

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO POLICY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: 19TH JUNE 2018
title: UPDATE ON THE CONSULTATION PARTNERSHIP – INFUSION RESEARCH
submitted by: DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES
principal author: MICHELLE HAWORTH – PRINCIPAL POLICY AND PERFORMANCE OFFICER

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To inform committee of the change of approach to the Council's consultation and research requirements.
- 1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:
- Community Objectives – It is important to engage with the public, partners and staff in an effective and meaningful way in order to
 - Corporate Priorities – determine levels of satisfaction, and to help inform
 - Other Considerations – decision-making on service delivery.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 We received a letter from Blackpool Council in early May 2018, Appendix A, which informed us that they would no longer be providing the Infusion Research service following the departure of the Infusion Service Manager.
- 2.2 It is clear that replacing the manager's role at Blackpool is not a viable option given the income pressures that come with it. It is also apparent that Blackpool would not be able to commit to delivering work for external organisations with the research capacity it will be left with. Therefore there will be no Infusion service offer from Blackpool Council in 2018/19.
- 2.3 It should be noted however, that the move to Blackpool Council at the beginning of 2016 enabled us to extend the life of the Infusion partnership and we have met the initial two year commitment.
- 2.4 We have paid Infusion an annual subscription of £6,500 plus VAT in recent years (a reduction from the £18K paid before that). This entitled the Council to draw down a number of days for research and consultation work based on:
- £250 per day of the Infusion Service Manager
 - £155 per day of an Infusion Support Officer
 - £75 per day of a Casual Fieldworker
- 2.5 Additional payments were made for postage and printing costs.
- 2.6 In recent years our subscription has paid for a variety of surveys and pieces of work:
- Biennial Employee Satisfaction Surveys
 - Biennial Perception Surveys
 - Clitheroe Food Festival Surveys
 - Clitheroe Market Redevelopment Consultation
 - Biennial Community Safety Consultation

- Council Tax Support Consultation
 - Maintenance of the Citizens' Panel database
 - Plus adhoc advice and input on smaller surveys as required
- 2.7 Some analysis carried out in 2015 summarised comparable costs for running a Staff Survey:
- Cost for Infusion based on 5 days @ £250 = £1,250
 - Average costs for Market Research companies = £3,500 - £4,500

3 COUNCIL CONSULTATIONS IN THE FUTURE

- 3.1 All historic data, surveys, reports and the Citizens Panel database have been transferred from Blackpool Council to ourselves. We had already planned to take back ownership of the Citizens' Panel database after the completion of the 2018 Perception Survey on the back of GDPR.
- 3.2 We shall carry on running smaller surveys ourselves, as we do currently. We retain ownership of the Snap Survey software. Our IT section has hosted online surveys on our Intranet/Internet for a number of years.
- 3.3 We are part of a network of Policy/Performance/Consultation officers across Lancashire which will enable access to data for comparison purposes.
- 3.4 Following on from the analysis of the 2018 Perception Survey we have already begun to consider additional and alternative methods of consulting with the public.
- 3.5 We will continue, however, to require occasional help and advice especially with larger, more complex, surveys and reports. Independent input is also useful for some pieces of consultation work – for example the Market Redevelopment Consultation.
- 3.6 The Council will retain a Consultation budget of £6,500 to be used for corporate consultation requirements which historically have been carried out by Infusion Research. Quotations from market research companies will be sought for these larger consultation activities – subject to our procurement policy.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications
- Resources – None identified.
 - Technical, Environmental and Legal – None identified.
 - Political – None identified.
 - Reputation – None identified.
 - Equality & Diversity - None identified.

Michelle Haworth
 PRINCIPAL POLICY AND
 PERFORMANCE OFFICER

Jane Pearson
 DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES

REF:

For further information please ask for Michelle Haworth, extension 4421

Date: 04/05/2018

Michelle Haworth
Ribble Valley Borough Council
Council Offices
Church Walk
Clitheroe

Our Ref: INFPBC18
Your Ref: INFPBC18

Dear Michelle

Further to previous updates, I am writing to confirm that Blackpool Council will no longer be able to offer an external research service to Ribble Valley Borough Council, delivered under the Infusion name to this point.

After the resignation of Adam Pearson, the Infusion Research manager, we have undertaken a considered review of the service's financial position. It is clear that continuing to offer the service is not viable given the income pressures attached to it and levels of demand within the public sector. We could not confidently commit to delivering such a service with our remaining capacity.

Whilst it is with regret that we can no longer commit to offering and hosting the Infusion research service, I am aware that the move over to Blackpool at the beginning of 2016 still enabled us to extend the life of what was the Infusion partnership. The initial two year commitment has been met and so we are formally calling to an end the Service Level Agreement which expired on 31 March 2018.

We do not make this decision lightly, but we do so in the knowledge that there are viable alternative solutions in the market for you to turn to if needed.

Yours sincerely



Neil Jack
Chief Executive

