



The East Lancashire Joint Consultation Project

Who was involved

The East Lancashire Joint Consultation project consists of the Borough Councils of Burnley, Hyndburn, Pendle, Ribbles Valley and Rossendale working together as a joint partnership using a collaborative approach to develop a Citizen's Panel underpinned by new technology.

Project aims

The partners wanted to create a web-based approach to consultation that could be replicated across the north west and is aimed at improving consultation and avoiding duplication.

The idea is to involve the customer more effectively in council decision-making, to share costs and best practice in consultation and also to incorporate the use of multi-media consultation survey software.

Background

It was recognised that the way partners consulted their citizens could be improved and made more efficient. The need to engage more effectively with people was paramount, so a shared approach to consultation was an obvious step.

What they did and how they did it

A full-time co-ordinator was appointed in July 2004 to lead on the joint citizens' panel, the interactive consultation diary and capacity building.

Individual councils would not have been able to afford this resource. This appointment, along with additional skills from partner councils, has led to an innovative peer learning approach that enables partners to share experiences and competencies across the organisations at a fraction of the cost of commercial conferences and seminars.

The results

Pilot projects tested so far include SMS texting which is proving popular with the young, online surveys which cut down on costs, PDAs which are quick and easy to use and deliver instant headline results and interactive handsets which are great for audience interaction.

Improvement through efficiency

The provision of a joint tool, citizens' panel and joint consultation diary is a first step towards more co-ordinated activity among the five partners. The benefits of centralised support include extra capacity for research on such areas as local demographic trends and increased capacity for consultation.

The identification, selection and joint procurement of SNAP survey software gives the partnership the ability to develop and analyse online surveys as well as enhancing traditional methods and techniques. It means citizens' views can be fed into council decision-making more rapidly with considerably faster data analysis and reporting.

Project highlights

The partner authorities pool resources to purchase publicity material resulting in considerable savings. In addition, it has been seen that a group of authorities acting together has greater 'clout' when it comes to engaging with the media to gain editorial coverage.

The future

A sustainability plan has been developed for the further development of consultation and e-consultation activity. Issues central to sustainability include:

- Making our expertise profitable – in other words, developing our commercial activity
- Increasing people's involvement in local community decision-making
- Panel refreshment and Involvement of young people

