

Report of	Meeting	Date
Deputy Chief Executive (Introduced by Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member (Strategy and Reform))	Cabinet	15 September 2021

Is this report confidential?	No
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Is this decision key?	No
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Shared Consultation Framework

Purpose of the Report

1. To present the consultation framework for approval.

Recommendations to Cabinet

2. Cabinet are asked to approve the Consultation Framework in Appendix A.

Reasons for recommendations

3. The Consultation Framework sets out how South Ribble Borough Council undertakes consultations.
4. Without a framework, consultations may not be consistently planned and undertaken in the proper way across the council. This can lead to poor consultations and consequently poor decision making. This framework is a shared approach across Chorley and South Ribble Councils which will provide a consistent approach for staff to work too.
5. Consultation is also a way for communities, residents and businesses to engage with the Council and shape their local area. Without a framework key features that promote inclusivity and accessibility may not be routinely applied, inadvertently leaving some voices unheard.
6. The framework provides officers across South Ribble Borough Council with the guidance and tools to undertake high quality consultations as and when needed.

Other options considered and rejected

7. To not have a framework. As shared services continues to develop consultations could continue to be undertaken unilaterally by services, however the quality may be

inconsistent. Further to this, different processes across shared teams could lead to confusion or misapplication, whereas a single shared framework will provide consistency.

Corporate priorities

8. The report relates to the following corporate priorities:

An exemplary council	Thriving communities
A fair local economy that works for everyone	Good homes, green spaces, healthy places

Background to the report

9. In November 2020, a review was launched to produce a shared consultation policy with Chorley Borough Council, seeking to harmonise and strengthen the approach to consulting across South Ribble Borough Council. This forms part of the wider implementation of shared services Phase 1, as well as responding to a need identified within the Annual Governance Statement action plan.
10. This resulted in the creation of the Consultation Framework, which is shared between South Ribble and Chorley Councils. The purpose of the framework is to ensure that the council has a clear statement of the approach it will take to consultation, supporting all officers to apply a consistent approach.
11. The framework also provides staff with a straightforward guide on how to conduct consultations, outlining the overall approach and presenting a step-by-step toolkit on how to conduct consultation activities.
12. The drafted Consultation Framework is presented in **Appendix A**.

Overview of the Framework

13. Consultations are part of a range of methods that the Council can seek feedback from communities and stakeholders. It is distinct to community engagement, where that is an ongoing process of developing relationships and partnerships with local people. A consultation may be one of the ways that we engage. The framework is part of the overall toolkit to reinforce and support engagement, setting out clearly when and how we consult.
14. The framework sets out a consistent approach across the council so that every consultation undertaken is of high quality. The framework includes:
 - Defining what a consultation is and when they are necessary.
 - The council's approach to consultations.
 - A six-step toolkit on how to conduct a consultation. This includes guidance on the types of questions to ask, how to determine an audience, as well as how to store and manage data correctly.
 - Consultation Initiation Documentation (CID).
 - Equality monitoring questions.
 - The range of consultation methods.

15. It should be noted that the framework does not replace or supersede guidelines or consultation methodologies set down by external bodies or central government. For example, local planning consultations are managed through nationally agreed frameworks and statutory guidelines.
16. The framework has been developed by researching current best practise from other local authorities and considering well known consultation methods and principles such as the 'Gunning Principles' which set out guidance on fair consultation processes.
17. The key improvements brought forward by the framework are:
- Introduction of mandatory equality monitoring questions.
 - Creation of a step-by-step toolkit to guide staff through the consultation design, implementation, and analysis process.
 - Introduction of a Consultation Initiation Document to provide an additional guide to staff on how to conduct and evaluate consultations.
18. In addition to the current toolkit and assistive documents, a checklist will be developed to ensure that the framework is applied robustly so that all key parts of the framework have been considered and applied.

Climate change and air quality

19. The work noted in this report does not impact the climate change and sustainability targets of the Councils Green Agenda and all environmental considerations are in place.

Equality and diversity

20. The framework places an obligation on officers to ensure that any consultation that is developed and undertaken is inclusive and accessible to everyone in our community by considering and addressing potential barriers to participation.
21. Within the framework officers will be required to undertake an equality impact assessment as part of every consultation they do, which will serve to highlight any barriers and provide an action plan on removing or mitigating areas that could prevent fair access and not enable peoples voices to be heard.

Risk

22. The framework acts to mitigate risks to the Council resulting from poor consultation. It provides the tools and guidance to ensure officers undertake high quality consultations that meet required and expected standards from stakeholders.
23. The key risk to the framework is poor implementation, whereby officers are not aware of the requirements placed on them as well as not being provided sufficient or adequate training. To mitigate this risk a communications and training plan will be implemented following the approval of the framework by cabinet.

Comments of the Statutory Finance Officer

24. There are no financial implications of this report.

Comments of the Monitoring Officer

25. There are no concerns to raise from a Monitoring Officer perspective. Carrying out sound and robust consultation exercises can help to improve the quality of decisions being made – further it can also help to reduce the chances of the council being subject to a judicial review challenge.

Background documents

There are no background papers to this report

Appendices

Appendix A: Shared Consultation Framework

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