User Focus Review

Bury Metropolitan Borough Council

INSIDE THIS REPORT

Introduction and background

'User focus' is a term used by the Audit Commission to describe the way in which public service providers relate to the people who pay for and use their services. User focus is about looking at organisations from the perspective of those who come into contact with them and how the diversity of service users is reflected in the design of service delivery.

Consulting and involving service users, and finding out what they want from their local services, can help councils carry out their work more efficiently and effectively. Public participation is also about enhancing the democratic legitimacy of local government and the development of community leadership. Improving the level of involvement of local people in public services is a major part of the government's modernisation agenda.

To help assess how effectively user focus is taken into account in the way services are delivered, the Audit Commission has undertaken reviews in eight organisations across the Greater Manchester area.

Scope and audit approach

Each council was asked to produce a self-assessment showing how they collect, analyse and respond to users views. By reviewing this self-assessment document and supporting evidence we assessed how successfully the Council has taken user focus into account in its corporate governance arrangements. We also interviewed four staff in each council; the lead person for user focus, the lead person for communication through residents' surveys, citizens' panels etc, and senior officers in the library and housing benefit services. Finally, we tested the organisations website from a user perspective.

Using the Audit Commission user focus assessment tool, we have structured feedback through the following five key themes:

- commitment;
- community;
- connections;
- channels; and
- change.

In addition to identifying key issues for Bury, we have identified some areas of good practice in other organisations in an attempt to share learning more widely across Greater Manchester.

Main conclusions – Bury

Commitment

The Council shows a commitment to user focus through its strategic documents and collective responsibility to the issue. There is commitment at a senior level within the Council with key officers and members taking a lead role in promoting user focus.

Community

There is considerable information about the local community but this is not effectively collated and used routinely in the decision-making process.

Connections

Bury is still at an early stage of community engagement. There is considerable activity and a clear commitment to the process. The extent to which the community feels engaged has not been evaluated.

While there are examples of departments using user feedback to shape how they deliver services this is not consistently applied. Routinely seeking and taking users views into account is not an integral part of the decision-making process.

Channels

Cross-council learning is encouraged and is facilitated through the consultation liaison officers group. This group also attempts to co-ordinate consultation to improve quality.

The Council's website does not meet the needs of the wider community as it is restricted to the English language and is limited in its ability to cater for people who are visually impaired.

Change

Positive steps are being taken to enhance Bury's approach to users. However, the Council remains focused more on service provision and less on community leadership. At present it is on a journey towards improving user focus but with barriers still to overcome.

User focus is not integrated into the Council's performance management system.

Best value performance indicators show no movement for satisfaction in the library service or handling of complaints. Overall satisfaction with Council services has worsened from 2000/01 to 2003/04.

The way forward

This report highlights a range of areas for improvement in organisations across Greater Manchester covered by this review. It also identifies some of the good practice taking place. As shown in the detailed findings, there are a wide range of positive steps being taken within Bury. We have three key recommendations to improve the user focus for the Council to consider as follows.

Recommendations
R1 Evaluate the effectiveness of user focus/community engagement to ensure that future engagement is appropriate.
R2 Collate the range of information/feedback to provide a comprehensive picture of the community.
R3 Integrate user focus into the Council's performance management processes.

Status of our reports to the Council

Our reports are prepared in the context of the Statement of Responsibilities of Auditors and Audited Bodies issued by the Audit Commission. Reports are prepared by appointed auditors and addressed to members or officers. They are prepared for the sole use of the audited body, and no responsibility is taken by auditors to any member or officer in their individual capacity, or to any third party.

Detailed findings

We asked each council to complete the user focus self-assessment tool to match experience against notable practice and to provide some consistency across the reviews. A copy is attached at Appendix 2.

The following section takes the assessment tool and highlights four aspects. Firstly it identifies what good practice would look like. Secondly it identifies common barriers to improvement and/or good practice, then thirdly it summarises key points from the review of arrangements in Bury. Finally it draws a conclusion about the Council's progress.

Commitment

1. Does the organisation demonstrate a visible **commitment** to ensuring that all its activities are designed to meet the needs and take account of the views of all types of service users and citizens?

What would good practice look like?

We were looking for:

- evidence of a commitment to user focus in key strategic documentation;
- a lead officer or member to champion user focus within the organisation; and
- a clear message throughout the organisation promoting user focus.

Common barriers and good practice

Lead responsibility for user focus is not routinely delegated to one officer or member. Some organisations justify this on the basis that it is everybody's responsibility to promote user focus on a day-to-day basis. Whilst this is a reasonable aspiration, we recommend as good practice that a key part of internal challenge is the establishment of an organisational champion to drive forward improvements in this area. Greater Manchester Police is developing this lead role by promoting local chief inspectors and inspectors as key community links.

All organisations covered by this review make user focus explicit within their key strategic documents. This emphasises organisational commitment and provides the key messages for service/business plans and individual staff development programmes. Rochdale MBC particularly emphasises user focus as a council priority throughout strategic documents.

Some organisations have recognised the need for specific training to bring about a culture where user focus is at the forefront of service delivery. This has been achieved in some cases by internally designed training courses and in others through national vocational qualification in customer care. Whilst these courses are key to organisational change, good practice is for user focus to be integrated into all appropriate training opportunities starting at induction.

Key points in Bury

- User focus is a core theme within strategic documents emphasising that it is a collective responsibility across the whole Council.

- The Assistant Chief Executive has lead responsibility at officer level for driving forward user focus and staff can identify with particular members who act as champions.

- There are a variety of initiatives promoting user focus which demonstrate the Council's commitment to user focus. For example listening days seek the views of local residents and area boards include an open forum where local issues can be raised.

- Staff are kept informed of user focus events as many are also residents of Bury, thus increasing the potential participation in the event.

Conclusion

The Council shows a commitment to user focus through its strategic documents and collective responsibility to the issue.

There is commitment at a senior level within the Council with key officers and members taking a lead role in promoting user focus.

Clear messages are sent throughout the organisation reminding staff of the Council's commitment to user focus and community engagement initiatives.

Community

2. Does this commitment translate into actual processes which are used to ensure that the organisation understands its diverse **community's** needs and is ensuring that service delivery is designed on clear priorities which are based on need and aspirations of all sections of the community?

What would good practice look like?

We were looking for:

- a structure to engage members of the public;

- knowledge of the diverse nature of the area and their needs and use of this in the decision-making process; and

- evidence of active consultation.

Common barriers and good practice

Most organisations covered by this review have developed structures such as area boards or township meetings. Attendance at these meetings varies depending on the strength of local issues. Closure of a local amenity or a new development is likely to generate significant interest whilst ordinary meetings are likely to attract only a handful of members of the public. As a fairly recent development, this interface with citizens needs to be reviewed by all organisations to examine how they could be made more relevant to local people and act as an effective part of community engagement. For example, if they were used more as a vehicle to shape local services and less as a public gallery for local democracy, local interest/participation may increase. There are examples within social services departments where carers and voluntary organisations are actively involved in developing services.

Technology now allows organisations to develop sophisticated software to understand the diverse nature of their community and identify gaps in services based on the census data and indices of local deprivation. We found a good general understanding of the geographical location of key groups and an appreciation of their diverse needs, but there is considerable scope for using this information more constructively within service planning and decision-making processes.

Most organisations have citizens' panels and conduct regular surveys. Panel membership is refreshed regularly and significant efforts have been made to ensure that the panel membership reflects the community profile. In Manchester the Council actively consulted with the Somali community over their needs and developed services in response to this consultation. In most authorities, seeking views from the community through citizen's panels is in its early stages. Trend information over consecutive years is not widely available and this is not routinely linked into planning processes along side other user feedback such as compliment and complaints data.

Key points in Bury

- Area boards provide a formal mechanism for open debate where the Council is more visible to the community and local people can raise issues through the open session. Attendance varies, often depending on the strength of local interest in current issues, but generally numbers are low. The Council has introduced changes in an attempt to increase attendance.

- There is a range of information available showing the community profile of Bury and officers interviewed explained how their knowledge of the diverse community had been used to develop specific services. There is however potential to use this information more effectively, particularly in the decision-making process. The community has sometimes become engaged due to dissatisfaction with Council decisions whereas earlier involvement in the process would have been more effective.

- The Council's intranet holds details of surveys carried out across the Council but this does not link into complaints or other local knowledge of the community.

- There are several approaches adopted by the Council to actively consult with members of the public. For example, 'listening days' have proved an effective means of gathering feedback from residents on local issues, young people are engaged through the youth cabinet, 'friends of' groups have taken ownership of some local parks and there is active tenant participation.

Conclusion

A structure exists primarily through the area boards to increase resident participation in local decision-making.

There is considerable information about the local community but this is not effectively collated and used routinely in the decision-making process.

There is evidence of active communication with local residents such as listening days and the youth cabinet.

Connecting

3. Is the organisation clear on what it is trying to achieve by **connecting** and engaging with different types of users and citizens and is it clear how the information generated by this engagement will feed into policy formulation?

What would good practice look like?

We were looking for:

- clear understanding by the public about what the organisation is trying to achieve;

- users views being taken account of through the service planning and decision-making processes; and

- active communication between the organisation and citizens.

Common barriers and good practice

Public expectations of organisations have increased and this has prompted a greater awareness of public perception through the decision-making processes. Publication of strategic documents and a more open culture has increased understanding of key issues, but it is unclear how widely this understanding is shared across the whole community. Organisations have invested in publicity material, website development and user consultations but the actual effectiveness of this is not quantified in either cost or outcome measures. We recommend organisations to evaluate the effectiveness of the range of publicity information available and ways in which this is provided to identify duplications and gaps in order that these can be addressed.

Considerable data is collected through surveys, complaints and regular interface with service users. The degree that this information is used constructively to influence decision-making varies across organisations, but the active involvement of users in service planning is generally very low. Good practice would be to involve local residents more within the planning processes to provide a wider range of potential solutions and increase community ownership of service developments.

Publicity through a range of approaches provide members of the public with information and surveys are a popular way in which organisations receive feedback on specific issues. Public meetings and day-to-day interface with the public provide a more qualitative dialogue between the organisation and the public, but this is rarely collated and is therefore outside the organisations information systems. 'You said, we did' leaflets provide part of a feedback loop, but generally, organisations covered by this review need to do more to join up the information giving and receiving processes.

Stockport marketing and media team has a policy that awareness must lead to action; they ensure that every consultation exercise is treated as a project, so they make sure that the service in question states expected outcomes, and then provides actual outcomes. This ensures a clear link to value for money (VFM). They also enter competitions for communication and consultation, and use this to benchmark their success against others. If they do not get nominated for an award, it is assumed that their consultation was not up to standard, and changes are made accordingly.

There is an increased awareness of barriers to communication through language and disability. Most organisations have taken steps to address these issues when planning consultation or meetings with members of the public. Telephone translation services provide an important service where information is not already available in specific languages and compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) has helped organisations to focus on barriers due to disability.

All organisations provide information about services and most provide this information in appropriate languages. The content of leaflets is largely decided upon by officers within the organisations and key partners. Users are rarely consulted on the content.

Key points in Bury

- Two-way communication with the community is limited. The Council provides considerable information to the public but is unable to evaluate its effectiveness in making people aware of its activity in solving local issues.

- The Council's 'ambitions' have been discussed at area board meetings and feedback has been sought through residents' surveys. This is a positive attempt to take users views into account through the service planning process, although at this stage it is unclear how much influence these views will have on the final plans. Some changes have been implemented to reflect service users' views; refuse collection takes account of religious festivals and the reception arrangements at the housing benefit office have been changed to reflect user views.

- The Council has, through the Community Cohesion Survey 2004, sought to identify residents perceptions of community engagement and have identified areas for improvement.

- Information is made available generally in Urdu, Gujarati, French and Polish. Translation into other languages is available through language line. Listening days involve direct face-to-face contact with members of the public whilst residents surveys enable active participation for people comfortable with written questionnaires.

Conclusions

Bury is still at an early stage of community engagement. There is considerable activity and the Council's commitment to the process is clear. Based on the Councils own survey data, only 11 per cent of people believe their comments will be listened to. The Council recognises that this number is low and is committed to addressing this as an area for improvement.

While there are examples of departments using user feedback to shape how they deliver services this is not consistently applied. There is little evidence (such as a specific user focus comments box on management board and scrutiny reports) that user views are routinely taken into account as part of the decision making process.

There are many examples of active communication between the Council and local residents however there has been no evaluation of these approaches, therefore the effectiveness remains unclear.

Channels

4. Is the organisation clear on the consultation and engagement techniques and **channels** that they are going to use to achieve what they have set out to achieve?

What would good practice look like?

We were looking for:

- guidance and support to officers and members on consultation;

- shared learning to improve consultation;

- websites are easily accessible;

- community engagement extends to the whole community; and

- community engagement is carried out in partnership with appropriate agencies.

Common barriers and good practice

Some organisations have made guidance available to officers and members. This is often available through the organisations intranet. As a result, we found that some staff were unaware of its existence, and such guidance is not used as a day-to-day management tool. Some people still have barriers around technology and may not access the intranet.

As different approaches to user focus and community engagement are piloted, it is important that organisations learn from good practice and poor experiences. Some organisations publish the results of surveys on the intranet to try to reduce duplication and make the results available internally as widely as possible. Where there is a lead officer with responsibility for co-ordinating surveys, clearly learning is shared, but without such a post, such learning is often lost. Organisations should consider ways of sharing learning to improve the effectiveness of consultation in the future.

All organisations have websites that are easily navigable, provide considerable information on services and recent issues. Some are limited to people who can read English and most do not cater for people with visual impairments. The Manchester City Council website welcomes people in Arabic, Bangla, Chinese, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Somali, Urdu, Vietnamese and finger spelling and provides information in community languages on request. It also has a link to free downloadable technology, 'Browse aloud', which can be used by people with visual impairments. Stockport MBC has a speech-enabled website with instructions on how to activate this feature. Bury has been rated highly for the performance and accessibility of its website. In addition, a recent independent survey conducted by the Society of IT Managers survey ranked Bury top of the Greater Manchester authorities when it came to customer satisfaction with IT.

Each organisation could identify parts of the community where engagement is particularly difficult; 'hard to hear groups'. These tend to vary depending on the type of service being provided, but particular difficulties exist around young people, older people and asian women. Bolton is targeting specific groups within communities, for example following the identification of ethnic minority residents as being underrepresented and providing a low level of response to questionnaires, the specific survey of BME communities this year targets ethnic minority residents face-to-face at appropriate times. This enhances their opportunities to comment. This type of survey is expensive, and will be carried out every three years. In Trafford, local black and minority ethnic residents were recruited to carry out a face-to-face survey of residents from minority communities of their experience of housing, and their housing preferences, to inform the development of the Council's black and minority ethnic housing strategy. Trafford MBC also estimates that the Council newspaper 'Trafford Today' is delivered to approximately 97 per cent of local residents ensuring that most people are kept informed of local Council issues. Feedback shows that 'Trafford Today' is particularly valued by older people.

It is important that members of the public are not subject to 'consultation fatigue', therefore effective partnership working with councils, Greater Manchester Police, health colleagues and other organisations is critical. We found some good examples of partnership working through the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities best value group where data has been shared and joint working with primary care trusts (PCT) has provided some positive results.

Key points in Bury

- There is a consultation handbook which was published in April 2003 covering issues such as the different techniques, choosing the appropriate method, potential barriers, corporate support, stakeholder needs, feedback and evaluation.

- Information and techniques are shared across the Council to help staff undertake consultation exercises. The consultation liaison officers group share experience and plan future consultation, but there is more work to be done to ensure that learning is shared more widely.

- Navigation within the website is good, and information is clearly presented, however it is all in English, with no mention of help for the visually impaired.

- There are links to neighbouring councils, GMeP, and Directgov. There is an email address for comments however the website does not appear to be used as a mechanism for consultation. Contact information for members is available, and an email address for the Chief Executive is given.

- Each service can identify different 'hard to hear' groups depending on the nature of the service provided. This gives the Council a particular challenge when developing a communication strategy for the whole community. Some groups do not wish to be engaged with the Council other than as a customer.

- There is no citizen's panel in Bury.

- The Council works closely with health colleagues and Greater Manchester Police to promote community engagement and to shape services for the future.

Conclusion

The Council provides support to staff undertaking user focus activities and the consultation handbook provides a more formal reference point.

The consultation liaison officers group facilitates learning across the Council as a whole and attempts to co-ordinate consultation to improve quality.

The Council's website does not meet the needs of the wider community as it is restricted to the English language and is limited in its ability to cater for people who are visually impaired.

The Council does not engage with the whole community as each service identified a group of citizens who were particularly difficult to consult with over local issues.

Partnership working with other agencies does take place.

Change

5. Does the organisation ensure that these processes are resulting in improved service delivery and demonstrable **change** for users?

What would good practice look like?

We were looking for:

- examples where user engagement has resulted in change;

- evidence of moving beyond the barriers;

- user focus as part of the performance management system; and

- improved performance.

Common barriers and good practice

There are many examples across Greater Manchester where user involvement has resulted in change. Local residents often become engaged with the organisation because of dissatisfaction with decisions and this involvement can often result in agreed innovative solutions. User involvement is therefore often reactive to local views. Organisations should move to a more balanced approach whereby there is a proactive relationship with local residents who can be involved earlier in service planning and decision-making processes.

In this report we have identified progress made by individual organisations and recommended some further steps to be taken to improve user focus. Making the shift from service provider to community leader requires significant cultural change and Greater Manchester organisations involved in this review have started on this journey, although some are further ahead than others.

We found little evidence of targets being set around user focus. The best value performance indicators (BVPIs) give a measure of satisfaction, but user focus is not an integral part of the organisations performance management systems as referred to above in terms of monitoring and reporting through the decision-making processes.

There are clear indications that services are improving as reported through various mechanisms such as comprehensive performance assessments (CPAs) and external inspections. Councils are placing a greater emphasis on improving how they manage performance and inevitably this includes a greater focus on users and delivering what matters most.

Key points in Bury

- There are examples where user focus has shaped services. The reception services in the housing benefit section were based on user feedback and library services have been developed in conjunction with users. However, as community engagement is not always planned for as an integral part of all service developments, it is difficult to quantify its impact on the overall development of Council services.

- The results of surveys and consultation are often used to confirm council actions, rather that as a driver in their own right. In this respect the Council is still predominantly a service deliverer not a community leader. As user focus and community engagement become mainstreamed there will need to be more of a shift towards community leadership, but at present, they are mainly service driven.

- There are some measures around user focus such as awareness of area boards, perceptions of the Council, feeling listened to and who to contact to effect change. The results have led to plans to improve performance in this area but no local targets have yet been published.

- BVPI 119 measuring satisfaction with the library service and BVPI 4 around the handling of complaints showed that satisfaction over 2000/01 and 2003/04 had remained the same. BVPI 3 showed a lower level of satisfaction with the overall service provided by the Council in 2003/04 than in 2000/01.

Conclusion

User focus has some way to go before it is fully understood by staff across the Council, but there are examples where involvement with users has shaped services.

There are positive steps being taken to develop a user focus in Bury. However, the Council remains focused more on service provision and less on community leadership. It is therefore on a journey, with barriers around user focus still to overcome.

User focus is not integrated into the Council's performance management system.

Best value performance indicators show no movement for satisfaction in the library service or handling of complaints. Overall satisfaction with Council services has worsened from 2000/01 to 2003/04.

Self assessment - Bury

The following user focus assessment tool asks key questions of organisations, suggests the potential sources of evidence and gives examples of notable practice. Authorities are then invited to give details of how this is demonstrated within their own organisation and to show supporting evidence.

Bury MBC

General comments on user focus in Bury, not covered by the self-assessment questionnaire.

The Council has recognised structures (area boards, tenant participation, youth cabinet, area youth action groups, service user groups) for gathering data from the public and this is backed up by regular surveys in community-based services to test attitudes and satisfaction levels. The issue for the Council, which was well made in the recent Corporate Assessment, is that it is unclear how these findings have influenced Council priorities and service delivery.
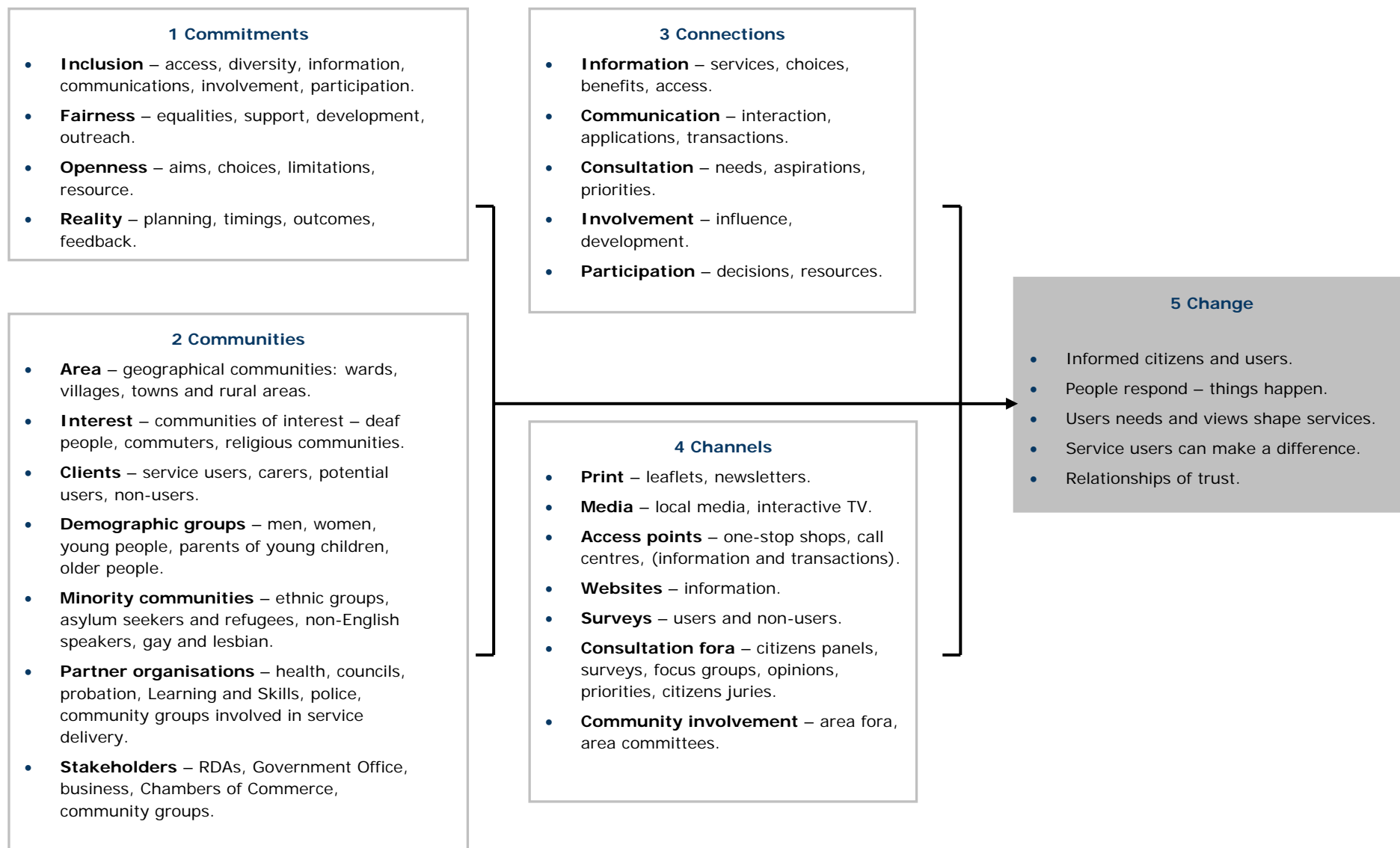
With that in mind, the Council is putting in place a more corporate approach to user involvement. As part of the customer contact strategy:

- a new website has been implemented;
- a new telephone system has been installed;
- council information points are being developed in each township; and
- CRM is at tender stage (and supported by process reviews, rationalisation of contact points and workflow procedures).

The Council has also embarked on a more robust approach in the gathering and use of data.

- A consultation database is in place to record consultation activity being undertaken.
- There is a network for staff undertaking consultation to share information and experiences.
- The Audit Commission were appointed to test the level of improvement in our communications processes.
- A residents survey is planned (autumn 2004). This will be an annual event with the results feeding into the annual strategic forward planning event. The Council has no citizens panel but may call on a sample of residents responding to the annual survey to provide more in-depth, qualitative data if required.
- Employee surveys, currently conducted every two years will continue and test the Council as an employer of choice.
- Complaints handling (and the way this data is being used to improve services) is currently being reviewed by the Performance Management Scrutiny Panel.
- Annual corporate mystery shopping exercise carried out.

In summary, the Council has a sound approach to user involvement at service level but we have not always been successful at joining it all together. This has been identified as a gap and we are working to develop a more systematic approach to evidence the way user views and needs influence service delivery.

1 Commitments

- **Inclusion** – access, diversity, information, communications, involvement, participation.
- **Fairness** – equalities, support, development, outreach.
- **Openness** – aims, choices, limitations, resource.
- **Reality** – planning, timings, outcomes, feedback.

2 Communities

- **Area** – geographical communities: wards, villages, towns and rural areas.
- **Interest** – communities of interest – deaf people, commuters, religious communities.
- **Clients** – service users, carers, potential users, non-users.
- **Demographic groups** – men, women, young people, parents of young children, older people.
- **Minority communities** – ethnic groups, asylum seekers and refugees, non-English speakers, gay and lesbian.
- **Partner organisations** – health, councils, probation, Learning and Skills, police, community groups involved in service delivery.
- **Stakeholders** – RDAs, Government Office, business, Chambers of Commerce, community groups.

3 Connections

- **Information** – services, choices, benefits, access.
- **Communication** – interaction, applications, transactions.
- **Consultation** – needs, aspirations, priorities.
- **Involvement** – influence, development.
- **Participation** – decisions, resources.

4 Channels

- **Print** – leaflets, newsletters.
- **Media** – local media, interactive TV.
- **Access points** – one-stop shops, call centres, (information and transactions).
- **Websites** – information.
- **Surveys** – users and non-users.
- **Consultation fora** – citizens panels, surveys, focus groups, opinions, priorities, citizens juries.
- **Community involvement** – area fora, area committees.

5 Change

- Informed citizens and users.
- People respond – things happen.
- Users needs and views shape services.
- Service users can make a difference.
- Relationships of trust.

Key question	Examples of potential notable practice	Yes/ No	Details of how this is demonstrated and evidence to support this
Does the organisation demonstrate a visible **commitment** to ensuring that all its activities are designed to meet the needs and take account of the views of all types of service users and citizens?	• Staff in the organisation are aware of which cabinet/board member leads on community engagement/patient involvement.	Yes	• Not a simple answer. Managers are aware that the Executive Member (Community Services) and Assistant Chief Executive fulfil this role in respect of area boards and community-based services but planning, housing, social services all have a specific remit for user/tenant involvement which falls to individual Chief Officers and portfolio holders to discharge. Staff at lower levels may not make a distinction.
	• Staff can articulate what the commitment means and have an understanding of the diversity of the population they serve.	Yes	• Internal policies (customer care, performance management, equality standard) promote user focus and are backed up by awareness raising and training. The impact is tested on a regular basis eg mystery shopping, employee survey, external inspections.
	• Vision statements, strategies and plans express commitment that user focus/patient involvement is the key to improving services and understanding the diverse needs of users eg training plans.	Yes	• Commitment set out in corporate plan, BVPP and service plans and strategies. Effective engagement of people in the planning, design and long-term stewardship of their community lies at the heart of decision-making. All services are required to review operations in relation to race equality.
	• Consultation/community engagement/patient involvement plans demonstrate corporate approach to communicating with users/ patients, all communities and other stakeholders eg cross-cutting programme of communication and engagement.	Yes	• The connection between the community strategy, council and local areas is maintained through local community plans for each of the six townships in the Borough. Developed following in-depth and interactive consultation with local people, regular feedback through area boards and other events such as listening days, these plans (and the area board network) provide a sound framework for capturing the needs of each area and enable responses to be differentiated according to the important issues within communities. The Housing Forum provides a similar arena for housing related issues. Increasingly work cuts across agencies and geographical boundaries. We are addressing this by having other agencies attend area boards and multi-agency working (shared Health Scrutiny covering the Pennine Acute Trust; You and Your Community Survey – 2004 with Oldham and Rochdale Councils, joint project with the police on crime and disorder related issues).

Key question	Examples of potential notable practice	Yes/No	Details of how this is demonstrated and evidence to support this
Does the organisation demonstrate a visible **commitment** to ensuring that all its activities are designed to meet the needs and take account of the views of all types of service users and citizens? (continued)	• Processes involving users are transparent and inclusive eg widely publicised open invitations to become involved.	Yes	• Different methods are applied according to circumstances. Surveys are regularly undertaken to collect responses to standard questions; tenant participation activities have been in place for many years; each area board has a 45 minute 'open forum' where members of the public can raise any issue; these are supplemented by dedicated open meetings particularly where there is a burning issue (eg windfarm application) whilst other methods are applied when we need qualitative data eg area board 'listening days' to identify specific local issues, personal interviews (older people services for BME groups), case studies to measure outcomes (libraries and parks). Mechanisms exist to share this information across the Council although it is not always possible to evidence how the results have influenced decision-making and led to positive outcomes.
	• Commitment to user focus is demonstrated by being built into the organisation's performance management system. Inclusion of commitment in Chief Executive and Directors personal targets.	Yes	• Annual Resident Surveys (commencing autumn 2004) will test perception on specific services and council priorities and feed user views into the annual strategic planning event. Commitment to user focus is a collective responsibility in Bury rather than a target for specific Directors.
	• Organisation understands the value that the contribution of diverse groups can make to the quality of life/well-being of the community.	Yes	• The contribution of service users is valued and the Council attempts to accommodate diverse needs. This has led to changes eg Sunday opening of Prestwich library following consultation the local Jewish community, refuse collection arrangements take account of religious festivals, focus on addressing the poor lifestyle in an area with greatest ethnic population through SRB5. Our commitment can also be seen in the development of a youth cabinet to improve young people's engagement in the democratic process, working with older people and related organisations to develop older people's services, a successful bid for community cohesion pathfinder status and Guardian newspaper nomination for integrating asylum seekers into the community. By providing support to the voluntary and community sector and recognising the needs of marginalised communities, the Council is aiming to build capacity for local people to challenge services and the way they are delivered, thereby encouraging a bottom-up approach to community cohesion. This is soon to be extended by the creation of a housing BME group.

Key question	Examples of potential notable practice	Yes/ No	Details of how this is demonstrated and evidence to support this
Does this commitment translate into actual processes which are used to ensure that the organisation understands its diverse **community's** needs and is ensuring that service delivery is designed on clear priorities which are based on need and aspirations of all sections of the community?	• The organisation has accurate, up-to-date, centrally accessible information about local communities and their diversity eg area profiles of the population.	Yes	• Area-based profiles from the 2001 census are available together with IMD statistics from the Corporate Research and Consultation Unit.
	• GIS is used to map and identify individual communities.	In part	• The web-based Asset Management IT system is currently being rolled-out. This system allows community profiles to be overlaid on asset and other contextual information about localities to enable managers to make better decisions for the benefit of local users.
	• The organisation has accurate, up-to-date, centrally accessible information about the identified needs and views of service users/ patients, carers and non-users eg analyses of customer/user/patient satisfaction, complaints and citizens panel data.	In part	• The web-based consultation database holds details of surveys carried out but this is not linked to complaints or 'softer' data that departments may have gathered over the counter. The complaints process is currently undergoing member scrutiny to improve to gathering and handling intelligence as part of service improvement.
	• Processes engage effectively with a wide range of communities eg targeted approaches to ensure effective communication, especially with under-represented groups.	Yes	• Mechanisms have been put in place to identify and address the needs of specific groups across services eg Roshni in social services, links with the Bury and District Disabled Advisory Council (BADDAC), access to 'Language line' for people whose first language is not English, the youth cabinet and related democratic structures such as area youth action groups to engage young people. The community cohesion survey did booster samples for asylum seekers and Muslim and Jewish groups to ensure their voices were heard. Community input is a feature of larger schemes such as Pimhole Renewal Area and SRB. Independent assessment by WM Enterprise Consultants of SRB5 concludes *'there has been an open and transparent decision-making structure through a strong partnership approach. Fundamental to this has been the high degree of community involvement. The involvement and structure of the programme sitting under the LSP which has encouraged a high degree of inter-working and reciprocate influence'*. Further evidence of this can be found in the Homeview group and mystery shopping volunteers.
	• Users are directly involved in service planning.	Yes	• Evidence of involvement can be seen in the 'Friends of' groups in local parks, tenant participation, service users consultation in older people's services as well as people in sheltered accommodation, young people's influence on youth services/leisure facilities, revised library opening hours, changes to recycling arrangements, area boards prioritising highway maintenance/street cleansing work, involvement of schools in formulating LEA policies. Such activity is less well defined in central services.

Key question	Examples of potential notable practice	Yes/ No	Details of how this is demonstrated and evidence to support this
Does this commitment translate into actual processes which are used to ensure that the organisation understands its diverse **community's** needs and is ensuring that service delivery is designed on clear priorities which are based on need and aspirations of all sections of the community? (continued)	• 'Hard to hear' groups are offered appropriate support to enable them to participate and develop the capacity to engage eg supporting local advocacy groups and developing communication skills – particularly for newly arrived groups (eg asylum seekers/refugees).	Yes	• Attempts are made to ensure equality of access. On a day-to-day basis, the translation service reworks information into different languages and arranges for interpreters. In terms of service development the Council is keen to engage the whole community as can be seen with detached youth workers reaching out to young and disaffected young people, social services working closely with service users and their carers and funding for independent advice agencies. The asylum seekers team has developed a resettlement information pack for every asylum seeker together with citizenship material for the Borough's high schools. The Council is also piloting a project to engage low income, young families to widen opportunities for accessing health, education and community regeneration. Julie Hartley of Woodhill Tenants and Residents Association says *'Families and friends has really made a difference to our lives. I've made a lot of friends and now I feel there is a real sense of community spirit'.*
	• The organisation works closely with its partner organisations to plan and deliver involvement across organisational boundaries and avoid consultation fatigue eg LSP/strategic health authority-wide consultation processes.	In part	• Joint work with police (around crime and disorder and the Bury reassurance, signal crime and cohesion project), the voluntary sector and faith groups around community cohesion and health in terms of developing services. There is no joint citizens panel or surveying mechanism to gather data systematically on behalf of the different agencies.
	• The organisation can demonstrate that it knows who makes up its population for example where different groups of people live, how demographics might change in the future, and an understanding of the inequalities that some groups face.	Yes	• Area-based profiles, demographic and IMD data is used to influence service delivery. You and Your Council 2004 survey, crime and disorder audit and forthcoming cultural audit identify more specific local needs and perceptions. Future trends are mapped by key services such as education and social services for planning and budgetary purposes.
	• Conflicting user views are explicitly acknowledged in the decision-making/policy formulation process and the impact of eventual decision on different groups/communities is assessed. The rationale behind decisions is articulated back to communities in a clear way.	Yes	• In publicising our ambitions and proposals for modernising services, different views are expressed. This has happened on many occasions including school closures, EPH closures, town centre regeneration (moving the market) and recycling arrangements. We listen to the differing views and try to find common ground although sometimes hard decisions have to be taken on a case-by-case basis. Some schemes proceed despite objections, some schemes are adjusted to accommodate views whilst continuing to achieve policy objectives (EPH closures) whilst other schemes are completely reassessed (recycling).

Key question	Examples of potential notable practice	Yes/No	Details of how this is demonstrated and evidence to support this
Is the organisation clear on what is trying to achieve by **connecting** and engaging with different types of users/patients and citizens and is it clear how the information generated by this engagement will feed into policy formulation?	• Information about services is readily accessible. Staff answer users'/patients' questions about the services provided by the whole organisation, especially where diverse users may have more complex information needs.	In part	• Information is available 24/7 through the website and in other media such as leaflets, helplines, council information points. Many services have published standards. Streetcare services have signs around the borough with a hotline number for people to report defects/service requests. The Council has deliberately not gone down the one-stop shop route but is promoting a network of council information points in each township that can answer general enquiries and signpost people for technical/specialist assistance. Implementation of the new CRM system will develop this further – extending access to back office systems, publicising easy to remember 'golden numbers' (such as for streetcare) and managing data to allow more complex information needs to be met at source.
	• Communication is planned to meet the needs of the user eg flexible, responsive and in a way which reflects their specific diverse needs (eg. language, hearing, seeing, cultural and religious needs).	Yes	• Communication is a two-way process and designed to meet the needs of both the user and the Council. Consequently, care is taken over the timing and method of data collection with different approaches being applied according on circumstances. Cultural or other needs are respected.
	• Consultation processes are planned effectively eg using methodologies (more than one methodology may be used to be as inclusive as possible) appropriate to issue and client group.	Yes	• Surveys remain popular, but other methods such as case studies (libraries and parks) and face-to-face interviews (ethnic elderly survey) are used where qualitative information is required or surveys would produce a low response. Cost-effectiveness is a consideration in determining consultation methods.
	• Consultation approaches have taken account of previous learning.	Yes	• Information and techniques are shared across the Council. The consultation database provides details of previous exercises whilst the consultation liaison officers group share experiences and plan future work to avoid duplication/consultation overload.

Key question	Examples of potential notable practice	Yes/No	Details of how this is demonstrated and evidence to support this
Is the organisation clear on what is trying to achieve by **connecting** and engaging with different types of users/patients and citizens and is it clear how the information generated by this engagement will feed into policy formulation? (continued)	• The organisation welcomes active involvement from all groups equally eg supporting user and carer groups. • The organisation clearly identifies opportunities for participation in decision-making eg allocation of resources.	Yes Yes	• Many services have active involvement from service users or their representatives (TRA representatives sit on housing working groups and ALMO working parties, 'Friends of' groups in parks, service users and carers groups in social services, partnership working with various environmental interest groups to develop wildlife habitats, tourist attractions, etc). • Service users/groups are heavily involved in the planning of change. Apart from statutory requirements to consult, evidence of proactive engagement can be seen in the rationalisation of school places (where plans were discussed with schools, governors, teachers and parents), EPH closures, changes to children's services, tenant involvement in housing rents and R&M allocations. Many of these approaches are strengthened because they are underpinned by formal structures (as opposed to ad-hoc engagement) such as LEA networks, service user groups, the Tenants Compact, etc.

Key question	Examples of potential notable practice	Yes/ No	Details of how this is demonstrated and evidence to support this
Is the organisation clear on the consultation and engagement techniques and **channels** that they are going to use to achieve what they have set out to achieve?	• Attractive information is available in a variety of formats eg leaflets designed in partnership with users.	In part	• Corporate standards set out the format for communications including design, readability and alternative formats/languages. Plain English is encouraged and a number of documents have the Crystal mark. User involvement in some services. The Council has its own civic newspaper which acts as an information source about service delivery initiatives and opportunities for interacting with the Council through its 'Did you know?' section on each page. It also serves as a means by which the Council gauges public opinion on new and upcoming features by means of a free prize draw.
	• Local media are seen as partners and are used effectively eg regular radio phone-in.	In part	• It is difficult to class the local media generally as partners given their legitimate scrutiny role. They provide however a useful channel for information – publicising public interest/safety items and act as a barometer of public opinion to which the Council responds positively. One local paper is particularly involved in our Employee Achievement Award (printing nomination forms and sitting on the judging panel).
	• Access points developed to meet users complex needs eg integrated local police, health and local authority services – accessible to different groups (eg physical access, appropriately placed based on understanding of the location of different communities).	Yes	• Strong asset management has seen increased co-location of services to improve suitability, location and sufficiency of premises as well as reducing costs. The Council has 100 per cent compliance with BV156 – buildings meeting DDA requirements. In partnership with schools and health we are currently looking at the concept of extended schools to bring public services closer together. This is particularly important in townships to support our sustainable communities agenda and reduce unnecessary journeys.
	• Websites informative, up-to-date and easily navigable eg terminals and support available in libraries and access points which adhere to specific standards.	Yes	• New website introduced in 2003 to make it more user-friendly and interactive. Content being added all the time in support of the customer contact strategy (as evidenced by higher BV157 values). Independent assessment by Sitemorse rated Bury fourth best website in the Local Council Websites Report (June 2004). To promote inclusion particularly among low income groups and people with limited IT skills, assisted public access is available through free internet points in libraries and youth centres. Basic IT training (including how to get started on the internet) is also available through libraries.
	• Surveys are well-planned and inclusive eg self-completion and interviews used to increase response rate. People from local communities are used as interviewers.	Yes	• Greater clarity and focus in surveys as we seek to attain greater cost/ benefit from consultation. Corporate direction to measuring diversity to ensure samples are representative and within confidence intervals. Some examples of public involvement (eg tenant representative checking sample of housing repairs).

Key question	Examples of potential notable practice	Yes/No	Details of how this is demonstrated and evidence to support this
Is the organisation clear on the consultation and engagement techniques and **channels** that they are going to use to achieve what they have set out to achieve? (continued)	• Consultation fora are managed, used appropriately and membership reflects all communities eg citizens' panels regularly refreshed.	Yes	• Consultation forums are managed and information used to inform decision makers. Area boards are serviced by council officers and the area board chairs meet with the Executive Member (Community Services) to pick up issues from the townships. Other user groups and partnership bodies are also supported by officials to maintain momentum. Membership on groups is reviewed from time to time although it could be more systematic.
	• Community involvement is planned and managed effectively eg role of area committees is widely publicised and understood.	Yes	• Widespread publication of area board meetings (eight per year) and council meetings (where time is also set aside at the beginning for public questions). Attendance has been an issue in some areas and different approaches have been trialled to increase participation (changing meeting times, alternative structures to encourage youth participation, members holding 'Question Time' sessions in youth clubs).
	• Regular honest and open dialogue with different groups takes place to share views and information.	Yes	• Formal and informal interaction with the public, extensive publication of information, involvement with user groups and partner bodies (including the voluntary sector) are in place. Positive results include the self-management of outdoor sports facilities by voluntary clubs, better services to older people (although at one stage this went to judicial review), development of activities through libraries to meet local community needs (Asian literature and videos, drop in facilities, housebound services, reconsideration of the alternate weekly collection of refuse following significant local protests, greater joint working with police leading to reduced crime and disorder).

Key question	Examples of potential notable practice	Yes/ No	Details of how this is demonstrated and evidence to support this
Does the organisation ensure that these processes are resulting in improved service delivery and demonstrable **change** for users?	• Users/patients are well informed eg the organisation measures the impact which its messages are having and identifies any differences in receipt and understanding of these messages.	In part	• A range of techniques are used to assess stakeholder views (mystery shopping, residents' survey, employee survey, etc). Work by the Audit Commission, (2004) however challenges the effectiveness of our communication arrangements. Whilst the mechanisms are there and we can point to positive feedback from those involved, some people do not want to engage with us whilst others feel there is little point. We intend to re-assess the different communication channels in this year's residents' survey and measure the impact of our customer contact strategy on public confidence and satisfaction.
	• People/patients respond to invitations to become involved eg parents volunteer to help with school sports.	Yes	• TRAs are growing and other community initiatives (self-management of facilities, community-based learning in Chesham, neighbourhood renewal in Pimhole) have been successful. Sixty-nine per cent of residents provide some form of informal assistance to others in their community whilst around half provide unpaid help to groups or organisations (You and Your Community Survey, 2004).
	• Users/patient needs and views have shaped services eg plans changed as a result of consultation.	Yes	• There are examples across the Council where needs and views have shaped services eg revised library opening hours, co-location of services, recycling, older people's services, Learning Disabilities. Internally the employee survey and focus groups have helped worklife balance opportunities, reduce sickness levels and focused performance management on the things that matter.
	• Service users/patients are aware that service delivery has changed as a result of their input and that they have made a difference eg regular feedback and thanks to participants.	In part	• There is some evidence of this in environmental services and the 'report back' boards in libraries but it is not systematic and the link between comments and change is not always apparent. Work by the Audit Commission (2004) and the You and Your Community Survey (2004) suggest this is an area we need to develop.
	• Relationship of trust and high satisfaction exists within all communities eg young people accessing social services.	In part	• Seventy-eight per cent of people are satisfied with their neighbourhoods (dissatisfaction is 9 per cent) with low crime, clean streets, health services and affordable decent housing the main factors. These all feature in the Council's priority list. Relationships/satisfaction with individual services however varies according to individual circumstances.
	• Service managers, members, senior officers can articulate what has changed as a result of user focus activities.	Yes	

Action plan

Recommendations	Priority 1 = Low 2 = Med 3 = High	Responsibility	Agreed	Comments	Date
R1 Evaluate the effectiveness of user focus/community engagement to ensure that future engagement is effective.	3	C Wilkins Assistant Chief Executive H Downie Head of Performance	Yes	Analysis of existing user focus/community engagement infrastructure to be completed as part of developing a corporate framework for the Council. Further research to be undertaken into reasons for the gap between performance and perception ratings. Findings will be used to establish areas for improvement around communications, methods of engagement, etc	September 2005 September 2005
R2 Collate the range of information/feedback to provide a comprehensive picture of the community.	3	C Wilkins Assistant Chief Executive K Hoyle Research and Consultation Officer	Yes	Upgrade consultation database to include: • key messages from consultation exercises; and • action taken as a result of consultation. Develop wider feedback mechanisms to inform people of the outcomes of consultation exercises, actions taken as well as actions not taken together with rationale. Area Profiles to be developed with key partner agencies to build up a picture at Borough, Area Board and community level (as appropriate). Information to be used to inform service design and delivery and promote local community planning.	October 2005 Scoping of Area Profiles by July 2005.

Recommendations	Priority 1 = Low 2 = Med 3 = High	Responsibility	Agreed	Comments	Date
R3 Integrate user focus into the Council's performance management processes.	3	C Wilkins Assistant Chief Executive	Yes	Annual Residents' surveys introduced. Area Profiles will provide baseline and progress reports on quality of life issues within communities to target resources more effectively. Consideration to be given to enhancing contact with the community including Citizens' panel and on-line consultation. Consideration to be given to including user focus within reports to Management Board and Members (eg analysis of complaints, service monitoring and feedback processes).	Complete July 2005