SCRUTINY REVIEW OF

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

IN CONSULTATION

REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

FOR SAFE AND INCLUSIVE

COMMUNITIES

IN CROYDON

May 2004

CONTENTS

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE REVIEW

The multi-agency Community Involvement Steering Group are asked to consider the recommendations arising from this review:

- **To make greater use of partnership work and consultation tools to bring about significant improvements in:**
  - co-ordinating consultation work as effectively and attractively as possible
  - identifying economies of scale
  - increasing the range and number of residents taking part in consultation

- **To develop and propose procedures to ensure that all consultation exercises clearly inform participants of their aims, possible outcomes, channels for communicating feedback and estimated time frames for action**

- **To consider how to develop and use simple systems for tracking decisions made in meetings**

- **To draw up proposals for user-friendly processes to evaluate consultation projects both as they progress and when completed, and review the effectiveness of consultation work on a wider scale**

- **To consider how to make effective use of Information Technology, including the existing consultation database to be found in the Intranet, to record, monitor and evaluate consultation exercises**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

1.1 At the Scrutiny Sub-Committee for Safe and Inclusive Communities of 1st July 2003, Members agreed to conduct a Scrutiny Review focusing on consultation work carried out by the Council.

1.2 The review set out to:
- Identify a working **definition** and description of consultation, for the use of officers as well as those being consulted
- Examine the rationale behind consultation exercises carried out by the Council
- Ascertain what impact consultation work has had on service provision and delivery, as well as on the evolution of consultation techniques
- Investigate how effectively consultation initiatives conducted by Council departments have involved the community
- Highlight successful, innovative approaches to community involvement, and how these might be adopted council-wide where appropriate.

1.3 **Outcomes** to emerge from this review include:
- considerations on how to carry out an objective assessment of the success of consultation exercises.
- an evaluation of the Council's success in involving the public in consultation, and in particular, in "face-to-face" consultation exercises
- recommendations on how best to highlight and disseminate good practice in consultation, and avoid duplication and "consultation fatigue" where possible

BACKGROUND

2.1 Croydon Council has been carrying out a broad range of consultation exercises for a number of years. Some have been undertaken to meet statutory requirements, such as consultation on the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy and the Community Strategy, etc.

2.2 Many other, non-statutory consultation activities have been undertaken to determine the community's views on services being provided or developed (e.g. the Customer Focus and Smarter Croydon initiatives).

2.3 To provide a well co-ordinated corporate approach to consultation, the Corporate Consultation Group was established in 1999, and drew representatives from all departments. This group developed a Consultation Strategy in 1999/2000 to support the Council's policies (e.g. the Equal Opportunities Policy) and its Vision and Priorities, with the Policy Unit taking a lead.

2.4   In addition to this, departments have established their own mechanisms to assist with service specific consultation requirements.

2.5   The government's modernising agenda has contributed significantly to these developments, through legislation such as the Local Government Act 1999 and the Local Government Act 2000, as well as the recently published Code of Practice on Consultation (January 2004), which will have a particular impact on the management of feedback on local strategies and action plans.

2.6   As stated in "Feeling the Pulse II" (July 2003), a review commissioned by IDeA and produced by MORI on local government consultation practices, this legislation has been a significant driver behind the significant increase in consultation work in local government in recent years, and the growing range of good practice in this field.

3   DEFINITION OF CONSULTATION

3.1   Councils and organisations use a varied range of definitions to explain what consultation is about. Indeed, the task of defining what consultation is constitutes a significant challenge in view of the breadth of objectives and models used by different agencies, but is necessary to provide a clear focus and give an indication of how results will be used.

3.2   The review sets out Croydon Council's definition of consultation and explores the main variables which impact on the task of drawing up such a definition, namely:
- The broad purpose of a consultation initiative and its relationship to subsequent service development, if any
- The target group's level of involvement in the consultation and its outcomes

4   EVALUATION SYSTEMS

4.1   The review puts forward a few options for evaluating consultation, both as it takes place, and after the event. The Inlogov Conference attended by the Chair of the review, Cllr Godfrey,   proposed a few key concepts around which effective evaluation of this work might be drawn up:

1. A checklist of essential steps to take in order to maximise **fitness for purpose**, to manage the process, the resource implications and the resident expectations which consultation entail, from the planning stage to follow-up and evaluation of the work carried out.

2. The need to securing a clear **audit trail** between planning, consulting, and implementation, even if indirectly, through simple processes such as action plans.

3. A possible model for evaluating the **influence** consultees have had on decision-making and service improvement.

CROYDON COUNCIL'S CONSULTATION WORK

5.1   The review outlines the wide range of consultation networks and systems used by the Council to ascertain the needs and aspirations of local residents e.g. by need (e.g. Mobility Forum), by locality (e.g. Neighbourhood Partnerships), and by interest group (e.g. Children's and Young People's Network).

5.2   Strategic responsibility for Consultation within the Council and with other partner agencies lies with the Executive Office, which takes the lead on obtaining the views of residents, the voluntary sector, the business sector and other public sector organisations. It also co-ordinates consultation on corporate and cross-departmental matters such as budget setting.

5.3   The multi-agency Community Involvement Strategy Group (CISG) came into being with the Croydon Strategic Partnership which steers forward the Community Strategy. It reports to the Strategic Partnership through the Chief Executives Group and to the Healthy Croydon Partnership through the Modernisation Executive Group. The CISG has taken on the baton for the high-level co-ordination of consultation. It has recognised that there is considerable scope for the co-ordination of consultation activity amongst partnership members, a need which is echoed in the following Community Strategy action point for this year:

        "(To) develop a process to ensure that community consultation is co-ordinated between public sector agencies" *(Community Strategy Action Plan 2004-2005 – Providing Better and Fairer Services)*

5.4   The main tasks the CGIS proposes to focus on in the first instance are:
        • Identification of good practice in and outside the Council
        • Identifying existing groups and involvement arrangements operated by different agencies/partnerships.
        • Registering consultation activities

5.5   In addition to setting out the main framework for consultation currently in place, the review examines how Council consultation measures up to the evaluation systems outlined in section 4. In particular, it examines the work carried out in connection with Neighbourhood Partnerships and the Neighbour Renewal agenda, and some of the approaches taken by Council departments to communicate with and obtain the views of the "hard to reach".

CONCLUSION

Croydon Council is well regarded nationally in the field of consultation. However, consultation needs to reflect the evolving nature of local needs and services, and to take advantage of the opportunities for good co-ordination and sharing of good practice arising from the establishment of the Community Strategy and the Croydon Strategic Partnership. This is why the recommendations of the review are addressed to the Community Involvement Steering Group which reports to the Croydon Strategic Partnership.

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF
COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN CONSULTATION

1   INTRODUCTION

1.1   At the Scrutiny Sub-Committee for Safe and Inclusive Communities of 1st July 2003, Members agreed to conduct a Scrutiny Review focusing on consultation work carried out by the Council.

1.2   This report sets out the findings and recommendations of the working party, whose Members are Cllr Godfrey (Chair), Cllr Slipper, Cllr Neal and Cllr Selva.

1.3   As detailed in the terms of reference agreed on 14th October 2003, the review set out to:
- Identify a working definition and description of consultation, for the use of officers as well as those being consulted
- Examine the rationale behind consultation exercises carried out by the Council
- Ascertain what impact consultation work has had on service provision and delivery, as well as on the evolution of consultation techniques
- Investigate how effectively consultation initiatives conducted by Council departments have involved the community
- Highlight successful, innovative approaches to community involvement, and how these might be adopted council-wide where appropriate.

1.4   Outcomes to emerge from this review include:
- considerations on how to carry out an objective assessment of the success of consultation exercises.
- an evaluation of the Council's success in involving the public in consultation, and in particular, in "face-to-face" consultation exercises
- recommendations on how best to highlight and disseminate good practice in consultation, and avoid duplication and "consultation fatigue" where possible

1.5   Members have explored this theme through the following activities:
- working group meetings
- attendance at a training course on Evaluating Consultation run by the Institute of Local Government Studies (Inlogov)
- attendance at Neighbourhood Partnership meetings
- presentations to the Scrutiny Sub-Committee by the Policy Unit and the Housing Department
- obtaining information from Council departments regarding their consultation processes
- obtaining information about other councils' consultation systems e.g. the Community Councils run by the London Borough of Southwark

2   BACKGROUND

2.1   Croydon Council has been carrying out a broad range of consultation exercises for a number of years. Some have been undertaken to meet statutory requirements, such as consultation on the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy and the Community Strategy, Best Value User Satisfaction Surveys on services such as cleansing, council housing and benefits, feedback on draft Unitary Development Plans, etc.

2.2   Many other, non-statutory consultation activities have been undertaken to determine the community's views on services being provided or developed (e.g. the Customer Focus and Smarter Croydon initiatives).

2.3   To provide a well co-ordinated corporate approach to consultation, the Corporate Consultation Group was established in 1999, and drew representatives from all departments. This group developed a Consultation Strategy in 1999/2000 to support the Council's policies (e.g. the Equal Opportunities Policy) and its Vision and Priorities, with the Policy Unit taking a lead.

2.4   In addition to this, departments have established their own mechanisms to assist with service specific consultation requirements. Well developed examples are the Housing and Environmental, Cultural and Sport Services departments' consultation strategies and activities.

2.5   The government's modernising agenda has contributed significantly to these developments:

- The Local Government Act 1999 included, for the first time, a direct overall requirement to consult with a range of stakeholders to bring about continuous improvements linked to Best Value, through the 4 C's (consult, challenge, compare, compete)

- The Local Government Act 2000 sets out, in its proposals for new constitutional arrangements and community planning (Community Strategies), a key role for consultation in implementing these policies.

- The White Paper "Strong Local Leadership - Quality Public Services" (December 2001) reaffirms the centrality of consultation to the modernising agenda and defines the essence of community leadership as being in touch with local people and working to meet their aspirations.

2.6   Statutory guidance on community planning which was provided by the DTLR illustrates the extent to which local authorities are expected to engage with their local stakeholders:

"If community strategies are to respond to public concerns, there needs to be genuine community engagement with the beginning of the process allowing communities to be fully involved in establishing the long-term vision and the shorter-term priorities for action. It would not be sufficient simply to consult communities on a range of options determined by the authority and its partner agencies"

2.7 The Government's latest contribution to this agenda is its Code of Practice on Consultation (January 2004), which will have a particular impact on the management of feedback on local strategies and action plans. Its main elements are set out in Appendix 4.

2.8 What of other councils countrywide? "Feeling the Pulse II" (July 2003), a review commissioned by IDeA and produced by MORI on local government consultation practices, states in its introduction:

" Until fairly recently, those local authorities who were conducting regular research into the views of local people were very much the exception rather than the norm"

And later,

"The picture we see today is rather different."

"Anyone going in to a local authority today will be able to look at a range of consultation initiatives covering many different areas of Council activity"

2.9 The national picture provides a good opportunity to investigate emerging good practice in consultation and ascertain what lessons might be of benefit to Croydon.

2.10 This review examines the following:
- Defining the concept of "consultation"
- Identifying the main elements a consultation process should comprise and how it can be evaluated
- The Council's implementation of consultation processes

2.11 While this review will focus solely on the Council's involvement in consultation, it needs to acknowledge the existence of many other consultation mechanisms in use by partner agencies such as the police and the health services.

2.12 The "community" the review will focus on are the residents of the borough. However, the Council consult with other groups, such as their own staff (who can also provide useful information on resident needs and ideas for service improvement), the voluntary sector and the business community. While general consultation principles will apply to all groups, particular groups have specific needs to consider, e.g. in the case of the business community, the financial cost and value of the time dedicated to this work, which may deserve a study in its own right.

2.14 It may be noted that a frequent by-product of consultation involving a wide range of stakeholders (e.g. Croydon's Neighbourhood Partnerships) is the useful networking and "informal consultation" between various groups which develops informally as these processes mature.

3   DEFINITION OF CONSULTATION

3.1 Councils and organisations use a varied range of definitions to explain what consultation is about. Indeed, the task of defining what consultation is, is a significant challenge in view of the breadth of objectives and models used by different agencies. However, the main variables which will impact on its definition are:
- The broad purpose of a consultation initiative and its relationship to subsequent service development, if any
- The target group's level of involvement in the consultation and its outcomes

PURPOSE

3.2   What information is to be collected, and to what end? How is the subject-matter determined?

3.3   The purpose of consultation can vary considerably from one initiative to another. Some consultation aims to seek information which may not be intended to have a direct impact on future service delivery, but provides useful data which may contribute to future decision-making and / or the supporting case for an application for funding. An example of such consultation is some of the data collected through the Talkabout questionnaires completed by the Members of Croydon's Citizen's Panel, each of which contains sets of questions put forward by departments or partner agencies with a specific consultation need.

3.4   Other consultation networks have a very specific aim, e.g. to obtain residents' views on priorities for future service delivery (Community Strategy, Housing Stock Investment Plan, Open Spaces Strategy, etc.) or to ascertain how a new service may be designed or fine-tuned to address the needs of potential users. Residents may be given power to shape services from early on, or be asked to comment close to the end of the planning process – a decision dependent on residents' interest in the service, its importance to them, or on the resources available for consultation and follow-up.

3.5   A further distinction may be made between consultation regarding future policy and service development, and consultation on matters such as a choice of colour scheme or design. The former type of consultation may require more training to acquaint the public with the background to the issues under discussion and help residents articulate their views, and more complex negotiations.

3.6   Other consultation processes aim to gauge the views of specific groups of residents, whether in a particular area (e.g. Neighbourhood Partnerships), or in a particular interest group (e.g. the Mobility Forum, the Bus, Rail and Tram Network, etc.). By definition, as such groups operate as "the eyes and ears" of the Council, their concerns will have some impact on the agenda-setting process.

LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT

3.7   The definition of "consultation" will depend on the involvement between those who seek the information and those who provide it: how open are the questions asked? How extensively are residents able to influence service delivery?

3.8   The range of degrees of involvement used by many organisations today draws inspiration from a model originally drawn up by Sheila Arnstein, writing in 1969 about citizen involvement in planning processes in the United States.

3.9   The tenant participation framework used by the Housing Department owes its origins to her work, and recognises the following degrees of engagement:
1. Information – Explaining issues or developments to service users, but not inviting feedback
2. Consultation - Seeking service users' views and feedback about issues or developments but giving them relatively little scope to change services
3. Participation – Seeking service users' views and feedback about issues or developments and giving them a significant say in shaping or changing services
4. Control – This involves tenants running a service. In the late 1990s, a number of estates in the UK took up the opportunity to run their own housing services through the "Right To Manage" programme. In Croydon, this option was explored by a number of estates but did not attract significant interest from residents.

3.10   The Housing Tenant Compact, a statutory agreement setting out how tenants of the Council can take part in decision-making, shows the level of involvement which has been agreed between residents and the department with respect to the various services provided by the department.

3.11   The choice of level of participation in any service is based on a number of considerations, including local residents' interest in and familiarity with an issue, as well as the resources which are available for consultation, training, and subsequent service development.

COUNCIL DEFINITION OF "CONSULTATION"

3.12   Consultation in the Council's Corporate Consultation Strategy is defined as both

"A two-way dialogue with people to get their views in order to inform the council's decision-making process, and

A process enabling people, organisations and businesses to participate in decision-making"

3.13   The Corporate Consultation Strategy also states that

"The Council aims to move towards a participative approach which would mean a greater involvement of its stakeholders in the decision-making process."

4 EVALUATION SYSTEMS: VARIABLES TO TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION

4.1   The Inlogov Conference attended by Cllr Godfrey, the Chair of the Working Group steering forward this review, proposed a few key concepts around which effective evaluation of this work might be drawn up:

1. A checklist of essential steps to take to maximise **fitness for purpose**, to control the resource implications and the resident expectations which consultation entail.

2. Securing a clear **audit trail** between planning, consulting, and implementation (even if indirectly).

3. **Influence** – estimating the effect of resident feedback on service design and delivery.

FITNESS FOR PURPOSE

4.2   What resources are available for consultation? What room for manoeuvre is there for service planning or improvement in terms of resources (budgetary, staff, training, etc.) How will residents' expectations and knowledge and understanding of underlying issues be managed? What groups of residents will be involved in the consultation? Are they representative of the community whose needs we want to ascertain?

4.3   These are some of the key issues which officers have to address in planning, carrying out and reacting to consultation exercises.

4.4   What are the implications for the following parts of the consultation chain?
- Planning consultation work
- Preparation of consultation exercises
- Carrying out consultation
- Communicating results to residents and staff affected and where relevant, acting on results (and communicating results back to residents)
- Evaluating the process to learn lessons for future consultation

4.5   As the design of any consultation exercise is dependent on the capacity of the questioner and the respondents, there is no one correct model. Rather, there is a set of questions which need to be addressed in a way which suits the organisation and the community in question. While this is extensive, it will generally not be the sole remit of one individual as the planning, running and follow-up of consultation is often shared out between many individuals, sometimes different sections or departments. However, such a "checklist" provides each participant a glimpse at the whole picture and how its parts fit into it.

PLANNING

4.6   This stage would have to consider:
- High-level planning to maximising efficient use resources and minimise consultation fatigue, keep up standards, effective dissemination of guidance and make training available, keep records of past consultation exercises

- How to involve council departments and partner agencies in consultation planning in such a way as to maximise efficiency
- The effective co-ordination of statutory consultation e.g. work done in connexion with the Community Strategy, and satisfaction ratings linked to Best Value Performance Indicators
- Defining the key issues to consult on and the types of outcomes required
- Making full use of results of other existing consultation / on-going consultation exercises
- Determine target groups to include in consultation work
- Selecting the range of methods to use, in order to reach and communicate effectively with the size and type of audience needed, including the "hard to reach"
- Costing every step of the process to ensure that the exercise can be supported from the planning phase through to the implementation of agreed recommendations
- Using cost codes for consultation to track expenditure on this function (For instance, the Scrutiny review on consultation carried out by the London Borough of Waltham Forest (February 2004) recommends that a cost code is created in the Council's financial system to monitor the Council's spending on consultation)
- Maintaining some contact with officers running consultation and residents responding to it to help fine-tune processes in the light of experience

4.7   It has to be noted, however, that various agencies carry out small-scale consultation exercises, the planning of which would not require the same amount of resources and officer time.

PREPARATION

4.8   Having identified the issues to investigate, the methods of consultation and resources required, this stage allows for fine-tuning of the consultation exercise to maximise resident participation and quality of data. Matters to be considered include:

- Drawing up well designed agendas, or questions, which link back to the objectives of the consultation, and, where possible, Involving key stakeholders and residents in this process to maximise effective communication
- Deciding what – and how much - information and/or training to provide about the consultation exercise to help residents take a more motivated, confident and purposeful part in it
- Being sensitive to the needs and circumstances of target audiences
- Identifying the "environment" likely to attract the widest possible participation: meeting rooms need to have access to the disabled, be easy to get to; the consultation needs of "hard to reach" groups have to be identified and addressed (One way of consulting with specific groups which may not attend a council-run meeting, is to link in with existing networks which cater for their needs and arrange to attend their meetings to explore issues of mutual interest)
- Work with young people might benefit from an internet consultation option; Access to internet consultation needs to be easy (from the home page, or a variety of entry points), and the survey straight-forward to complete and send
- Producing publicity suited to the consultation exercise – taking into consideration the message, the extent of advertising and the locations and media to be used

CONSULTATION PROCESS

4.9   Whatever the environment, the target population needs to feel motivated to take part, and comfortable with the process.

- Meetings benefit from a welcoming greeting, and a clear introduction setting out the purpose of the event and any necessary ground rules
- Good chairing is essential to encourage maximum participation and to draw out – and manage – different views
- In public meetings, a " toolkit" of strategies for dealing with aggressive behaviour is essential – the views may be useful, but aggressive exchanges will not allow them to be explored constructively
- If meetings are very well attended, a number of methods may be considered to ensure that all participants are heard (e.g. going into smaller groups, asking participants to put forward ideas in writing, or, in the case of young children, in drawings)
- If a large number of useful contributions are made, the Chair may consider prioritising these to avoid later disappointment
- In meetings, ensuring that clear decisions/conclusions about further action are reached democratically at the end of a discussion item

COMMUNICATING RESULTS

4.10   This part of the consultation process is essential to maintain residents' trust in the value of consultation. Issues to consider include:
- How to communicate results and future action based on these
- How to report the results to staff whose work may be affected by the consultation results and how to steer forward any service changes
- How to involve residents in the follow-up to a consultation exercise

EVALUATING CONSULTATION

4.11   As consultation is generally resource-intensive, it is particularly important to evaluate its usefulness in order to fine-tune future work. Elements to be examined include:
- The user-friendliness of the process to residents and to staff involved
- The effectiveness of the work in reaching out to a significant and representative proportion of the target population
- The availability and use of resources from the beginning of the initiative to its end
- The organisation's ability to deliver a satisfactory response to residents' needs
- The effect of the consultation exercise on customer satisfaction

4.12   Simple ways of evaluating a consultation exercise might entail including the above steps in a checklist to ensure that all parts of the process have been implemented, and using a "swot analysis" by officers involved in the process, which can elicit a good range of qualitative data to use in subsequent consultation work.

KEEPING AN AUDIT TRAIL

4.13   As shown above, consultation can often be a long and complex process involving a number of officers, or agencies. New service priorities or budgetary changes can

clash with planned consultation, or with consultation outcomes. This represents a challenge in terms of maintaining continuity of decision-making, based on previous planning and decision-making.

4.14   Realistic planning and effective communication, both informally and through clear notes and minutes of work carried out, are the main tools which can help in keeping as good an audit trail as possible of the full process.

4.15   The need for an audit trail might be combined with the need to keep key data on previous consultation exercises for other officers to make use of. The easiest way in which this might be implemented would be to store key data in a user-friendly central point, e.g. an Internet site, which can be easily accessed and used by various departments and other partner organisations.

EVALUATING INFLUENCE

4.16   Positive resident Influence on decision-making is the end-product which consultation work is aspiring to. However, this is an intangible concept, and therefore potentially difficult to measure or assess.

4.17   One possible way forward – discussed at the Inlogov conference - may come from a recent initiative by "Active Partners", which forms part of the Regional Forum, the strategic organisation for the voluntary and community sector, working across Yorkshire and the Humber. It has built on work carried out with various communities across the region to develop a set of meaningful benchmarks or measures to assess the level and quality of community participation.

4.18   The 12 benchmarks this work led to, which are set out in the table below, cover four main themes linked to resident participation:
- Influence
- Inclusiveness
- Communication methods
- Capacity (understanding and skills)

4.19   Most of the benchmarks shown in the table on page 16 can be evidenced through a product (a set of procedures, the number of seats for resident representatives in a particular group, a code of conduct, information notes or a training course) or statistics (e.g. attendance numbers, monitoring of ethnicity), although others ("Volunteers are valued") may have to be refined in order for officers and residents to be able to agree on easy and transparent ways of monitoring them. The benchmarks also need to be championed and upheld by officers leading on specific services, or projects, and by the Chairs of meetings at which consultation work takes place.

4.20   This system has the advantage of measuring performance on important elements of the consultation process. In addition, it would be relatively easy to provide evidence of performance, by producing data and documents which are tools of the consultation process, e.g. training courses, sets of regulations, consultation budgets, etc.

4.21 However, the 12 benchmarks do not help in evaluating the outcome of consultation work, how it genuinely reflects local priorities and concerns, and how it will be acted upon in future.

INFLUENCE	• The community is involved and valued as an equal partner at all stages of the process • There is meaningful community representation on all decision-making bodies from initiation • All community members have the opportunity to participate • Communities have access to and control over resources • Evaluation of regeneration programmes incorporates a community agenda
INCLUSIVITY	• The diversity of local communities and interests are reflected at all levels of the regeneration process • Equal opportunites policies are in place and implemented • Volunteers are valued
CAPACITY	• Communities are resourced to participate • Understanding, knowledge and skills are developed to support partnership working
COMMUNICATION	• A two-way information strategy is developed and implemented • Project procedures are clear and accessible

The 12 benchmarks of community participation developed by the Yorkshire Active Partners (2002)

THE LONG VIEW

4.22 The evaluation of consultation also needs to take the long view. The Council needs to have mechanisms for ensuring that the consultation it carries out continues to address its objectives, and to ascertain whether its practices need to evolve to address a changing public, changing resources, emerging good practice, and new objectives.

5 CROYDON COUNCIL'S CONSULTATION WORK

5.1 The Council – the focus of this review – carries out a very wide range of consultation work, at a corporate level and within departments. Some consultations are on a large scale, and others on a very small scale, as needs arise, e.g. agreeing the colour scheme of a block of flats.

5.2 A full mapping and evaluation of consultation process would fill several volumes and is beyond the scope of this review. This report summarises current best practice and some areas for development within each assessment criterion identified above.

MAIN STAGES OF CONSULTATION

5.3 PLANNING

5.3.1 Strategic responsibility for Consultation within the Council and with other partner agencies lies with the Executive Office, which takes the lead on obtaining the views of residents, the voluntary sector, the business sector and other public sector organisations. It also co-ordinates consultation on corporate and cross-departmental consultation such as budget setting and work on" Talkabout" questionnaires, established in 2000. These are designed in partnership with officers with a consultation need, and completed by the 1000 or so members of Croydon's Citizens' Panel., The membership of this panel of volunteers is regularly renewed to avoid "consultation fatigue" and ensure members are representative of the community at large. Members of the Citizens' Panel were also involved in focus group meetings, as part of the Corporate Performance Assessment carried out in 2001.

5.3.2 The Council makes use of a wide range of consultation networks and systems to ascertain the needs and aspirations of local residents:
- By subject (departmental consultation work, Citizen's Panel questionnaires, Greenlinks, , budget-setting process, etc …)
- By area (e.g. Neighbourhood Partnerships)
- By need (transport fora, the Mobility Forum)
- By group of residents (e.g. Children's and Young People's Network, Older People's Network)

5.3.4 While this makes for a large number of groups, it is usually much easier for groups with clearly perceived common concerns to put together and pursue an effective agenda for action.

5.3.5 Additionally, a large amount of consultation stems from statutory imperatives. In the case of planning matters, for instance, the Town and Country Planning Act 1974 gives local residents the right to put forward objections to neighbouring planning applications. In addition, the forthcoming Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill will include a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), which will require councils to ascertain how residents wish to be consulted on the planning of their area.

5.3.6 Appendix 1 lists a summary of the statutory and non-statutory consultation carried out by Croydon Council which were listed in the Council's Corporate Consultation Strategy.

5.3.7 Preparation for consultation at a corporate level as well as a departmental level is increasingly planned well in advance and embedded in yearly service plans, with considerations on the resources required to carry out this work systematically. Two examples of departments using this approach are Housing and the new Cultural, Environmental and Sports department.

5.3.8 The multi-agency Community Involvement Strategy Group (CISG) came into being with the Croydon Strategic Partnership which steers forward the Community Strategy. It reports to the Strategic Partnership through the Chief Executives Group and to the Healthy Croydon Partnership through the Modernisation Executive Group. The CISG has taken on the baton for the high-level co-ordination of consultation. It has recognised that there is considerable scope for the co-ordination of consultation activity amongst partnership members, a need which is echoed in the following Community Strategy action point for this year:

"(To) develop a process to ensure that community consultation is co-ordinated between public sector agencies" *(Community Strategy Action Plan 2004-2005 – Providing Better and Fairer Services)*

5.3.9 The main tasks the CISG proposes to focus on in the first instance are:
- Identification of good practice
- Identifying existing groups and involvement arrangements operated by different agencies/partnerships.
- Registering consultation activities

5.3.10 The Scrutiny and Overview Committee which has commissioned this review also has a role in involving local residents in influencing decision-making, as the Local Government Act 2000 granted it the power to scrutinise the Council's performance on promoting the 'economic, social and environmental well-being' of communities and therefore to ascertain what their current and future needs are. While the formal structure of committee and sub-committee meetings and its type of business do not lend themselves to spontaneous public participation, Scrutiny reviews conducted in Croydon have included consultation with the public through a range of surveys and open discussion, two examples being:
- Surveys and open discussion with young people (Scrutiny review of Young People's Citizenship and Involvement)
- Questionnaires (telephone, face-to-face, Internet and Croydon Reports) regarding night-time transport (Scrutiny Review of Croydon's Night-Time Economy)

5.3.12 The findings of this consultation work played a key role in framing Scrutiny recommendations for future action or service improvement for Cabinet Members to consider.

5.3.13 The Scrutiny and Overview Committee also communicates with the public through Croydon Reports, the Scrutiny web pages and various leaflets, and deals with regular queries from the public concerning broad issues affecting the community. In addition, following changes to the Council's Constitution introduced in 2004, it is set

to bring in another communication channel with the public through twice yearly Public Question Time at Scrutiny and Overview Committee Meetings.

5.4   PREPARATION

5.4.1   There exists a wide range of good practice in addressing this crucial element of consultation work.

SETTING THE AGENDA

5.4.2   In Neighbourhood Partnerships, a great deal of time is given to preparing the agenda in conjunction with the Chair. Agendas have previously been felt to reflect current Council priorities rather than residents' interests. However, with the creation of steering groups e.g. in New Addington and Fieldway, residents are now exerting a stronger influence on the business to be addressed. The Coulsdon East and West Neighbourhood Partnership has reduced its agendas to investigate fewer issues in greater depth, in addition to giving residents the opportunity to raise miscellaneous queries.

5.4.3   Residents and councillors in another Neighbourhood Partnership, for the Addiscombe, Ashburton and Woodside areas, have worked to identify the needs of their local neighbourhoods with a view to agreeing action plans suggesting how these areas should be improved.

5.4.4   In areas of deprivation e.g. West Croydon and New Addington, action plans are being put together by residents and councillors as part of the Neighbourhood Renewal agenda, and local Neighbourhood Partnership are being actively involved in this process. Appendix 5 sets out the process used in the Fieldway and New Addington area to identify and address local needs as well as the Government's key floor targets on health, crime, education, employment, housing and transport issues in the area.

5.4.5   Community Planning work on the redevelopment of Purley Town Centre is also currently taking place, and focuses on the main priorities of the Purley and Kenley Neighbourhood Partnership.

5.4.6   The selection of appropriate agenda items which are of interest to the community is dependent on residents' skill in using these forums to highlight key concerns, and the Chair's ability to liaise with residents and to prioritise their contributions into items for discussion and miscellaneous queries to address with the appropriate officers outside the meeting.

5.4.7   In Neighbourhood Partnerships, two developments have arisen from feedback from Chairs and Vice-Chairs and other stakeholders:
- Steering groups have been set up in some areas to provide a community lead to the activity of the Partnership, e.g. in Fieldway and New Addington
- A training programme has been designed and delivered in collaboration with Chairs and Vice-Chairs to address their development needs as Chairs. The training has been supplemented with a detailed pack providing hints on good chairing and partnership working, information on the Community Strategy, the Neighbourhood Renewal strategy, and a directory of local services and their contact details. The training programme and materials may be worth re-using in future as new residents express an interest in community leadership.

PROVIDING BACKGROUND INFORMATION

5.4.8 Effective consultation does not only provide service providers with information on the community, but it also informs residents, equipping them to participate effectively in discussions and decision-making. This might be provided through written information, through officer attendance, and perhaps through some form of training for members of steering groups. For instance, in the case of Neighbourhood Partnership meetings dealing with the redevelopment of the Croydon General Hospital site, detailed reports were sent out with agendas for residents to absorb before the meeting itself.

5.4.9 A number of officers e.g. Street Scene Officers attend Neighbourhood Partnership meetings regularly and can provide information on their area of work as the need arises. This work is being developed further with the establishment of "virtual teams" of officers for individual Neighbourhood Partnerships, which will provide expertise and address queries raised at meetings (see paragraphs 5.6.4 and 5.6.5).

5.4.10 Interestingly, research carried out by the London Borough of Brent Citizen's Panel suggests that effective two way communication can have a positive effect on resident perceptions of council services – unsurprising, as the council gains a better understanding of what the residents need, and the residents become better acquainted with the legislation and procedures underpinning service delivery. Residents who were well informed regarding council services generally held a better opinion of them, as shown in the table below:

STATEMENTS REGARDING COUNCIL SERVICES	LEVELS OF RESIDENT AGREEMENT	
	UNINFORMED	WELL INFORMED
Council listens to views of local people	18%	38%
Council gives local people good value for money	16%	38%
Quality of Council services is good overall	33%	61%
Satisfaction with Council	31%	57%

Citizen's Panel Survey Results (Consultation Strategy for Brent 2001-2004 - page 14)

5.4.11 Making use of information already produced for Croydon Reports, the Council's website, etc., to convey information on council services could help a "critical mass" of residents to gain a better understanding of local services and how they are run and funded, and to contribute to local decision-making in a more informed way.

DELEGATING POWERS

5.4.12 In paragraphs 3.6-3.10 of this review, a quick overview was provided of the different levels at which people could be involved in decision-making. While past experience e.g. in Croydon's Housing Department suggests that local residents do not have great interest in taking over the running of a service, they do react very positively to opportunities to have a direct say in decisions affecting their neighbourhood, and the use of funding to improve it.

5.4.13 The Housing Department, for instance, has involved council tenants and leaseholders borough-wide in its Environmental Improvement Scheme since 1999. This has given them the power to make decisions about the use of this part of the

department's budget, and to prioritise the applications put forward. Residents are given training to conduct this work effectively and equitably, and are provided with information on each application (including a "virtual tour" around each site – previously, real site visits) to ascertain what residents' problems and needs are.

5.4.14 The London Borough of Southwark has taken this idea further and delegated a number of powers to its Community Councils (equivalent to our Neighbourhood Partnerships). They have been granted a significant budget with which to fund environmental improvements in each locality, as well as planning decision-making powers, and are given training to gain an understanding of the responsibilities delegated to them.

5.4.15 However, it is worth sounding a note of caution on the delegation of powers or budgets to residents. Such action can only be useful if the powers, resources and training available to the public are sufficient to bring about changes or improvements which are of significance to the neighbourhoods concerned. In addition, such work should not distract residents from taking part in other consultation work which will have a significant albeit less direct impact on local services.

OBTAINING THE VIEWS OF "HARD TO REACH" GROUPS

5.4.16 Current experience in consultation work such as Neighbourhood Partnerships shows that Black and Ethnic Minority groups, young people and young parents have in various cases been difficult to reach and consult. However, other hard to reach individuals are those who do not use a service, and those who are uninterested or uncomfortable with some aspect of the consultation process - far harder "groups" to define and search out.

5.4.17 It may be noted that not all people are interested in consultation on council services, as illustrated in "Feeling the Pulse (II)", a study conducted by MORI: Hertfordshire County Council conducted research to segment their residents into distinct groups by their different attitudes towards the County Council, with a view to future targeted communication. Analysis in this study led to the identification of the following groups:
- **"All round apathetics"** 20%
- "Content with status quo" 14%
- "Favourable outsiders" 9%
- "Uninformed critics" 12%
- "Critical Politicos" 9%
- "Informed advocates" 19%
- **"Motivated information seekers"** 16%

5.4.18 Analysis was then run off to detail the characteristics of people within these different clusters, providing the potential for future targeting of communications in the county.

5.4.19 Another set of figures, from the evaluation of Best Value, which also appeared in "Feeling the Pulse (II)", shows people's broad attitudes towards their local authority, and their willingness to get involved in consultation:

- 58% like to know what the Council is doing, but are happy to let them get on with their job
- 20% would like to have more of a say in what the Council does and the services it provides
- 17% are not interested in what the council does as long as they do their job
- 3% are already working for, or involved with the Council and the services it provides
- 1% are not interested in what the Council does or whether they do their job
- 1% did not state their level of interest

5.4.20 Again, by segmenting customers according to their attitudes to the organisation and their interaction to it and its products, it is possible to build a greater understanding of how best they might be consulted, and in what context . However, judging from attendances at Neighbourhood Partnerships, a simple trigger for turning apathetic residents into vocal protesters is the announcement of the end of a valued service or facility - whether council run, or not.

5.4.21 A number of methods are being used by the Council to reach and obtain the views of a wide range of individuals, including groups which are hard to reach:

- As explained in its presentation to the Scrutiny Sub-Committee for Safe and Inclusive Communities on 17th February 2004, the Housing Department has recently changed its resident participation structure to offer a broader range of opportunities for residents to get involved. The new structure reflects the fact that not all wish to have the same level of involvement, enjoy attending meetings, or have an interest in the full range of issues encompassed in resident participation.

-
- Consulting people where they are likely to be can be very effective in reaching out to people who are not interested in attending meetings or filling in questionnaires, or who are not very mobile: the Scrutiny review of Services to Older People involved linking in with networks providing support to older people and obtaining a good range of information on this specific topic. Another example of this practice is the Social Services department's use of a "roaming coffee morning" approach to consultation in connection with the production of its Long Term Care Charter in 2002, which involved visiting a number of community-based locations around the borough.

- A number of council departments (e.g. Housing, Social Services and Education) have succeeded in obtaining feedback from asylum seekers by seeking it at the point of service delivery. While there may be a danger in the environment influencing the results, giving support and encouragement can at least provide the opportunity to gain feedback from a group which generally keeps a very low profile.

- Social Services have linked up with voluntary organisations such as Mencap to reach people who are not known to the department, to provide them with information and support

- Specialist consultation work has been carried out by Social Services with people with a hearing difficulty

- Another strategy which can draw a large number of people from the community is the use of a "fun day" combined with dialogue with the council. An example of this, quoted in the Audit Commission website, is the "Torfaen Big T2" event held in May 2002, which combined fun activities, exhibitions, performances and instant opinion polls to get local people planning the county's future and how they would like to influence it. Croydon too has used this model on a number of occasions, including consultation on services to be provided through the Sure Start initiative.

5.4.22 Young people in particular tend to be few in number at traditional meetings (e.g. residents' association or neighbourhood partnership meetings). Open discussion at venues where they feel more at ease and where they can have more control over the agenda is a more successful format and has been used by the CVA and New Addington and Fieldway Neighbourhood Partnership to give young people their own forum. Another popular medium for consultation with young people is the Internet. The Royal Borough of Kingston, for instance, has acknowledged its potential and created web pages specially geared to local young people, to encourage their involvement in local matters.

5.4.23 The web-based survey on using night-time transport, which could be accessed from a number of points in the website and also appeared in Croydon Reports in October and November 2002, provided a good proportion of responses from young people using very late transport, and a large number of comments on how they felt about using night-time transport. The responses obtained through the web were from a significantly younger group of respondents than those obtained through Croydon Reports. Many of the web respondents stated that they returned home significantly later and had proportionally greater trouble finding transport than Croydon Reports respondents.

5.4.24 Apart from providing the current facility for web-based surveys, the Council's website will soon provide the potential to run one question "Quick click polls", which are already in wide usage in the media. Such surveys might be supplemented with qualitative data from a smaller sample of the population. The challenge will be to find questions which are useful to the Council and interesting to the public.

5.4.25 The above examples are but a small sample of a wide range of consultation techniques which can be used to reach the widest possible audiences. Indeed, particularly in the case of an extensive consultation initiative, it is useful to adopt a mix of advertising and consultation methods (e.g. dissemination through the local press, the Internet, and through a well attended event), to bring in the views of people with different "life habits" and levels of interest in Councils services.

5.4.26 However, the traditional meeting must not be underrated as a means of consultation, and has been used to good effect council-wide. It is perhaps a format which is less predictable and controllable than surveys or internet polls, but sensitivity and good organisation, as well as training both on running meetings and the subject-matter to be dealt with, has helped many groups gain in confidence and effectiveness.

5.4.27 Indeed a study commissioned by the Local Government Association (LGA) named "Designs on Democracy" (June 2003) investigated a number of examples of public consultation countrywide, set out in the table below, and came up with the following

conclusions around requirements for good consultation, which transcend technological and advertising gimmickry:

- A need to understand the real interests of public
- A need for staff and financial resources
- A long-term commitment
- A need for involvement council-wide
- Using appropriate techniques
- Choosing judicious choice of venues and times
- A need to measure success of events

DESIGNS ON DEMOCRACY - CASE STUDIES ON DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION - JUNE 2003

- London Borough of Camden
  - Executive Question Time
  - Webcasting meetings - transmitted through the Internet

- Lancashire County Council
  - Executive Question Time
  - "Cabinet in the community"Web-casting

- Shropshire County Council
  - State of the area debate
  - Citizen and Democracy pack

- Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council
  - Area boards
  - Mayor making and Trafford Civic Awards

- West Lindsey District Council
  Public debates

5.5   CONSULTATION

5.5.1 Members attending Neighbourhood Partnership meetings at the beginning of this review found that many meetings were well led, with plenty of opportunities for residents to express their views. Some effective conflict management was also witnessed.

5.5.2 A number of Neighbourhood Partnerships cover groups of wards which are geographically close, but have very different issues to address. To address this, a number of Neighbourhood Partnerships split into "ward meetings" for part of their discussions. While this is to be welcomed, it was observed that a number of ward discussions were chaired and managed less well than the plenary part of the meetings. Topics are not clearly prioritised, little information is provided on existing procedures and what action can be taken, and follow-up is less clearly set out.

Discussions by ward could be very useful if residents were invited to prioritise and discuss key issues, and had easier access to key information helping them to reach useful decisions.

5.5.3 In various well-attended neighbourhood partnership meetings in the past, Chairs have asked participants to conduct discussions in small groups, in order to involve as many people as possible, particularly those who feel intimidated at having to speak in front of a large audience. The very first New Addington and Fieldway Neighbourhood Partnership, for instance, gave participants a chance to voice their main priorities for their neighbourhood and take part in prioritising them, by working in small groups and asking each to write down their main decisions and priorities. This technique can work well to encourage shy participants, reduce the likelihood of having a meeting dominated by a few vocal individuals, and give some residents the opportunity to do some "low-risk" chairing and gain experience in this skill.

5.5.4 It has been noted, however, that attendance at neighbourhood partnerships is not fully representative of the local population. While no statistics are kept at present regarding the age, gender and ethnic background of residents attending Neighbourhood Partnership meetings, anecdotal accounts consistently suggests that ethnic minorities and young age groups are under-represented. Some discussions and awareness-raising with representatives of local groups which are not represented at the moment may serve to identify the reasons why these groups are not currently motivated to take part, and to find ways of assisting them in making their voices and interests heard through this channel.

5.5.5 Some insights on how BME representation may be encouraged can be gained from the work of the Croydon African, Asian & Caribbean Tenants' Association (C.A.A.C.T.A.), which was set up to work for and represent the interest of all ethnic minorities who are tenants or leaseholders of Croydon Council or Housing Associations within the London Borough of Croydon. Its remit includes empowering, training and supporting members to enable them to participate in their local community groups, resident associations and housing panels, and on matters relating to the needs of BME tenants and leaseholders.

5.5.6 An essential feature of consultation through meetings is the possibility of encountering views which are at least on the surface diametrically opposed to each other, e.g. various groups' priorities for the development of a specific area. Negotiations then need to be facilitated between the parties involved to find a workable compromise. Another example is the tension experienced between service users and officers aware of a service need and the wider public who may consider it either a low priority or an unwelcome development.

5.5.7 The handling of conflicting views and decisions regarding subsequent action need to be made in a climate where all participants are assured that their views are valued and are supported in finding a way forward which addresses their fundamental needs. This requires a great deal of time, which needs to be scheduled into meeting agendas, as well as relevant background information, and good mediation skills.

5.5.8 This will become particularly important in the context of consultation on planning matters after the reform of the UK planning system, which is currently in the last stages of Parliamentary approval. As stated in paragraph 5.3.5 of this review, local councils will be required to produce a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI).

Suggested changes to traditional consultation on the Unitary Development Plan will entail "participatory planning", which will involve a process of negotiation between stakeholders.

5.5.9   It is anticipated that the skills such consultation will require will include:
- Extensive negotiation through a planning process
- Mediation between various parties
- Managing a process involving multiple stakeholders
- Conflict management
- The ability to synthesize information, evaluate and make accurate records of opinions
- Training for participants on negotiation techniques as well as the information on which such negotiations will focus

5.5.10 While these changes will affect one department in particular, it will be useful to share any good practice deriving from this work council-wide. This will be essential as the Council aims to involve residents ever more closely in decision-making on service planning.

5.6   FEEDBACK AND FOLLOW-UP

DEVELOPMENTS IN NEIGHBOURHOOD PARTNERSHIPS

5.6.1   One simple form of feedback to residents is the provision of information on a query at the meeting itself, in order to facilitate more realistic decision-making. Another type of feedback, which is of importance to participants, is follow-up on action points raised at previous meetings. As stated in paragraph 5.4.8, officers are currently in attendance to address matters relating to waste management and cleansing. As stated in the Community Strategy action plan for 2004/2005, it is also planned that Senior Police Officers should take part in each Neighbourhood Partnership to provide information on current work and answer residents' queries.

5.6.2   However, it has been acknowledged that appropriate corporate support to Neighbourhood Partnerships at the right level of seniority is important to ensure that all issues raised at meetings are taken forward and dealt with.

5.6.3   A number of Council departments and some statutory agencies have already allocated specific officers to support individual Neighbourhood Partnerships, and others have been approached to provide expertise and assistance in their field.

5.6.4   Lists of these officers are now being compiled to create "virtual teams" to support Neighbourhood Partnerships, and pilots of this initiative are planned for two cycles of meetings in 2004. It is proposed that one second or third tier officer within these "virtual teams" will take on a lead function and becomes the key contact for co-ordination and support to a particular Neighbourhood Partnership.

5.6.5   It is planned that the role of virtual teams will include:
- Co-ordinating and providing feedback to issues raised at meetings and implementing agreed decisions
- Co-ordinating input from other council departments and partner agencies
- Supporting steering groups where they exist

FOLLOWING UP ACTION POINTS

5.6.6   Consultation exercises which lead to the production of a strategy or local action plan hold a promise of action within their objectives, although there exists a danger of being over-ambitious when faced with a blank sheet. Costing action points accurately, and getting a good match between needs and resources, can prove something of a challenge.

5.6.7   The task of following consultation with appropriate action or improvements may be an ever greater challenge in the case of regular consultation, through resident meetings, satisfaction surveys, etc. While resident pressure plays a role here, the Council may wish to explore decision-tracking systems and set simple management performance indicators to ascertain how many action points have been dealt with satisfactorily, and in time. Such an exercise would also encourage officers and residents to agree realistic deadlines in line with existing procedures and available resources.

CHANGES TO SERVICE PROVISION ARISING FROM CONSULTATION WORK

5.6.8   Consultation work has resulted in a wide range of changes to service delivery, which are embedded in service plans across the council. A small selection of improvements stemming from consultation with residents is set out below:
   • Changes in library hours, including the introduction of Sunday opening hours
   • Changes in the management of business waste, including more enforcement action
   • The provision of a more flexible range of services in the Literacy Centre, instead of twice weekly sessions for a year
   • Changes to the curriculum of the Bridge Course run by Croydon College
   • A more accessible and responsive complaints process for Looked After Children
   • With regard to planning applications, a duty officer rota has been introduced at the one-stop reception to deal with enquiries more efficiently
   • Again in the context of planning, the format of approval notices has been made more user-friendly, and, following work with Scrutiny Members, the content of notification letters to residents living in an area where a planning application has been made has been changed to facilitate residents' involvement in consultation.

5.6.9   However, in many cases, residents are not clearly advised of the main outcomes of the consultation, or, in some cases, are given too much information, from which it can be difficult to extract what is important to them. In addition, some improvements may take some time in being implemented, and their link to a previous action plan may not be highlighted. As a result of being unaware of service improvements arising from past consultation, residents may not feel motivated to get involved in future. Croydon Reports has been used in the past to highlight recent service improvements. Its role in linking changes with the outcome of consultation work could be reinforced.

5.7   EVALUATING CONSULTATION WORK

5.7.1   A number of consultation processes (e.g. the Talkabout questionnaires) use regular evaluation systems to assess their usefulness. In addition, the CISG is producing

good practice guidance on consultation, which covers the consultation steps described in pages 6 to 9 of this review, and could provide the foundation for a "checklist" to ensure that all parts of this long chain have been completed.

MEASURING INFLUENCE BY "YORKSHIRE FORWARD" BENCHMARKS

5.7.2 As stated in the Community Strategy, "The Council aims to move towards a participative approach which would mean a greater involvement of its stakeholders in the decision-making process". To this end, it has put in place a number of measures to improve resident involvement and influence. alluded to in the "Yorkshire Forward" benchmarks set out on page 16, such as the following:

- The community is increasingly well trained to participate: examples include housing participation training for residents, training in specific services such as stock investment issues, training for Neighbourhood Partnership Chairs , the "Total Respect" training for senior staff by young people and staff from the Leaving Care and Independence Service, etc.

- Equal Opportunities policies are in place, as well as codes of conduct which reiterate principles of democratic participation

- Croydon African Asian and Caribbean Tenants' Association, created by the Housing Department to provide peer encouragement and help BME communities to take greater part in decision-making

- As shown in Appendix 3, a number of Community Strategy action points for 2004-2005   also   feed   into   benchmarks,   e.g.:
  - Further develop the capacity of Neighbourhood Partnerships through supporting the steering groups and ensuring they are supported by all public sector   agencies
  - Develop further local improvement plans in some Neighbourhood Partnership areas
  - Continue to develop methods to enable young people's views to be heard and taken   into   account
  - Involve local people in the delivery of Neighbourhood Action Plans for North West Croydon and Fieldway/New Addington

5.7.3 The "Yorkshire Forward Benchmarks" would require extensive monitoring of gender, ethnicity, age, etc of participants at meetings and other events. The Council has succeeded in reaching out to groups which are representative of the local population in their panels, e.g. the Citizen's Panel and the eight "Stock Section Panels" used by the Library Service to choose new stock (see Appendix 6).

5.7.4 However, a representative group is more difficult to assemble when agencies do not know who will attend a consultation event such as a public meeting. Some monitoring already takes place in meetings such as Neighbourhood Partnerships, for which statistics are compiled after each meeting. However, information regarding participants' gender, ethnicity and age is not compiled in all consultation exercises. This is partly due to the resource implications of such a task, as well as to the fact that many participants are reluctant to provide such information.

5.7.5 If the Council wish to ascertain how well the various sectors of the community are represented in their consultation work, they will need to set up a system capable of recording attendance at the majority of their consultation exercises, which would only be manageable if held on a commonly accessed and well maintained database.

5.7.6 In taking forward its programme for increasing the involvement of residents in its decision-making processes as stated in the Community Strategy, the Council will have to decide how to measure its progress. It is hoped it will draw inspiration from the benchmarks set out on page 16, which encapsulate many of the systems which need to be in place in order for residents to get more involved in the Council's decision-making processes.

KEEPING A RECORD OF CONSULTATION EXERCISES

5.7.7 The Community Strategy action plan for "Better and Fairer Access to Services" includes plans to "develop a process to ensure that community consultation is better co-ordinated between the public sector agencies" and would need an information storage facility to manage such a process.

5.7.8 A consultation database is already available on the Council's Intranet to share records of previous consultation exercises. It holds data on:
- aims and objectives of the consultation exercises
- target audiences and sampling techniques if any
- participation methods used
- numbers of people taking part, and diversity monitoring
- key results
- key actions resulting from the consultation

5.7.9 The system holds data on 140 consultation exercises carried out until 2003 – a large number if not a complete record of all consultation work done by the Council. The database is easily available from the "Consultation" Icon on the Intranet Home Page. The information is stored as an SQL database, and can be manipulated by I.T. to be used as an Excel file.

5.7.10 This database is currently underused, perhaps because officers are not fully aware of its potential uses and do not use it enough to ask for improvements to current weaknesses.

5.7.11 The search facility by department and date is not very user-friendly, particularly as users may not be familiar with past consultation work or previous departments names – easier browsing and sorting facilities are needed to access the records.

5.7.12 The fields on the form provide useful summaries and are reasonably user-friendly in number, but there would room for further development if the CISG feel a strong need to use the system and fine-tune it to meet its requirements.

5.7.13 There is plenty of potential for developing this facility, but stakeholders concerned would have to assign responsibility for ensuring that it is used consistently, and usefully. The current form could be used as a summary sheet for consultation reports, and data could be divided into a "design stage", a "results and follow-up" section, and a brief evaluation outlining successes and problems encountered.

5.7.14 It would be useful for the multi-agency Community Involvement Strategy Group (CISG) which forms part of the Croydon Strategic Partnership to explore the potential of this system for sharing consultation data within the Council and with partner organisations, either by sending snap shots of it by e-mail or on CD, or storing it on shared Internet pages.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 This review has brought to light a wide range of consultation needs, statutory and non-statutory, which are driving forward the development of good practice in this field and the need to co-ordinate this work in a systematic way. Indeed, Croydon Council is well regarded nationally in this field, and is quoted as a case study of effective consultation by the ODPM.

6.2 However, consultation needs to reflect the evolving nature of local needs and services, and to take advantage of the opportunities for good co-ordination and sharing of good practice arising from the establishment of the Community Strategy and the Croydon Strategic Partnership.

6.3 The multi-agency Community Involvement Steering Group are asked to consider the recommendations arising from this review:
- To make greater use of partnership work and consultation tools to bring about significant improvements in:
  - co-ordinating consultation work as effectively and attractively as possible
  - identifying economies of scale
  - increasing the range and number of residents taking part in consultation

- To develop and propose procedures to ensure that all consultation exercises clearly inform participants of their aims, possible outcomes, channels for communicating feedback and estimated time frames for action

- To consider how to develop and use simple systems for tracking decisions made in meetings

- To draw up proposals for user-friendly processes to evaluate consultation projects both as they progress and when completed, and to review the effectiveness of consultation work on a wider scale

- To consider how to make effective use of Information Technology, including the existing consultation database to be found in the Intranet, to record, monitor and evaluate consultation exercises

6.4 Three factors remain essential to good consultation, however: interest value to the target group, trust in the usefulness of the process and the likelihood of being heard and understood, and an efficient infrastructure to accommodate the various stages of the process and ensure continuity and satisfactory results.

APPENDIX 1:
STATUTORY AND NON-STATUTORY CONSULTATION QUOTED IN THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE CONSULTATION STRATEGY

STATUTORY CONSULTATION

A number of consultation activities are undertaken by the Council in order to meet statutory requirements. Examples of these are listed below:

BEST VALUE
- Summary of Best Value Performance Plan (Survey)
- As part of Best Value Reviews (various techniques used)
- Best Value User Satisfaction Surveys (MORI Survey)
- Planning Application User Satisfaction Survey (Survey)
- Housing Benefit User Satisfaction Survey (Survey)
- Council Tenant User Satisfaction Survey (Survey)

- New political structures (focus groups, workshops and borough-wide survey)
- Community Plan Survey (borough-wide survey)
- Community Safety Audit
- Unitary Development Plan
- Education Development Plan
- Lifelong Development Plan
- Early Years and Childcare Development Plan

NON-STATUTORY CONSULTATION

A large number of consultation activities have been undertaken to determine the community's views in order to help improve services. Some examples include:

- Smarter Croydon (Citizen's Panel, focus groups and borough-wide survey)
- Customer Focus Project (Citizen's Panel, Focus Groups and surveys)
- Referendum on Council Tax (Citizen's Panel, focus groups and borough-wide survey)
- Tenant Participation Survey (detailed face to face interviews)
- Finding a Voice (Youth Conference)
- Customer questionnaires regarding CETS
- Education Community Consultation Partnership (forum)
- Quality of School meals including providing beef in school meals (survey)
- Greenlawn Memorial Park referendum
- Thornton Heath Pool Redevelopment Programme Survey
- Canterbury Road recreation ground facility redevelopment
- Sustainable Transport Strategy survey
- Closure of residential homes for older people
- Social Services joint review

APPENDIX 2:
COMMUNITY STRATEGY ACTION PLAN FOR 2004-2005 ("BETTER AND FAIRER ACCESS TO SERVICES – INCREASING COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT")

Actions relating to consultation are shown in Bold
Proposed Actions for 2004 – 2005

- **Further develop the capacity of Neighbourhood Partnerships through supporting the steering groups and ensuring they are supported by all public sector agencies**

- **Develop further local improvement plans in some Neighbourhood Partnership areas**

- Co-ordinate support to enable Croydon to bid more effectively for external funding to support community activity

- Undertake a programme of capacity checking for voluntary organisations

- Improve opportunities for voluntary organisations to access suitable accommodation for their activities

- Develop the support available to enable people to undertake volunteering opportunities, particularly through Investing In Volunteering.

- Accredit the Community Champions course to ensure it provides a recognised qualification

- **Develop a process to ensure that community consultation is co-ordinated between public sector agencies**

- **Continue to develop methods to enable young peoples views to be heard and taken into account**

- Implement the Compact Action Plans and include other public sector agencies such as the Police, Croydon College, and the Learning and Skills Council

- Develop a framework to improve the co-ordination of the number of Community Development initiatives operating in Croydon

- Further develop a corporate social responsibility programme to maximise business support for voluntary and community organisations

- **Involve local people in the delivery of Neighbourhood Action Plans for North West Croydon and Fieldway/New Addington**

- **Provide a training and development package for Neighbourhood Partnership Chairs and Vice-Chairs**

- **Complete arrangements for new Community Housing Panels to link up with Neighbourhood Partnerships**

- **Arrange programme for Senior Police Officers to take part in each Neighbourhood Partnerships**

Proposed Actions to be taken over the next few years:

Review the lessons learnt in developing action plans and apply it to all neighbourhoods

- **Implement Neighbourhood Action Plans in conjunction with local people**

- To develop methods to improve local election turnout in 2006

- Explore the scope for greater involvement of local people in the direct management of aspects of public services

APPENDIX 3:

RECORD FROM THE COUNCIL'S INTRANET CONSULTATION DATABASE

Record Number: 60

Department : Cultural Services

Purpose of Consultation : To establish information on general customer profiling (age, gender, ethnicity, etc, mode of travel, etc), what activities people take part in and customer satisfaction ratings on the facility, staffing, activities provided and accessibility.

What will the Results be used for? : Basis for a Benchmarking Report. An important part of the Best Value process. The results will also give valuable information on the performance of sites and how we can improve them in terms of performance targets/standards.

Research Method

Questionnaire :

Telephone Survey :

Focus Groups :

Public Meeting :

Face to Face Interview : YES

Citizens Panel :

Other Method :

Who is undertaking the Survey/Research?

Inhouse : YES

External agency : University of Sheffield for Sport England

Cost : Inhouse: approx £800. External: approx £800

Target Group : A good cross-section of all service users

Location for Research : Purley Swimming Pool

Start Date : 07/10/2001

(Any further comments) :

Approximate End Date : 16/10/2001

(Any further comments) :

Sample Size

(Specify number of people invited to participate) : 900-1000 approx

(Specify the expected % response) :

Lessons Learnt : It looks like being a very useful exercise once we get the full results and will help set the benchmarks for future improvements, but takes a lot of resources to carry out properly

Further Information : Full report on benchmarking service available from Cultural Services when the end of year financial information is sent to Sport England to complete 'number crunching' aspect of exercise

Contact Person : Pam Pilcher

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Comments :

APPENDIX 4:
THE SIX MAIN CONSULTATION CRITERIA OF THE GOVERNMENT'S CODE OF PRACTICE ON CONSULTATION

1. Consult widely through the process, allowing a minimum of 12 weeks for written consultation at least once during the development of the policy.

2. Be clear about what your proposals are, who may be affected, what questions are being asked and the timescale for responses.

3. Ensure that your consultation is clear, concise and widely accessible.

4. Give feedback regarding the responses received and how the consultation process influenced the policy.

5. Monitor your department's effectiveness at consultation, including through the use of a designated consultation co-ordinator.

6. Ensure your consultation follows better regulation best practice, including carrying out a Regulatory Impact Assessment if appropriate.

<u>These criteria must be reproduced within all consultation documents.</u>

Appendix 5
Extract from the
Fieldway and New Addington Local Neighbourhood Action Plan

Delivery Plan for 2004/05

1. Introduction

The Fieldway and New Addington local Neighbourhood Action Plan is the first of its kind. It was developed over a period of nearly a year and combines the efforts of local residents, community and voluntary groups and delivery agencies. In this respect it is a comprehensive document bringing together community energy and aspirations with professional expertise and resources from the main delivery agencies, such as the Police, the Primary Care Trust, the local College and the Council. The voluntary and community sector have also played an important part in developing this document.

The Delivery Plan gives a clear picture of what is going to happen in this area in the next year. It also highlights some of the long-term major initiatives, which will be finalised during this time.

The allocation of the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund is another important aspect of the Delivery Plan. It will reassure the local community that this money is well-spent on projects which address local issues and priorities.

The local community will be able to scrutinise the way services are delivered in their area and their effectiveness in tackling inequalities and providing a better quality of life.

2. Brief record of process

The Fieldway and New Addington local Neighbourhood Action Plan was developed over a period of several months through a process of consultation with local people and service providers. It began with a meeting of the Neighbourhood Partnership steering group to plan a community wide action-planning day on 26 April 2003. The day was attended by over 80 local residents, representatives of delivery agencies, local Councillors, the Deputy Leader of Croydon Council and the local Member of Parliament. The outcomes of the day determined the vision and the aspirations of the local communities for the future. This provided the basis for developing sets of actions reflecting the community priorities.

An in-depth Questionnaire was circulated to service providers and, supplemented by interviews with key service stakeholders at a number of levels (from policy makers to operational managers and deliverers). Over fifty questionnaires were returned covering, at least in part, every statutory service operating in the area.

In order to reflect the strong "cross cutting" themes emerging from the process, the principle of '3 pillars' was devised to support and draw together the concerns and themes underlying both the local community's stated priorities and those embedded in the service plans of the delivery agencies and the Government 'floor targets'. At the top is the ultimate goal of Community Pride and Cohesion. A second pillar of Learning and Earning reflects the dynamic of the progression from learning to earning and back again – life-long learning for both the individual and whole families. The third pillar, Healthy People in a

Healthy Environment, reflects the strong and proven link between physical, mental and spiritual health and the local environment, including housing.

A sketch plan was produced in early July 2003 and discussed by the Inter-Agency Group, the Partnership Steering Group and its sub-groups, set up to provide continued community input in agreeing the final project proposals. Finally a simple street questionnaire was devised which invited those who had not been necessarily involved in the process to comment on the identified priorities.

A draft Action Plan was produced and presented to the local Neighbourhood Partnership. Then the Chair and the Vice Chair took the plan to the Board of the Croydon Strategic Partnership and it secured overwhelming support. At the same time a Council's Chief Officers Steering group was set-up to lead the overall local regeneration process. The Interagency Group recommended to this group to task three sub-groups to develop workable project proposals reflecting the priorities in the Action Plan. All delivery agencies participated in the work of the subgroups. Three main principles were applied when putting forward project proposals. These were financial sustainability, community involvement and addressing 'floor targets'. The Chair of the Chief Officers group has become the Champion for the area.

The project proposals (See Section 5) were also validated and approved by the subgroups of the Neighbourhood Partnership, which will be merging/have merged into a Residents Scrutiny Panel. This Panel will provide community governance over the main projects funded as part of the action planning process and the implementation of the agreed priorities. The Panel and the Neighbourhood Partnership have permanent representation on the Interagency group.

3. **Overview of most important actions, cross referring to what community said in the Action Plan**

The actions to be taken forward fall within three main themes or community action pillars, as called in the plan. These three pillars are:
- Community pride and cohesion
- Learning and Earning
- Healthy people in a healthy environment

The pillars are supported by four crosscutting themes to make the plan as comprehensive and effective as possible. These themes are:
- Liveability
- Crime and anti-social behaviour
- Accessible dynamic one-stop delivery point
- Training and enterprise

The proposed actions (see Section 5) address the community priorities within the pillars and the themes. These actions also reflect the realistic capacity and resources available to delivery agencies and also the agreed allocation of the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund for 2004/05. Floor targets have been the basis for all the discussions when agreeing the proposals.

Although every proposal has its own merit and contributes to the overall impact of the Action Plan, several initiatives stand out as having the most immediate and widely acknowledged effect. These are the following:

- The continued support for the post of the Community Development Co-ordinator
- The Cyber Café as the leading focal point for community involvement and learning
- The proposals to guarantee improved communication channels
- The increased policing of the estate involving additional police resources and more effective neighbourhood wardens scheme
- The proposed series of job fayres on the estate, involving major employers from the town centre
- The expansion of the Community Champions scheme and linking it directly to the work of the Street Scene Manager
- The opening of a new Learning Centre at Wayside in Fieldway
- A number of health-related projects including tackling teenage pregnancy issues and smoking cessation

Another group of projects are long-term and will address the community priorities within the pillars on a larger scale. These projects require further work as they are more complex, involve several partners and need more time to implement. What is important at this stage is the commitment to these initiatives from the delivery agencies and the support of the local residents. Examples of such projects are the following:
- The Regeneration of Central Parade in New Addington including a Multi-Service One-Stop Facility
- The setting –up of a Children's Trust
- The Extended Schools Initiative
- A strategy for health improvement and local delivery mechanisms
- The Redevelopment of the Park Way Medical Centre
- All Council housing in the area to meet the Decent Homes standard by 2010

The wide range of projects agreed and included in this plan demonstrates the active participation of all agencies in the planning process and the effective role of the Neighbourhood Partnership in shaping the services delivered within the area.

4. Arrangements for implementation

The Delivery Plan will be approved by the Board of the Croydon Strategic Partnership in June 2004. Prior to this approval the Plan will have been discussed and agreed by the Interagency Group. The Residents Scrutiny Panel will consider each proposal to make sure that they meet the community priorities and aspirations.

Each project will be delivered by the identified agency, organisation, community group or partnership. The projects will be monitored on quarterly basis. At the start the projects will have to agree realistic sets of deliverable outputs and outcomes. These should be addressing and contributing to achieving the 'floor targets' on education, health, crime, employment and housing as set up by Central Government. Local targets are also being developed to address more specific priorities and concerns of the local community.

The progress of each project will be reported to the Interagency group and the Chief Officers Steering group. The Residents Scrutiny Panel will work closely with the project managers to ensure local involvement and accountability.

The projects will be evaluated as part of the overall borough-wide Neighbourhood Renewal Programme.

Appendix 6

CONSULTATION OF HARD TO REACH GROUPS ON NEW LIBRARY STOCK

The Library Service has a designated resource provided by the Ethnic Minorities Information Officer to enable equal access and opportunities for 'hard to reach' groups. Stock Section Panels are one of the mechanisms used to achieve this. Eight Panels exist that comprises a minimum of five members, being representative of the local community (male, female, retired, employed and a range of ethnic and religious beliefs, with knowledge of 11/12 community languages across all the Panels). Panel members are identified mainly through word of mouth and attendees at Stock Selection Day.

Suppliers send lists of stock (books, audio and visual materials) that the Panel members discuss and classify into the following categories: 1 being the highest priority – 3 being the lowest priority, titles with no markings do not get purchased. At times Panel members select materials which are not appropriate in terms of the Library users of Croydon.
The Ethnic Minority Officer in addition consults with regular readers of community languages and other CIFPA neighbours in terms of the best and worst used stock etc. This information is communicated to the Panels. A departmental decision is then taken as to whether or not the request can be ratified.

The main stock of materials published in community languages are based at Central Library and in the north of the borough being Norbury, Thornton Heath, Broad Green and South Norwood. Other sites receive materials upon request.

A local performance management decision was taken in regard to audio music cassettes to take them out of distribution and replace them with CD's. However the selection of stock managed by the Ethnic Minority Officer is available on audio music cassettes, as a large proportion of the users have no access to a CD player.