

West Wiltshire District Council

Cabinet

12 January 2005

Formalising External Consultations

1. Purpose

To approve the procedure for dealing with external consultations which require a corporate response from the Council rather than from an individual officer or service area.

2. Background

At its meeting on 17 November 2004 the External Overview Committee considered the actions of the Council during a consultation exercise carried out earlier this year regarding post office closures. While the External Overview Committee recognised many of the positive ways in which the Council responded to this consultation, such as letters and press releases being issued, they did have concerns regarding missed opportunities.

The Council had tried to engage with the Post Office on this issue by asking a Post Office representative to attend a Council meeting and had also included the consultation letters on the Members' Information Sheet. However, the response that was sent to the consultation on the Urban Re-invention Programme did not challenge some of the underlying issues around post office closures and neither did it reflect the implications of all 11 post office closures. The External Overview Committee noted that an opportunity for a substantially more co-ordinated response with County, District, Town and Parish Councils and the Local Strategic Partnership was missed.

3. Key issues

In order to avoid a repetition of this situation, External Overview has recommended the development of a more co-ordinated system for dealing with such consultation.

In order to achieve greater co-ordination it is suggested that all letters received by the Council requiring a response to consultation are passed to the Performance and Scrutiny Support Team.

The benefits of this include:

- A central co-ordination point
- Easier monitoring of consultation issues

- A single point of contact for members, especially where the views of County, Parish and Town Councillors are sought
- Co-ordination with the Communications Team
- Collation of technical information and supporting evidence

Why Performance and Scrutiny: Performance and Scrutiny is a cross cutting service and already undertakes an information gathering role. The team has links with many elected members with whom a co-ordinated reply is likely for most consultation issues. It is expected that some of the consultation will have policy implications and the team is best placed to refer matters to the appropriate Portfolio Holder, Director or Service Manager.

Key features of the new procedure:

- Letters will be logged in the Chief Executive's office as at present.
- They will then be passed to the Performance and Scrutiny Support Manager.
- The Performance and Scrutiny Support Manager will, in consultation with Ian Gallin, consider with whom to consult with regard to the response.
- Copies of the correspondence will be passed to the relevant Service Manager.
- The correspondence will also be copied to the relevant Portfolio Holder and discussions will take place as to whether the matter should be referred to Cabinet. If the relevant Portfolio Holder is not available, the consultation papers will be passed to the Leader.
- Ward members will be informed, where appropriate, in line with the separate ward member briefing procedure, which was previously agreed by Cabinet at its meeting on 3 November 2004.
- Copies of the correspondence will be included in the weekly Members' Information Sheet.
- Particular attention will be given as to whether the issue is a matter for consideration and comment by the Local Strategic Partnership. If appropriate, comment will be sought via the Community Leadership Manager.
- The Performance and Scrutiny Support Team will request comments and, if necessary, arrange for the matter to be considered by Corporate Management Team, Cabinet or an Overview Committee.
- The Performance and Scrutiny Support Team will assist service areas with gathering and collating information. The team will also help the Portfolio Holder to formulate a response.
- The Performance and Scrutiny Support Team will ensure that a response is issued by the Portfolio Holder, or Cabinet if appropriate. A copy of the decision will be communicated to all interested parties.
- Any follow-up correspondence will be passed to the Performance and Scrutiny Support Manager for consideration as to the action to be taken.

These procedures were approved by Corporate Management Team on 8 December 2004. It is not the intention that these procedures will replace systems currently in place within each service area for responding to general requests for information.

Financial implications: there are no financial implications.

Legal issues: there are no legal implications arising from this report.

Human Rights: the Human Rights implications of the actions recommended in this report have been considered.

4. List of background papers

External Overview Committee Minutes of 17 November 2004
Corporate Management Team Report of 8 December 2004

5. Recommendations

Cabinet is asked to:

- recognise that the Council missed opportunities for a fuller response in replying to this consultation exercise
- consider whether the new procedures would prevent the same situation occurring in the future and, if so, adopt the new procedures

Plain English Guidance Given

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