

## Oxfordshire Libraries Consultation and Engagement Policy

### **Statement of Commitment:**

Oxfordshire Libraries is committed to placing local people at the heart of its work.

We want to find new and better ways of involving the people of Oxfordshire and increasing their influence in our decision-making process.

We want to ensure that when we talk to our customers, they feel that it has been worthwhile, so that we continue to make the services offered more relevant to their needs.

This commitment is made to customers in *The Oxfordshire Library Promise*, which states that:

*“Our aim is to provide exceptional service that will encourage you to return time after time. To achieve this we will: [amongst other things]*

- *Consult you about proposed changes or new services, and take full account of comments received*
- *Use your suggestions to help shape and improve our services*

A checklist for effective consultations has also been produced, and is available on the intranet.

Our approach to consultation and engagement is based on the County Council's Consultation Strategy and Standards *[to be published 2008]*, and our over-riding aim is to ensure that we listen to what our customers tell us, through formal and informal consultation or their feedback on issues of importance to them.

---

## Why Consult?

Effective consultation helps to ensure that our service improvement priorities are the right ones and that they take into account local priorities, ensuring our services are tailored and responsive to local needs.

Specific consultation may be undertaken for any number of reasons, but may include:

- To obtain feedback from existing and potential customers on the range and quality of services we provide
- To inform decision-making and planning process
- To identify and target specific areas of the service for improvement
- To meet our statutory and performance monitoring needs

## What is consultation?

Consultation is a means of giving people opportunities to express their views which then can be used to help shape and influence the development of services. It sits midway on the involvement continuum that starts at information provision and continues through to delegation and involvement in other ways.

<b>Information provision</b>	→	<b>Consultation</b>	→	<b>Involving in another way</b>
(telling people what you do and enabling people to get involved)		(giving people the opportunity to have their say )		(giving people greater involvement e.g. from partnership work to delegation etc.)

## Consultation methodologies

A variety of methods may be used to consult but the method chosen should be appropriate to the groups or individuals being consulted and to the outputs and outcomes sought.

Methods may include:

- Suggestion schemes [e.g. staff or customer schemes]
- Surveys (Public Library Users Survey (PLUS), Children's PLUS etc.)
- Focus groups to include sub-sets of groups
- Questionnaires – paper and virtual
- Informal discussions with customers in-branch
- Web forums – to get a flavour of public opinion (this would be a specific section of the community and not necessarily representative but valuable none the less).

- Graffiti wall/ post it wall – This has been used very successfully in Wallingford library and generated discussion and responses from customers who might not normally have got involved
- Mystery Shopping
- The Oxfordshire County Council Citizen’s Panel
- Unsolicited customer feedback [e.g. customer comments]
- Or a mixture of the above
- And any other methods as appropriate

Guidance and advice is available on how to use the various techniques from your Line Manager, the Customer Service Manager with countywide responsibility for Customer Service and the Libraries Communities and Learning Team. Appendix 1 also provides guidance on community engagement from the Communities and Learning team. Corporate colleagues in the Customer First team can also provide support and guidance is available on the consultation section of the intranet, which can be found at [SUPPORT>CONSULTATION GUIDANCE](#).

It is also worth noting that we have access to a computer programme called *SNAP*, which is a user-friendly programme to help design paper-based or web surveys, enter the data and analyse it. If you think you may wish to use this facility, please contact the Customer Service Manager with countywide responsibility for Customer Service.

### **Who we will consult?**

We will consult with our customers and potential customers i.e. library users and others who live, work or study in the county. This will include:

- Current, past, and potential customers
- Groups targeted by the service through both mainstream activity and project based work, including, pre school children and their families, school age children and their families, young people (11-16), adult learners and emergent adult readers, older people (60+)
- communities and individuals who may not have a tradition of using public library services, some of whom may be hard to reach and/or disadvantaged groups
- Partners
- Staff

### **What will we consult about?**

Some consultation will happen on a regular basis as a matter of course [e.g. PLUS surveys], but a great deal of consultation will be instigated at a local level and be driven by local needs, interests and developments.

If significant changes are being considered or planned at a service level, at a group level, or at a library level, consultation with customers and potential customers should be considered early on in the process. For example, at a service level, to develop an effective marketing strategy, we may need to consult with a sample of lapsed users; at a group level, to improve the spread of opening hours we may want to consult users of a number of libraries to ascertain the best spread of hours; at a library level, to improve use and take up of children's services we may want to consult with families and staff using the local children's centre.

Some examples of recent consultations are noted in Appendix 2.

The medium term consultation action plan is attached at Appendix 3

## **The process of consultation**

### Planning Consultation

If significant changes are being considered or planned and these changes could usefully be subject to consultation, the person responsible and accountable for the implementation of these changes should produce a consultation proposal that will detail the objectives of the consultation, who is being consulted, and why.

It is important that consultation is necessary, proportionate and robust. It may be a waste of time and resource, for example, to consult users on possible changes or choices that cannot actually be acted on or implemented.

It is very important that respondent's expectations are managed. Respondents need to know that they have an opportunity to have an influence on the ways in which services are developed but we should be realistic about what we consult on. For example, it may not be helpful to consult users about extending opening hours if we know there is no prospect of additional resources to funds such a change.

### Possible Partners

The Customer Service Manager with countywide responsibility for Customer Service will ensure that duplication of effort does not occur by being aware of consultation exercises taking place across the Council. When appropriate we will consult jointly with other services, and outside agencies such as voluntary organisations.

### Costs of Consultation

As part of the consultation proposal we will identify the resources [financial and staff time] required to carry out the consultation. We will keep costs to a minimum by working with partners, and seeking support from our corporate colleagues.

### Analysing the Data

All analysis will be carried out using internal resources or external agencies as appropriate.

The analysis should include non-responses and 'don't knows' as they may indicate key deficiencies with one or more aspects of the consultation.

The person who instigates the consultation will review the results and comments.

#### Planning and implementing what action we'll take

When the results have been analysed and decisions made about what action will be taken, these will be fed into the service planning process and implemented. If in our professional judgement it is decided that some of the recommendations from the consultation are not to be acted upon, then these decisions will need to be justified.

#### Providing Feedback

Providing effective feedback is an essential part of the consultation process.

We will give feedback to:

- The people with whom we have consulted, AND
- To customers / potential customers / communities, AND
- To staff

Feedback will include:

- What respondents said
- What they liked/did not like
- What will happen next
- Explanation of any action we take or plan to take
- Reasons for not acting upon certain recommendations

Feedback will be given as appropriate by:

- Press releases sent to the local media
- Council publications and newsletters
- Council website
- Displays in our libraries
- At management meetings

The results and action to be taken will be made available no later than the date indicated on the Consultation Action Plan.

#### Evaluating the effectiveness of consultation

Consultation exercises will be reviewed the Customer Service Manager with countywide responsibility for Customer Service to assess how effective they were. This review will include consideration of the following:

- How far the consultation met its objectives
- The extent to which we successfully engaged with the target group and the effectiveness of the methods used to consult
- The effectiveness of feedback
- The extent to which consultation influenced subsequent decisions or choices

The results of this review process will then also help to inform and/or initiate future consultations. The Customer Service Manager will also maintain an

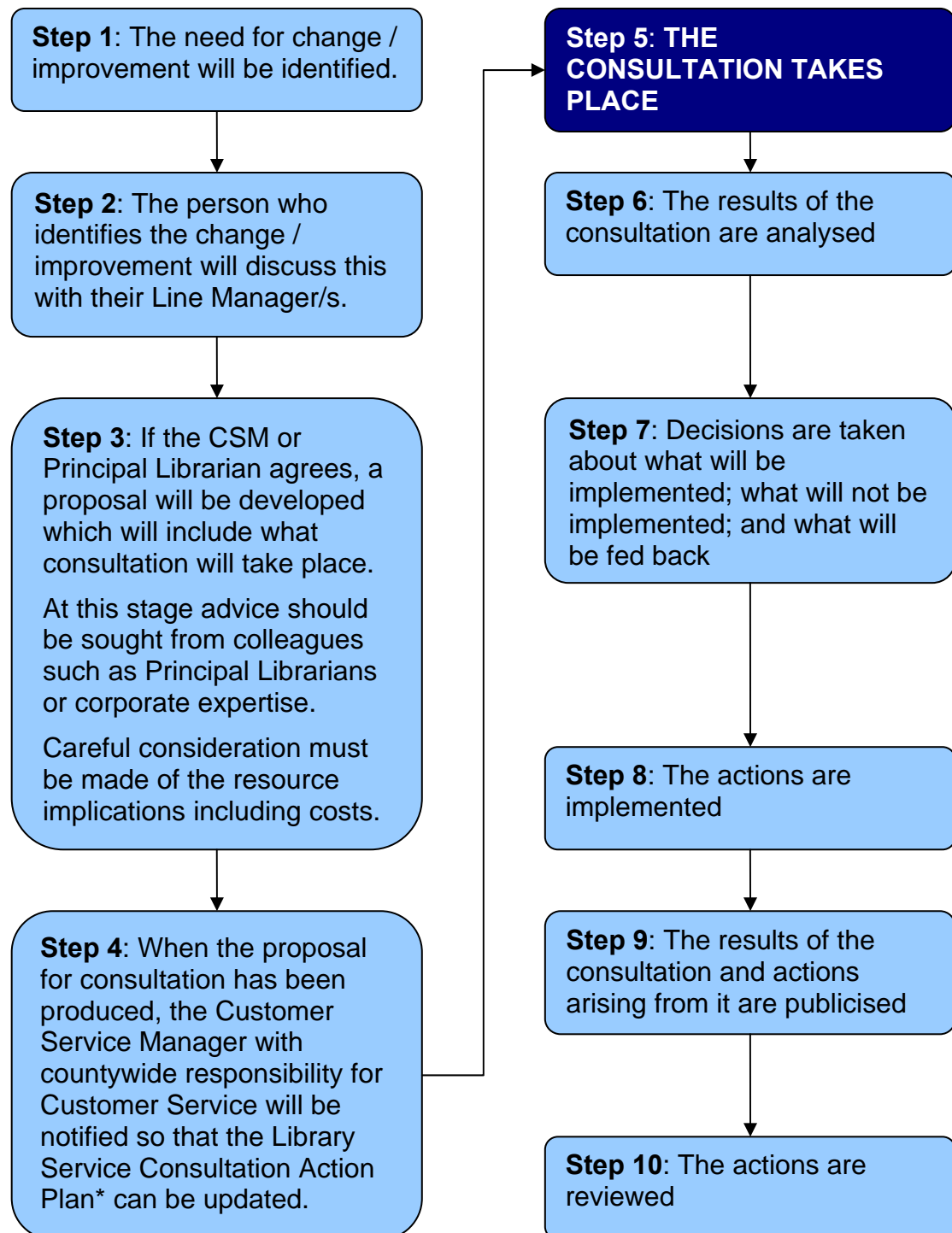
overview of good practice in the county council and elsewhere in order to ensure that the library service can develop this consultation strategy and its associated processes.

Reviewing the decisions we have taken in response to consultations

An appropriate length of time after the changes or actions have been implemented, a review will take place. We will evaluate if our objectives have been achieved or if not what else might be done. Action will then follow accordingly.

John Pilling; Principal Librarian, Communities and Learning

## Overview of the procedure



**\*NB** - It is essential that the Consultation Action Plan details all consultation that the Library Service will conduct in the medium term. The Consultation Action Plan will be added to as and when ad-hoc consultations become apparent and reviewed annually, by the Customer Service Manager with countywide responsibility for Customer Service.

# Appendix 1

## Community Engagement

### Why Engage the Community?

- It enables everyone in the community to work alongside experienced service deliverers, participating in shaping the future of the service while gaining an appreciation and understanding of the problems.
- It aims to improve the quality of people's lives by providing choice in the way they access and interact with the service.
- It encourages staff to share their knowledge and enthusiasm for their job and improve their skills.
- It changes the image of the service in the eyes of the people who pay for it through their taxes
- It makes the most of local knowledge and expertise by working with already set-up organisations and groups

### Key Features of Community Engagement

1. Identify your Community – prioritise which sections you need to work with and establish their needs.
2. Research Your Community – network and place the project at the heart of the community i.e. obtain the views of the public.
3. Training – particularly for library staff. Explain the reasons and benefits of community engagement, inviting questions and comments. Establish and discuss worries, concerns, issues. Train staff in group involvement. Create a mentor or 'buddy' scheme for staff.
4. Partnerships – you cannot plan without partners. Engage Partners, listen to them and (ideally) put working relationships into place before launching into the main strategy. Work with like-minded partners.
5. Trust - Listen to the community, staff and partners and trust those to whom responsibilities are given that they will carry them out. Provide them with 'safety-net' arrangements and consultation partners.
6. Plan an 'exit' strategy to lead everyone on into the next phase of the project

**Engagement means 'doing', it does not mean paying lip-service to 'consulting'.**

### Key steps of community engagement

1. Establish a plan of engagement – purpose, methodology, timescales, skills required and outcomes.
2. Engage staff – set the scene and give reasons for the new project, identify attitudes to the project, listen to concerns and issues, discuss possible solutions to problems. Focus on the benefits to staff, i.e. an opportunity to develop skills and even teach skills to others. More freedom within the working environment to affect change; more input to

- and control over a major project; team working; chance to work with the public and shape the future of the service; become knowledgeable advocates for the service; help to attract funding. Emphasise that everyone will make mistakes but will admit to them and rectify them.
3. Establish the 'areas' of community engagement –  
As places, e.g. town centre, districts, neighbourhood areas,  
As concerns affecting the locality – patterns of immigration, levels of employment skills, housing developments, changes in provision of essential services.  
As a healthy and 'green' community  
As a leisure facility  
As a learning facility
  4. Establish Core Partners.
  5. Research – barriers to use, e.g. opening hours, policies, staff attitudes and age profile, procedures, image as a place for educated people; patterns of exclusion, disadvantaged groups, assess physical barriers to use e.g. transport, design, location, disability. Assess what encourages use – book groups, language classes, ethnic language provision et al.
  6. Collate all known information including the proposed design of the new building and put together for public presentation. Organise ways of receiving feedback, e.g. public debate evenings, consultation boxes in various places, ensure opinions are sought from ethnic community members unable to participate through the normal methods e.g. for reasons of language, age etc. Encourage community members to present some of the events.
  7. Give feedback through the media etc. on suggestions, comments, opposition etc.
  8. Start the project ensuring all parties are kept informed of progress at regular intervals.

HW/06/2007