

**Notes of Consultation Workshop  
Mulberry Park Hub  
Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> January 2019, 10am – 2pm**

**Attendees**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Representing</b>
Cllr Paul Myers	Cabinet Member for Economic and Community Regeneration
Cllr John Adler	Chair of Freshford Parish Council and Cam Valley Forum
Cllr Hugh Baker	Chair of Bathford Parish Council and Bathavon North Forum
Richard Clist	Clerk to Swainswick Parish Council, Bathavon North Forum
Cllr Dave Collett	Timsbury Parish Council, Somer Valley Forum
Dave Dixon	Community Engagement Manager, B&NES
Sara Dixon	Locality Manager, B&NES
Roger Driver	St Michael's Church, Bath City Forum
Mark Hayward	Community Engagement Officer, B&NES
Adrian Inker	Volunteer and Vice Chair of Keynsham Area Forum
Kathryn Manchee	Clerk to 3 Parish Councils, Cam Valley Forum
Kate Morton	Chief Executive - Bath Mind; B&NES Third Sector Group (3SG)
Cllr Rosemary Naish	Chair of ALCA and Clutton Parish Council. Chew Valley Forum
Paul Roles	Bath City Forum
Alison Wells	Community Engagement Officer, B&NES

**Apologies**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Representing</b>
Enya-Jayne Battersby	Vice President Bath Spa Students Union, Bath City Forum
Nicolette Boater	Resident. Bath City Forum
Stephen Dale	Head of Community Partnerships – Dorothy House, B&NES 3SG
Chris Head	Chief Executive of West of England Rural Network and Chair of Chew Valley Forum
Mike Hammond	Resident. Keynsham Area Forum
Cllr Alastair Slade	Midsomer Norton Town Council, Somer Valley Forum
Roanne Wootten	Operations Director - Julian House, Bath City Forum

**1. Welcome, Housekeeping, Introductions and Ice-Breaker**

PM welcomed those present and gave a safety announcement. The aim of the session was to look at the issue of consultation – he referred to his own experience being a resident, Town Councillor, Ward Councillor and Cabinet Member. Roundtable introductions were made.

PM explained that the Council had received a proposal from representatives of the Bath City Forum which highlighted:-

- an inconsistent approach to consultation,
- lack of expertise in the process,
- poor methodology and design of consultation materials and
- apparent lack of application of results ('a black hole').

Part of the aim of the workshop is to take forward the proposal and explore the experiences from other areas. The Council does have processes it needs to follow including statutory.

The group will do an exercise later to feel what it's like to live through a consultation from different perspectives.

## 2. Truth and Reconciliation

PM asked the group to share their views about what was good and what was bad with consultation exercises in the past. In order to achieve the best consultation going forward, we need to be really frank today, no comments will be attributed to individuals.

Roundtable discussions were held and the following comments were made:-

- As part of the Clean Air Zone (CAZ) consultation, a well-attended public meeting was organised by the Council. It quickly became apparent that there were no options - a decision had been made on the solution. Also, no-one from the Council was taking any notes – this gave the impression that they did not care about the views being given.
- Up until recently, I thought consultation meant that the Council was getting consultants in – people have no interest in how the Council works so don't understand the processes.
- People have lost trust in consultation as they think it is a done deal – the CAZ is a good and recent example of this as is the Keynsham One Way. This entrenches people's views. It should be a two stage process the first being 'Why are we doing it' then, when the community are on board with that, look at 'how to get there'. Keynsham has grown enormously in size with the community having little say on the matter. It seems at times that common sense has gone out of the window with decisions.
- Whilst officer reports suggested that there was support within the community for a One Way System in Keynsham, the Council they didn't consult on the best way to reach the objective.
- Some of it is about the language used – this needs to be right early on and avoid Council jargon.
- Could there be a central place on-line where notes from consultation events are posted?
- The on-line consultation form for the CAZ only included one section where you could give a view.
- The Hollies Library move was a 'done deal' – you are often consulting on a solution that has been decided, not getting ideas in advance.
- Don't assume that everyone can access information or take part in consultations on-line. For example, a consultation affecting homeless people was put on on-line.
- The planning consultation process is very open and there can be lots of comments to wade through – I do feel for the officers having to do this because there never is one solution to please everyone.
- It strikes me that the Council is often in a position of power – it's a bit like planning a family holiday – I ask the kids where they want to go but I will have the final say

because I am paying. There was also a view that it would be better if the Council could admit this at the start.

- People think the Council is responsible for everything – there was a huge protest outside the Guildhall about Culverhay/Bath Community Academy closing but surely the ultimate decision was not the Council's? People were angry but didn't know where to direct their frustration about this issue.
- I think the Council should make more use of existing groups of people (eg interest groups, WI, rugby clubs etc) to consult. People can discuss the issue with others they know and trust, then feedback be given. This may encourage individuals to give a view when they might not otherwise.
- I often see letters in the local press from residents complaining and it is obvious that they do not understand the issue or the facts. Maybe the Council needs to explain things better.
- I have an issue with how the Council uses the media. It was recently announced that they are considering using the A46 as a Park and Ride – that is not the way to introduce a scheme or policy to the public.
- When I worked for a private company in marketing, we planned communications and launches. It is different at the Council where everyone has a right to Freedom of Information; differing views; information put out can be distorted or not read. Politicians set policy, officers implement.
- There are often time constraints that influence when engagement takes place and officers can have one hand tied behind their back – this goes over people's heads sometimes.
- It is difficult to know what the truth is when you read newspapers, Twitter etc. People are engaging with angry social media posts, not facts. Sometimes it almost seems that the media want to engage in conflict to create headlines and drive sales.
- Consultation means different things to different people in different situations. We get consultation from the Council, consult the public ourselves as an organisation, individuals want to discuss things with us. My biggest disappointment with the Council is that consultation is often *'this is what we have decided, what do you think?'* It would be preferable to talk through options with groups, although it's appreciated that this is a longer process. However, having a longer process would allow for feedback at different stages.
- Maybe consultation is the wrong word unless it's statutory – maybe it should be resident/community involvement.
- I would hold out for the word consultation – it is consultation when it goes your way and not when it doesn't!
- Officers are not always clear on the difference between the 3 C's (Consultation, Community Engagement, and Communication). The three words are really an iterative process where the starting point is the stage most appropriate to the specific subject. Internally the Council needs to be clearer so that officers know which method is appropriate and what is meant by the terms eg consultation, engagement or communication.

- I would endorse starting the process earlier where possible, although it is appreciated that sometimes there is a push to reach a deadline. If so, this needs to be communicated too.
- I see it a bit like planning a meal out. First of all you make a suggestion 'Shall we go to a restaurant on Friday', then you need to decide which one, then when you get there, you decide what you want to eat.
- 80% of the feedback probably comes from 20% of the people - most probably don't care.
- The Council cut the parish sweeper scheme and told the affected parishes just two months before. When this was deemed to be outside the terms of the Parish Charter, the Council found a way of mitigating the impact. It is possible to negotiate.
- A lot is a lack of understanding about why things have to happen – sometimes people probably regret getting caught up in misleading information and taking a polarised position.
- It is easier to put out fires when they are small. Also, people respect honesty.
- There can be 'organisational ego' perhaps due to individuals concerned about their legacy.
- Some departments of the Council are particularly prone to being the experts taking a 'we know best' approach – this disengages people.
- Consultation can be affected by cost and deadlines. If there was a Terms of Reference, the clear outcomes could be known at the outset.
- Consultation can be seen a vote but it is not. It is not always possible to get people to agree but there is a need to address the needs of those who are not going to get what they want and mitigate the impact of decisions.
- There is also consultation v expectation. We have an issue that will impact on our community and one group of people feels we should engage and consult but another feels there are elected representatives with a mandate should take these decisions.

*PM thanked everyone for their contributions. There was a short break.*

### **3. How Can We Make Consultation Better?**

Roundtable discussions continued and the following comments were made:-

- The Council undertook a similar process when refreshing the Parish Charter – there were workshops with officers and parish representatives and everyone had a chance to say how it felt for them. We do have a Parish Charter but still need to make sure that people know how to behave as both officers and protesters. We also want to engage the media in this process.
- Is it built into Council staff objectives/performance?
- I am sometimes horrified at the way in which people behave towards the Council.

- Be up front – we are consulting but say if there are constraints.
- Don't call it consultation if it's not.
- The example in the budget about the cost of adult and children's social care really helped people to understand the costs and difficulties the Council faces.
- What outcomes are you looking for – it might not be a yes/no but a how do we get there.
- The three C's are different things but all are being presented as consultation – the Council needs to say which it is and why you are doing it as well.
- Is it a consultation you have to do or are choosing to do?
- There should be a check list for officers eg., have you made your decision already, if so, it is not consultation.
- Whichever one of the 3 C's it is, there needs to be a clear definition of the purpose and the objectives and what the problem.
- Define where you can and can't go and what the project is.
- If there was a joint process for the Council and public to follow, what should it be called – a 'contract'; 'memorandum' or 'deal'? It doesn't need to be a lengthy document – we just need some rules that everyone involved in the process whether they are in opposition; Cabinet; press; officers or public, can agree.
- I struggle with contract as this suggests something different like Charter or Memorandum of Understanding.
- I've seen it work with the Parish Charter and Parish Sweeper.
- An example where the Council has made improvements is Fix My Street which is working well. It is very transparent. It addresses criticism around lack of feedback from the Council.
- Be up front.
- The Council's budget presentation is clear – 82p in the £1 is spent on essential services.
- If we have arrived at conflict, we have failed.
- There are Government guidelines on consultation which the Council can use and apply in simple language.
- In marketing, there are panels to use as 'critical friends'. They represent a range of people and views with members regularly changed so they do not become 'experts' and views remain fresh. Do you think something like this would be helpful?
- People thought the bus service was being cut by the Council – they did not realise the decision was made by First.

- Would statutory consultation cause issues with this approach?
- Both can be combined as long as it is made clear what the Council has to do and what it has chosen to do.
- The NHS has to consult on major changes with a particular time frame – it may only be 12 weeks.
- Officers would need to be trained in whatever the process is. The Forums could have a session on it.
- When the Forums were set up, it was considered whether they might play a role in testing ideas, so it may be possible to use them.
- The Forums are not diverse enough.
- One of the newer Forums has been asking what it is for, where it is going. There was little community involvement until the presentation on the CAZ – this was vocal and vociferous because the issue interests people – individuals came and personal views were given.
- It is because the CAZ affects everyone.
- Often there is consultation on a small point – the Forums could be used to engage with communities before it goes to individuals.
- There are two universities in Bath – they have sophisticated knowledge of sampling and research. The Council could make use of this.
- How would the Council ensure that all people have access to the process? Some people do go to meetings but others are harder to reach. Does the Council commit to at least try to reach them? The Council cannot force people to engage.
- Community organisations can help share information.
- In Foxhill, residents were trained to undertake engagement.
- I still think there is benefit from engaging with groups, not individuals – people are comfortable talking in their groups, not to the Council.
- People talk on buses – there could be an opportunity for them to pick up leaflets on the bus.

**The group agreed the following key actions for consideration:**

- develop a 'Charter' on consultation similar to the Parish Charter, providing guidance on the rules including responding to issues as they arise as well as training and promotion of the Charter.
- agree a vocabulary of 'consultation language' that is understandable by residents across the district.
- explore opportunities of working more closely with the 3SG to engage harder to reach groups.

- investigate the idea of setting up an 'Consultation Panel' to give officers feedback prior to the Council embarking on consultation.

PM thanked everyone for their input and said he would be feeding back to Informal Cabinet on Monday.

#### **4. Putting principles into Practice**

A participatory workshop was held. The aim of which was to understand the varying issues, draw conclusions. Roundtable feedback was given.

#### **5. Conclusions and next steps**

PM thanked everyone for really getting into the spirit of the session. All agreed that it had been a very interesting session particularly to see the different perspectives and impact of a consultation process.

PM confirmed that he would report back the consultations and suggested actions to the Cabinet. The group proposed that they would be interested in continuing to develop a new consultation approach for the Council. This was agreed with a unanimous show of hands.

There was a vote of thanks to PM and the officers and a request for feedback to be given at Bath City Forum on Monday and to the B&NES Third Sector Group.