

Responsive to the Needs of Communities and Stakeholders

We recognise the **diversity of the communities** we serve and are responsive to the varying needs of all our stakeholders. We believe that to respond effectively to the needs of our communities requires us to communicate effectively with them, to learn from what they tell us and to learn from the best practice of other organisations and our own successes and areas for improvement. This is reflected in our **Corporate Values** and our priority of Social Inclusion.

The Council has a well established public consultation process. Our **Consultation Strategy and Toolkit** have been updated and were approved by the General Management Policy Board on 3 November 2004. Consultation is monitored annually at the Chief Executive and Directors scrutiny meetings and through the annual Service Plans. We were one of the first Councils in Scotland to introduce a **Public Services Panel** over five years ago and our 2,000 strong Panel is now a key method of consultation with our community. We undertake other consultation exercises using a wide range of techniques including focus groups and opinion meters. We share this information across the Council using our **corporate consultation database** and provide information for our partners and the public through the Internet.

We use **Plain English** for all key public documents to ensure clarity and ease of understanding and make documents available in a wide variety of formats to meet the particular needs of individual customers.

We are investing in modern ways to ensure we provide services that meet the diverse needs and preferences of our community. This includes investment in our **Customer Service Centre**, our **Customer Contact Centre**, which is one of the largest and longest running in the public sector in Scotland, our **Portal**, and **Rentext**. Our emphasis on the development of telephone and face to face communications stems from the results of consultation where our residents have told us that they prefer to contact us in these ways.

We operate an effective and accessible **complaints system** which empowers staff to give priority to putting things right quickly and effectively. The Ombudsman commended our system as a model example of how it ought to be done at a seminar for members and employees in June 2005. Where matters are not resolved to the satisfaction of the customer they can ask for a formal complaint to be registered and following this, an appeal to be considered by a third party. All employees have been issued with **written guidelines** on how to deal with complaints and full **training** has been provided as part of the customer care training programme.

Customers are made aware of the complaints procedures through **leaflets and posters** prominently displayed in all offices, through the **Internet** and the **Renfrewshire Magazine**. Customers can make complaints in writing (letter or e-mail), in person at any Council facility or reception or by telephone to any council employee, or to a Customer Services telephone number for the Department.

We actively seek complaints, comments, suggestions and opinions as a means for the public to help us to improve our service. We **record and analyse** formal and informal complaints and comments and **monitor** these on a regular basis and then use the information to help us **make changes and to improve our services**. We publicise the results of our complaints monitoring as part of our performance standards information. We have publicised clear deadlines for dealing with complaints in our leaflets and on the internet and monitor achievements against these departmentally and corporately. Complaints received and the response times for resolving them, is one of the common PIs reported quarterly to the Corporate Management Team and annually to the Council.

Examples of good/poor practice as a result of complaints to the Ombudsman in relation to this Council are highlighted to other Departments. In addition, when reports of maladministration in other authorities are provided by the Ombudsman, departments are asked to consider their practices and procedures against the findings.

Key Strengths

- Corporate Statement vision and values and Community Plan guiding principles.
- Investment in modern technology and business change to improve efficiency.
- Corporate service pledges for customer service and complaints handling.
- Regular review of effectiveness of consultation and of the corporate guidance and toolkit.
- Complaints process.
- Consultation part of performance management and effectiveness monitored regularly.

Core Evidence

- Corporate Statement and the Community Plan.
- Consultation Database, Strategy and Toolkit.
- Corporate Complaints procedure.
- Community Capacity and Community Engagement with the Community Planning process.

An Ongoing Dialogue with Partners

We have an **ongoing dialogue** with other public sector partners and our local business, voluntary and community sectors. The primary method for achieving this is the **Community Planning** process, although a key strength is the fact that the Council has a strong track record of working in partnership with the local community that predates the introduction of the Community Plan. For example, the Joint Community Care Plan and Children's Services Plan were produced prior to the Community Plan being introduced.

In addition to **regular meetings** at a senior management, elected member and officer level, we have held **joint training seminars** for our partners on issues such as Emergencies Planning and Best Value. We share our **Public Services Panel** results with our partners and we actively work with them to join up services and improve service delivery locally.

We are partners on the **Renfrewshire Economic Forum** which brings together the key public and private sector partners to oversee the ongoing regeneration of the local economy. In addition, we have active engagement with the private sector with Board representation on the Renfrewshire Chamber of Commerce and Scottish Enterprise Renfrewshire.

Our recently relaunched **Community Portal** is a good example of working to develop joined up services with our partners. Considerable investment has been made to provide a single electronic gateway to all Renfrewshire services and facilities in the public and voluntary sectors. The Portal is working towards achieving Plain English Crystal Mark accreditation and has been built to "AA" accessibility standards.

The current redevelopment of our HQ complex is another example, where all Council services will be available through one single Customer Service Centre and the Health Board have agreed to share accommodation on the same campus, bringing together the Council, Police and Health Board in one central location.

Members and senior managers acknowledge, and our **Corporate Statement** emphasises, the value and importance of constructive engagement with stakeholders. We have developed **service pledges** for all key service areas and these standards have been set following consultation with service users. **Charter Mark** services in particular maintain ongoing consultation and involvement with service users and local partners. The principle of service pledges is an integral part of induction courses for all new employees.

Key Strengths

- Community Planning process.
- Development of Community Portal.
- Planning for Change programme and redevelopment of Council HQ site.

Core Evidence

- Community Plan and the Corporate Statement.
- Consultation Database, Strategy and Toolkit.

Open, Fair and Inclusive Consultation

We have **consultation arrangements** which are open, fair and inclusive. Our stakeholders feel that we listen to and take account of their views and that they are provided with information about the actions taken in the decision making process.

We **consult widely** and ensure that difficult to reach groups are not missed. Regular consultees include: Tenants and Residents Associations; Neighbourhood Forums; Estate Liaison Committees; Young Persons Housing Forum; Service User groups; Community Care Plan groups; Community Planning groups; Community Councils; and an extensive programme of user consultation related to Charter Mark and disability and minority groups. We are currently recruiting focus groups from minority ethnic residents (less than 1% of the population) to discuss race equality issues.

We have a **programme of meetings** with trade union representatives at departmental level, corporate officer level and with elected members. Within this process key issues are addressed ranging from employee relations matters to health and safety arrangements and procedures. In addition, all employees are advised and consulted on major Council initiatives through **Team Talk** which includes an employee feedback facility and **Staff Matters** our employee magazine. We undertake **employee surveys** to gauge employee satisfaction. We have an **Employee Suggestion Scheme** which encourages employees to come forward with ideas for service improvements and the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council recognises these suggestions at an annual awards ceremony.

We have a systematic approach for **co-ordinating consultation exercises** and sharing information within the Council and with other bodies. We have a **consultation database** which is currently available within the authority and will shortly be available over the Internet to be shared with partners. Our **Quality and Performance Co-ordinators** meet every six weeks and they have a specific remit to share best practice and discuss current and future corporate guidance on consultation. Similar guidance is included in our **Service Plan Guidelines** and **Service Review Guidance** and achievement is monitored through the **performance scrutiny process**. Consultation exercises have clear objectives in terms of what we are seeking to find out, and result in clear recommendations for action. A summary of consultation conducted at service level is included in each of the Service Performance Profiles.

Each **Public Services Panel** has a specific theme or themes and we use the results to shape policy and service delivery. For example, themes have included: our Customer Service Centre and Customers Matter programme; our Community Safety Strategy; Modernising Government and Reaching Renfrewshire Strategy. We also use the panels to consult on specific service areas or priorities. We publish a **panel newsletter** after each public service panel questionnaire that provides a summary of feedback and sets out how we intend to use the information to improve services. The Public Services Panel results are shared with Community Planning partners who are also offered the opportunity to include questions on each panel questionnaire.

The Renfrewshire Magazine includes "**How are We Doing?**" which provides comprehensive and balanced information on how the Council has performed and the steps that are being taken to improve further. Information is also contained on the **Community Portal**. Specific services ask their customers about the service they provide and their satisfaction with services and facilities and ask for their views on how they can improve. They publish the results and check that customers and stakeholders are happy with the changes they have made. **Planning Hearings** have also been in place for a number of years. These are held in advance of a Planning Board and allow objectors an opportunity to speak to the issues they raise in their objections and also allow applicants to speak to their proposal and respond to the objectors.

We systematically review the effectiveness of our approach to consultation to ensure **Best Value**. The **Chief Executive** regularly reviews the effectiveness of consultation with Directors as part of the annual **performance scrutiny process** and reviews of consultation are carried out within departments as part of the annual service planning process.

Key Strengths

- Consultation Strategy which is regularly reviewed.
- Consultation Database that ensures Departments share best practice.
- Public Services Panel and Newsletter.
- Strong corporate focus through Quality and Performance Co-ordinators and monitoring by the Chief Executive and Directors through the annual performance scrutiny process.
- Strong evidence of changes made to service delivery as a result of involving stakeholders. Charter Mark approach and customer focus.

Core Evidence

- Consultation Database, Strategy and Toolkit.
- Public Services Panel and Newsletter.
- How are We Doing? and Renfrewshire Magazine. Charter Mark Programme and Customers Matter Strategy.

Best Practice

Registration Service Focus Groups
(CS BP9)

Following a consultation with customers through focus groups, the Registration Service introduced service improvement. They now open during lunch hours; have weekend civil marriages; and have refurbished the marriage suite to meet the needs of people with disabilities. (Cosla citation of merit issued in the customer focus category 1999/2000).

Tenant Participation Framework
(HPS BP5)

The Tenant Participation Team was short listed for an APSE award in 2005. The framework was identified as best practice by a peer review in September 2005.

Young Persons' Housing Forum
(HPS BP6)

The forum won the TPAS/CIH Good Practice Award 2002 for outstanding achievement in participation. It was also included in the Communities Scotland video highlighting best practice in tenant participation.

Planning Hearings
(PT BP 7)

The Council has a practice of holding planning hearings regarding planning applications that are both contrary to the Development Plan and subject to objections. Hearings are held in advance of a Planning Board and are chaired by the Convener with other relevant members attending. Objectors are given an opportunity to speak to the issues they raised in their objections and the applicant also has the opportunity to speak to his proposal and respond to the objectors. The results of the Hearing are included in the report to the Board for decision.

Benefits Service Charter Mark
(FIT BP 1)

The Benefits Service was successful in securing Charter Mark and as part of the assessment a number of specific aspects relating to how the service engages with stakeholders were highlighted as areas of best practice. These included; dedicated sheltered housing complex benefit surgeries, benefit take-up open days and consultation forums which have been established with the private landlords in Renfrewshire.

Plans for Continuous Improvement

- Develop the Community Portal as the single public service electronic gateway for Renfrewshire that will deliver a range of on-line information, services and transactions to meet the needs of the Council, Community Planning partners and residents.