



Report from Engagement Roadshows in support of the new Corporate Plan and Priorities Consultation

On Behalf of Woking Borough Council

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Background

This report provides the findings from the seven engagement roadshows that took place at various venues across the borough to support and inform the main consultation around the formulation of a new five-year Corporate Plan and Priorities for Woking Borough Council (WBC). The council used these roadshows as an opportunity to act upon their commitment, launched earlier this year, to establish an effective two-way dialogue with residents and key stakeholders, to do more listening, and giving a voice to all members of the community. Anyone interested in attending one of the roadshows was required to pre-book and they were also given the opportunity to submit a question in advance of the session. In total, **161 people** attended the eight roadshows including sixteen Councillors.

The format used for each session was a brief presentation from the Leader of the Council and then from the Chief Executive of Woking Borough Council, about the future vision they have for Woking, followed by a facilitated question and answer session where residents had the opportunity to ask questions, and to share their views on the issues and services that matter the most to them. They could also discuss the improvements they would like to see in the future with a panel comprising of the Leader of the Council, WBC Chief Executive as well as one other Senior Officer from the council. At some of the roadshows, the Deputy Leader of the Council as well as some Local Councillor Portfolio Holders also joined this panel.

At the end of the roadshow, residents were encouraged to take part in the main consultation by completing the consultation questionnaire either online or by returning the questionnaire by post, copies of the printed version of the questionnaire were available to pick up at each event. In addition, people were also encouraged to complete a roadshow feedback form and return this to us at the end of each session. The results of these are included in this report.

In total, a hundred feedback forms were received and analysed.

As well as the seven core roadshow events, an additional less formal session was also arranged with students at Woking College. At this session, only The Leader of the Council and Chief Executive took part in the discussions.

The full details of each of these roadshow was as follows:

Roadshow	Additional Panel Members	No. of attendees
21/10: Holy Trinity Church, Knaphill	Geoff McManus, Cllr. Harlow	12 residents 3
26/10: Scout Hall, Woking Park	Leigh Clarke, Cllr. Kemp	11 residents 1 Councillor
3/11: Parkview Centre, Sheerwater	Louise Strongitham, Cllr. Davis	15 residents 4 Councillors
15/11: WBC Council Chamber	Giorgio Framalicco, Cllr. Ashall and Cllr. Kemp	27 residents
29/11: St Mary's Community Centre, Byfleet	Geoff McManus, Cllr. Ashall	25 residents 5 Councillors
2/12: The Lightbox, Woking	Louise Strongitham	20 residents
6/12: Woking College	-	12 students
6/12: St Andrews's Church, Goldsworth Park	Leigh Clarke, Cllr. Ashall	23 residents 3 Councillors

Summary

- After a slow start, the attendance at the roadshows increased steadily as the impact of the supporting marketing and media promotion began to work. There was a high no-show rate, as the roadshows took place amongst a backdrop of social distancing, mask wearing and further Covid-19 restrictions, however the discussions at each roadshow were frank, honest and at times lively.
- Residents said they appreciated the opportunity to listen to and to talk directly to the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive and readily recognised that this had not always been the case.
- These engagement roadshows are one step towards rebuilding a level of trust between the council and residents, however they will also raise expectations especially amongst those attending whether the subsequent actions taken by the council will also be different.
- The diversity of the population in Woking Borough was not reflected in the profile of the people attending the roadshows, who in the main were older, and from a white British background. Involving the students from Woking College in the discussion was a great idea, and hopefully this is something that can be repeated in the future. What perhaps was a surprise or reassuring was that whilst the students wanted to see more facilities provided for people of their age, many of their concerns and priorities for the future were exactly the same as was heard elsewhere.
- There were a large number of questions and issues raised across all of the roadshows, however the following list shows the key themes that were repeated at most, if not at all of the sessions.
- **Provision of affordable housing:** will there be the right mix of housing at the right price that will encourage younger people to move into the area, and then stay locally for the longer term
- **Highways:** too much traffic, moving too fast in places on roads in poor condition
- **Development:** protection of Green Belt, loss of habitats, pressure on existing infrastructure
- **The Council:** investment strategy, financial stability, commitment to consultation
- **Climate Change & Sustainability:** what is or can the council do to support this, how can it adapt its policies such as planning, encouraging people to use their cars less, electric vehicle charging
- **Woking Town Centre:** redevelopment, town centre economy, traffic congestion. Victoria Arch
- **Sustainable Transport:** enhancement of cycleways, footpaths, public bus services
- **Support services for vulnerable people:** mental health, homelessness
- **Local villages:** more visible signs as to how the council are supporting these local economies
- **Parking:** lack of provision in certain areas, lack of enforcement, new homes and parking spaces
- **Partnership working:** with Surrey County Council, Surrey Police, the NHS, developers and others
- Whilst the roadshows may be evidence of a new culture across the council, there is still a great deal of scepticism from residents to overturn. As the results from the feedback form highlight, confidence in the council to do the right things for the local area remains low. Only a third of those attending were confident that the council would do what's needed for their local area. This result is also reflected in the overall scores for trust and confidence in the main consultation report.

Overview

This is an overview of each of the eight roadshows.

Roadshow	Overview	Key Themes Raised
Knaphill	<p>This was a relatively low- key start to the series of roadshows, with only a small number of local residents attending. The low attendance was primarily explained by the supporting marketing and communications only starting the week before the event took place. It also proved to be a useful test event for future roadshows and it was the only roadshow where the questions and answer session was facilitated by one of the senior executives on the Q&A Panel rather than by Kevin Foster.</p> <p>A number of the questions raised during this roadshow focused on very local issues, in particular the problems associated with speeding traffic and congestion on Knaphill High Street. One other resident, well known to the Council, raised a number of comments around access to those with disabilities, whilst other residents had a number of observations and suggestions as to how the green environment could be better protected by changing some of the planning rules and regulations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traffic congestion and speeding traffic in Knaphill. • Provision of affordable housing in Woking • Cycleways • Promoting sustainability and supporting Climate Change initiatives through planning policy.
Woking Park	<p>The second roadshow attracted a slightly higher number of attendees, however those that did attend were very engaged in the debate and discussions with the roadshow panel and as a result this was a very positive session. Given the proximity of the venue to Woking Town Centre, it was no surprise that some of the questions focused on the proposed development, the type of new housing being proposed as well as the rationale of the financial investment strategy adopted by the council to help fund the development.</p> <p>There were also questions about WBC's involvement in Woking Football Club as well as Victoria Arch, the HIF Planning Application and the Network Rail site currently occupied by Days Aggregates.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial investments and risk strategy taken by WBC • Victoria Arch & HIF Planning Application • Town Centre development • Reasons for WBC investment in Woking Football Club
Sheerwater	<p>The third roadshow took place in Sheerwater. The mood here was very different from the previous session with the initial discussions focused on the lack of parking provision in and around Sheerwater and the problems this causes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of parking provision in Sheerwater • Progress of Sheerwater Regeneration Scheme

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	<p>to local residents. There was some frustration that this issue has been exacerbated by the council by not providing sufficient car parking spaces in the first phase of the Sheerwater Regeneration Project new build.</p> <p>There were also a small number of residents from West Byfleet who attended this session. They were very concerned about the very low footfall in the village, partly a result of the Sheer House redevelopment currently taking place, which along with the lack of parking was putting the future of the remaining shops in jeopardy. They wanted the council to look at introducing short term free parking or taking other initiatives to support local businesses, whilst the redevelopment was taking place.</p> <p>This was the first roadshow where questions were asked about the provision of electric vehicle charging points in and around Woking Borough and what the future strategy was about increasing the number of these both off street in car parks as well as on street across the borough.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • West Byfleet redevelopment and parking restrictions • Electric vehicle (EV) charging points • Level of trust in WBC
Council Chamber	<p>This was by the nature of the venue, the most formal of the engagement sessions that took place. The roadshow was very well attended, and the residents that came along all had well-formed and reasoned views. This was the first session where questions/issues were collected at the start of the session and used by the facilitator to direct the Q&A session with the panel.</p> <p>There were a number of questions about how the council were going to help support and rebuild the 'economy' in Woking Town Centre after the pandemic, as well as questions about the relative merits of, and look of the proposed Town Centre redevelopment. One of the topics discussed at this session and in most of the other sessions as well, focused on the need for more affordable housing in the borough, and questioned whether the new development included the right type of dwelling at an affordable price.</p> <p>Another of the themes discussed at this session was around what the council would be doing or could do to encourage people to move away</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local economy, promotion of and re-development of Woking Town Centre • Provision of affordable housing in Woking • Move to a more sustainable transport strategy for Woking including improvements to cycleways • Lack of mother/toddler facilities in Woking • More focus on the needs of younger residents to identify what they want? • Traffic congestion in and around Woking Town Centre

Roadshow	Overview	Key Themes Raised
	<p>from using their own vehicles on journeys to/from Woking Town Centre. The discussion centred on the role of public bus services, and the extension and improvement of cycleways and footpaths connecting Woking with the surrounding villages.</p> <p>This was also the first and only roadshow where someone directly addressed the question of overall representativeness of the people attending the session, pointing out that most of the people present were older, male and from a white background. This profile was reflected in all of the roadshows.</p>	
Byfleet	<p>This was a very lively and well attended session both by residents as well as by Councillors, of which five attended. It was readily apparent that many of those present at the session share a sense of frustration and do not feel that WBC are sufficiently engaged in the issues and challenges faced by residents living in Byfleet. Their key concerns are severe local traffic congestion, the potential loss of some of the local green belt as a result of proposed housing development, and the implications of any proposed new housing developments both within the borough and in neighbouring boroughs will have on local infrastructure including roads and health facilities.</p> <p>Whilst, we heard from a number of residents about the pressure on the town centre economy in West Byfleet as a result of the ongoing Sheer House redevelopment during the roadshow held in Sheerwater, perhaps surprisingly similar comments were not raised during this session although there were some people from West Byfleet at the session.</p> <p>It has been mentioned many times by people from within WBC, that there is a degree of antipathy amongst some Byfleet residents towards WBC and a feeling that WBC overly focus on Woking rather than on the surrounding villages. This was not readily apparent from the results to the Residents' Panel Consultation earlier this year, but it certainly came out during the roadshow. Whilst the Panel responded succinctly to all of the questions raised by residents during the session, there was a notable</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WBC Financial strategy • Lack of infrastructure, pressure on existing infrastructure such as roads, GP surgeries in Byfleet • More facilities for young people in West Byfleet • Protection of Green Belt. Loss of local woodland, impact on flooding problems. • Over development in Byfleet and in surrounding areas • Climate Change

Roadshow	Overview	Key Themes Raised
	<p>absence of any examples mentioned of new initiatives or investment directly or indirectly influenced by the work of WBC in the local area in and around Byfleet that could have helped change these opinions.</p> <p>This was by far the most negative of the roadshow sessions in terms of the levels of confidence those attending had on whether WBC would take the appropriate action in the future on behalf of local residents.</p>	
Woking Lightbox	<p>This was the only roadshow session conducted during the day time. The roadshow attracted a very engaged group of residents, who were well briefed and up to date on local issues. By far the majority of those who attended the roadshow were men, aged 65 or over. Despite the proximity of the venue to the town centre, the questions raised during this roadshow did not focus on the town centre re-development. Whilst there were some questions centred on housing provision, and specifically what WBC are doing to attract and retain families with younger children in to the area, other questions focused on anti-social parking, and in particular the perceived lack of parking enforcements as well as how WBC work with partners such as Surrey Police on community safety related matters.</p> <p>As in many of the previous groups, there was significant interest in finding out more about the indicatives WBC are taking and have taken around Climate Change, sustainability, and the 'green agenda', how traffic flows can be improved in the town, and how WBC and their partners can encourage people to use their cars less, and use alternative methods of transport when making journeys to Woking Town Centre.</p> <p>Several residents praised the services WBC currently provide, notably the facilities at Woking Leisure Centre and the new initiatives to bring physiotherapy services out of the hospitals into the community, and overall, there were more positive comments raised by residents in this roadshow than in the previous sessions combined. As in many of the previous groups, residents expressed thanks at being given an opportunity to share their views and engage in a dialogue with the senior leadership team at</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population growth, provision of the right mix of housing • Town Centre redevelopment • Traffic congestion, and encouraging people away from using their vehicles • Provision of accessible mental health support • Climate Change related • Partnership working with other public service providers • Resident engagement, bringing council services in-house

Roadshow	Overview	Key Themes Raised
	<p>WBC, something they said which had been missing in the past under the previous management team.</p>	
<p>Woking College</p>	<p>This additional session was held at Woking College and involved twelve students from both lower- and sixth-year groups. Some of the students were studying politics and some of the group lived outside of the borough.</p> <p>After a slow start to the session, the students really engaged with the discussions, which were deliberately kept as informal as possible. So, there were no formal presentations from either Leader or Chief Executive, it was purely a Q&A session.</p> <p>The young people we met came across as very altruistic, many of the issues and priorities raised by students in this session were exactly the same as the ones discussed at the other roadshows, such as the provision of affordable homes, the pressure from the expansion of the borough on the 'green belt', the provision of services to address homelessness, the impact of road closures and roadworks on getting around the borough and the future of local bus services. How to improve access to free or subsidised mental health support for young people, either in school, college or at work was also one of the questions raised by one of the students.</p> <p>One question, which hadn't been raised before, was about how the council were going to ensure that the upkeep and appearance of the town centre high rise building would be maintained so they remained 'decent and sustainable' in the future? This student gave as his example Surrey Towers in Addlestone, as an example of another high rise building in the area, which doesn't have a very good reputation with local people.</p> <p>One of the students who travels in from Spelthorne said that Woking compares very favourably with his home borough. He really appreciated the close proximity and blend of urban and rural environments in Woking, which was something he would love to be emulated by the politicians in Spelthorne.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traffic Congestion • Homelessness • Activities for 16–17-year-olds across the borough • Future of public bus services • Provision of accessible mental health support • Growth of local economy, job creation • Keeping the new high-rise buildings as decent, sustainable homes • Provision of affordable housing • Protection of Green Belt and green spaces

Roadshow	Overview	Key Themes Raised
	<p>But as one might expect, there were also a number of other questions and priorities raised that were influenced by their age and life stage. Examples included the future job market; students were keen to know how the council were planning to help grow the local economy post pandemic. Students would also like the council to prioritise services for young people aged 16 or 17, those legally too young to be visiting pubs. There was a strong feeling that whilst many other age groups were very well served across the borough, this particular age group were not. This has been exacerbated by the loss of youth clubs. Several people gave examples of amenities such as the Friday Night Project and Phoenix Club, both of which were focused on young people in this age groups, which had been shut as a result of the pandemic and which so far had not re-opened. One student also asked when a night club would be opening again in the town.</p> <p>Students also praised the provision of the ‘mop up’ vaccine centres in Woking and the wide range of leisure services available across the borough.</p>	
<p>Goldsworth Park</p>	<p>This roadshow proved to be quite lively, although the discussions were overly dominated by the contributions of three people in the audience.</p> <p>One of the three residents, who is well known to the council only wanted to discuss issues around the council’s plans and priorities towards people with disabilities. Another well briefed resident focused his concerns around the lack of affordable homes being provided as part of one of the proposed new developments in the Town Centre and the policies adopted by the council as part of the planning process that helped enable this to happen.</p> <p>In the main, common themes such as traffic congestion, the town centre redevelopment, and whether WBC would be able to achieve the right balance of housing to attract and retain all types of residents were again raised by residents.</p> <p>There was also interest in finding out more about the plans to increase the provision of EV</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection of Green Belt • Sustainability Related • Traffic congestion • Provision of affordable housing in Woking • Disability access • Town Centre redevelopment • Resident Engagement • WBC Financial strategy

Roadshow	Overview	Key Themes Raised
	<p>charging points across the borough, and any plans the council have to encourage people to use their cars less, and move to others forms of transport for local journeys.</p> <p>In this session, a number of residents wanted to know more about why WBC had adopted the financial strategy they had in the past, and how financially secure the council were as a result of their previous high borrowing.</p> <p>A small number of local issues were also raised including questions around the consultation on the new cycling track, and whether future investment by the council could also be directed to making improvements to Goldsworth Park as well as to Woking Town Centre. The resident mentioned that this could be directed to repairing broken equipment in the children’s play areas and to resurfacing the shopping centre car park.</p> <p>The feeling throughout the session unlike some of the previous roadshows, was that there was underlying scepticism towards the council and their intentions for the future. This view was supported by the feedback forms, which showed that there was little confidence amongst attendees that WBC would take the appropriate steps required for their local area.</p>	

Roadshow Feedback

Overall, a hundred feedback forms were analysed and the overall results are shown below.

Chart One: First Impressions

Overall, residents were very pleased they had attended the roadshow, indeed a very small number of people came to more than one. However, a significant number of people did not find the sessions as informative as they would have liked. Some people said they would have liked more detail in the core presentations and to hear what vision the key decision makers at WBC had for the future of Woking Borough and for those living and working there.

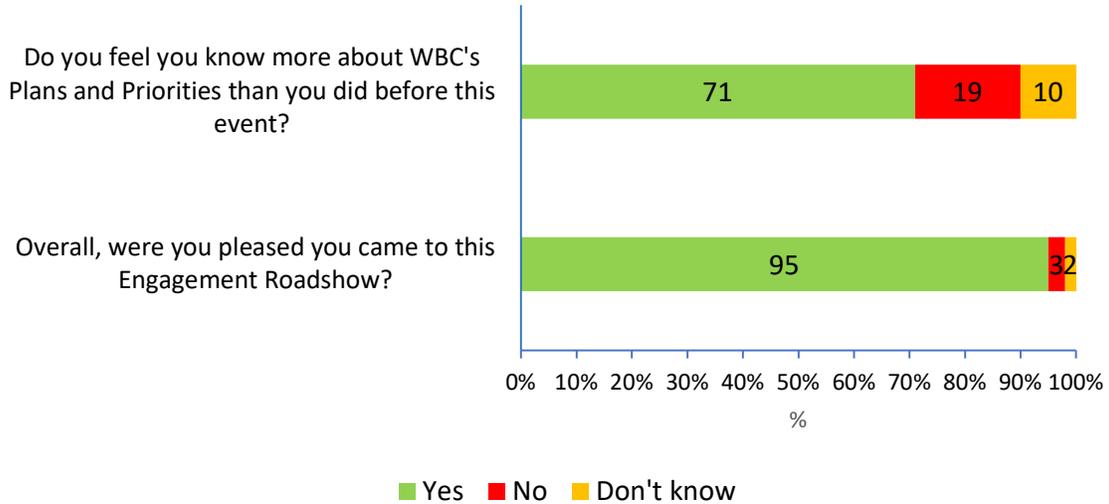


Chart Two: Elements of the Roadshow

The feedback on the booking process was very positive, as it was for the choice of venues used to host the roadshows. Most people appreciated having the opportunity to hear at first hand from both the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive, even if they had been expecting to hear a bit more detail about what their future plans for the borough were. The Q&A worked well at some of the roadshows, but not at all of them and this is reflected in the overall feedback scores.

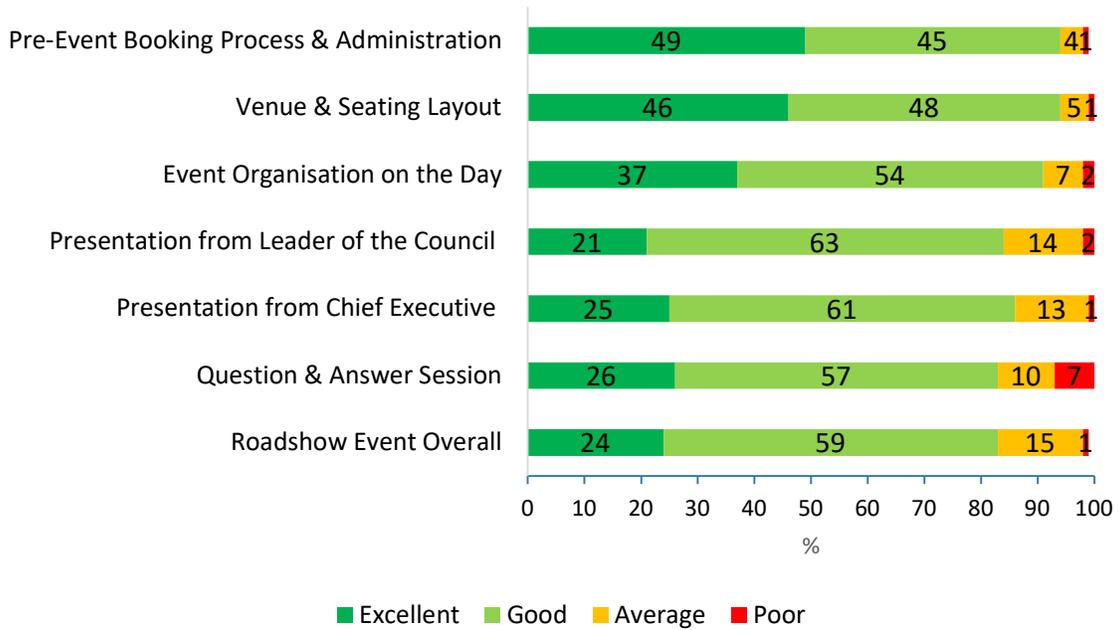
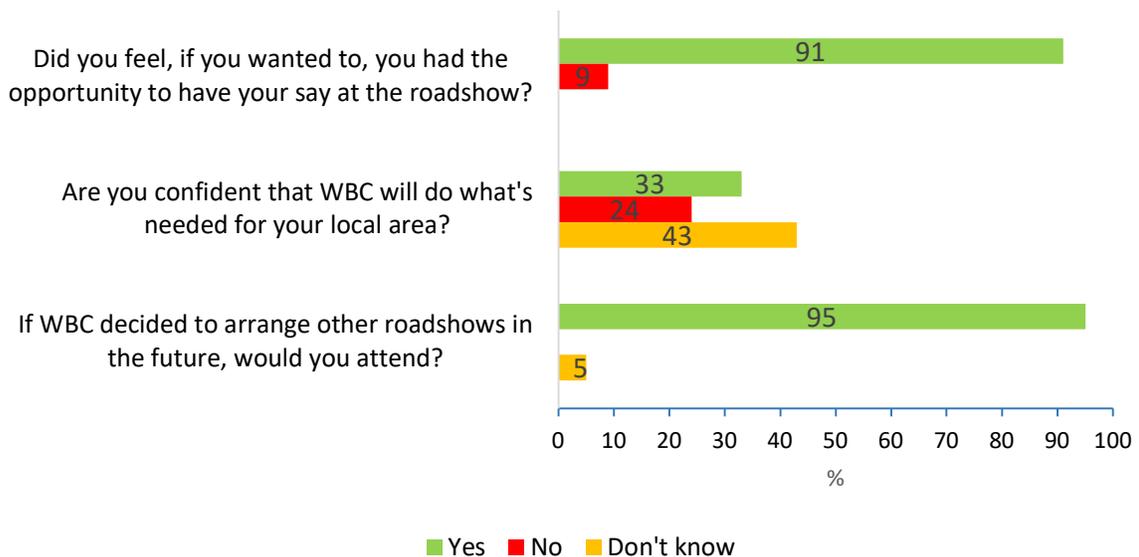


Chart Three: What Happens Next?

By far the majority of people who attended a roadshow felt they had sufficient opportunity to ‘have had their say’ during the session, and 95% said that if further roadshows were arranged by WBC in the future, they would attend. What perhaps is the biggest challenge facing WBC is convincing local people that this new approach to engagement will be backed up by appropriate actions.



Points for the Future

- Start the promotion and awareness of any roadshows as early as possible using local media, social media and existing databases
- The 'no show' rate is high between a quarter and a third and in some cases even higher
- Keep the content of any presentation succinct, but detailed enough as people expect to learn a thing or two from attending
- Ensure at the start of the session that any Councillors present are acknowledged, as not everyone in the room will know who they are
- Sending out a reminder the day before the event to anyone booked to attend is a good practise
- The plan was for these roadshows was for 50% to be Q&A, in practice it was more like two thirds Q&A, which felt about right and more appropriate
- The facilitation of a Q&A session from someone not on the 'panel' is essential
- Even in smaller halls, the people at the back of the room can't easily hear questions from people sitting in the front rows. In some of the larger venues, the presentations couldn't be read by everyone as the font size was too small
- If you don't repeatedly remind people to complete and hand in their feedback forms they forget
- If you require people to take an action such as completing an online consultation when they get home, re-enforce the point when closing a session
- Ensure wherever possible that in the Q&A session people are instructed to ask questions rather than simply make comments and for everyone to respect other people when they are talking
- Having pre-submitted questions is a good idea, however ensure they are still addressed even if there are plenty of questions on the day
- Don't be afraid to get back to residents with a response at a later date, if you don't know the answer to the question
- The roadshows are a good idea, and residents could see that the council are looking to listen, and to change perceptions about how they go about doing things. This will raise expectations, amongst residents that the subsequent actions will be different as well.