A Guide to
Community Consultation
in the
Southern Midlands

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Communities
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Introduction

Quality consultation and engagement are building blocks for good governance. Local governments that inform, consult and listen to their local communities, and communities which are engaged and participate in their governance, make for healthy democracies and involved people.

This document lists some important issues to take into account during the planning and implementation of a Community consultation process. The three levels of headings provide a convenient checklist: you can use it to ensure that most of the important issues are addressed in some way. The accompanying text offers some brief suggestions about the approach that may be appropriate under the different conditions.

1 Contextual issues

The context of a consultation influences the outcomes, for better or worse. It also determines to some extent which consultation processes will be effective. It is not enough to pay attention to the immediate issues and the stakeholders who are affected. The aims, the scope, and the intended time span, as well as the history: all have an important influence on the consultation.

1.01 Overall aim

One of the most important of the contextual issues is the overall aim of the consultation. It limits your choice of the structures and processes which are appropriate. If you are not clear about the aim, you will find it hard to decide if you are succeeding. (You may also have to be willing to add to, or even change, your aims as the consultation proceeds.)

Some possible aims, arranged in order of increasing ambition, are...

1.01a To give information: that is, to inform the Community

When the main purpose is to give information, it may be appropriate to use the mass media. However, there is one important caution. It is important not to raise expectations that involvement will be greater than this. Unmet expectations merely breed dissatisfaction and conflict.

1.01b To get information: that is, to gather information to be used in decision-making

Sometimes the purpose is to gather information, and no more than that. If so, the use of a low key method of accessing a well-chosen sample may be adequate. In general, a maximum diversity sample may work best. Take pains to tap a sufficient variety of opinion -- it offers you better information for a given expenditure of money and effort than a random sample does.

1.01c To exchange information: that is, a combination of the preceding categories

On other occasions you may wish to bring about an exchange of information. A combination of the methods so far described may then be a good choice. This offers little chance for stakeholders to understand each other's position, however. You may find it useful to consider the next option (for reaching agreement between different stakeholder groups) as a possibility.

1.01d To reach agreement or partial agreement on a design for some proposed initiative

A more ambitious aim is for different stakeholders to reach agreement or partial agreement. This can only happen when each becomes informed about the position of the others. Agreement is likely to require at least some of the stakeholders to change their views.

This is most likely to occur in face-to-face meetings within a supportive and consensual climate. People have a better chance of understanding an opposing point of view when they are able to listen to it, face-to-face.

It also requires a climate and process which reduces the need for people to defend their own views. (And that is more easily said than done.)

1.02 Scope

The scope, too, has an important influence. In general, single issue consultation is more likely to generate strong feelings and antagonistic relationships. More careful design is then indicated.

1.02a Single-issue: where only one aspect of Community living is being addressed

A single-issue consultation is one which is focused on one aspect of Community life, for example changes to road traffic, or a major residential or commercial development, or the like. A single issue offers fewer opportunities to find goals which most stakeholders can subscribe to. Single-issue consultation is thus more difficult. It requires more care in planning and implementation.

1.02b General: non-defined issues or more general aims (for example Community development)

This more resembles Community development than the usual forms of Community consultation. Because citizens have a broad range of potential goals to choose from, it is easier to avoid antagonism and adversarial relationships. People will often put aside their differences if you use a planning technique which allows them to identify their common visions.

Consensus-seeking techniques like search often work well. Large meetings (which are usually to be avoided in single-issue consultation) may work if they are well structured and some care is taken in attracting a representative group of participants.

It is still important to take care in informing participants about the purpose and process of the exercise.

1.03 Time span

Time limits bring their own problems. It is hard to maintain wide involvement over lengthy time spans. But brief consultation may raise more issues than it can address. Most planning authorities allow far too little time for effective consultation.

1.03a A brief consultation for a once-only event

In some respects, brief consultations are more easily managed than extended consultations. The silent majority can be involved, and are likely to maintain their interest, for short periods of time. However, any form of consultation

may raise expectations which cannot be met in short time periods. Low key consultation methods may therefore be indicated.

1.03b A more extended consultation for a substantial but once-only event

For more extended consultation processes it becomes necessary to identify a small number of people who will be most heavily involved. Selecting people who can put aside their own biases enough to act for the Community as a whole is difficult, but important.

To add to your problems, such people may become distanced from those in the Community. It is important to maintain communication between those who are more active and those who are less active.

1.03c An ongoing consultative process

See the preceding paragraph. In addition it is hard to maintain the momentum of such an exercise beyond about two years.

Selection of those who are most directly involved is even more important. So is the maintenance of links with the wider Community. You can't expect to get the silent majority along for more than one or two meetings unless you use low key methods like neighbourhood meetings, and organise your activities around specific and attention-getting issues.

The use of a steering committee for overall communication and coordination, and small working parties for specific initiatives, has worked well on occasion. Even then it will be very hard to maintain ongoing consultation. It is suggested that outside help and skill-development workshops for those most directly involved could be advantageous.

1.04 History

One of the most important influences on Community attitudes is previous experience. On occasion, people are reluctant to become involved in a second consultation process ("We've already been consulted."). In any event, their knowledge of consultative processes and the results is based on their prior experience.

If they have taken part in one form of process, they may be reluctant to try a different one. This is often true even when the previous process was neither successful nor satisfying. The careful planner therefore checks out the previous consultation history before going too far with a consultation process.

1.04a Previous consultation and its style

People expect adversarial processes at the best of times. If this expectation has been confirmed by the consultation style previously adopted, consensual styles will require more care and effort in planning and consultation. You will have to spend more time with people. You will have to give more attention to building open and trusting relationships.

If previous consultation has generated mistrust rather than trust, this is even more important.

1.04b People accessed and with what effect

The greater the number of people previously involved, the harder it is to involve any but the vocal (and often antagonistic) minorities. More intensive

methods are then needed if you want to tap the opinions of the whole Community.

Building trust is more important. Using methods which take you out into the neighbourhood and the homes will almost certainly be needed to obtain wide involvement.

1.04c Polarisation, assumptions, trust within relationships, and so on

Many consultative processes actually polarise opinions. It is then difficult to achieve good relationships with the various interest groups. Approaching any one of them may damn you in the eyes of the others.

The assumptions people form about your intentions, and the trust they are willing to place in you, will also depend on their prior experience.

2 Style

Especially when you hope for agreement between different stakeholder groups, the choice of consultation style has far-reaching effects.

The relevant questions are...

- Who are the stakeholders?

- How many of them will you involve?

- How great will their involvement be?

- What processes will you use to generate agreement.

- How consensual or adversarial will those processes be?

In what follows you should mostly assume an approach which aims for substantial involvement of as large a proportion of stakeholders as feasible. You should also assume a process which is consensual, and which uses face-to-face contact to generate trust, understanding and agreement.

You might summarise the intentions of this preferred style as...

- The provision of maximum access

- By mixed face to face groups

- to real decision-making power

- Using non-adversarial processes.

However, these are all choices. Depending on the circumstances and your own preferences you may choose different approaches.

2.01   Target population

The "stakeholders", those with some stake in the decisions to be made, form the population to be consulted. Several categories are described below.

For some purposes you may wish to distinguish between two broad categories. Direct stakeholders are immediately and directly affected. Indirect stakeholders have an interest which is less direct, and less immediate.

2.01a Local stakeholders: people who reside in the Community within which the design is to be implemented

These are the "direct stakeholders", you might say. They are usually most affected by the decisions made, and will expect to be involved. They are also usually the people on whose behalf the activists speak, or claim to speak.

For many purposes it is useful to redefine the local stakeholders for each decision within a consultative process. In that way, those most directly affected can be most closely involved.

2.01b Non-local stakeholders: people who do not reside locally but who have some direct stake in the issue

Non-local stakeholders are most likely to be overlooked unless you make some effort to involve them. Local stakeholders will try to solve the problem by putting it onto someone else. (This is the "not-in-my-back-yard" or nimby phenomenon.)

It is often helpful to involve non-local stakeholders in face-to-face interaction with local stakeholders. In fact, this may be the only way of ensuring that non-local interests are to some extent taken into account.

2.01c Government, etc.: those who have the ultimate responsibility for choosing and funding the design, and their agents (typically public service officers)

Government officers will usually ensure their own involvement. Usually they will want to minimise the influence of other stakeholders, promising only to take their views into account.

It is hard to do effective consultation, however, unless you agree certain conditions with the relevant government officers (or similar).

Firstly, try to ensure that your clients in the consultation are all the stakeholders, not just those who pay you.

Second, encourage the government officers to define the "givens" or limits, and to try to which are consistent with those limits.

Don't expect this to be easy to do.

2.01d Experts: people who have technical or professional experience in disciplines relevant to the project

Some of these will be included as part of the previous category. Examples include the planners or traffic engineers or the like who are responsible for the design.

Other bodies (the RAC, for instance, if traffic design is the focus of the study) have valuable opinions to offer. On occasion they may claim a greater right

to speak for an electorate than is appropriate. In addition, therefore, you may choose to access their "electorate" directly.

2.01e Other vested interests

Most important here are the Community activists. They are valuable contributors if you involve them -- they are usually well informed, have good organising skills, and often excellent knowledge of the Community networks. Time put into establishing relationships with them is always valuable and sometimes essential.

But there are traps. Some of them are likely to be adversarial and untrusting. A few seem to believe that any behaviour is fair if it supports their cause. Many of them will assume you are the enemy, and treat you accordingly. As with expert bodies, they tend to overestimate the extent to which they speak for the Community. If they decide to make life difficult for you, they are very skilled at this.

2.02 Breadth of involvement

How many stakeholders are you going to involve? The choice is between trying to reach most, or limiting the consultation to a smaller number who are some sample of the wider population.

2.02a Direct access: stakeholders are involved directly, in some way, in the consultative process

This is my preferred option. By involving as many stakeholders as possible in face-to-face discussion you increase the likelihood that all views will be taken into account. This is most true when the silent majority is involved: they often represent a middle ground without which it is hard to avoid extreme polarisation.

The effect to aim for is to allow each person to speak for herself, while being encouraged to take into account the wishes of all stakeholders.

2.02b Representation: selected representatives of the stakeholder population make decisions, or provide information, on behalf of their "electorate"

Although this is the more common approach, it can make agreement hard to achieve. People who "represent" an electorate often feel less free to change their mind in the light of new evidence or information. Representative approaches can also lead to representatives who slowly lose touch with their electorate.

You may have to give special attention to maintaining good communication between representatives and electorate.

The use of representative approaches will often be unavoidable because of constraints of time and other resources. If so, you can improve their effectiveness through the use of certain strategies...

- Try to involve people who collectively are an adequate sample of the whole population -- the Community in microcosm.

- Check that all interests are included, especially when the sample is small.

- Avoid selecting people who have poor listening skills and no interest in consensus. (You may choose to find other ways of involving them.)

- Encourage the representatives to behave as full participants, not as spokespeople for a point of view.

- If necessary, use market research methods to keep them informed of wider Community opinion.

- Give more than usual attention to establishing good relationships and good problem-solving processes.

- Use the mass media to keep the Community well informed.

2.03 Depth of involvement

Depth of involvement can vary widely whether you are using participative or representative approaches. The lower-key approaches are more economical and less time consuming when they are effective, but may be regarded by the Community (sometimes with justification) as merely token consultation.

They may make it more difficult to engage a full range of stakeholders.

2.03a Information: kept informed about developments so that they can react if they wish

This is minimal consultation. If there is little reaction from the Community it can be economical and easy. When there is a reaction, however, it may be only from those with more extreme views.

On occasion you may not know how much consultation is warranted. You might then use this approach until a reaction occurs. When it becomes apparent that an issue exists you can move into a more intensive consultation with a wider sample of stakeholders.

2.03b Consultation: an exchange of information takes place between government (etc) and stakeholders

Consultation has two meanings. The narrow one describes an exchange of information without commitment to anything beyond that. The broader meaning encompasses a range of strategies from being informed to being involved in real decision-making.

Government officials, and other people commissioning a consultation project, will often favour an approach which leaves the decision making in their own hands.

2.03c Involvement in decision-making, probably within limits

This depth is unfortunately rare in Community consultation, but has a lot to commend it. Often it cannot be done formally -- in Queensland it is government policy that the government retain all decision-making power. However, government officers can inform the stakeholders honestly about the issues and then honour as many Community requests as they reasonably can. A more effective depth of consultation can then be achieved.

False expectations are one of the great obstacles to effective consultation. If false expectations are not to be raised, you will need very careful definition and very clear communication about any limits.

2.04 Form of processes used

As mentioned previously, people enter consultation expecting that adversarial processes will be used. After all, this is what usually happens in most other settings.

Majority vote is an example, as in our political system. Non-adversarial methods are also available, however. If your aim is to meet the needs of as many stakeholders as possible, they are to be preferred.

2.04a Adversarial: people are encouraged or enabled to argue for their own interests

Adversarial processes tend to create antagonism and polarisation. More importantly, they make it hard to obtain valid information: people say what is most advantageous to their cause rather than telling the truth.

On the other hand such processes can be more economical. On some occasions they may be your only choice if time and funds are very limited (though I would not make this decision lightly).

If you do use adversarial methods, try to agree on the process with the stakeholders before addressing the issues. They may then be more likely to accept the decision even when they don't agree with it.

2.04b Non-adversarial: people are encouraged to try to act for the benefit of the Community as a whole

There are two general forms of non-adversarial processes...

- Consensual processes focus on those issues on which people are agreed.

- Dialectical processes generate agreement out of disagreement.

If the consultation is about multiple issues and the most important issues do not involve major disagreements, consensual methods will work effectively. There are processes which yield agreement quite readily provided these conditions are met.

Dialectical processes are characterised by the debate which is found in adversarial methods, but with people trying to use the debate to reach agreement on what is best for all. (And some people, often those who claim some expertise in such processes, claim that they use dialectical processes where they could be perceived as adversarial.)

Such processes are not for the inexperienced. They require smaller numbers, more care in their design, and more skilled facilitation than either adversarial or consensual methods.

3   Practice

The previous parts of this document are about choosing a consultation process. This final step is about seeing it in place. In a sense, therefore, this section overviews the overall process.

The process as a whole, and many parts of it, follow a three-phase sequence:

- first establish relationships;

- then agree on the structures and processes;

- then do the actual implementation and consultation.

The effectiveness of the later stages depends upon the care with which the early stages are handled.

3.01   Contracting

The first task is to establish an adequate relationship with the various stakeholder groups, beginning with those who pay for the consultation. For greatest effectiveness, the result to aim for is twofold.

First, only a close and open personal relationship allows you to say what needs to be said without damaging that relationship and the project.

Second, without clear agreement on your role and theirs, misunderstanding is very likely to arise. The role suggested that you create and maintain is one where your responsibilities are to all of the stakeholders, and you manage the process. (You may also co-manage the process with the participants as co-facilitators.) The issues or problems are then the responsibility of the stakeholders.

3.02   Structure

This is the consultative structure through which the members of the target population are involved.

3.02.a Identify the stakeholders

Identify the various stakeholder groups. This may be done by

- asking knowledgeable informants,

- interviewing known stakeholders, and

- following contacts from person to person on the social networks.

At the same time you can begin to find out about the previous history, and define the most salient issues.

3.02b Devise the structures through which those stakeholders can be involved or represented

Identify the smallest number of stakeholder groups that can be used without missing important views. Then devise mechanisms (committees, working

groups, and the like) to access their views and communicate with them. (Some of the likely stakeholder groups were mentioned earlier).

In many instances, three different structures may be desirable:

- one is to handle decision-making within the design or planning body, usually the responsible service department;

- a second is to involve the direct stakeholders, usually local; and

- the third is to represent other stakeholder groups.

3.03   Process

This consists of the consultative processes used within the consultative structure to engage the stakeholders. In general, it is recommended to use processes which generate high rather than low involvement. For real attitude change and better agreement, processes which engage different stakeholders in face-to-face interaction are my preference.

3.03a Choose the style of consultation to be used

This was addressed earlier, under the major heading "Style". It is suggested that you aim to maximise involvement and access to decisions within the constraints on time, money, and other resources.

3.03b Who needs to know your results?

You should always provide feedback to your respondents and consultees. Refer back to your original list of stakeholders. Make sure that you let them know what was learnt and what we did with the information. In addition consider:

- Council – you need to report the results of strategic/contentious consultation exercises
- General Manager, Directors, Managers – particularly where the results affect their service
- Front line staff and other Officers
- Partner organisations
- Users/residents and other members of the community
- Other identified stakeholders to check that you have not missed anyone out of the feedback

3.03c What does your audience need to know?

You will need to take account of when feedback should be provided to consultees. On some occasions this should be after decisions are taken so that you can report not only what you found out, but also the outcome of the process.

Different audiences will want different levels of information. For example, residents may be interested in the headline findings of a residents' attitude survey - but may be more interested in the detailed results of consultation on a controversial development in the area.

It is particularly important to give clear feedback when there has been controversy, or a decision has been taken which goes against popular

opinion. In these circumstances respondents may want a detailed account of the findings and the outcomes, and to know how their views were taken into account – even if they didn't get their desired outcome.

Care should be taken to communicate appropriately to all those who took part to increase public confidence in the process.

The levels of information you should consider providing include:

- What methodology was used and how it worked

- Headline findings or an executive summary

- Full results

- Invitation for feedback/suggestions

- An action plan

3.03d How will you tell them?

Different audiences will have different needs so communicating the results of the consultation could take different forms and in many cases a mix of techniques is best. For example, communication methods could include:

- Feedback documents/letters to respondents, which include headline findings and subsequent actions

- Presentations

- Seminars and workshops

- Summary reports

- Detailed reports

- Through the Council's website and email system – remember to obtain the necessary permission

- Through SMS/Text Messaging

- Make a video or use drama or other interactive method

- Residents' newspaper or magazine

- Via the local media

- Through the Council's intranet site

- Staff newsletters

- Through the GM's Briefing Publication that goes to the Councillors

Make sure that you consider the communication requirements of people who will be receiving your feedback.

3.04 Implementation

These are the steps by which the structures and processes are put in place.

3.04a Devise an implementation plan

This will typically be done in a number of stages, which will depend on the situation and the decisions already taken. However, a typical process for designing the implementation plan may include these steps. Decide...

- who will set up the structures;

- who will involve the stakeholders;

- how these people will be recruited and trained;

- what needs to be done to establish an adequate relationship between the different people involved (including yourself).

3.04b Implement it

Recruit and train the people who are to be involved in the implementation. Then set the implementation in train.

4 Templates

4.01 Checklist   What do you want to have achieved at the end of the Consultation?

Think about what you are really trying to achieve. A clear sense of the purpose will help you decide on the appropriate methods, who to consult, and enable you to decide at the end whether the process was successful.

- ❑ A better understanding of the issues among stakeholders (including promotion of and influencing objectives)?

- ❑ Help and advice from stakeholders, resulting in a better policy/decision?

- ❑ Information from the stakeholders on the implications, costs and benefits of different policy options?

- ❑ Demonstrate and improve reputation for accountability and responsiveness?

- ❑ Prevention of problems later?

- ❑ Compliance with a statutory requirement?

- ❑ Confirmation that your proposals are on the right lines?

- ❑ Statutory consent to your proposals?

- ❑ Comments and suggestions on alternative proposals/options?

- ❑ Detailed comments on a preferred alternative/option?

- ❑ Beginning of a long-term relationship with stakeholders?

- ❑ Opportunities for joint working and funding e.g. partnership initiatives?

- ❑ Detailed and carefully considered comments from experts?

4.02 Checklist   What is the purpose of this consultation?

In our Consultation Strategy we have said that we will usually consult about the following areas. Think about your objectives for consulting. Which of these do you want to do? These apply even if we are 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 Southern Midlands' 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 all of Southern Midlands Communities
- ❑ 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 all of Southern Midlands Communities

❑ 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 Southern Midlands Communities

❑ Set priorities for action

❑ Set priorities for future spending

❑ Look for quality improvements

❑ Improve customer relations

❑ Other issues – what are they??

4.03 Template   Setting out your objectives to the people who you are going to consult

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.

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 website.. 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 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*

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

in your response. (Confidential responses will be included in any statistical summary of numbers of comments received and views expressed.)

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4.04 Checklist   Identify 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, Parishes, government departments, employers and the business sector)

Interest 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

4.05 Table   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 customer's views, combined with knowledge about the practical aspects of providing the service.

4.06 Checklist   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 Council **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 Council	
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.	Ideally 12 weeks for written consultation documents.
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	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.	2-4 weeks

If you require your data to be processed either in–house or through a data processing company build this in to your timetable now.	
Produce consultation material – ❑ 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.	2-4 weeks
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/Council need to approve your consultation plan? Remember for **strategic/contentious exercises** Council 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 Consultation 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 consultation process?	

| Clarify why you are consulting - can you link up with another consultation process with the same time frame? | |

4.07 Template   Consultation Project Plan

Title:

Brief Description of Objectives:

Brief Description of Expected Outcomes:

ISSUE	ACTION	HELP – GUIDE / CHECKLIST
PRE – PLANNING		
Do I need to carry out this exercise? Can I link up with someone else? Do we already know the answer?		
How specifically will I use the results of this consultation? What is the decision that I am seeking views on?		Checklist 4.02 – What is the purpose of this consultation exercise?

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ISSUE	ACTION	HELP – GUIDE / CHECKLIST
When does this exercise need to be completed? When will a decision be made? What approval process do I need to go through in order to make a decision? What is the timeframe for this? How long will this consultation exercise take? At the end you want to be able to measure whether: • the timetable was clear and kept to and if not, why not • enough time was allowed for responses.		*Checklist 4.06 – Preparing Your Timetable*
Who needs to give approval for this exercise to take place? • what do I need to do to obtain approval • by when.		*Remember for strategic/potentially contentious consultation exercises Council's approval MUST be obtained BEFORE the consultation starts*

ISSUE	ACTION	HELP – GUIDE / CHECKLIST
What have I learnt about what does and does not work in public consultation? What methods have I used previously that worked well? How can I use this knowledge to help this time?		
What resources do I need to complete this exercise? • Human • Financial • Technical		*You may want to come back to this once you have worked through the Guide.*
My estimate of how much this exercise will cost is Is the cost of this exercise proportionate to the issue under consideration?		*You may want to come back to this once you have worked through the Guide.*

ISSUE	ACTION	HELP – GUIDE / CHECKLIST
At the end you need to be able to measure whether: • you budgeted adequately • you made savings in particular areas or overspent in others - and why • there were unforeseen costs - and what they were.		
My analysis of how I will know this exercise has succeeded is		*Identify critical success factors*

ISSUE	ACTION	HELP – GUIDE / CHECKLIST
PLANNING YOUR EXERCISE		
What specifically will I consult about? What are my key objectives? What is open to change and what is not? Make this clear in your consultation material. At the end, you want to be able to measure whether: • objectives were clear • they were relevant to the consultation itself and linked to your wider planning process • they were explained to, and understood by, all relevant staff and those consulted.		*Checklist 4.02 – What is the purpose of your consultation exercise* *Template 4.03 Setting out your objectives to consultees.*

ISSUE	ACTION	HELP – GUIDE / CHECKLIST
Who will I consult? Who are my key stakeholders? How will I ensure that I reach groups that we have traditionally found hard to engage in consultation? Whose views and responses do I consider to be most important? Set specific targets for the level of response you want from your different stakeholders. At the end, you want to be able to measure whether: • you have views from those you wanted • you were successful in consulting minority, disadvantaged or under-represented groups • different groups responded to different methods • you gave feedback to those consulted • the people consulted felt that the consultation was worthwhile.		*Checklist 4.04 – Identifying Your Stakeholders.* *Table 4.05 – What sort of views can you expect from different stakeholders?*

ISSUE	ACTION	HELP – GUIDE / CHECKLIST

What methods of consultation will I use? Ideally use a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods.
 	
Do I need to engage an external agency?
 	
Do I need to reserve premises, book interpreters, etc. See checklist for planning a consultation event.
 	
At the end, you want to be able to measure whether:
 	
• the methods used were right for your objectives
• if you used more than one method, which worked better than others - and why
• you gathered the required
   o quantitative and/or qualitative information
   o response rate
   o representative sample.		

ISSUE	ACTION	HELP – GUIDE / CHECKLIST
How will I analyse the results? Do I need to engage data processors? Do I need assistance from Research and Intelligence? If so plan this in advance.		*Checklist 4.09 – Identifying Key Messages* *Checklist 4.10 – Identifying Priorities and Actions*

How will I use the findings?
 	
Who needs to know what I have found out:
 	
   • in the Council?
 	
   • other partners/stakeholders?
 	
   •
		Refer to Guideline – Who needs to know your results?

How will I provide feedback to participants? Make this clear in your consultation material.		*Refer to Guidelines – How will you tell them?*
Build in time to evaluate this consultation exercise. Ensure that you give your participants an opportunity to evaluate your exercise.		*Checklists 4.11 – Participants' evaluation of consultation,* *Checklist 4.12 - Questions you should ask yourself to evaluate your exercise,*

ISSUE	ACTION	HELP – GUIDE / CHECKLIST
Consider lessons that you have learnt from previous consultation exercises. The Guide will provide you with Checklists to help.		*Checklist 4.13 - Strategic evaluation of consultation outcomes and process.*

4.08 Checklist   Organising a Consultation Event

Use this checklist to ensure you have thought about each aspect of your consultation event.

- ❑ Is the consultation method appropriate for your target audience?

- ❑ Have you taken advice where appropriate from members of the target audience e.g. voluntary organisations, cultural leaders, specialist workers or carers – before you start?

- ❑ Have you ensured the consultation exercise is well publicised in a variety of media to attract your target audiences?

- ❑ Have you explained clearly from the outset what you are consulting on and what the options are so that public expectations are not raised unrealistically?

- ❑ Have you explained who will take the decision and when?

- ❑ Is the information you are providing available in the right format (e.g. other languages, large print, audiotapes etc) for your audience?

- ❑ Is the venue appropriate? People may feel more comfortable in community buildings such as schools, tenants halls or day centres rather than council offices, or chambers

- ❑ Have you checked that your venues are fully accessible for the target audience (e.g. wheelchair access, disabled toilets, lifts, induction loop, childcare, substitute care?

- ❑ Is the layout appropriate? People may feel more involved if the layout of chairs is in the round, rather than with an audience and top table Do you need to provide translators/ interpreters

- ❑ Is the timing appropriate for your audience? For people who work, or for those who look after children, do you need to provide crèche facilities?

- ❑ Have you considered holidays including school and religious holidays and festivals? Visit www.tas.gov.au for a list of public and school holidays in Tasmania.

- ❑ Have you provided transport for those who need it or offered to pay transport costs?

- ❑ Have you provided refreshments?

- ❑ Are these appropriate for your target audience? (e.g. where possible use local produce, include a vegetarian option, reflect different cultural tastes and preferences.

- ❑ Have you provided expenses for attending the meeting if appropriate? Have you provided any other incentives for attendance?

- ❑ Have you given people an opportunity to provide feedback on your exercise or fill in an evaluation sheet?

- ❑ Don't forget to thank the participants and tell them how and when you will be feeding back the results

❑ Have you made sure that people have a contact point for further information?

Ensure the results of the consultation exercise are widely communicated in a variety of media to help increase public confidence.

4.09 Checklist   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

4.10 Checklist   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.

4.11 Checklist   Participant's Evaluation of the Consultation

In every consultation that you undertake 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)?

4.12 Checklist   Basic Evaluation – Questions to Ask Yourself

Use this checklist 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?

❑ 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?

4.13 Checklist 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?

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 made available to other services or organisations that might find them helpful?

A final thought ...

Consultation is not for the faint-hearted. No matter how well you design and implement consultation, you may finish up with all stakeholders disappointed.

Even though everyone may be better informed and indeed better off, than if you hadn't set up the consultation, they may still blame you for their disappointments.

So, for your own mental health, here are two guidelines...

- Most people are, in some sense well-intentioned. They can be reached by persistence and genuineness.

- Above all, never take anything personally.

Information in this document has been drawn from

Dick, B. (1997) *Community consultation checklist* [On line]. Available at http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/arp/comcon.html

Central Coast Council Community Consultation Toolkit

www.worcestershire.gov.uk/home/tcom_toolkit