The objective is to achieve a broad awareness of consultations, with the specific aim of avoiding consultation fatigue. Corporate level consultation exercises will be undertaken centrally. *(Responsibility for co-ordinating the management and use of the Citizens' Panel lies with the Citizens' Panel Co-ordinator, Kris Barker, who is based at Pendle Borough Council).*

9.7 It is particularly important to co-ordinate use of the Citizens' Panel. Panel members have a limited "research life" before they become unrepresentative, and are told this when they are recruited. It is therefore important to avoid surveys which use panel members ineffectively.

9.8 To ensure effective co-ordination, service managers will be informed of forthcoming corporate and panel surveys, and in turn they should always inform the Corporate Services section of service-specific surveys.

9.9 This strategy, together with a consultation plan and the co-ordination of section service plans (which include consultation programmes) will ensure a strategic approach to consultation, and that consultation is taking place to a common standard within a consultation framework in accordance with the Consultation Toolkit.

10 SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION AT RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

10.1 Ribble Valley Borough Council has, over recent years, undertaken a number of significant consultation exercises that have helped inform the policies and services of the authority, including:

- **Best Value Performance Indicator General Survey:** This survey last took place during October/November 2006 and is a statutory requirement. The survey asked questions on the following services: household waste collection, recycling facilities, and cultural and recreational services. The survey also gained views on complaints handling, council communications and the Council as an organisation. A total of 3,000 questionnaires were

distributed to residents in the Borough and a response rate of 49% was achieved.

- Separate **Best Value Performance Indicator Surveys** were carried out on Housing Services, Benefits Services and Planning Services.
- **Housing Needs Surveys:** Since 2004, Ribble Valley Borough Council has been proactive in undertaking local Housing Needs Surveys. The surveys are used as a tool to identify the nature, scale and type of housing needed across the Borough. 22,209 households, equating to 91% of the Borough, have completed a local Housing Needs Survey. The average response rate to these surveys is 37%. Over the coming year, Housing Needs Surveys will be completed in the remainder of Parishes, as well as re-surveying of the two larger market towns of Longridge and Clitheroe. This information will be critical in providing an evidence base for Ribble Valley's Local Development Framework and future housing strategies.
- **Community Safety Survey**: This was the first survey run through the East Lancashire e-Partnership Citizens' Panel and took place during August/September 2004. An overall response rate of 67.4% was achieved. The results from the survey have been fed back to respondents through the Citizens' Panel Newsletter. The results and analysis have been used in the compilation of the Ribble Valley Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership's Audit and Strategy.
- An on-line **Licensing Survey** was carried out during the consultation period on the Council's draft Licensing Policy – October 2004. The survey was available on-line through the Council's website.
- The East Lancashire Citizens' Panel was used for a joint survey commissioned by the East Lancashire Partnership and Elevate. The survey looked at **Living and Working in East Lancashire** and was carried out in November/December 2004. In total 2,900 responses were achieved.
- The first **Ribble Valley-only Citizens' Panel survey** was conducted during February and March 2005. The survey covered the following topics: leisure, community, and recreation services, arts and heritage, parks and other green spaces. The results of which will inform the Ribble Valley Open Space Audit and Planning Policies for the provision and protection of open space in the Borough. In October 2005 the second Ribble Valley-only survey provided invaluable information regarding refuse collection which was used in the development of our new Three-Stream Waste Collection service.

The Main Building Blocks of Consultation

10.2 The main building blocks of the Council's approach to consultation are:

- **The Citizens' Panel** - The Citizens' Panel and similar survey mechanisms are essential to finding out the views of local people in a statistically reliable manner. In addition to surveys, small groups of Panel members can be brought together in focus groups to conduct qualitative research, and to examine issues in more depth. The Panel will be surveyed up to 4 times per year. It is anticipated that two of these exercises will be Ribble Valley-only surveys whilst the remainder will be carried out across East Lancashire. The

surveys will be used to examine strategic issues affecting the community. It is hoped that the Citizens' Panel representing the Ribble Valley will number 800 people. To ensure we meet this target we need to carry out ongoing recruitment.

- Surveys will be used to help the Council meet the consultation requirements of **Best Value**, and to respond to any service imperatives where the views of local people are needed.
- **Parish Council Liaison Committee and other Partners** – will help to gain the views of local stakeholders and interest groups, business and market towns.
- **Surveys and Other Research -** In addition to the Citizens' Panel, individual services/the authority will need to use other techniques to explore matters in more depth with particular stakeholders. This will be particularly true for internal support services where the main customers are other council services and not the public.

Consultation Programme

10.3 The following pages contain details of Ribble Valley's consultation programme for 2007/2008. The programme will be influenced by those services that are required to carry out service reviews, as well as the key strategic issues affecting the Borough, and the corporate ambitions and priorities of the authority. The programme will be updated annually.

11 CONCLUSION

11.1 Effective consultation and research is becoming increasingly important to the planning and delivery of local authority services, as well as being crucial to community leadership. The strategy establishes a systematic, co-ordinated and practical approach to consultation, one which will help ensure that Ribble Valley Borough Council has access to reliable information on the views, needs and aspirations of local people - information which is vital if the authority is to remain relevant to the needs of the community.

Further Information

Further information on all the issues contained in this strategy can be obtained via the contact details provided on the back page.

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL – CONSULTATION PLAN 2007 – 2008

SURVEY TITLE	WHY NEEDED	INFORMATION TO BE GATHERED	METHOD OF COLLECTION	TIMESCALE
Environmental Health Customer Service User Questionnaires	To give customer feedback on their experiences of the service.	Opinions on food & health & safety inspections, pollution inspections, dog warden & pest control services and general queries.	Questionnaires sent out to service users every 3 months.	March, June, September & December 2007
Local Development Framework Resident Involvement	To involve RV residents in the development of a LDF.	Opinions on various topics relating to the LDF.	Various.	Ongoing throughout 2007.
Housing Needs Surveys	To provide an evidence base for the LDF and future housing strategies.	Opinions on the nature, scale and type of housing needed across the Borough.	Paper surveys sent to all households within the Borough.	Ongoing throughout 2007.
Accessibility Survey	To provide views on accessibility to services, and to give information to be used in the development of a new Sustainable Community Strategy and a Local Development Framework.	Information about accessibility to services, employment, the environment, affordable housing and methods of communication.	Citizens' Panel (RV-only)	February 2007
Community Safety, Local Opportunities, Sustainability & Climate Change Survey	To provide updated views on Community Safety (last surveyed on this topic in 2004). Also, to provide information on the key issues of climate change and economic regeneration.	Information about community safety, economic regeneration and climate change issues.	Citizens' Panel (Full Panel)	April 2007
Cashiers Customer Satisfaction Survey	To assess levels of satisfaction with the service.	Customer opinions on all aspects of the service provided.	Mail-out survey to customers visiting offices during set period.	May 2007

SURVEY TITLE	WHY NEEDED	INFORMATION TO BE GATHERED	METHOD OF COLLECTION	TIMESCALE
Youth Homelessness Survey	To assess levels of awareness amongst young people.	Opinions of Year 10 school students regarding homelessness.	Surveys to be given out as part of an educational workshop.	May 2007
Health & Safety Climate Survey (internal)			Survey for all staff – available online via intranet and paper copies also available.	May/June 2007
Conservation Area Consultation	To provide opinion on proposed changes to rules re: development within conservation areas.	Opinions on set of management proposals that will control how/what development can be done to properties in conservation areas.	Consultation document & response forms, & public meetings.	June 2007
Local Development Framework Resident Involvement	To involve RV residents in the development of a LDF.	Views on options for development in the Borough – what, where, when etc.	Consultation paper, email & paper response & comment forms, workshops & public meetings	July & August 2007
July RV Panel Survey	To provide opinion on our range of Street Scene services. Other topics to be confirmed.	Assess customer views of our range of Street Scene services.	Ribble Valley Citizens' Panel	July 2007
Key User Feedback Survey	To assess the opinions of users of the Citizens' Panel.	Information on users' needs, key uses and opinions re: the Feedb@ck Panel	Mail-out and email to all users of the Feedb@ck panel over the last 3 years.	July 2007
Housing Stock Transfer Tenants' Survey	To reach a decision on whether the Council's housing stock will be transferred or not.	Ballot of all tenants to find out if they would like the Council to transfer its housing stock or not.	Mail-out ballot papers to all Council tenants.	September 2007
October Joint Panel Survey	To be confirmed.	To be confirmed.	Citizens' Panel (Full Panel)	October 2007

Further Information

For further information on any of the issues covered in this strategy, please contact our Corporate Services Unit on 01200 414421 or email michelle.haworth@ribblevalley.gov.uk

Additional information is also available from our website – www.ribblevalley.gov.uk.

For further information about the ELEP Consultation Service please contact the Joint Consultation Service Co-ordinator, Kris Barker on 01282 661614 or kristian.barker@pendle.gov.uk

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