

Consultation Framework

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The principles of good governance require that public bodies are accountable to users of their services and stakeholders generally. Real accountability requires that the Council engages with stakeholders to understand and respond to their views in a meaningful and timely way as we plan and carry out our activities.
- 1.2 In view of these responsibilities, on 13 September 2005, the Council agreed a Consultation Framework.

2. CONSULTATION METHODS

- 2.1 Where it is proposed to hold a consultation, a report including the draft consultation documentation will be considered by the Committee responsible for the particular function, unless there are exceptional circumstances. The Committee will decide on the most appropriate methodology for the consultation, and on the period of the consultation, taking cognisance of Scottish Executive guidance, which requires that where the Council is issuing papers for consultation it allows three months for response, unless there are exceptional circumstances. In exceptional circumstances, the lead officer for the Committee and the Chair will decide on the methodology and the time limit for response.
- 2.2 Consultation will be undertaken through the issue of consultation documents, but in appropriate circumstances, it may, in addition, include: -
- Postal and online surveys
 - Meetings
 - Informal discussion
 - Stakeholder comments and complaints
 - Focus groups
 - Service user surveys
- 2.3 Consultation documentation will:
- be distributed to organisations and individuals with an interest in the area of consultation, particular consideration should be given to seeking the views of users and carers;
 - present a clear reason for carrying out the consultation and set out specific questions to be answered by consultees;
 - be clear about how responses should be made;
 - explain the purpose of the consultation and how it anticipates the results will be used;
 - allow sufficient time for response;
 - be inclusive by taking account of any particular needs of consultees;

- aim to produce consultation results that are measurable and can be evaluated objectively;
- offer the opportunity for consultees to comment on how future consultations might be improved.

3. GOVERNANCE IN RELATION TO CONSULTATION

3.1 It is recommended that in recognition of the importance attached by the Council to meaningful consultation and to facilitate the involvement of all Council Members, the Council adopt the following processes:

- all Council Members will receive a copy of Committee agendas to enable them to attend Committees where consultations papers are being considered. This will allow contributions by any interested Member on consultation papers;
- all Council Members will receive copies of reports/supporting papers relating to consultations to enable Members to contribute
- all Council Members will receive a copy of final consultation documents and a list of consultees, at the same time as the public consultation commences;
- outcomes of consultations including analyses of responses will be reported back to relevant Committees and thereafter both the outcome and the Committee's recommendations will be presented to the Council for final decisions on action;
- the analyses will be published.

4. REVIEW

4.1 This policy will be reviewed in one year and every three years thereafter.

Procedure for Responding to Consultation Documents

- 1 A Procedure is proposed whereby all requests for responses to consultation documents are logged in a single system, co-ordinated by the Chief Executive.
- 2 Consultation documents received by the Council will be passed to the Chief Executive to be logged and presented to the Senior Management Team (SMT), which will consider the appropriate consultation methodology and identify a lead officer.
- 3 The lead officer will have final responsibility for the drafting of a response which will then be passed to the Chief Executive and Convener for comment and approval/amendment as appropriate.
- 4 A Consultation Register will be submitted to each SMT meeting to enable progress to be monitored and to allow input from members of the SMT who may wish to comment.
- 5 The Consultation Register will be tabled at each Council Meeting to inform members of all the consultation activity in progress. Members will be entitled to request copies of particular consultation documents and Council responses. On issues of importance to the Council's work, the Convener will involve members as appropriate. This will usually be where matters of policy are at issue. Where the Consultation Document is of a technical nature only e.g., legal comment on statutory guidance is requested, the response will usually be drafted by the appropriate officer, without involvement of Council Members, other than the Convener.