CONSULTATION TOOL KIT
NOTTING HILL HOUSING
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INVESTORS IN PEOPLE

INDEX

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STEP 1

1.0 FIRST THINGS FIRST

1.1 Know what you are doing

Be clear about what you want to achieve when engaging with the public. Is it to:

- **Inform:** you tell people what is planned so that they are informed about what is happening.
- **Consult:** you are clear about what you are asking and why, what can be changed and what cannot. You offer a number of options and listen to the feedback you get. A decision is made taking account of the results of the consultation as well as other factors.
- **Decide together:** you encourage others to provide some additional ideas and options, and decide together the best way forward.
- **Collaborate:** you decide together what is best and also collaborate to carry it out.
- **Support independent community initiatives**: you support others do what they want – sometimes with grants, advice, support.

Adapted from David Wilcox (1994) and
Worcestershire's model 'The Ladder of Participation' (2005)

Having clarity about what you are doing will influence what method you use, the people you engage with and the base line against which to evaluate your results.

1.2 Research

'*Before any new consultation begins, a thorough search will be made to find out if relevant questions have already been asked of the public so we avoid unnecessary repetition and duplication. Our aim is to seek informed public opinion, not just an 'instant reaction'. Whenever possible, we will use our organisation's communication mechanisms alongside consultation to inform and stimulate public interest, particularly in relation to major strategic and borough issues.'*

Adapted from Bristol City Council Consultation Strategy (2001)

Key Questions

- Do we really need to carry out this consultation?
- What do we know already so we don't ask the same questions again?
- What has been done before? What was the outcome?
- How much will it cost and where is the money coming from?
- Is there anyone else we join forces with thereby reducing costs, duplication and residents' fatigue?

Build up a data base of organisations in your borough that may have covered your topic (in part) already. Consider what has been done regionally and nationally. Collect, analyse and use as much available and relevant data as possible.

Check to see if any other organisation is running, or considering running, a consultation exercise. See if you can link up.

1.3 Clarify why you are running a consultation exercise

Key Questions

- Have I thought it through? - Is it a one-off consultation? Am I trying to start an on-going dialogue? Am I asking people to be involved in decision making?
- What I am trying to achieve?

Checklist 1 – Our objective is to:

□ Gain a better understanding of the issues among stakeholders (including promotion of and influencing of objectives)
□ Get help and advice from stakeholders, resulting in a better policy/ decision
□ Obtain information from stakeholders on the implications, costs and benefits of different policy options
□ Demonstrate and improve reputation for accountability and responsiveness
□ Get compliance with statutory requirements
□ Prevent future problems
□ Confirm that our proposals are on the right lines
□ Obtain statutory consent to our proposals
□ Gather comments and suggestions on alternative proposals/ options
□ Get detailed comments on a preferred alternative/ option
□ Begin a long term relationship with stakeholders
□ Establish opportunities for joint working and funding – eg partnership initiatives
□ Obtain detailed and carefully considered comments from experts

Adapted from Environmental Agency – Modernising Consultation (2003)

Write yourself a clear, concise and succinct 'objective statement'. Keep this in front of you at all times!

1.4 Prepare your Consultation Project Plan

Once you are clear about what you want to achieve, draft your Plan to include:

- Time frame
- Budget
- Staffing
- Staff training needs

and submit this for approval.

Key Questions

- Has my manager/ consultation commissioner signed off my Plan so I can now start the consultation process?
- Have I informed the appropriate Councillors about the local consultation exercise and told them how I will be involving them?
- Does this consultation need to go to Cabinet because it is on a strategic issue or likely to be contentious/ controversial?
- Is this a statutory or non-statutory exercise? If it's statutory, are there particular guide lines and time scales I have to follow?
- Can I plan my consultation so that it's useful to other departments or partner agencies?

1.5 Publicise your consultation

You need to develop a communication plan. For small-scale consultations this may be included in your Plan; for more complicated issues you may need to produce a separate Communications Plan.

1.6 Register your consultation

Once your Consultation is approved, register it on the required sites. Maximise opportunities for collaborating on consultations with others.

STEP 2

2.0 WHAT ARE WE CONSULTING ABOUT?

Good Practice Principle

'Any consultation will contain a clear statement describing why it is being carried out and how the results will be used. It will be clear to those being consulted what can be changed by responding to the consultation – and what can not. Consultation will usually be related to a decision that the Council is intending to make and that can be influenced by the result of that consultation. The principle will be intelligently applied, as there may be circumstances in which consultation not linked to a decision is appropriate.'

Adapted from Bristol City Council Consultation Strategy (2001)

Key Questions

- What am I trying to achieve?

- Have we thought of the right issues and questions to focus on?
- Why am I doing it?
- What decisions will it influence?
- How does it link with the work of others?
- Where does it link to the wider planning process?

2.1 Be clear about what you are trying to achieve

Be clear about your objectives for the consultation (see Checklist 2) and that you communicate these to everyone concerned. Check that both the relevant staff and those being consulting understand the objectives.

Make sure that the issue you are consulting about is linked to a decision; focus on issues you can change/ strongly influence. Avoid asking about things you are just interested in knowing!

Be clear about how you will use the results.

2.2 Manage expectations

Everyone will have different expectations out the outcomes of a consultation exercise.

It helps if you are explicit about:

- why the consultation is being carried out
- what is on offer
- what can change
- what are the options
- what constraints are (eg pre-determined statute/ policy/ financial)
- how the results will be used

Think about the consultation from the customer's point of view.

What might they want to tell you?

STEP 3

3.0 WHO ARE WE CONSULTING?

Good Practice Principle

'*A consultation should be inclusive and aim to seek a representative cross-section of views. Some sections of society are harder to engage than others; action should be taken to ensure that the views of these individuals and groups are not excluded or overlooked.'*

Adapted from Bristol City Council Consultation Strategy (2001)

Key Questions

- Who do we want to reach? Have we thought of everyone?
- Can we use existing groups and networks?
- How can we engage with the more difficult to reach?
- What views are we looking for? – representative, in-depth, individual’s experience?
- Can we balance stakeholders’ views? Whose views will be most influential?
- What consultation method(s) will suit our target audience?
- How will the results be fed back to the people?

3.1 Identifying stakeholders

This is key! Start with the main customers or users of your service and then work outwards in ‘rings’. You cannot consult with everyone about everything but remain reasonable and make it appropriate. See Checklist 3.

Check if there are existing networks and groups that you could talk to about your consultation. This is particularly important as a means of engaging with those more difficult to reach individuals and sectors of society. Be as inclusive as possible.

3.2 Set targets for level of stakeholder response

Decide what sort of response you need for your consultation. It may be a representative sample, an in-depth informed opinion from a small group or personal experiences. This will influence the method(s) you use to run your exercise.

Set specific targets for the level of response you want from your different stakeholders. This will allow you to evaluate if:

- You obtained the views from those you wanted
- You consulting with the widest community possible
- Different groups responded to different methods
- You gave feedback to those consulted
- People consulted felt the consultation was worthwhile

This information will also be useful for future consultation exercises.

3.3 Balance stakeholders’ views

Consider how the views of different stakeholders will be balanced against each other. If there are opposing views, these will need to be recorded. Decide how to weight the responses and why. Be prepared to explain the weighting if challenged!

Points to consider:

- Major stakeholders

- Whose opinions are most important
- Can everyone be pleased?
- Is it simply numbers of responses that will influence the consultation exercise or are in-depth qualitative methods/ responses required
- Cabinet/ Local Councillors involvement

STEP 4

4.0 WHEN ARE WE CONSULTING?

Good Practice Principle

'A consultation should be well planned and timely. Consultees must be given adequate time to prepare their response. The length of time required will depend on who you are consulting, the time of year and the level of response you seek. Allow sufficient time for the results to be collated, analysed and considered, so the results of the consultation feed directly into the decision-making process.'

Adapted from Bristol City Council Consultation Strategy (2001)

Key Questions

- Are there other consultation exercises happening? Will we clash? Can we collaborate?
- When will the decision on our issue be taken?
- What time frame do we need to work within, allowing time for analysing and evaluating the results?
- Do we need to develop our proposal and then consult, or consult and then draw up our proposal?
- Will the time of year affect the consultation?

4.1 Time frame

A consultation exercise always takes longer than your think it will! Plan the consultation with sufficient time for each stage of the process (see Checklist 4) working back from the point when you need to feed the results into the decision-making.

Allow time for:

- Preparing the Consultation Project Plan
- Response time needed - paying attention to the time of year (school holidays, religious festivals, etc) and the impact on timing
- Collating the responses
- Analysing, evaluating the responses and drawing out key messages
- Allowing Management and others to review the results
- Reporting on the findings and feeding into the decision-making

- Giving feedback
- Evaluating the process

STEP 5

5.0 HOW SHOULD WE CONSULT?

Good Practice Principle

'*Methods should be appropriate and well managed. A wide range of consultation methods should be used to reflect the strength and weakness of each method. A clear understanding of the particular skills, knowledge and resources required by a consultation is needed.*'

Adapted from Bristol City Council Consultation Strategy (2001)

5.1 Consultation method

Key Questions

- What is the objective of the consultation? To inform, consult or involve?
- What is the most appropriate method to meet this objective?

There are a number of different methods you can use within any consultation exercise – from opinion polls to Mad/ Sad/ Glad boards (see Checklist 5). There are advantages and disadvantages to each method.

You also need to ask yourself:

- Do we need our responses to be representative?
- Do we need to get a response from as wide a group/ as many people as possible?
- Is it a complicated issue?
- Do we need to include groups that are often excluded?
- Do we need to review/ improve our service or test a new approach?
- Will be need to have regular dialogue with the same people?
- Will we want to use inter-active methods (like electronic voting)?
- Do we need to concentrate on a particular geographical area?

5.2 Qualitative or Quantitative

Where possible, use a mix of these two methods.

Qualitative to tell you about attitudes, views, opinions and reasons why people feel the way the do. This is less about the number of people involved and more about the type of information you are trying to get. Use in-depth interviews, group discussions, and so on. Analysing this data involves clustering strands of opinion.

Quantitative for collecting data based on a representative sample of the population. Use straight-forward closed questions so you can produce numbers (generally expressed as percentages and frequencies).

5.3 Communication

Key Questions:

- Are our documents written in plain English?
- What communication needs must we consider?
- Have we given people enough time to respond?
- How will the results be fed back to people?

Whatever method you use, remember to use Plain English! Consider that some of the group may have particular communication needs and make provision for this.

Give sufficient information about the consultation so that people can consider and respond. Consultation documents need to be written simply and unambiguously – and sent out in an accessible form.

Allow sufficient time for consultees to give a considered response (check for religious festivals, school holidays, etc).

5.4 Consultation event

Key Questions

- Is the venue easily accessible to the target group/ people with disabilities?
- Will we need interpreters/ child care/ substitute care for dependent relatives?
- Are our refreshments and food appropriate?
- Is the time of day appropriate for our target group?

5.5 Legal framework

Sometimes the consultation may be governed by a legal framework which may involve statutory guidance on how to carry out the consultation. In some cases, the methods are not prescribed.

5.6 Data Protection Act

Key Question:

- Have we complied with the Data Protection Act?

STEP 6

6.0 ANALYSING THE RESULTS

Good Practice Principle

'*The results should be acknowledged and properly considered. The full range of views expressed during the consultation should be presented and areas of agreement/ disagreement noted. The results must be weighed carefully with other evidence and considerations before decisions are made.*'

Adapted from Bristol City Council Consultation Strategy (2001)

Key Questions

- Have we allowed for sufficient time to analyse the results?
- Have we identified our key messages?
- Have we presented a balanced picture where views diverge?
- What are we going to balance conflicting results? Have we acknowledged which stakeholders' views are given priority?
- Have we been open-minded?
- How are we going to present the results?
- What actions will follow as a consequence of the results?
- Have we included findings that we cannot act on in the short term and given clear feedback on these areas?
- Are we in line with the Data Protection Act and made the results anonymous?

6.1 Analysing results

It will probably take you twice as long as you planned to analyse your data! The analysis method you use will depend on your consultation method(s). Responses must be analysed with an open mind to allow an evaluation before coming to a final decision. If you do not do this, the consultation is purely a validation exercise and open to challenge.

6.2 Key messages and balancing conflicting results

It is important that the key messages from the consultation are clearly identified and reported. Note where views diverge and opinion is divided. Consultees who feel that their view point has been negated may result in the consultation exercise being challenged. Balanced feedback can help people accept that the consultation has given them a fair hearing. - See Checklist 6A and 6B.

Remember the Data Protection Act and ensure that feedback is anonymous.

STEP 7

7.0 PROVIDING FEEDBACK

Good Practice Principle

'Accessible feedback should be given both on the results of the consultation and how they have been used in order to encourage greater public participation in the future.'

Adapted from Bristol City Council Consultation Strategy (2001)

Key Questions

- Have we identified the different stakeholders who will need feedback? Who needs to know?
- What level of information will they need?
- How will we tell them?

7.1 Report to the stakeholders

Always provide feedback to the people who have been consulted. Let them know what was learnt and what has been done with the information.

Also, where appropriate, speak to Cabinet, Local Members, partner organisations, front line staff and anyone else who has an interest in the consultation exercise.

7.2 What the stakeholders need to know

Decide when the feedback should be provided – sometimes this is after the decisions have been made so not only the results but also the outcome of the process can be reported.

Different stakeholders will need different levels of information. Tell them what they need to know rather than off-loading everything. It is particularly important to give clear feedback when there has been some controversy or a decision which is against public opinion. If people understand why a decision has been made, and feel that they have been listened to, they will be more willing to accept the decision.

Communicate appropriately to increase public confidence in the consultation process.

7.3 Feedback options

Feedback can be given in a mix of ways. It is important to report your findings in the most appropriate ways. This could be through:

- Feedback letters, summary or detailed reports
- Presentations, seminars or workshops
- Emails, intranet site
- Newspapers and local magazines

Make sure that the message in the appropriate language for the different stakeholders who have been consulted.

STEP 8

8.0 EVALAUATION

Good Practice Principle

'The effectiveness of consultation exercises will be evaluated and the results shared to encourage broader lessons to be learnt. Evaluation will consider not only the number of responses received, but also the quality, cost, timeliness of the consultation and the overall usefulness of the results in helping to inform decision.'

Adapted from Bristol City Council Consultation Strategy (2001)

Key Questions

- Have we built in an evaluation strategy?
- When and how are we asking the consultees for their evaluation?
- Can we carry out the evaluation or should it be an independent evaluator?
- What effect has the consultation had?
- Who do we need to tell about the results of the evaluation?
- What are the lessons learnt for the future?

8.1 Why evaluate?

Evaluating a consultation exercise will help to:

- Find out what worked and what did not
- Uncover unexpected outcomes
- Apply learning to improve future practice
- Know whether involving the public actually contributed to improved decision making
- Assess the cost effectiveness of the exercise in terms of time and resources

(*Adapted* – Cabinet Office, Code of Practice on Consultation)

8.2 How to evaluate

How you will evaluate needs to be considered at the planning stage and built into the consultation exercise. It is important to ensure that evaluation is:

- Done in good time
- Cost effective
- Proportional to the scale of the project
- Invested with adequate resources

Consultees should be given an opportunity to comment on the consultation; how the method to use will reflect the method used in the consultation itself. (Checklist 8A)

Lessons learnt for the consultation team also need to be recorded (Checklist 8B) both for audit purposes but also to improve consultation practices in the future.

8.3 The effect of the consultation

The key question: ‘Has anything changed as a result of the consultation?’ needs to be addressed.

You need to measure whether:

- Views were obtained that could be used
- You have actually used these views
- The consultation has led to some identifiable change in your service or policy
- The consultation has changed the relationship between you, your users and others

Checklist 8C developed by the Audit Commission will help with this but also, in some circumstances, it may be worth employing an independent evaluator. External evaluation may increase legitimacy of the findings – particularly if there has been criticism of a particular project.

Record the evaluation results and share with stakeholders and partners as appropriate

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CHECKLIST 2
THE PURPOSE OF THE CONSULTATION EXERCISE

Think about your objectives for consulting. Which of these do you want to do? These apply even if required to consult on a particular issue by statute or guidance.

Policies, Strategies and Budgets

- ❑ Find out opinions, views and attitudes in order to draft /develop a policy, strategy or budget
- ❑ Check out reaction to new ideas or initiatives
- ❑ Look for quality improvements
- ❑ Check opinions, views and attitudes on a draft / existing policy, strategy or budget
- ❑ Assess potential interest in a policy, strategy or budget
- ❑ Set priorities for future spending
- ❑ Check that policies, strategies and budgets will meet the needs of all of Worcestershire’s Communities
- ❑ Set priorities for action
- ❑ Set targets for the policy or strategy
- ❑ Monitor targets for the policy or strategy
- ❑ Improve customer relations
- ❑ Other issues – what are they??

Service Delivery / Best Value

- ❑ Look for unmet needs
- ❑ Understand the needs of a particular community / group
- ❑ Challenge the existing service
- ❑ Shape the way the service is delivered
- ❑ Measure satisfaction with the service
- ❑ Check out reaction to new ideas or initiatives
- ❑ Check out reaction to potential changes to the service
- ❑ Set priorities for action
- ❑ Set priorities for future spending
- ❑ Set targets for the service
- ❑ Monitor targets for the service
- ❑ Check that the service will meet the needs of everyone
- ❑ Look for quality improvements
- ❑ Improve customer relations
- ❑ Other issues – what are they??

Needs of the Local Community

- ❑ Look for unmet needs
- ❑ Understand the needs of a particular community / group
- ❑ Check opinions, views and attitudes on local priorities
- ❑ Check that existing services will meet the needs of everyone
- ❑ Set priorities for action

- Set priorities for future spending
- Look for quality improvements
- Improve customer relations
- Other issues – what are they??

Particular Interest Groups

- Look for unmet needs
- Understand the needs of a particular community / group
- Check opinions, views and attitudes on local priorities
- Check that existing services will meet the needs of all of Worcestershire's Communities
- Set priorities for action
- Set priorities for future spending
- Look for quality improvements
- Improve customer relations
- Other issues – what are they??

Adapted: Worchestershire Council Toolkit 2007

CHECKLIST 3A

WHAT SORT OF VIEWS CAN YOU EXPECT FROM DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS?

Remember to set yourself some targets for the groups whose views you want to hear.

Use the table below to help you consider the sorts of response that you are likely to get.

Who is being consulted?	What sort of views/comments can you expect?
Individual users	Personal view of service as individual has experienced it. Snapshot of service.
User groups/panels/meetings	'Non-expert' view from users of your service. Can help you see a different perspective.
Representative groups	Considered thoughts and proposals based on good knowledge of the service you provide and what users of your service want. Sometimes views may be stronger than those of the average user.
General public	General perception of service. Can be useful indicators of problems and preferences with service provision
Sounding boards (non-users)	Relatively impartial views on proposals - useful for testing out proposals and plans.
Staff	Experience of a range of customers' views, combined with knowledge about the practical aspects of providing the service.

Source - Cabinet Office – Code of Practice on Consultation – Guidance 2004.

CHECKLIST 3B
IDENTIFYING YOUR STAKEHOLDERS

Use this checklist to think about and identify your stakeholders

EXTERNAL CUSTOMERS

- ❑ Users or customers of your service
- ❑ People affected by the service you provide (e.g. parents of children, carers of service users)
- ❑ Residents or Citizens
- ❑ Non-residents (e.g. in the case of a tourist attraction)
- ❑ People affected by policies or developments
- ❑ Suppliers/Businesses/Service Providers

INTERNAL CUSTOMERS

- ❑ Staff
- ❑ Members
- ❑ Other Directorates
- ❑ Trade Union Representatives

NON USERS

- ❑ People who are unaware of the service
- ❑ People who might need the service at a later date
- ❑ Ex-users or dissatisfied customers

PARTNERS

- ❑ Partner organisations (e.g. voluntary sector, health, police, probation, Learning and Skills Council, Parish and District Councils, government departments, employers and the business sector)

NTEREST GROUPS

- ❑ Interest or pressure groups
- ❑ Everyone living in a specific location

PARTICULAR DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS

- ❑ Children and young people
- ❑ Families and carers
- ❑ Single parents
- ❑ Students
- ❑ Women
- ❑ Men
- ❑ Employed
- ❑ Unemployed
- ❑ Particular socio-economic groups
- ❑ Religious groups

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CHECKLIST 4
PREPARING YOUR TIMETABLE

When planning your consultation timetable remember to build in time for these relevant steps.

Work BACKWARDS from the date the decision will be taken to clarify your timetable.

Task	Approximate time guide
When will the decision be taken? Remember **strategic/contentious consultation exercises** must be approved by Cabinet **before** the exercise starts and reported to them afterwards	Insert date
Does my report need to be approved by anyone before the decision takes place? If so allow time for this process. In particular for **strategic/contentious consultation exercises** ensure this has gone through the appropriate process before being submitted to Cabinet	 Check
Draw up my report on this issue – including consultation outcomes and recommendations	1 day
Draw up my report of the consultation outcomes - prepare different formats to enable feedback to stakeholders.	2 days
Collate, analyse and consider the consultation outcomes.	1-4 weeks
Run the consultation – allow sufficient time for all your key stakeholders to respond. Be aware of **times of year** when the response may be affected e.g. religious festivals, school holidays. If you are using **postal surveys** build in sufficient time for reminders to be sent out 1-2 weeks before closing. Build in time to reach **"hard to reach"** groups	Ideally 12 weeks for written consultation documents. Allow 4 weeks to respond to postal survey – allow a further week for late returns.
Consider if you need to "pilot" your consultation - if so build in time for this and any modifications that you may need to make	2 weeks
Advertise and publicise the consultation – allow sufficient time for distribution. Consider time needed for printing, enveloping, post etc. If you require your data to be processed either in-house or through a data processing company build this in to your timetable now.	2-4 weeks
Produce consultation material –	2-4 weeks

❑ Do you need input from the design/reprographics/communications teams? ❑ Do you need materials produced in community languages, converted to Braille, produced in different formats? If so build this in.	
Are you involving other partners/Directorates/agencies in this exercise? – Build in time for them to contribute.	Allow time for partners to participate in your exercise as appropriate
Are you using an external agency to run your consultation? Build in time to: ❑ prepare a brief ❑ tender ❑ interview and select your consultants	Allow 6 – 8 weeks
Depending on your method of consultation (e.g. focus groups, public meetings, roadshows etc.) you may need to let people know the date and broad outline of your event or recruit people NOW	Let people know the date in advance
Does management/Cabinet need to approve your consultation plan? Remember for **strategic/contentious exercises** Cabinet need to approve your consultation Project Plan **before** your consultation starts.	Build in time to get necessary permission
Identify resources - budget and staff time to carry out this exercise. Build this in to work programmes. Do staff need training to be involved in running this exercise? If so schedule this in.	Take a day to plan your consultation exercise thoroughly – complete the Project Plan
▫ Decide on methods of consultation.	
▫ Decide on who you will consult.	
▫ Decide on what you will consult about.	
▫ Build in time at the end of your exercise to feedback results after the decision has been taken – do you need to let Communications team know?	
▫ Build in time to evaluate your exercise.	
Do you need a new exercise? -Register your consultation on the database.	
Clarify why you are consulting - search the database - can you link up with another exercise with the same time frame?	

Source: Worchestershire Council Toolkit 2007

CHECKLIST 5
METHODS ACCORDING TO KEY QUESTIONS

The answers to the following questions will also help guide you to choosing the right method:

Do you need your response to be representative?
Do you need to get a response from as many people as possible?
Is the issue complex?
Do you need to include groups that are often excluded?
Do you need to review or improve your service or test new approaches?
Do you need to have a dialogue with the same people?
Do you want to use more interactive methods?
Do you want to find out about a geographical area?

Do you need your response to be representative?

- Representative Focus Groups
- SIMALTO
- Face to Face Survey
- Postal Survey
- Citizens Panel
- Telephone Survey

Do you need to get a response from as many people as possible?

- Planning for Real Event
- Community Profiling / Community Auditing
- Community Visioning
- Large scale community event
- Open Space event
- Future Search Conference
- Youth Council
- Youth Parliament and Cabinet
- Youthink event
- User Forums and Networks
- School Councils
- Referenda / Deliberative Polling
- Open / Public meeting
- Face to Face Survey
- Web Forum
- Text Poll / WAP / SMS
- Citizens Panel
- Postal Survey
- Telephone Survey
- Electronic Survey / Web Survey
- Radio Phone In
- Exhibitions and Presentations
- Paid for advertising
- Media
- Leaflets with response form
- Onsite Survey

CHECKLIST 6A
IDENTIFYING KEY MESSAGES

This checklist will help you to identify what your results have told you:

Think about the following questions:-

- **The overall picture**
  - ✓ What are the main findings?
  - ✓ Are people satisfied/dissatisfied?
  - ✓ What are the areas on which there is a majority consensus?
  - ✓ Where do views and opinions differ?

- **Are views consistent**
  - ✓ What does the sub group analysis show?

- **Strengths and Weaknesses**
  - ✓ Do we have any clear messages?

- **What are the priorities of the public?**
  - ✓ How are we doing on each of these?
  - ✓ What can we do to meet these?
  - ✓ What can we do little about?

- **User expectations**
  - ✓ How are we doing against these?
  - ✓ How can we improve?
  - ✓ What can we do little about?

- **Our expectations**
  - ✓ Which results did we expect?
  - ✓ Which results are a surprise?

- **Benchmarking**
  - ✓ Can we benchmark these results against other Council services?
  - ✓ Can we benchmark these results against other authorities?

- **Can we identify any trends**
  - ✓ Any upward trends?
  - ✓ Any downward trends?
  - ✓ Any results that have stayed the same?

- **Can we identify trends from elsewhere**
  - ✓ Can we compare results with others who have asked the same questions/used the same methods?
  - ✓ Are we moving in the same direction as national trends?

- **What is the current climate**
  - ✓ Are ratings rising/falling in general

Adapted from MORI – Feeling the Pulse 2.

CHECKLIST 6B
IDENTIFYING PRIORITIES AND ACTIONS FROM YOUR RESULTS

In analysing the results you will need to identify priorities and highlight these in your feedback and communications. Work through the **checklist** to help you do this:

- **Which findings do not require action?** E.g. low priority or results that are very good
- **Which things can we not change in the short term?** How do we tell people – popular recommendations that cannot be taken forward require an explanation as part of your feedback
- **Which things can we change in the short term?** Identifying "quick wins", especially those that can be done within existing budgets or timescales. This demonstrates that you can and will act on the outcomes of consultation
- **Which results highlight the need for action?** What are the next steps, who needs to know, does funding need to be identified, is further consultation needed, when can decisions be taken?
- **Which results highlight the need for more communications?** What is the issue, how we will communicate it, to whom and where?
- **Which results highlight the need for further consultation?** In some circumstances new alternatives will come to light which may call for further consultation.

(Adapted from – Cabinet Office – Code of Practice on Consultation http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/regulation/consultation-guidance/content/analysis/index.asp)

CHECKLIST 8A
PARTICIPANTS' EVALUATION OF CONSULTATION EXCERCISES

In every consultation undertaken it is important to give participants an opportunity to evaluate the exercise. Choose from the range of questions below those that are applicable to your method.

- Did you understand why you were asked to be involved in this exercise?
- Did you know from the outset what difference your participation would make – i.e. did you understand what this consultation could influence and what it could not?
- Did you think that you were provided with adequate information about the issue?
- Was the information easy to read and understand?
- Was the information of sufficient detail to help you make up your mind?
- If not, what information would have helped you to take part?
- Were you told who to ask or where to go if you needed more information?
- How easy was it for you to give your views?
- Did you think the questions you were asked were fair and balanced?
- Were you given the opportunity to express a range of opinions?
- Did you feel that you needed additional support to participate?
- What else could have been done to help you to participate?
- What did you think of the practical arrangements for this exercise (e.g. venue, refreshments, interpreters, facilitators)?
- Did you feel that the consultation exercise was fair and balanced?
- Did you feel that your contribution was listened to and respected?
- Did you feel your contribution was taken seriously?
- Did you feel that your contribution made a difference?
- How would you suggest that this consultation exercise could have been improved?
- What do you feel you gained from being involved in this exercise?
- Were you given information about what we found out as a result of this exercise?
- Did we tell you what, if anything, changed?
- What do you think happened as a result of this exercise – do you think it made a difference?
- Has being involved in this exercise changed the way that you feel about the service/issue (either for better/worse)?

Source: Worchestershire Council Toolkit 2007

CHECKLIST 8B
BASIC EVALUATION – QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF EVERY TIME

Use the checklist attached to evaluate your consultation exercise:-

- Did everyone involved (staff, consultees, partners) understand the objectives of the exercise?
- Were the right stakeholders involved ?
- Did you successfully reach all your stakeholders?
- Were the numbers who took part as expected – did you reach your targets?
- Were you successful in reaching ‘hard-to-reach’ groups?
- Did the publicity material you used work (e.g. posters to advertise an event, putting material on the internet, press releases)?
- Did you get the level of information you provided right? (e.g. it was easy to access; relevant to the consultation, produced in plain language, easy to understand and available in other languages and in other formats, e.g. Braille and audio cassette, where necessary)
- Was the consultation accessible (e.g. interpreters were provided if necessary, venues were accessible, seating and set up encouraged participation)?
- Did the methods used match the objectives?
- Was there the right balance of qualitative and quantitative methods?
- If you used more than one method, which worked better than others and why?
- Did some methods work better with particular stakeholders than others? Note this for the future.
- Was the timescale and process transparent and kept to – if not, why not?
- Did you get the information you wanted in sufficient time, depth, and quality?
- Were the level of resources and support right?
- Did you budget adequately – note areas of overspend/savings for next time
- What were the costs (include staff time)?
- Were there any unforeseen costs – what they were?

CHECKLIST 8C
STRATEGIC EVALUATION OF CONSULTATION OUTCOMES AND PROCESS

This tool offers you an opportunity to evaluate your consultation in terms of the outcomes achieved and the process that you undertook. It is particularly useful for managers taking a strategic look at consultation in your section.

Considering Outcomes

- ❑ Did consultation directly inform a decision or shape policy or service delivery arrangements?
- ❑ Were the consultation results used to set local performance standards and targets?
- ❑ Has the exercise helped to improve the cost effectiveness of a service by making it match users' needs more closely?
- ❑ Over time, has consultation resulted in an increase in the percentage of local people who say that the authority listens to their views or who have expressed satisfaction with your service?

Considering Process

- ❑ Did the exercise(s) reach a representative sample of the population or, where this is appropriate, all the target groups?
- ❑ Are your response rates consistently high enough to give reliable results?
- ❑ Are results regularly disseminated to consultees, the wider public, relevant staff (including front line staff) and partner organisations?
- ❑ If consultation exercises did not meet their objectives, why was this and what steps can be taken to prevent similar problems in the future?
- ❑ What did consultation cost, both directly and indirectly?
- ❑ What proportion is this of the overall cost of the relevant service?
- ❑ How does the cost compare with other similar exercises in the authority or other similar authorities?
- ❑ Has the cost been shared by designing the exercise to be valuable to more than one service or organisation?
- ❑ Has the programme been planned to cover both corporate and service area priorities?
- ❑ Has the programme been planned jointly with partner or neighbouring organisations?

- Is consultation being carried out to a consistently high standard across the organisation – is the Toolkit being used in a consistent way and all steps followed?

- Were 100% of your exercises - including your findings and outcomes - logged onto the Consultation database and made available to other services or organisations that might find them helpful?

Adapted – Listen Up – Effective Community Consultation produced by the Audit Commission

- What was the evaluation of those who took part - what did they think of the information provided, was it easy to give views, did they perceive the exercise as fair, useful?

- Did it lead to a change of policy, service etc – be specific - how?

- How many people will be affected by the changes?

- Has the consultation changed the relationship between you and your users and others?

- What would you do differently next time?

Adapted: An Introductory Guide – How to Consult Your Users – Cabinet Office

redochre

GUIDANCE 1
SAMPLING

The guidance below sets out the various methods of sampling.

Random Sampling

Random sampling is a sampling technique where you select a group of subjects (a sample) for study from a larger group (a population). Each individual is chosen entirely by chance and each member of the population has a known, but possibly non-equal, chance of being included in the sample.

By using random sampling, the likelihood of bias is reduced.

Simple Random Sampling

Simple random sampling is the basic sampling technique where we select a group of subjects (a sample) for study from a larger group (a population). Each individual is chosen entirely by chance and each member of the population has an equal chance of being included in the sample. Every possible sample of a given size has the same chance of selection; that is, each member of the population is equally likely to be chosen at any stage in the sampling process.

Stratified Sampling

There may often be factors which divide up the population into sub-populations (groups / strata) and we may expect the measurement of interest to vary among the different sub-populations. This has to be accounted for when we select a sample from the population in order that we obtain a sample that is representative of the population. This is achieved by stratified sampling.

A stratified sample is obtained by taking samples from each stratum or sub-group of a population.

Cluster Sampling

Cluster sampling is a sampling technique where the entire population is divided into groups, or clusters, and a random sample of these clusters are selected. All observations in the selected clusters are included in the sample.

Quota Sampling

Quota sampling is a method of sampling widely used in opinion polling and market research. Interviewers are each given a quota of subjects of specified type to attempt to recruit for example, an interviewer might be told to go out and select 20 adult men and 20 adult women, 10 teenage girls and 10 teenage boys so that they could interview them about their television viewing.

(With Thanks to Lancashire University for the information)

CALCULATING SAMPLING SIZE

Sample sizes are not dependent upon the size of the population. As long as the sample represents a small proportion of the population and is randomly selected, then it will give reasonably accurately results. For general surveys, most research companies use 1,000 responses.

If you want to analyse sub-groups, you will need at least 100 responses from each group to ensure a degree of accuracy – so you could begin by deciding how you want to analyse the results and build up a sample size from there. For example if you wanted to look at the differences between men and women – you will need at least 100 men and 100 women in your sample. If you have a range of different age groups or ethnic backgrounds, then again you will need to ensure you have at least 100 people in each category.

For postal surveys, you will need to send out to a wider sample to make up for low returns.

SAMPLE ERROR

Surveys represent a snapshot in time and can only be approximate: if another sample was selected, the results may differ. In a random sample, it is possible to calculate this 'sampling error' and the results are often called 'confidence limits'. Generally, the larger the sample size, the lower the sampling error will be.

For example, the table below shows the approximate error for a question where 50% of respondents gave a particular answer:

Sample size	Error(+/-%)
100	10
200	7
500	4
1000	3

(IdeA Knowledge)

For more information on Sampling, Calculating Sample Size and Confidence Intervals view the Brent Council Consultation Toolkit.

http://www.brent.gov.uk/consultation.nsf/24878f4b00d4f0f68025663c006c7944/1ba5f40a89659aaa80256b28005e24ff/$FILE/Consultation%20Toolkit%20Apr%202002.doc

SAMPLE SIZE CALCULATOR

Use this handy sample size calculator:

http://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm

FRAMING QUESTIONS

- Questions should be 'neutral' and not lead people to answer in a particular way.
- Do not ask two questions in one, or make the question too long and overcomplicated.
- Do not use difficult or technical language or ask hypothetical questions such as asking the respondent to imagine their reaction in a different situation.
- Where possible use pre-coded, tick box response questions where the answers are provided for the respondent to simply tick their choice or in the case of face-to-face surveys read out a number on a showcard.
- Avoid open-ended questions, people are less likely to answer these as they require work and thought on their behalf. Open-ended questions involve a heavy workload in terms of data processing and analysis.

DESIGNING A POSTAL OR SELF-COMPLETION QUESTIONNAIRE

- Split the questionnaire into sections that flow logically and begin with a brief paragraph introducing each section.
- Keep the wording and design consistent throughout the survey.
- Choose an appropriate font and size (11-13pt) and highlight questions and important text in bold. However do not go over top with formatting!
- Design the questionnaire so that is appealing to the eye. Do not overload pages with questions or information, white space is a good thing. Maximise your margins to make full use of the space on the page.
- Number questions and parts of questions logically and clearly.
- Provide 'GO TO' rules instructing respondents where to go and what questions to answer next. Think about how changing the order of your questions can help this.
- Help the respondent by stating 'Tick one only' or 'Tick all that apply'.
- Be consistent in your design and question framing i.e. always fro from positive to negative or 1 to 5.
- Ask straightforward questions first, leaving any sensitive, more difficult or contentious questions until last. You can ask 'About You' questions either at the beginning or the end of the survey.
- Do ask 'About You' questions which will add value to your analysis. Analyse results by groups such as age group, sex, district etc and compare results to see how opinions vary. What you ask here depends on your survey topic.
- If you ask open ended questions ensure you leave enough space for comments. Provide blank boxes rather than lines which limit what people can fit in, everyone's handwriting is different. Also consider how you are going to analyse this information and take it into account.

DESIGNING FACE TO FACE OR TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

- Give the interviewer(s) a detailed briefing about the purpose of the exercise and how you are going to use the results. Provide a laminated letter of authenticity for the interviewer to show the respondent.
- Everything the interviewer needs to say should be provided on the questionnaire for them to simply read out to the respondent.
- Split the questionnaire into sections that flow logically. Write brief introductions that the interviewer reads out before each section.

- Keep the wording consistent throughout the survey.
- Number questions and parts of questions logically and clearly for the interviewer to follow.
- Provide detailed instructions, verbatim and ‘GO TO’ rules for the interviewer to follow throughout the whole survey. Think about how changing the order of your questions can help this.
- The interviewer should indicate to the respondent questions where they can choose one option or more than one.
- For face-to-face surveys use laminated showcards that list and number the responses to each question. The respondent then simply reads out the number that matches their answer.
- Be consistent in your design and question framing i.e. always from positive to negative or 1 to 5.
- Ask straightforward questions first, leaving any sensitive, more difficult or contentious questions until last. You can ask ‘About You’ questions either at the beginning or the end of the survey.
- Do ask ‘About You’ questions which will add value to your analysis. Analyse results by groups such as age group, sex, district etc and compare results to see how opinions vary. What you ask here depends on your survey topic.
- If you ask open-ended questions ensure you leave enough space for comments that the interviewer writes down. Provide blank boxes rather than lines which limit what people can fit in, everyone’s handwriting is different. Also consider how you are going to analyse this information and take it into account.

TYPES OF QUESTIONS

Pre-coded or closed questions – a list of pre-coded responses are provided for the respondent to simply ring or tick. Each option is assigned a numeric code which is used for data input and analysis. The option of ‘Other’ may also be offered with space for respondents to write in their answer. Be sure to include a full range of options so that you don’t get lots of people ticking ‘Other’.

Rating or attitude scales – can be used to measure agreement or satisfaction. Ensure that you provide a fair range of responses that are balanced e.g.

How satisfied are you with the bus service overall?

Very satisfied, Fairly satisfied, Neither, Dissatisfied, Very satisfied

Or

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement “The quality of Council services is good overall”

Strongly agree, Agree, Neither, Disagree, Strongly agree.

Open ended questions - for these question types no categories or answers are suggested, the respondent is free to express themselves in their own words.

E.g. Why are you dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the service provided?

(Please write in the box below)

Classification questions – 'About You' questions such as sex, age group, employment status, tenure, ethnicity. These are very useful in breaking down the results into different groups for analysis.

PILOTING THE QUESTIONAIRE/INTERVIEW

Pilot the questionnaire before doing it for real. Test either with colleagues or a sample of people. Check the questionnaire and showcards thoroughly for spelling errors, go to rules, instructions, responses, question numbering and coding. Do take people's feedback into account, if they say they don't understand something or find it difficult to complete or answer then you should do something about it! Time how long it takes someone to complete the questionnaire or interview it may take longer than you think.

RAISING RESPONSE RATES FOR POSTAL QUESTIONAIRES

- Include the Council logo on the mailing envelope will aid recognition and makes your letter stand out from the rest. Reprographics can arrange to have our logo printed on your envelopes, note this can take up to 4 weeks.
- Include a clear, concise covering letter signed by an appropriate senior officer signifying its importance. Underline what will happen with their answers, explain why it is important that they respond.
- Don't make your questionnaire too long people will be put off straight away. Consider stating how long it should take them to complete or using another method.
- Include a pre-paid envelope so that people can easily return their completed survey.
- Send a reminder or reminders two to three weeks after you sent the survey. You should only send reminders to those people who have failed to respond. Sending reminders to everyone is wasteful and will be perceived as inefficient. To do this you must assign ID numbers to the people you send surveys to. This ID number is then written onto the survey and recorded as completed surveys are returned.
- Offer an incentive. Selecting one respondent at random who wins an appropriate prize. Ensure you do not over or under spend and cash may not always be appropriate (it can affect people's benefits) consider vouchers.

RAISING RESPONSE RATES FOR FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEWS

- Send a letter in advance of the interviewer calling at the respondent's house, explain what the survey is about and why it is important. Include your contact details so that residents can contact you should they not wish to take part.

- Interviewers should carry and ID badge and a signed letter of authentication.
- Brief the interviewer fully so they can answer any questions the respondent might have about the survey.
- Give interviewers a clear opening statement to read out when they call at a person's house. Don't be too forceful but be persuasive and truthful.
- Give an indication of how long the interview might take.
- If residents appear reluctant offer to call back at a more convenient time.
- Interviews are best conducted in the evening or weekends. If residents are out interviewers should call back at least 4 times. Leave a calling card/letter asking them to contact you to arrange an interview.
- Offer an incentive such as entry into a prize draw.

RAISING RESPONSE RATES FOR TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

- Give interviewers a clear opening statement to read out when they call at a person's house. Don't be too forceful but be persuasive and truthful.
- Give an indication of how long the interview might take.
- If residents appear reluctant offer to call back at a more convenient time.
- Interviews are best conducted in the evening or weekends. If residents are out interviewers should call back at least 4 times.
- Offer an incentive such as entry into a prize draw.

GUIDANCE ON CONSULTATION METHODS

COMMUNITY PROFILING/ COMMUNITY APPRAISAL

A range of methods can be used to enable communities to develop an understanding of itself. These include: -**Community profiling methods**

Activity chart.
Plotting people's activities each day, or each week. Useful for understanding divisions of labour, roles and responsibilities in a community.

Building survey.
Recording the state of repair of buildings.

External relationship profiling.
Examining the roles and impact of external organisations.

Gender workshop.
Separate sessions for women (or sometimes men) to analyse their situation, needs and priorities.

Historical profile.
Identifying and listing key events, beliefs and trends in a community's past and their importance for the present.

Household livelihood analysis.
Comparing sources of income and support with expenditure patterns and looking at coping strategies for times of hardship.

Informal walk.
Walking in a group without a definite route, stopping to chat and discuss issues as they arise.

Mapping.
Making maps showing various characteristics, e.g. resources.

Organisation review.
Review of existing groups and organisations to assess their roles, membership, plans and potential.

Personal history.
Recording detailed oral accounts of individuals lives, perhaps asking them to emphasise specific issues.

Problem tree.
Analysing the inter-relationships among community issues and problems using a graphic based on a tree.

Role-play.
Adopting the role of others and acting out scenarios.

Seasonal calendar.
Exploring changes taking place throughout the year, e.g. in work patterns, production.

Semi-structured interview.
Conversational open discussion using a checklist of questions as a flexible guide instead of a formal questionnaire. Different types include; individual, group, focus group, and key informant.

Simulation.
Acting out a real event or activity in order to understand its effect.

Skills survey.
Assessing skills and talent in a community

Transect walk.
Systematic walk through an area to observe and record key features, for instance land use zones.

Well-being or wealth ranking.
Assessing levels of well-being of different households using pile sorting.

For further information on these methods go to:-

http://www.communityplanning.net/methods/method42.htm

COMMUNITY VISIONING

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Community visioning involves a group of people coming together to develop ideas about what they would like their community ideally to be like. After the vision is agreed the group will then work on looking at what needs to be done to bring about that vision and put this together in an action plan.

Community visioning can involve conference or workshop events. It is likely that drawing up the vision and the action plan will take place over a period of months. Groups meet, and are assisted by a trained facilitator to agree on a vision for their area and look at ways of achieving this goal.

Alternatively, creating the vision can be tied into other events. For example, Southampton City Council held a Community Visioning Festival.

COST

There needs to be a process, framework and resources in place to translate community visions into action. Other resources are meeting rooms and trained facilitators.

CONTACT

The link below has useful case examples

http://www.sustainable.org/creating/vision.html

WHEN TO USE

Can be used for large-scale community planning, or to look at the way forward for particular issues such as health, environment and education. It has been used as a tool for Agenda 21 planning.

POINTS TO THINK ABOUT

Visioning projects can cover any geographical area, from a street to the whole world. Factors that influence that scale are:

- Go for somewhere small enough that people can identify with it;
- Go for somewhere large enough that decision-makers will feel it is worth putting effort into;
- Go for somewhere that feels like a natural unit.

USEFUL LINKS

For a comprehensive guide to community visioning

http://www.neweconomics.org/gen/uploads/doc_18920003301_Howto.doc

For basic information

http://www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk/stellent/groups/public/documents/webpages/scrcs_006712.hcsp

REFERENCE
Thanks to Scottish Centre for Regeneration - Communities Scotland

FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEWS

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Face-to-face interviews are the traditional way of asking large numbers of people their views based upon a structured questionnaire. Trained interviewers either stop respondents in the street, or visit them in their homes, to find out what people think about services and issues. Structured questionnaires are used with special interviewer instructions/guides and often complex routing.

'Showcards' are normally used where the respondent calls out a number that corresponds to their response (this is good for sensitive questions such as income.)

As face to face interviews are interviewer led, they can be more detailed and complex. An experienced interviewer will be able to build up a rapport with the respondent, allowing feelings towards certain subjects to be gauged.

COST

Trained market research interviewers are usually paid for each interview they complete plus travel expenses. The process is very labour intensive and involves lengthy timescales of fieldwork, therefore face-to-face interviews can be expensive.

WHEN TO USE

Face-to-face interviews are typically used to gather specific information about a subject, such as facts, figures and attitudes. They can also be used when issues are already known and need to be quantified, or when open-ended information is required. Face to face methods are most suited to surveys in which a wide range of topics must be covered using a large number of questions.

They are suited to all sorts of people, however they are especially effective with adults (homeowners) as face to face interviews are often conducted door to door.

Less effective with children and younger people and older people.

POINTS TO THINK ABOUT

- If the interviews are to be selected using a random sample, interviewers should not attempt to increase the response rate by interviewing people not on the list. This will reduce the validity of the sample.
- Depending on the complexity, an interview comprising 60 questions would take about half an hour to complete depending on the respondent (e.g. interviewing older people usually takes longer). An interview of 30-45 minutes is considered the maximum length.
- Professional interviewers should conduct the interviews. They will be required to carry an ID badge and a letter of authentication as well as keeping to the Market Research Society Code of Conduct. It is also a good idea to notify the local police that market researchers are conducting

fieldwork in the area. Sometimes you can also send an advance letter to notify householders an interviewer is due to call and what its all about.

- Normally at least 4 call backs are made in an attempt to interview a person who is not in the first time an interviewer calls, further adding to the cost.
- Response rates, and questionnaire lengths will depend upon the location of the interview. People will have less time if interviewed on the street, but may be less accessible, and less inclined to agree to an interview in their own home.
- Provision needs to be made where necessary for interviewers who speak ethnic minority languages. The interviewer should also be appropriate to the people you are trying to interview i.e. gender issues, sensitivity and ethnicity.
- Sample size. Should you tender for a project that involves face to face interviews, you should ask the companies you contact to identify what sample size they will use and what response rate they expect to achieve. Their response to this will give you a clear indication of quality, efficiency and value for money.

PROS

- The questionnaires used in face-to-face interviews can be longer and they are more flexible than postal surveys. Greater complexity and routing of questions can be incorporated so that particular questions can be bypassed and tailored to the respondents' answers as they go along. Only simple routing can be incorporated in self-completion questionnaires.
- Response rates are generally high. You can also track the progress of the number of completed interviews throughout the fieldwork process which is important when a particular response rate or number of responses is required.
- More probing, complex questions can be asked as the interviewer can guide the respondent through the questionnaire, display visual aids, or even offer personal experience and encouragement.
- Sensitive or difficult subjects can be explored and respondents can answer using numbers on laminated 'showcards'. Electronic methods of data capture such as CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing) can also be used, here the respondent answers questions via a laptop or handheld device. CAPI enables more accurate, faster data capture without the need for data inputting and therefore reduces costs.
- Collecting responses through face to face interviews can be as quick if not quicker than postal surveys.
- The quality of the data you collect is of higher accuracy and completeness than in a postal survey. Those being interviewed cannot jump questions or misinterpret the meaning of questions.

CONS

- Face-to-face interviews are more expensive than postal surveys and telephone interviews. They are more time consuming, labour intensive and require trained interviewers.
- In some cases there may be difficulties with interpretation of responses, especially when responses are sought from for whom English is not a first language, or people with disabilities such as a hearing impairment.

Interpreters may be required or you may need to consider what is the most appropriate way of communicating.

- Interviewer effect can occur. This is when the presence of the interviewer influences the respondent e.g. the respondent may not answer truthfully or give an answer they think the interviewer wants to hear.
- Feedback from individual interviews may not be representative of the views of all the respondents.
- Not everyone is willing to take part especially when interviews are conducted on the street and door to door.
- Older and younger people are more likely to refuse than other groups of people.

Use reputable companies or market researchers who are members of the Market Research Society and follow the Market Research Society Code of Conduct.

Source: Worchestershire Council 2007

FOCUS GROUPS

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Focus groups are discussions with around 8-10 people chosen according to specific criteria e.g. age, gender, service-user. Individuals are usually strategically invited to attend the 'informal' discussion to talk about a particular issue following a pre-defined agenda.

It is advisable to use a trained, independent moderator to facilitate the group. Effective moderation is the key to a successful focus group. It is important to ensure that the discussion does not divert from the agenda or 'topic guide' which lists the main areas of interest to be covered. It is the moderators' job to move the discussion along without imposing their own views and they must also ensure that particular participants do not dominate the discussion or 'shout down' others.

Focus groups are cheaper and quicker than in-depth interviews and the discussion may stimulate ideas within the group, with people 'bouncing' ideas off each other. Focus groups are very good for clarifying ideas and testing them out with the benefit of exploring issues in great detail.

Traditionally focus groups last 1½ to 2 hours and participants can be recruited from a variety of sources including existing network groups, Citizens' Panels or on the back of other surveys.

Focus groups are a qualitative method of consultation. The data you collect is dynamic and interactive. People's views develop and change during the discussion, people are influenced by other members of the group, individual views can be identified but should not be aggregated.

COST

It is the norm to pay participants in return for their time. £20 - £25 is the going rate plus travel expenses by car or public transport (although exceptions should be made in particular circumstances). Other costs include hire of a suitable venue, refreshments such as tea coffee, biscuits and if appropriate a buffet.

WHO TO USE WITH / WHEN TO USE

Use focus groups when wider discussion is beneficial and appropriate. They are particularly suited to finding out what specific groups think about your service. Do not use focus groups when addressing sensitive, personal or particularly contentious issues.

- Use when you need a broad understanding or overview of an issue or service.
- Use to clarify perceptions and definitions.
- Use to compare and contrast views and experiences and generate new ideas.
- Use to test alternative strategies.
- Use when people have similar circumstances/status.

Do not use focus groups when:

- Exploring individual attitudes, experiences or decision making.
- Collecting detailed or complex factual material.
- With people who have sensory problems.

Use focus groups to consult most groups including community groups, young people, Black & Minority Ethnic Groups , staff, service users and non-service users, older people and staff.

POINTS TO CONSIDER

Consider whether the venue you intend to hold it in is it appropriate to those attending. Ideally you should hold the focus group in the participants locality or community, in a building they are familiar with, one that is welcoming and not intimidating.

Think about the appropriateness of mixed groups e.g. are there likely to be any gender, ethnicity and religious issues? Is the facilitator suitable and sufficiently independent from the group so that their presence does not influence peoples' responses and the direction of the discussion?

Confirm their invite/attendance in writing and send a reminder with background information prior to the meeting. Include notes on what to expect, detail facilities car parking and building access. For some people attending a focus group can be very intimidating and nerve-wracking, it is important to make people feel at ease. It is polite for the moderator to introduce themselves and ask participants to say their name, where they are from and what they do, this helps settles the group.

You should record the discussion (make sure you seek permission from those taking part) so that it can be transcribed and accurately analysed at a later date. It might be appropriate to provide paper, pens and flip charts to help promote discussion.

House keeping – remember mobile phones, fire escapes, toilets etc.

PROS

- Focus groups are easy to organise especially if you already have contacts of people you can invite and they are willing to attend or have indicated an interest in advance.
- Complex issues can be addressed targeting specific interest groups.
- People generally feel more confident in groups.
- Discussion can stimulate thinking and spark ideas within the group.
- Focus groups can be used to communicate with all sorts of groups of people.

CONS

- Due to small numbers the results cannot be used to extrapolate to represent the whole population therefore not statistically reliable.
- It is recommended that you use an experienced moderator which can add to the cost.

- As focus groups are small it is difficult to make them representative of the population, you may need to run several focus groups that represent different groups in your population.
- As data from focus groups is not statistical (although it can be quantified) its analysis is time consuming and complex.
- Some participants might be inhibited or afraid to say what they really feel. Often a group view is the general outcome.
- Dominant participants might shout other members of the group down.

KEY TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE FOCUS GROUPS

- Use focus groups for gaining an overview or exploring the development of ideas, not for collecting detailed individual stories.
- Use groups when experiences are not too sensitive to share.
- Make sure that composition of the groups encourages rather than hinders the exchange of ideas.
- Pick a venue where you respondents will feel comfortable, not over- or under-whelmed.
- Deal confidently and effectively with practical matters such as refreshments, incentives, tape recording and seating.
- Internalise the topic guide, use only as an *aide memoire* to keep you on track.
- Concentrate and listen carefully, do not let your attention wander.
- Use silences, let the group fill the gap.
- Pay attention to non –verbal signals.
- Remember you are in control: if you are tentative the group will feel uncomfortable.

Source: Worchestershire Toolkit 2007

POSTAL SURVEYS

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Postal surveys involve sending out a paper based questionnaire to respondents who then complete and return it by a specified date. Paper based self-completion questionnaires, either postal or distributed in another way e.g. in-situ, are one of the most popular survey methods available. They are flexible, easy to administer, relatively cheap and can often be successfully carried out in house. Postal surveys are ideal when those you want to survey are widely dispersed. Wherever possible tick-box responses should be provided making it easy for the respondent to complete, and data analysis straightforward. Open-ended questions are not suited to self-completion surveys.

COST

Postal questionnaires are the cheapest way of collecting people's views and opinions. However do not forget the hidden costs such as printing, enveloping and postage. Use the budget checklist to help plan the cost of your postal survey

WHEN TO USE

Self-completion and postal surveys can cover a range of people and topics, however they are not always the best method to use. This method is difficult to use for complex subjects, but ideal when you want to gauge public opinion and satisfaction ratings on broad topics. They are also a good method to use when covering sensitive or personal issues. Pre-coded tick box questions are the best question types to use. This is where you best guess the full range of responses people are likely to say and list them for people to tick. You can also ask questions based on a rating scale where you provide a list of responses (usually 5) and force respondents to make a choice e.g. Very satisfied, Fairly satisfied, Neither, Dissatisfied, Very dissatisfied.

POINTS TO THINK ABOUT

Sample frames and Sampling
Framing questions
Designing postal questionnaires
Types of Questions
Piloting the questionnaire
Raising response rates for postal or self completion surveys

Analysis

PROS

- Easy to administer.
- A well designed questionnaire produces reliable statistical information.
- Repeating the same questions over a period of time allows you to track opinions.
- Pre-coded tick-box responses are quick and easy to analyse.

- Large numbers of people can be contacted in a short period of time.
- Relatively cheap especially where supported by in-house expertise.
- The respondent is able to complete the questionnaire in their own time which may lead to more considered responses.

CONS

- Only a small amount of information can be gathered in a self-completion survey. It is difficult to establish why someone has answered they way they have.
- A poorly planned or designed questionnaire will result in poor data, a low response and inaccurate results.
- Expect lower response rates especially within younger age groups, people with literacy problems and people whose first language is not English (unless translations can be provided). It is easier for someone to ignore a postal survey than an interviewer.
- Limited length and complexity of questions, the questionnaire must be easy to complete.
- The reader may misinterpret questions with the absence of an interviewer.
- Lack of control over who answers the questions

Use reputable companies or market researchers who are members of the Market Research Society and follow the Market Research Society Code of Conduct.

Costs to consider

Postal survey

Item	**£**
Raw Materials	
Headed paper for covering letter	
Envelopes C4 for survey and C5 for pre paid return envelope	
Printing - The majority of the cost for printing is in the set up charge rather than the running cost	
Covering letter, including extra cost for sending highly personalised letters (mail merge)	
Survey, including extra cost for binding survey once printed	
Printing logo on C4 envelopes (printing a logo on the envelope helps to distinguish your postal survey from junk mail)	
Printing return address on pre paid envelopes	
Artwork	
Design of survey front cover. Designers will often charge a surcharge for coming up with an original design idea, as well as a fixed hourly rate for actually producing the artwork.	
Enveloping	
Enveloping of survey, covering letter and pre paid envelope. You are charged extra for each item you want to be enveloped so beware of too many inserts!!	

Postal Charges	
The cost is determined by the size and weight of the envelope. There are discounts for large mail shots. For more information see www.royalmail.com	
If you are including pre paid envelopes with your survey, you will be charged for every envelope that is posted back to you	
Data Input	
If you employ a data input company to input the data from your surveys they will normally charge per keystroke. The more free text or questions in your survey the more expensive it will be. There is also scanning equipment available to buy if you are planning on regularly inputting a lot of surveys. However this can be expensive.	
Feedback	
Once you have analysed your results, you will need to feed them back to your respondents. If you are planning on writing to all of your respondents, then you will need to consider printing costs. You could also use the media to feedback results, or the Internet.	

PLANNING FOR REAL

Staff or organisations wishing to run "Planning for Real"® events, provide "Planning for Real"® training or to describe themselves as users of a "Planning for Real"® approach should first contact The Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation to discuss using the technique and to obtain permission for the use of the trade mark.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

A 3-dimensional cardboard model of a neighbourhood is created for use at the consultation session(s). Local people discuss relevant issues (e.g. community safety, traffic, housing, vandalism, provision of play facilities). Participants make suggestions about what they want to happen and where. Suggested actions can also be prioritised (e.g. Now, Soon or Later).

COST

Main costs include

- Materials for model(s)
- Hire of facilities (meeting room, refreshments etc).
- Facilitator time
- Promotional materials

WHEN TO USE

Planning for Real can be used:

- To establish local people's priorities in development of a general community action plan.
- To establish views about a particular issue (e.g. what to do with a piece of derelict land, how to tackle traffic problems).
- To demonstrate complexity of decision making processes

WHO TO USE WITH

- Take to community events e.g. village fete, neighbourhood meetings.
- Use with specific groups e.g. school children, women's institute.

POINTS TO THINK ABOUT

- How many sessions need to be held and where?
- How will sessions be promoted?
- How many models will be required?
- Time & materials to make model(s) (can involve local people e.g. school children).
- Presentation of background information/ main issues to consider
- Are participants given a list of possible options or will this be left open?
- How will suggestions be fed back? (e.g. cards to place on model, group presentation, feedback forms to fill in).

- How will suggestions be taken forward? (e.g. production of an action plan; feedback to relevant people).

PROS

- Highly visible and very hands-on
- Easy and enjoyable for people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds.
- Promotes discussion of real issues and allows local people to suggest solutions.

CONS

- Making models can be time consuming if starting from scratch.
- Time & effort to ensure all relevant groups are represented.
- Danger of being taken over by certain individuals- need to ensure everyone has their say.

USEFUL LINKS

Planning for Real was developed by the New Initiatives Foundation: **www.nif.co.uk**

USERS AS DECISION MAKERS ON COMMITTEES / PANELS

SEE ALSO USER FORUMS AND NETWORKS

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Service Users or representatives are elected / invited to join committees, panels or boards as equal partners in decision making. This approach ensures that the users / public voice is represented when decisions are made.

There are a number of examples of service users / representatives being involved in decision making bodies in Worcestershire. These include the involvement of service users in the various Health and Social Care Boards and the involvement of parents on Sure Start Local Projects, and young people involved in School Councils, Youth Councils and Youth Parliaments.

This is a good example on the 'Acting Together' stage of the Ladder of Participation.

COSTS

Costs include venue, refreshments, and in appropriate circumstances expenses and transport costs.

It may also be necessary to consider providing childcare, or alternative care, and to arrange sign language and community language interpretation. You also need to consider the accessibility of documents / papers that you produce for the meeting.

POINTS TO THINK ABOUT

- It is important to consider how meetings work from the participants' point of view.
- Be aware that your representative may need training or support to participate fully in the meeting
- Be clear about the capacity in which the user / member of the public is involved. Are they representing a personal opinion or a wider group or network
- If the individual is representing a wider group or network consider what are the mechanisms for the representative obtaining and disseminating information.
- Consider the frequency at which representatives are elected / replaced.

PROS

- Provides a regular opportunity to hear the opinion of the public / service user group
- Builds positive relationships between the service and its users
- Demonstrates that you are willing to share power and control

CONS

- Representation can become dominated by particular groups
- The individual involved may not be typical of the views of your service users
- The individual can become “institutionalised” to see the service from a providers point of view
- Lines of accountability and communication between the representative and those that they are representing may be unclear.

RECRUITMENT

You can use a number of sources to recruit people to take part in your focus group, (existing service users, established network groups or recruitment on the back of another survey). You can use specialist market researchers to organise and moderate your focus group or you can do it in house (consider the worth of an independent moderator and whether you have specific expertise in house).

Once you have finalised the dates, time, venue etc either send out invites or telephone potential participants. Ensure that the people you are inviting know what is expected of them. Give dates, times and venue including practicalities of access. Detail any incentives, travel expenses and refreshments. If you are gathering a sample of people who are willing/interested in attending the focus group, make sure you make it clear that you will write to them with further details if they are selected to attend.

Read the background on sampling frames and sampling

TOPIC GUIDES

You should design your topic guide as a statement or reminder of key objectives to cover during the focus group discussion. You should use it as a checklist of essential issues. The topic list is for use by the moderator only, however it might be useful to highlight key points for discussion on a flipchart. If you are running more than one focus group you can use the topic list to ensure replication across groups and between moderators. The topic list is an accountable document and can be used as the starting point of analysis.

Your topic guide should be flexible and open to development and it's a good idea to design the topic list in consultation with your colleagues and pilot it.

MODERATING THE FOCUS GROUP

Welcome people as they arrive. Help fill the time before you start, mingle with participants, collect details and hand out incentives.

Before you begin introduce yourself and the purpose of the group. As an ice breaker it's a good idea to ask participants to introduce themselves. Name labels are also useful. Set the ground rules and manage housekeeping. Eye contact is very important, look up at respondents rather than down at the guide and make sure the discussion runs at an appropriate pace so that you cover everything you need to.

As a moderator you cannot take accurate notes of the discussion, you will always miss information or possibly interpret it differently. You should either ask someone to take accurate notes or record the discussion (seek permission to do this first). Note that conventional tape recorders are not really suitable, think about the acoustics in the venue before you book it.

Start with easy questions as a warm up and leave sensitive more complex questions to the end after group dynamics and rapport has been established within the group. As moderator you should not give your opinion or say where you stand.

Ask questions that are simple, single, open-ended and non-directive or leading. Give people time to answer, do not rush to fill the silence or finish people's sentences. Make sure you probe fully, don't assume you know the context/motivation for why someone has said something. Do not allow side discussions to take place, invite contributions and avoid getting locked in with one person. It is essential that you try and get everyone to take part, neutralize the 'discussion hog' or disruptive participant. Ask them to leave if necessary.

Always end on a positive/constructive note, invite questions and re-affirm uses of findings and confidentiality.

ANALYSIS

Analysing qualitative data.

Market Research professionals get the focus group discussion transcribed and indexed by topic number and respondent. Only someone who was present at the discussion can accurately analyse the discussion and report the findings.

When reporting or presenting your results think about the diversity and range of views that were expressed. Highlight patterns and themes in the discussion. Don't get bogged down in numbers or prevalence! Don't just list quotes, use what people said to illustrate and amplify the richness of the discussion. A poor focus group will produce thin information and data. Use statements like 'the recurrent theme across the group was…' and not 'most people thought…'

It is likely a written report will be appropriate and/or an oral presentation of the findings.

SIMALTO

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

'Simultaneous Multi Attribute Level Trade Off' (SIMALTO) offers a number of services from online questionnaires to forecasts of customer activity and intentions. It is designed to aid service optimisation and in the development of new products. It has clear philosophies about how its research should be conducted, ensuring that questions are easy to understand, follow a logical path, and engage the participant.

www.simalto.co.uk explains the method in more detail. However in short it involves the use of a grid showing levels of satisfaction along the top and different attributes of service down one side. The customer is instructed to rate each attribute using a selection of marks including circles, ticks and crosses, to display an overall picture of the customer's satisfaction with the organisation etc. In particular, the customer must indicate their current level of service satisfaction for each attribute.

Each attribute is then given a cost and the customer is required to make a "trade off" or compromise between attributes to improve and those to cut back on. The cost of the attributes must be balanced to match either the original selection (reprioritisation), meet a set budget (first priority improvements) or allow reduction (savings). The trade off shows which of the attributes are important and which can be sacrificed for improved service elsewhere, simultaneously. This is how the method gets its name. More importantly, it also provides a measure of how much to change various attributes, how much the customer is prepared to pay for the changes and how this might impact on their satisfaction.

COST

Due to the high levels of expertise required, the need for detailed one-to-one interviews, and the complexity of the analysis, this method is very expensive.

WHEN TO USE/WHO TO USE WITH

Due to the complexity of this method face-to-face interviews are required, where a trained interviewer guides the customer through the data collection process.

It is particularly suited to dealing with budgets.

A good example of how to use SIMALTO modelling would be in establishing priorities in services provided by council tax. Which services could be improved, where savings could be made, and how much council tax people would be prepared to pay for certain levels of service and what level of satisfaction you might expect as a result.

The interviews can last between 45 minutes and an hour and a half depending on who you are interviewing and their overall grasp of the task.

POINTS TO THINK ABOUT

The data collection process is designed to extract information about a product/service as a whole. The SIMALTO grid must be designed to reflect this in order to make best use of the method. Any aspect of service should be included in the grid, regardless of whether there are any prior concerns about it. Customers may well regard excellence in some areas as wasteful if they think the money could be better spent elsewhere. Equally, customers may be prepared to accept poorer service in some areas if the alternatives are too costly, or if the low cost of these poor services allows for more spending in other areas.

Questions that ask the customer to rate a service, say out of 10, will generate a wide variety of responses from customers who share the same opinions. It is much better to ask whether an attribute is 'as good as', 'worth', 'better than' or 'worse than' etc.

Close working between the market research agency and the organisation is critical especially in designing the 'grid'. Chief Officers and Councillors should be involved from the outset.

PROS

- There are a number of benefits of SIMALTO both in terms of data collection and analysis. In terms of collection, questions are unambiguous, and the cost of changes to service is treated in a realistic way. In addition, the whole picture of customer service is displayed simultaneously so that this is the priority, not individual attributes. A great deal of information reflecting customer opinion, satisfaction, likely future behaviour, and values can be collected on the same grid.

- In terms of analysis, the greatest benefit is the ability to gauge the feelings of individual customers regarding the whole service, no averaging of opinions takes place and no underlying equations/rules are used to describe customers.

CONS

- The data collection process can appear confusing to the participant and this requires a trained researcher to administer the interview or guide the customer through it.
- This method is very expensive.
- Analysis of results is complex largely due to the individual nature of each customer response. Trends in customer feeling and behaviour with regard to individual attributes may not be available and may not be deducible from the data since each response will show details of the importance of attributes relative to others.

TEMPLATE 1
SETTING OUT YOUR OBJECTIVES TO CONSULTEES

This template sets out the main points that you will need to cover in order to let people know what you want to achieve. You will, of course, **need to adapt the wording to suit the method of consultation that you are using.** For example if you are doing a survey, or a written consultation exercise you could adapt the format below to be included on a front sheet or covering letter. If you are running a focus group or face to face interview you will need to cover the same points – but present the information differently according to the audience.

"Thank you for participating in *(Title of Consultation Exercise*). This consultation exercise will run between (*state start and end dates)*. The final date for responses is (*state when)*

Your responses are important to us. We would like to know *(state your objective – what do you hope to achieve)*

The reason for asking your views is *(what is on offer – what is the decision to be influenced)*. What you tell us can influence *(state what can be changed / what the options are)*

Some of this *(policy, service, document – state)* has already been decided *(state what - if appropriate)*. We are asking for your opinions only on the areas that can still be influenced. (*state here if you have set out specific questions to be answered)*

We will let you know what we found out through this exercise by *(state how you will provide feedback)*

We will take account of your views when the decisions about this *(policy, service, document – state)* are being made. This will be *(state when)*. The final decision rests with *(state who)*

It is important that you know that *(state any further constraints)*.

If you need any further information about this *(state method)* please contact *(state who, supply address telephone and email contact)*

Don't forget to use the appropriate Data Protection statement.[1] An example is given in the footnote below. *(see Guidance 5.1 Data Protection Act in the Consultation Toolkit for examples of other applicable statements)*

For written responses from organisations or individuals to a consultation document see footnote below[2] on confidentiality

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[1] *"The information you provide to us will be held by [name of body]. It will only be used for the purposes of consultation and research, in order to improve our services. We may send you a written reminder(s) or contact you in order to award any associated prizes; you may also be sent feedback of the results. Sometimes, we share consultation results with our partners [list, or footnote and list at bottom or state that a list can be provided upon request]. Anonymous results will be published on the Council's Ask Me! – Consultation Planner and Finder web database. Survey results will never contain your name or anything that could identify you."*

[2] *The information you send us may need to be passed to colleagues or shared with partners. It may also be published in a [summary of responses] received in response to this consultation. We will assume that you are content for us to do this, and that if you are replying by e-mail, your consent overrides any confidentiality disclaimer that is generated*

…………………

This is a genuine exercise to find out your *(opinions, views, concerns – state).* Thank you for taking part.

by your organisation's IT system, unless you specifically include a request to the contrary in the main text of your submission to us. Please ensure that if you want your name or response to be kept confidential, you state this clearly in your response. (Confidential responses will be included in any statistical summary of numbers of comments received and views expressed.)