



# A Guide to Better Consultation



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## INTRODUCTION

### WHY HAS THIS GUIDE BEEN PRODUCED?

The main purpose of this Guide is to **raise the quality of consultation** by the Council, and hence the services which it provides.

Its starting point is that good quality consultation helps in promoting and working towards more positive relationships between the Council and local people. Consultation can help us to:

- evaluate where we are now;
- plan what needs to be achieved;
- deliver services to realistic service users' expectations;
- check with service users whether objectives have been achieved; and
- revise the way we deliver services.

Consultation is an essential part of giving local people and service users an opportunity to inform local government about services which should meet their needs.

Listening to and acting on the outcomes of effective consultation enables the Council to become more responsive to the needs and priorities expressed by local people as citizens and service users. To be effective we need to work in collaboration with colleagues across the Council and in partner organisations.

This Guide is a companion document to the Consultation Strategy which sets out the Council's commitment to consultation and the basic principles of good consultation. It describes how they can be achieved and has a checklist for effective action.

This Guide offers you some approaches to consultation which you may not have considered. They may require some investment in the development of new skills, as well as a high level of commitment and good co-operation amongst colleagues. However, they can be rewarding because of the quality of the information that they produce and the changes that they stimulate.

Positive benefits from using the Guide should include better services for service users, greater involvement of local people in shaping the future of their area, and an enhanced public image of the Council as a listening and responsive organisation.

## **WHO IS THE GUIDE FOR?**

This Guide has been written as a practical guide for **officers of the Council** who organise or run consultation initiatives. They may, increasingly, be doing this within their own departments or in collaboration with colleagues in other departments or in partner organisations.

If you have organised consultation events in the past, the list of key questions and techniques in the Guide may encourage you to pause for thought and to try some new approaches.

If you are managing your first consultation, then the Guide will lead you through the questions that must be addressed to ensure success.

The Guide encourages staff to regard consultation as an ongoing process rather than a one-off exercise. It also stresses the need for those who are organising consultation to recognise and value the ideas and knowledge that everyone involved can contribute to the process.

## CORPORATE CONSULTATION NETWORK MEMBERS

<b>Chief Executives</b> Peter Hodkinson Sue Turner Rob Cartwright Jo Richmond Melanie Ormesher (GMPA Community Consultative Worker)	Ext 4694 Ext 4987 Ext 3198 Ext 4918 615 5218
<b>Education and Cultural Services</b> Richard Lambert Fiona Orr	Ext 4632 Ext 4202
<b>Environmental Services</b> Emelli Doran	Ext 3326
<b>First Choice Homes Oldham</b> Paul Newcombe	Ext 3586
<b>Social Services</b> Julia DeLoughry	Ext 4806

## SECTION 1 - GETTING STARTED

You may have been asked to undertake consultation. The request may have come from elected Members, a line manager, or a member of the public. It may be a statutory requirement or you may have identified the need yourself. Wherever the request for consultation has come from, *you need to have a clear brief!*

This section provides a framework to help you to answer the question, ‘**How do I start the process of consultation?**’ It reinforces the importance of planning for consultation and sets out key steps to take in developing your brief. You need to start by reading the Consultation Strategy and then asking some clear questions.

1. Why undertake consultations?
2. Who do I need to involve?
3. What do we already know?
4. When does consultation need to be undertaken?
5. What resources are available?
6. How and where will it be carried out?
7. Did it work?
8. Did I let people know what happened?

### **Step 1: Why undertake consultation?**

It is vital that you are clear about why you are seeking to consult service users or local people before embarking on any consultation process. This does not mean defining the brief so precisely that others are excluded from making a contribution. What it does mean is having some clear ideas about the broad aims and objectives of the consultation, what you are hoping to achieve and the role that people will play in the process.

There are 6 broad reasons for consulting the community:

- To inform / educate;
- To persuade;
- To listen and learn;
- To enter into a meaningful dialogue / discussion / negotiation;
- To deliberate; and

- To build capacity and confidence.

Most *consultation* exercises will combine several of these overall aims. However, if your only objectives are to inform / educate or persuade, it is not appropriate to call this a *consultation* or *participation* process. You should distinguish between:

Information;  
Marketing / PR;  
Consultation; and  
Participation.

Looking in more detail at these consultation objectives, examples under each heading might be:

*To inform / educate*

- give information and seek responses;
- respond to a complaint or suggestion; and
- meet a statutory requirement.

*To persuade*

- improve the Council's image; and
- test an idea or a marketing opportunity.

*To listen and learn*

- obtain information or collect data to inform decision-making;
- meet a statutory requirement;
- discover the extent of an interest or demand; and
- obtain ideas and suggestions.

*To enter into a meaningful dialogue / discussion / negotiation*

- identify service improvements;
- influence a decision; and
- give minority, excluded or marginalised groups a say.

*To deliberate*

- identify priorities; and
- let people indicate their preferences.

*To build capacity and confidence*

- provide participants with skills or training opportunities;
- improve relationships; and
- resolve a conflict or interest.

There is a need to balance the organisation's needs with the needs of service users and local people. So try to make sure you identify the benefits of consultation for both the Council and local people.

**Step 2: Who do I need to involve?**

There are likely to be a range of people with a stake in the consultation process, depending on the purpose of the consultation, including:

- the people who will make the final decision (e.g. Councillors, Chief Officers);
- the people living in a particular area (what are the boundaries?);
- the wider community;
- representatives and participants from existing groups;
- staff in your department;
- staff from other departments;
- the voluntary sector;
- the business community;
- other public agencies;
- people who are regulated / enforced against by the Council etc

Do you need to engage some or all of them in the consultation process?

What role will they play in the process? To help you decide, ask yourself the following questions:

- who will be affected by the outcomes of the process?;
- who is ultimately in a position to decide if the process goes ahead or not?; and
- who has skills, experience, knowledge and resources to contribute to the process?

It is strongly recommended that you develop a well-considered rationale about who to involve in the consultation, both to avoid accidental oversights and to demonstrate that you have been inclusive and fair in your approach.

*If you need to access groups or people with particular interests the following teams / officers may be able to help either directly or by putting you in touch with partners / carers or other appropriate contacts. The section or job titles should explain their areas of knowledge.*

<i>Education and Culture</i>	<i>Ethnic Minorities Support Service</i>	<i>Ext 3668 / 3669 / 3670</i>
<i>Education and Culture</i>	<i>Glodwick Community Outreach Project – employs a range of development workers (sports, health, women, youth, cultural etc)</i>	<i>Ext 3606 / 3607 / 3608</i>
<i>Community Services</i>	<i>Youth and Community Education Service</i>	<i>Ext 4258 / 4278</i>
<i>First Choice Homes Oldham</i>	<i>Tenant Participation Unit</i>	<i>Ext 3588</i>
<i>Social Services</i>	<i>Race Equality Development Officer</i>	<i>Ext 4769</i>
<i>Social Services</i>	<i>Policy Planning Team – employs two Consultation Officers for children’s and older people’s services respectively</i>	<i>Ext 4797 / 4753</i>
<i>Social Services</i>	<i>Physical and Sensory Disability Service (Social Services at the Link Centre)</i>	<i>0161 911 4799</i>
<i>Policy &amp; Funding Unit</i>	<i>Senior Policy Officer (Voluntary Organisations)</i>	<i>Ext 4918</i>
<i>Policy &amp; Partnerships</i>	<i>Principal Officer (Race Equalities)</i>	<i>Ext 4919</i>
<i>Environment &amp; Regeneration</i>	<i>Environmental Strategy Manager</i>	<i>Ext 4475</i>
<i>Regeneration Unit</i>	<i>Glodwick SRB Team</i>	<i>Ext 3616 / 3621</i>
<i>Regeneration Unit</i>	<i>The following regeneration schemes all undertake consultation / development work with the communities in the scheme area:</i>	<i>0161 624 6289</i>
	<i>Welfare to Work Plus Scheme</i>	
	<i>Oldham Route to Renaissance Scheme (SRB 6) – Fitton Hill, Limeside, Failsworth, Werneth and South Chadderton</i>	
	<i>New Deal for Communities</i>	

### **Step 3: What do we already know?**

*Avoid reinventing the wheel! Start with what you already know.*

Doing some background research will help you to determine if any consultation has previously been carried out and what action has been taken as a consequence. This is important in building credibility and in demonstrating a commitment to listening.

Are you clear about:

- what needs to be asked?;
- what has already been decided? (e.g. because of political, practical or financial constraints);

(need to be clear on what is open to change and what is not)

- what consultation has already happened in this area or is ongoing with the target groups and what are the outcomes?; and
- what conflicts (or alliances) may arise?

Existing research data may be able to give you a profile of the area or group, e.g. census, surveys by your own and other departments or agencies. Your first port of call should be the Oldham Area Consultation Events (Oldham ACE) database, which contains details of past, current and future consultation exercises undertaken by Oldham Council and our partners. (The Oldham ACE database is online at <http://intranet.oldham.gov.uk/ace> and accessible through the OMBC Website ([www.oldham.gov.uk](http://www.oldham.gov.uk)). Alternatively, contact your Department's Research Section, your Departmental representative on the Corporate Consultation Network or the Performance Team in the Chief Executive's Department, who should all be able to help. You may be able to find out about research projects elsewhere which could inform your decision.

You should also consider whether any of the consultation / research undertaken via the Council's citizens' panel *The Oldham Way – Listening to Oldham* is relevant for your purposes. This can be achieved by a call or visit to the Performance Team or to your Departmental representative on the Corporate Consultation Network.

Other consultation is likely to have been undertaken in the past and will be going on at present. You can talk to staff involved in past or current consultation about what issues are facing local people, what groups there are, key contacts, etc. However, do not be tempted to rely too heavily on consultation findings that are more than 2 years

old.

You could talk to front-line staff who work in the area about the issues and contacts they have identified. (Refer to the list given under ‘Who do I need to involve?’).

There are a number of standing committees or ongoing consultation methods that are used corporately or departmentally that may also be useful. Some examples of these include:

- Area Committees;
- The ALMO (Arms Length Management Organisation) Local Boards;
- Tenant groups;
- The Consumer Forum (Trading Standards);
- The Youth Forum;
- Friends of Parks groups;
- The Environmental Forum; and
- DCGs (Departmental Consultative Groups) – for staff consultation only

You can also use professional networks, e.g. Institute of Housing, the National Institute for Social Work and the Improvement and Development Agency to find out if other local authorities and agencies have undertaken similar initiatives and what their experience has been.

**Step 4: When does consultation need to be undertaken and how long will you need to do it?**

What will determine your time scale? Possible answers might be:

- statutory requirements;
- a report to Committee;
- funding application deadline;
- a need to co-ordinate / feed into other initiatives; and
- an Area Committee or other cycle;
- other?

*Quite often the deadlines set for consultation are unrealistic. You need to find out if there is any flexibility and argue for extra time if you think it is needed.*

Consultees need to be given a reasonable amount of time to respond to the consultation process – this means actively considering how long the target group would realistically need to deliberate or discuss a topic, to complete a survey or to respond formally to a written document etc. Remember:

- The more complex the issues being debated, the more likely it is that people will need more time to respond
- Lay-people may need more background information than professionals;
- A usual response period for a survey is two weeks;
- A central Government guideline suggests that complex or substantial written consultation documents should have an automatic response period of 12 weeks; and
- In face to face group consultation it can be beneficial to run several sessions allowing time for deliberation in between.

There are essentially 3 stages to any piece of consultation:

**Planning** e.g. researching what has been done before, identifying a budget, writing questionnaires, developing a topic guide, issuing press releases / invitations, targeting any relevant groups, writing briefing materials for participants, booking rooms and refreshments etc

**Implementation** e.g. mailing the questionnaires, facilitating workshops / discussion groups, recording what people say etc

**Analysis** e.g. data entry (in the case of questionnaires), writing up discussions and commentary, weighting responses, analysing responses by variables such as age, ethnicity, gender and so on, forming a view about what the key issues are, synthesising different aspects of the consultation, writing up findings thematically etc

Of these 3 stages, it is more common to underestimate the amount of time needed to undertake a full and accurate analysis of the responses. Some Best Value Reviews have been criticised for their poor analysis of consultation, which could have led to missed opportunities. **It is therefore very important to allow sufficient time to properly examine responses to achieve the full benefits of the consultation process**, especially if your analysis is done manually.

It generally follows that the more responses you have to analyse, the longer you should allow, but some qualitative consultation techniques can also be surprisingly time-consuming to write up and analyse.

**Step 5: What resources (skills, staff, money and venues etc.) are available?**

- for the consultation?
- to feedback to participants?
- for possible outcomes?

**Step 6: How ?**

It is only when you have clear and satisfactory answers to the previous questions that you can ask yourself how you should carry out the consultation. Section 2 gives guidance on choosing appropriate tools and techniques. Usually you will find that you need to use a combination of techniques. Some tools on their own can only be considered as ingredients of a broader consultation exercise. For instance, a “planning weekend” can help a group to map out their vision, but this may then need to be checked out with a wider audience using other techniques.

*The tools and techniques selected will be determined by the purpose of the consultation and the characteristics of the intended consultees.*

**Step 7: Did it work?**

It is important to evaluate how effective the consultation was. You can ask the following questions to begin with:

Objectives	Were they clear? Were they understood? Were any limits to the scope of the consultation made explicit? e.g restricted options between which choices could be made.
Choice of Technique	Was it appropriate for the objectives? Was it appropriate in terms of qualitative/quantitative, sample size, and sample selection?

Process	<p>Was a clear timetable set and kept to?</p> <p>Was sufficient time allowed for responses?</p> <p>Was the information and explanation easily accessible?</p>
Cost	<p>What was the cost of staff time?</p> <p>What was the cost of bought in goods and services?</p> <p>What other costs were there?</p>
Benefits	<p>Has the action led to some change - policy, service delivery, influencing other agencies or other action?</p> <p>What was the estimated impact over what time period - number of people affected, How can the benefit be gauged?</p>
Citizens' View	<p>Has the evaluation considered both the viewpoint of those consulted and of citizens more widely? Did you make it clear to all stakeholders that both viewpoints would be taken into account?</p>

It is becoming increasingly important for us to be able to demonstrate in a more systematic way how consultation is providing a force for change. Local Government is under considerable ongoing scrutiny in this respect. However, it is just as important to be able to provide evidence of this to the Oldham community as well as external commentators and observers of Oldham Council's performance.

The framework below suggests the types of areas against which consultation exercises might be usefully evaluated and departments are encouraged to use it on a voluntary basis, either partially or in its entirety, to help them to do so. Social Services began piloting the indicators in May 2002 to assess their collection and use.

## Citizen participation evaluation framework

CORPORATE EVALUATION		EVALUATION OF INDIVIDUAL CONSULTATION EXERCISES - local performance indicators		
CONTEXT EVALUATION				
Target / objective	Method of measurement	Indicator	Type	Method of measurement
Developing a broad and in depth understanding of the social, political and environmental factors that help and hinder consultation locally (will also consider the relative power-base of different groups)	Through active research within the community and the organisation	As a result of consultation, the no of participants reporting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Enjoyment at involvement</li> <li>▪ Increased confidence</li> <li>▪ Enhanced ability to express their views</li> <li>▪ Feeling that they have learned something</li> </ul>	Outcome	Measured via participant evaluation forms
Ongoing identification of the contextual factors that present the greatest barriers to successful community involvement (& take forward action to overcome them)	Through active research within the community and the organisation			

<b>ANNUAL CORPORATE TARGETS (RELATING TO STRATEGIC NEEDS)</b>				
<b>Target / objective</b>	<b>Method of measurement</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Method of measurement</b>
Aim to increase the numbers of people from ethnic minority communities participating in consultation by X%	Interrogate ACE Local PIs	No of participants from ethnic minority communities	Process	Gather through equal opps monitoring form – expressed as a whole number and as a % of all participants
Aim to increase the numbers of people participating in consultation who are considered to be at risk of social exclusion or are ‘hard to reach’ by X%	Interrogate ACE Local PIs	No of participants with a physical, sensory or learning disability or known mental health problem	Process	Gather through equal opps monitoring form – expressed as a whole number and as a % of all participants
		No of individuals who were directly enabled by the organisers to participate through the provision of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ child care support</li> <li>▪ audio / visual aids</li> <li>▪ language aids</li> <li>▪ travelling expenses</li> <li>▪ wheelchair access</li> </ul>	Process	Whole numbers (if individuals receive more than one type of support, count only the primary support they receive)
		No of individuals receiving more than one type of support	Process	Whole numbers
Aim to increase the number of consultation events that are planned		Was the consultation a joint effort of two or more agencies	Process	YES / NO

and delivered by X%				
Aim to increase the level of feedback that is provided to participants in consultation and the wider public by X%	Review of systems in place to provide feedback, test through citizens' panel	Method of feedback used	Process	Open response
Aim to increase the responsiveness of the Authority to consultation findings by X%	Interrogate ACE Local PIs	Total number of <i>discrete</i> actions by the service in <i>direct</i> response to consultation findings	Outcome	Whole number
		Nos of those actions that resulted in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ a change of strategy / strategic direction</li> <li>▪ an amended policy or procedure</li> <li>▪ an explicit change to departmental or service based aims and objectives</li> <li>▪ altered service delivery</li> <li>▪ a change to the design of the service</li> </ul>	Outcome	Whole numbers – should add up to total above
Aim to increase the reporting of consultation findings to a decision-making body by X%	Local PI	Decision-making body that the consultation findings were reported to	Outcome	Open response

PARTICIPATIVE LOCAL DEMOCRACY				
Target / objective	Method of measurement	Indicator	Type	Method of measurement
Increase the ease with which people perceive it is possible to introduce their views and concerns into the democratic decision-making processes of the Authority by X%	Tested and tracked via citizens' panel			
Increase awareness of the methods through which local people can raise their views and concerns (by X%?)	Measured by range and frequency of proactive activities – tested via the citizens' panel			
Increase in the use of participatory consultation techniques by X%	Interrogate ACE Local PIs	No of <i>different</i> methods used that are participatory i.e. focus / discussion group, interviews, users panels, case study, citizens' jury, Planning for Real	Process	Whole number (multiples of the same method still count as one)
		No of actions that were jointly arrived at e.g. service users and providers decide together	Outcome	Open response

**Step 8: Did I let people know what happened?**

Planning what will happen as a result of the views expressed by people should not be an afterthought. You will need to plan from the beginning how these views will be brought together, assessed and presented to the people who have contributed to your consultation and to the people who make the decisions.

Feedback helps build a long-term relationship with the public and makes participants aware that their contribution has been worthwhile and will be used to change and improve the situation.

Citizens' panel research has shown that the most likely reason that people do not respond to consultation is that:

- people do not feel it will make a difference - 84% of respondents said this!

Other common reasons for not getting involved are:

- people are not sure how their views are taken into account;
- lack of time;
- people do not hear about the results of consultation; and
- people do not feel their views are important

Importantly, the least cited reasons for not getting involved were:

- that the topic was not appealing
- that the topic was not relevant

So it seems that people are largely interested in the issues we consult them on but are not encouraged to respond or get involved because they feel that nothing will happen as a result.

- **The first vital step to overcome this perception is to always tell consultees about the results of the consultation exercise,**
- **The second vital step to overcome this perception is to ensure that the views of the community are explicitly and openly considered by the decision-makers, and**

- **The third vital step is to publicise to consultees and the wider community what the outcomes will be – what has changed, how and why.**

## TOP TIPS

The aim of this Guide is to raise the quality of consultation throughout the Council. The purpose of the following section is to present a few practical tips that have been drawn up from personal experiences, that may help you when you are conducting consultation events yourself.

- *Do not underestimate how long it takes to plan a consultation event.* Allow plenty of time to plan and prepare for any consultation event that you undertake.
- *Understand your brief.* Ensure you and your Senior Managers understand the purpose of the consultation exercise. Indeed, is it really consultation? It may instead be to *inform* local people of your policies and services or to give local people an opportunity to *participate in decision making* on a particular topic or local issue? Neither of these is “consultation”. Consultation is about enabling people to contribute ideas and information which may influence decisions made by the Council. It is vital to be absolutely clear about the purpose from the outset.
- *Do not make false promises.* When you are aware of your brief and the boundaries and purpose of the consultation, you should be honest with the people you consult as to how far their involvement can influence change. You may want to explore with the group you are consulting what they feel their involvement should achieve. This will enable you to hear for yourself their perceptions of the purpose of the event and to dispel any misconceptions.
- *Allow people time to “off load”.* If you are consulting face-to-face with the community, be it in a meeting or Focus Group, you may be consulting with a group of people who have previously been marginalised and your consultation session may be the first time they have had an opportunity to express their views. Be prepared to deal with anger and conflict. Listen to what people say, take the issues on board. At an appropriate moment stop the discussion and try and get the group to consider resolving some of the difficulties they have expressed by coming up with solutions themselves.
- The public may not even want to talk about the issue you have come to address. They may bring up issues which do not relate to your own field of expertise. Again, you need to allow them time to voice their concerns. You should note these concerns, take names and addresses and refer the matter to the appropriate department on the following working day. Use a flip chart to record these issues so that people can see that you are not fobbing them off. Once people see them recorded they are more comfortable about moving on.

- *Feedback.* Once you have consulted by whatever method, you must let the people who have taken part know what has happened in response to them giving up their time to express their views and comments. If the feedback involves going back to people with a response that they could be unhappy or angry about, you may wish to consider having a Senior Manager / Officer or Elected Member with you so that your position as the facilitator of the consultation process, is not compromised.

## **SECTION 2 - CHOOSING APPROPRIATE TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES**

A consultation exercise is often prompted by, “*We want a public meeting*”. This is because public meetings have traditionally been used as the main way of consulting people. Whilst public meetings still do have a place, they are often not the most effective technique. People may not be aware of other techniques so you may not have to take their request literally, but instead regard it as the expression of a general wish to be consulted.

**There is no one way to consult.** Every situation will be different and you will need to think through and plan what will suit your present need. This section helps you to think about your approach to consultation and the techniques for getting the process started. Although it talks about what tools and techniques might suit a particular need, you might need to adopt more than one technique, together or in sequence. For example, group discussions can be a useful way of identifying important issues on which to focus survey questions. These might then be put to a wider target group by means of a questionnaire.

To help you choose the most appropriate techniques, here are some key questions to ask yourself, bearing in mind your answers to **Why?** Once you have thought it through, you may have to go back to the people who asked to be consulted and say, “Having a public meeting is going to be ineffective because.....but here are suggestions to achieve what you want”.

## ***Key Questions***

### ***Do you need the response you get to be representative?***

- Methods:
- The citizens' panel – *'The Oldham Way – Listening to Oldham'*
  - Sample surveys
  - Representative focus groups

### ***Is the issue you need to discuss complex?***

- Methods:
- Focus groups
  - Surveys
  - Regular meetings
  - Travelling Exhibitions
  - Planning weekends
  - Residents' Panels
  - Representative forum

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

- Methods:
- Newsletter with response form or free phone line
  - Radio interview and phone-in
  - Press releases
  - Surveys (door to door)
  - Citizens' panel (for a representative group)
  - Targeted postal surveys accompanied by a marketing campaign

### ***Do you need to include groups which are often excluded?***

- Methods:
- Focus groups
  - Meetings with existing groups
  - Involve other departments
  - Involve community organisations
  - Surveys

It is important that consultation methods are inclusive. When making your choice on which appropriate method to use, you must consider who you are excluding by selecting that method. Traditional forms of public consultations such as public meetings are unlikely to engage marginalised or under-represented groups. *Specific consideration needs to be given to the inclusion of Black and minority ethnic communities; women, gay and lesbian and bisexual people; older people; children and young people; people living with HIV/AIDS; and people with sensory / learning / physical disabilities or mental health problems.*



***Do you need to review/improve your service or test out new approaches?***

- Methods:
- Focus groups
  - Learning from front line staff
  - User/non user surveys
  - User/non user focus groups
  - Suggestion schemes
  - Quality circles
  - Stakeholder meetings
  - User/non user panels
  - Watchdog groups
  - Staff feedback
  - Effective complaints systems

***Will there be conflicts of interest?***

- Methods:
- Stakeholder meetings
  - Mediation

***Do you need to have a regular dialogue with the same people?***

- Methods:
- Newsletter with feedback
  - Forum
  - “Learning from Service Users”
  - Regular meetings

***Do you need to provide information?***

- Methods:
- Newsletters
  - Exhibitions
  - Leaflets
  - Press Releases
  - Radio ‘advertisements’/interviews

*Whatever we do, we will be successful only if we do it well. Make sure that you have a clear brief, that you have done your research and that you have skills, experience and appropriate resources.*

## SECTION 3 - TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES FACTSHEETS

The broad elements of your consultation framework are now in place, including the particular approach and techniques you are going to use.

Fact sheets and accompanying case studies where appropriate on different techniques have been produced and a selection is listed below.

Remember, different techniques suit different audiences. Also, the availability of resources, the time scale and the purpose of consultation will all influence the techniques you finally use. You may also feel more confident using some techniques than others.

Bear in mind that whilst you can guard against some of the common pitfalls of consultation by good planning and preparation, ultimately **consultation is about people and the relationships between them**. It is important therefore to focus on building good relationships with participants in the consultation process, whatever techniques you ultimately use.

- Fact sheets
1. Surveys
  2. Focus Groups
  3. Planning For Real
  4. Drama Workshops
  5. Planning Weekends
  6. Mediation
  7. Quality Circles
  8. Newsletters
  9. Partnerships
  10. Voluntary Learning Networks
  11. Public Meetings
  12. Learning From Complaints
  13. Ideas Boxes
  14. Hot Lines
  15. Citizens' Juries
  16. Residents' Panels
  17. Using Information Communication Technology (ICT)
  18. Use of the Press, Television and Radio

## FACT SHEET 1

## SURVEYS

### What

At its simplest a survey is a means of gathering information through asking questions in a structured way. Depending on the type of information being collected questionnaires are usually made up of three different types of question:

1. Establishing facts or behaviour e.g. 'Have you ever....?', 'When did you last....?', 'Why did you....?', 'In the future will you....?'
2. Attitudes or opinions i.e. basic beliefs/perceptions people have about a given subject or service e.g. 'Do you agree or disagree....?', 'What do you think of....?', 'Why do you....?', 'How do you rate....?'
3. Classification - this provides information that can be used to group respondents to see how their responses differ e.g. Gender, Age, Race/Ethnicity, Work Status, etc.

A survey may be:

**Structured** (all the questions are defined in advance) - when 50+ interviews are required. Used where it is possible to closely predict the range of possible responses. These may be carried out by post, face-to-face or telephone.

**Semi-structured** (a broad framework of questions is defined in advance, but others can be introduced, in addition, in response to answers received) - where responses to certain questions are likely to be complex and require some exploration. Normally only used in face-to-face or telephone surveys.

**Unstructured** (only the most basic questions are defined in advance) - for in-depth interviewing and focus group discussions. This type of survey allows probing and searching where there is a considerable degree of uncertainty about the issues before the interview.

The purposes of a survey are to collect and record

comparable data and to ask questions in the same way so as to minimise bias. A less structured approach has the advantage of providing consultees with greater opportunity to express themselves (e.g. to identify their own concerns) but raises difficulties of analysis and of potential bias introduced by the interviewer.

**When**

A survey is rarely carried out in isolation. It is a means of plugging important gaps following desk or background research. It can provide; ‘new’ information to help solve a problem or make a decision, information that is representative, and indicators against which future performance may be measured.

Used correctly a survey is a valuable research tool which will help you deal with a wide range of decisions. It can for example give you an informed insight into problems experienced by service users, suggest areas for improvement and/or future needs and measure levels of awareness and perceptions of services.

**Resources**

Designing a questionnaire survey is a difficult task. All too often questions are phrased so that they are ambiguous, assume technical knowledge, or lead consultees to particular answers. Clear instructions on how to complete and return the questionnaire will be necessary in all but the simplest cases. You will therefore need people who have skills in questionnaire design, interviewing, inputting, analysing and interpreting data (research produced is only as good as its weakest link). These may be available in-house. If not they will either need to be bought in and/or staff training included in your development plan. Remember - if you intend to use an external agency you will need to go through the proper contracting procedures. The commercial costs of the simplest survey start from about £500.

Always “road test” a draft version of the survey before you issue it to the public. Try it on your colleagues, preferably ones who are not familiar with the subject.

**Potential Audience**

It is unusual to be in a position where the necessary resources are available to conduct a survey of the entire population from whom you want to collect information. It is more often the case that you will attempt to collect information from a group of people (a sample) who are representative of the population you are interested in. As such, it is important, before embarking upon a survey to give some thought to the composition of this population. For example, if information on the housing needs of white 16 year old working class males was required then clearly it is not necessary to consider designing a sample to include young women, black or minority ethnic people, people of different social classes or different ages. On the other hand if information was needed on the housing needs of young adults then careful thought would be required about how to design a sample to include members of all the above groups, and possibly more, to ensure as far as possible that representative information is collected.

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## **Case Study: Oldham Social Survey 1995:**

### **Survey design**

The 1995 Social Survey was conducted in conjunction with a Borough-wide House Condition Survey. The sample design was determined by the requirements of the surveys. The following were the key requirements for the House Condition and Social Survey:

- comparison between local authority and private sector housing;
- comparison of private sector housing within different parts of the Borough;
- sample of at least 10% of all private sector dwellings within Coppice, Freehold and Glodwick to enable assessment of whether to declare part of this area as a housing Renewal Area; and
- comparisons between Pakistani and Bangladeshi households and those of other ethnic groups.

To achieve this the Borough was divided into seven areas which had previously been used in assessing local housing need in the Borough. The sample was drawn from the list of dwellings in the Council Tax Register in mid February 1995. Institutional addresses, such as residential care homes, were excluded from the list. The method of sampling was one of “disproportionate stratification”. To achieve this the list of addresses was subdivided into nine separate strata as follows:

- eight strata containing private sector and housing association properties in the eight areas; and
- one stratum containing local authority housing in all parts of the Borough.

Within each stratum addresses were ordered by electoral polling district and, within these, by address. The sample was then drawn systematically within each stratum (for example, by taking every 25th address beginning with a number drawn randomly). This methodology helps ensure that the sample is geographically representative within each stratum. By using polling districts as ‘building blocks’ for the sample it also means that the results of the survey can be reanalysed for different geographical areas - such as wards or sector boundaries for different services - rather than sticking rigidly to the eight survey areas.

## **Survey methodology**

The questionnaire used to collect information for the Social Survey was first piloted to test its usability. It was then left at the selected household, by the surveyor who was conducting the House Condition Survey, along with a pre-paid reply envelope. Households who had not returned the questionnaire after several weeks were sent a reminder by post and those who still did not respond were visited by a social survey interviewer. In this way, the response to the Social Survey was improved beyond that normally associated with a straightforward postal survey.

## **Survey response**

Of the 4725 dwellings selected for the survey, 231 were vacant and 28 were void. Out of the remaining 4,466 occupied residencies a total of 3005 Social Survey questionnaires were returned. This represents an overall response rate of 67% of occupied addresses.

However response rates varied between survey areas, by tenure and ethnic group. There was a higher rate of response from public sector tenants than residents in private sector dwellings. Within the private sector there was a higher rate of response from Pakistani and Bangladeshi households than other ethnic groups.

To compensate for this a set of weights was devised. These take account of both differences in the proportion of households included in the sample and the differential rates of response. When the results of the Social Survey are grossed up using these weights, they produce figures which are representative of all residents in private households in the Borough. Sample errors associated with the Survey were also calculated.

*For further information contact:  
Research Team, Chief Executive's Policy Unit, Ext 5186*

## **FACT SHEET 2**

## **FOCUS GROUPS**

### **What**

At their simplest, focus groups are group discussions usually involving between 6-12 people. They are focused in two ways by:

- topic - restricted to a limited number of topics; and
- membership - people who have an experience in common and are able to talk about the topic(s) to be discussed.

For example, a focus group could be comprised of tenants discussing their experiences of housing services, or of users of a particular health service.

Focus groups are run by a Facilitator and Co-facilitator. The discussions are often audio or video tape recorded. If it is intended to do this, you should obtain the agreement of group members in advance.

### **When**

Focus groups can have a variety of uses:

- to gather information other methods cannot reach;
- to complement surveys and other consultation techniques;
- to understand 'why' group participants hold particular views or have responded in this way;
- to gauge reaction to proposed changes;
- to stimulate dialogue; and
- as preliminary work in preparation for a survey - to identify relevant topics and terminology and to 'fine tune' questionnaires.

### **Resources**

Staff will need skills in working with groups, group dynamics and understanding the life cycle of groups as well as active listening skills. If you are going to analyse the data yourself, you will need to consider how you are going to do this. Alternatively, you might be involving others in analysing the information, for example an external consultant, in which case you need to involve them from the outset.

You will need to ensure that venues for focus groups are accessible, consider whether childcare and carers allowances are to be available and transport provided. Ideally, the focus group should be conducted in the participants' first language.

**Potential Audience** Focus groups usually aim to seek information from a cross section, rather than a statistically representative sample, of the 'community' from whom information is required. Nonetheless it is still important to consider how this community may vary by sex, ethnicity, age etc. and how a focus group could be composed to reflect this. If information is, for example, required from a group of council tenants then a group composed of all white male tenants is clearly only going to provide information on white male council tenant opinion. So the group should be composed as far as is possible to include a cross section of council tenants. Alternatively, if money and resources permit, a number of different groups could be organised each composed of a different sub-section within the particular community. Thus, one group could consist of elderly people; another composed of young people or black people and so on. In this way a cross section of the community is accessed to provide the information required.

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## **Case Study: Friends Initiative**

Public Parks and Open Spaces are public property held in trust by the Council. They are part of our heritage for future generations to enjoy.

Although many people in Oldham take great pride in their parks, many concerns have been expressed. As a result, the Parks and Countryside Section produced the Urban Parks Strategy, which is a vision for the future and determines the way forward for their future management.

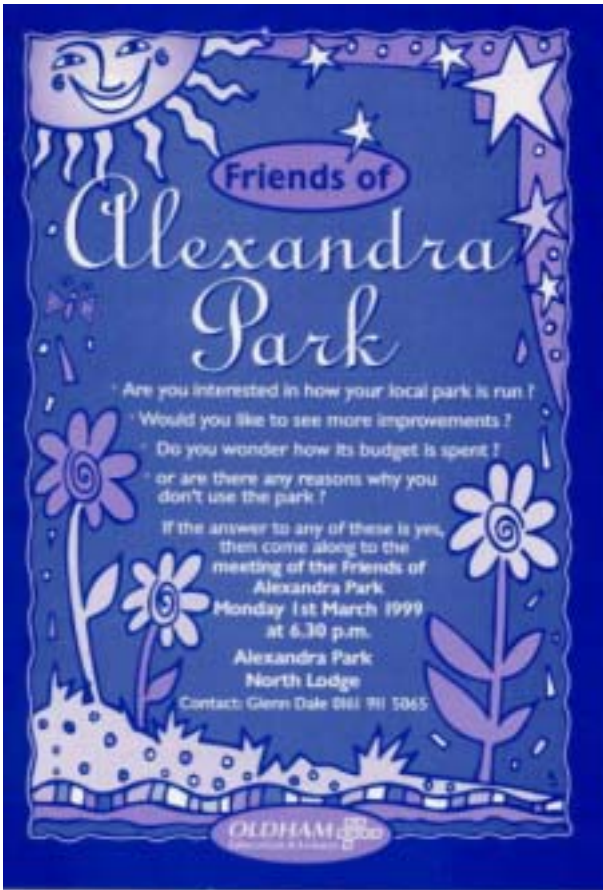
One of the many objectives in the strategy is to identify ways in which the people of Oldham may become more involved in the management and protection of their local park. With this in mind 'The Friends Groups' began.

The Council has 12 'Friends Groups' in operation. These groups established from 1995, have already proven local communities working together with the Council and police can make significant improvements to their parks.

The Parks and Countryside Section holds three meetings each year, one in spring, summer and autumn. We see the 'Friends Groups' as something the community should "own". At several of the groups, residents are now taking an active role in the protection and development of their parks. It is hoped in due course that all the 'Friends Groups' will follow with the appointments of Chair, Secretary and Treasurer.

Of the 12 'Friends Groups' Higher Crompton, Lees, Stoneleigh and Chadderton Hall Park are now organising and running their own events in the park with the assistance of officers from the Parks and Countryside Section. With respect to High Crompton the 'Friends Group' have now registered themselves as a Charity and are currently bidding for external funding to develop a new pavilion in the park.

*For further information contact: Glenn Dale, Education and Leisure Services, Ext: 5065*



**Friends of Alexandra Park**

- Are you interested in how your local park is run?
- Would you like to see more improvements?
- Do you wonder how its budget is spent?
- or are there any reasons why you don't use the park?

If the answer to any of these is yes, then come along to the meeting of the Friends of Alexandra Park  
**Monday 1st March 1999**  
 at 6.30 p.m.  
**Alexandra Park**  
**North Lodge**  
 Contact: Glenn Dale 0161 911 5065

**OLDHAM**  
 Education & Leisure



**150**  
 YEARS  
 Oldham's Parks

**Join the Celebrations**

Oldham's Parks are set to join the Borough's 150th Anniversary celebrations. Sconeleigh Park "Bliss" 5th June 1999, Lime-side Park Tulip Sunday 2nd May 1999, each event will provide a full range of entertainment and attractions for all the family.

**Other Park Events for 1999**

Date	Venue	Event
29th May-6th June	Churchill playing fields Greenfield	Saddleworth Festival of the Arts
6th June 99	King George V Park Uppermill	Vintage Vehicle Gala
June 99	Chuckle-ton Hall Park	Funday
12th June	Fowderton Park	Local History Exhibition
26th - 27th June	Werneth Park	Werneth Folk Festival
16th July	Clayton playing fields	Band's Festival
4th July	Rayton Park	Rayton Carnival
1st August	Churchill playing field Greenfield	Pony Club Area Dressage
1st August	Werneth Park	Out of the City Pop Festival
8th August	Werneth Park	Caribbean Day
	Oldham Edge Kite Festival	(To be confirmed)
	Lees Park Funday	(To be confirmed)

**OLDHAM**  
 Education & Leisure

## **FACT SHEET 3**

## **PLANNING FOR REAL**

- What** ‘Planning for Real’ allows the local community to express their needs and aspirations for improvement to their neighbourhood through the use of a physical model of their area. By placing pictorial “option cards” on the model suggestions can be prioritised.
- When** ‘Planning for Real’ is applicable where a physical change in the local community is envisaged (e.g. the redevelopment of a housing estate) or where local problems have been identified (e.g. a rundown shopping centre).
- Resources** The cost of a ‘Planning for Real’ exercise can vary according to who is involved. However, the cost of employing external consultants to plan and prepare for a ‘Planning for Real’ Open Day, including building by models and then analysing results, could be between £4,000-£8,000 for example. However, this may be cheaper than putting right any problems which emerge once the project is underway.
- Potential Audience** Planning for Real events should take place within the community which is being consulted. Because they do not require people to “speak up” or to have literacy skills they should be suitable for most of the community. The venue should be accessible. As with all events, to increase the potential audience issues of access to the venue, the timing of the event and child-minding or sitting services should be considered. Planning for Real events usually take place within an Open Day of events, which should be as appealing to as many people within the community as possible.

## **Case Study: Planning for Real at Limehurst Village - January/March 1999**

The following information was obtained from a report by the Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation and the Council's Housing Department published following the consultation.

In January 1999, the Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation was commissioned by the Council to undertake a community consultation exercise in Limehurst Village. The aims of the consultation were to:

- build on the results of consultation previously carried out;
- establish the needs and aspirations of the community in respect of the wider regeneration of the estate; and
- consult on (a) the facilities to be provided in a Neighbourhood Centre, (b) environmental works (c) issues of community safety and (d) possible highway improvements.

### **THE PROCESS**

#### **Raising Awareness**

Much of the publicity for the Planning for Real event had been arranged before the Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation had been commissioned. This was done largely by word of mouth and through posters and leaflets which outlined the event that would take place over two "open days." A preliminary questionnaire was issued to every estate household to provide an indication of the main issues prior to the formal consultation.

#### **Contact Work**

An initial meeting to discuss the Planning for Real consultation was held on 11<sup>th</sup> January 1999 to enlist the support of key residents and officers, organise suitable venues and dates for the two open days. It was also decided to hold two training sessions for key officers and residents to enable them to facilitate at the planned events. These were subsequently arranged for 18<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> January.

The central contact throughout the project was the Limehurst Regeneration Steering Group, consisting of Limehurst Village Trust Residents Association Members, Limehurst Village Trust Committee Members and local Councillors. Other agencies including Barnardos, West Pennine Health Authority, Greater Manchester Police and the local church worked alongside the Steering Group,

## **Model Making**

A large three dimensional model ( 12ft by 8ft ) was made by children from the Holy Family R.C. Primary and Limehurst County Primary schools. The children were then invited to the open days to put forward their own views.

## **Community Consultation: The Planning for Real Exercise**

Two dates were arranged in an attempt to make the event as accessible as possible for all members of the community. The open days were held in Limehurst Village Tenants Hall on Monday 1<sup>st</sup> February and Monday 8<sup>th</sup> February from 1.00pm to 7.00 pm. The second event was extended to 8.00pm to give young people on the estate the opportunity to participate.

Refreshments, face painting and a creche were provided at both events and pinboard questionnaires were displayed to ascertain where people lived, their age and gender.

## **Results**

The event enabled local residents to “ have their say “ about their estate and to put forward their ideas on the model.

250 households attended and 153 people completed the pinboard questionnaire.

Four main areas of concern were evident:

- Crime and Community Safety e.g problems with car theft; drug and alcohol abuse;
- Environment e.g need for vandal proof and dog free areas in the open spaces;
- Traffic e.g need to reduce traffic speed on Whitebank Road; and
- Leisure e.g. need for more provision of facilities, including football pitches and playgrounds for all ages.

Residents also identified a range of issues relating to:

- Community Facilities;
- Housing;
- Health; and
- Work/training.

As part of the pinboard survey, residents were asked whether they would like a Neighbourhood Centre on the estate. The majority of residents were in favour of this and made suggestions on how the centre should be used e.g. health centre, location for a wide range of activities

People also supported the idea of a Millennium Green in the village ( planned for February 2000 )

### **Follow up Meetings**

Two further meetings were held on 15<sup>th</sup> February (7-9.00pm) and 17<sup>th</sup> February (1-3.00pm) at the Limehurst Village Tenants Hall, to which everyone who had attended the planning for real events was invited. They were given the opportunity to prioritise their suggestions using three broad measures: NOW, SOON, LATER.

Once these results had been collated a final “Action Planning“ afternoon was held on Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> February (1.00-3.00pm) in the Tenants Hall to which all estate residents were invited. Residents were asked to decide, in relation to each of the priorities, “what action was needed” and “who should carry out the required action“.

This was done on the basis of five headings:

- Local people can do it on their own;
- Local people can do it on their own with a little money;
- Local people can do it on their own with a little money and expert advice;
- Local people can do it jointly with the Council;
- Local people cannot do it but can tell the Council (or another agency) what needs to be done; and
- Local people cannot do it - but who can ?

## **FACT SHEET 4    DRAMA WORKSHOPS**

**What**                      Drama workshops use drama and arts techniques in small group situations. Individuals are recruited to the workshops who have an experience in common or share a community ‘identity’; for example, a group of lone mothers, people with learning disabilities, a service or management team or local residents from a housing estate.

**When**                      Drama workshops can be used alone or in combination with other consultation techniques. The workshops are intended primarily to benefit the participants within the group, to enable empowerment and change. The workshops enable participants to:

- build self confidence;
- develop or learn new skills; and
- identify and work out solutions to problems.

**Resources**                Staff must be trained in using arts and drama techniques in group-work settings. It is important that you do not use techniques that you have not personally experienced yourself.

A range of art materials are needed:

A large enough room to accommodate people comfortably. You will need to make sure the venue is fully accessible. If you intend to work with the group over some weeks, it would be a good idea to have a venue where you can store the materials and any work produced. Transport, child caring and carers allowance costs may need to be budgeted for. You might also need Personal Assistants or Facilitators on hand when working with groups of disabled people.

## **FACT SHEET 5**

## **PLANNING WEEKENDS**

### **What**

Residential weekends at which groups develop a mission statement, define objectives and prepare a clear plan of action to them.

This can be achieved through small group discussions which feedback to the whole group on factors that need to be taken into account when establishing a work programme. This can be followed by exercises to demonstrate the process of decision making. This can include group work on presenting a case, negotiating effectively, preparation and evaluation.

Finally, the whole group draws up and agrees on the action plan.

### **When**

When community groups are first established or when they are “running out of steam”.

### **Resources**

Staff time at weekend for locally-based staff and support staff, e.g. specialist officers/senior managers and administration.

Preparation time of officers - minimum of a day.

Cost of residential accommodation/conference facilities - varies depending on numbers £1,500-£2,000. This can be drastically reduced if it is non-residential.

Childcare and caring costs, transport, interpreters will need to be considered.

### **Potential Audience**

Due to Planning Weekends targeting existing or newly formed community groups this method of consultation may be an appropriate technique for reaching marginalised or under-represented groups. When planning such an event, issues around access, venue, washing facilities, areas for prayer and other factors associated with the specific community group will have to be considered.

## **FACT SHEET 6**

## **MEDIATION**

### **What**

Mediation refers to the process whereby two or more parties in conflict reach an understanding and agree a way forward. The parties in conflict must agree to come together to discuss the problem and this is usually done under the guidance of an independent person or body which then helps the conflicting parties to identify the best way forward.

### **When**

Mediation can be a useful tool for community problem solving. There may be an issue of dispute arising from the needs and expectations of different sections of the one community. An example might be how the behaviour of young people on street corners affects elderly people. In this instance mediation might bring together representatives of young people and elderly people so that each group can begin to understand the needs and concerns of the other group. There may be an issue arising from the lack of a particular service or amenity such as poor play facilities in the local park. In this instance Mediation might bring together local parents and the local council to reach a solution.

### **Resources**

You will need to identify someone who has effective Mediation skills and experience. Mediators are usually volunteers, but it may be necessary to pay them a small fee. They are usually trained through special courses controlled or scrutinised by national mediation organisations.

You will also need to consider the cost of venues, distributing information and in some cases, interpreting and translation, transport and childcare allowances.

### **Potential Audience**

The very nature of this consultation method/technique is to only consult with the two or more parties involved in the conflict/dispute, therefore you will need to exclude those people or sections of the community who are not relevant. However, those parties taking part may need support with interpretation of any literature, translations during the session. It is important that the venue provides an environment which is perceived as neutral and non threatening by the conflicting parties.

## FACT SHEET 7

## QUALITY CIRCLES

### What

Quality circles are a formal arrangement for productive and participative problem-solving. They can be limited to officers/staff only or used as a consultation technique by **including service users**.

Quality circles involve small groups which meet on a regular basis to analyse problems which affect them, and the services they receive. They encourage a continuous, co-operative study process, enabling participants to uncover and to solve problems related to the service or area of work.

The number of people within a quality circle differs depending on the aims and the make-up of the group. Usually, the number is between four and ten people. The circle investigates the causes of problems and analyses solutions. Once a satisfactory solution has been found, the quality circle presents its findings to a Management Group which, provided it is in agreement, will give the go ahead to proceed with the recommended solution.

Quality circles are usually supported by a Facilitator, Leader and Deputy Leader. Membership of the circle is voluntary but participants are expected to have some knowledge or experience of the service as a service user or service provider.

### When

Quality circles are usually established to address quality issues within specific service settings. They can be used to:

- improve the quality of service;
- increase quality awareness amongst staff;
- encourage staff participation in decision making;
- encourage users and carers participation;
- to improve staff awareness of users and carers needs;
- to encourage greater communication between users, staff and managers; and
- to improve staff morale.

**Resources**

Quality circles normally take place in work/office hours but evening or weekend sessions may need to be considered in order to meet the needs of service users. This will need to be recognised by managers. Facilitators, Leaders and Deputy Leaders will need training in quality circle techniques. Venues for quality circle meetings will need to be accessible and, depending on the needs of the service users, consideration given to childcare and carers allowances. Interpreters, including signers, might also need to be provided.

**Potential Audience**

To be effective as a form of consultation, Quality Circles should not be limited to employees but should also include other groups such as service users and community groups who have a keen interest in the subjects being discussed. Consideration should be given to the use of venues such as community centres to enable ease of access by all. The provision of interpreters, signers and carers should also be considered.

## **FACT SHEET 8**

## **NEWSLETTERS**

### **What**

Newsletters can be a very effective way of providing information and inviting feedback. They can range from the very simple two sides of A4 to a magazine style.

An attractively designed newsletter should entice people to read it! Too much information can sometimes make the reader 'switch off', so newsletters should generally use shorter articles and (where possible) also use eye-catching pictures. A picture can say a thousand words!

It should also be laid out so that people can 'dip' into it, rather than be forced to read all the way through one, long continuous document. It goes almost without saying, but the most valuable information in the world is no good unless people actually read it.

You will need to ensure that the newsletter states clearly by whom it has been produced together with an address. You will want to use the Council logo and there is guidance on how it should be used.

If it is a community newsletter to which anyone is invited to contribute, you may want to have an editorial policy which is clear about how you will select articles and why you might reject them (e.g. they are contrary to the Council's equal opportunities policy).

### **When**

They can be used to keep a large number of people informed and invite them to provide their views or participate in other ways. It is particularly useful if the initiative is going to go on for a long time. It is important to be clear about the distinction between informing and consulting. Are you encouraging people to contribute their views - either through the newsletter itself or by other means?

### **Resources**

You will need access to a personal computer for the simplest newsletter. For a more sophisticated newsletter you will need to have a desktop publishing programme and someone with the skills to use it. Professional newsletters are usually produced on an

AppleMac computer. Photos, drawings and logos can be inserted into a newsletter using a scanner or imported from other programs.

Cost is affected not only by the number of pages, but also by the number of different colours used in the newsletter. Full colour printing would be very expensive but it is possible to achieve a satisfying result by using different shades of the same colour. This means that it is possible to produce a good quality newsletter at a reasonable price.

There is often a lack of understanding on the time and complexity of producing a newsletter. It is infinitely harder to amend a newsletter than it is to amend a normal typists' letter. Once a page has been designed, it can be very time consuming to alter the layout. Any late requests for major amendments are also difficult to incorporate.

**Potential Audience**

As said before, the most valuable information in the world is no good unless people actually read it. The written word can be a barrier for many people. Therefore, when contemplating using a newsletter considering the potential audience is particularly important. To increase the potential audience, it may be necessary to consider the format of the document. Would a large print or audio version be appropriate? It may also be necessary to consider language. Could the newsletter be translated into community languages? Remember, that translating written information into a community language does not necessarily mean that it will be accessible to all speakers of that language.



## Case Study: Newsletters

Newsletters are a popular and efficient way to provide information to a large number of people. They can entertain as well as inform and can range from a simple, double-sided document to a full magazine.

Newsletters are not only useful for informing people but can be an essential part of any consultation process. With a newsletter you can publicise events, ask people for contributions or fully explain the process that you are engaged in.

One thing to be aware of with newsletters is that many people may consider it as junk mail. Far too much information is pushed through peoples letterboxes and into peoples in-trays. You need to make sure that your publication will be valued.

There are a number of issues that you need to consider when putting together a newsletter.

### 1. Who is your audience?

You need to be very clear about who you are producing information for as this will determine how you present any information. Some questions you will need to ask are:

- **How much do people know about the project?** - Do you need to explain issues from the basics or can you take it as read that your reader has a baseline knowledge. This can be a difficult balancing act. Aim too high and you will go above some readers heads but aim too low and they may feel patronised.
- **Do people want the information?** - Do not assume that people want to read your newsletter. We can be snowed under with leaflets, newsletters and other documents and tend only to read those that we value. If you produce a newsletter just for the sake of producing one you may devalue other, later publications.
- **When is the best time to contact them?** - Be aware of when other publications are being produced. Does your newsletter clash with them or complement them?
- **How do people expect the information to be delivered?** - Have newsletters been produced before?

## 2. How are you going to present the information?

- **Breaking big issues down into smaller chunks** - People like to skip through a newsletter looking at the issues which interest them. Long articles may make people worry that they have to devote a long time to reading something that may not end up as relevant to them.
- **Use pictures and space to break up the text** - Try not to make your newsletter hard work to understand. As well as illustrating the text, pictures can make your newsletter less heavy going and easier to read. Try not to fill all available space with text and pictures though. Use space to frame the information and break up the text into reasonable chunks.
- **Give your newsletter a clear identity** - Your readers will need to know who is producing the newsletter and what it is about. To compete with other newsletters and flyers landing through peoples letterboxes you need to make an immediate impact. A dull, faceless newsletter will be put to one side.

## 3. How often are you going to produce the newsletter?

- **Do you need to produce a regular newsletter?** - if you are just preparing a one-off news-sheet then make sure that your readers understand this.
- **Can you sustain a regular newsletter?** - You might have a lot to say in your first newsletter but can you keep up that level. It is better to set yourself a standard that you can keep, rather than start to produce an all-singing, all-dancing publication that soon falters because you are struggling to find enough material to fill it.


## 4. How are you going to produce the newsletter?

Producing a newsletter takes more effort and time than simply filling a page with typing. Central Printing can provide a newsletter design service but you may find this a little expensive if you just want to produce simple, informal newsletters.

Most modern word-processing packages are capable of producing newsletters and some have ready made templates within which you can work. If you are going to be producing newsletters more regularly you might want to acquire a Desk Top Publishing (DTP) package. These are specifically designed for the production of a range of publications such as newsletters.

As a final tip, look at magazines, newspapers and other publications as examples of how to produce a professional document.

*For further information contact: Tenant Participation Unit, First Choice  
Homes Oldham ext. 3587*



## **Case Study: Oldham Against Crime Newsletter**

In 1998, the Government made it a duty on local Authorities and the Police to work together to reduce the levels of crime and disorder locally. In April 1999, having undertaken an audit of problems, and consultation, the Oldham Crime and Disorder Partnership produced a three year Strategy to reduce the levels of crime and disorder locally. A requirement of the Crime and Disorder Act was that local residents, community groups, businesses and others are consulted on an ongoing basis in relation to each strategy. The production of a newsletter was one way of informing the local community about the strategy.

### **Oldham Against Crime News**

*Target audience* - The initial newsletter was targeted at mainstream residents who might have little knowledge on crime and disorder, including young people aged 11plus, the elderly and those involved in businesses. The newsletter was also later translated into Bangla and Urdu to reach Oldham's main ethnic minority communities.

*Production* - Existing photographs were sought, material undertook several drafts and final design work commenced on 14,000 copies of the 4 page newsletter.

To attract attention:

Page 1 consisted only of the brand image;  
page 2 gave an introduction and key aims;  
page 3 outlined priorities for action and  
page 4 included action taking place as well as a tear-off strip questionnaire.

With the exception of the 'open events', the newsletters were to be targeted.

*Distribution* - Newsletters were distributed through a series of staffed open events where the free prize draw questionnaire was pushed together with other promotional items. Distribution also took place through a wide range of mailing lists, including Police and Community Consultative Groups, Homewatch, Voluntary Sector, Oldham Chamber of Commerce and other networks and forums. Presentations to local groups and through libraries, public buildings, community centres, secondary schools, supermarkets, exhibitions and conferences were undertaken. A copy of the newsletter was placed on the Council and GM Police websites.

*Feedback received* - The general response was very positive and it is clear that the newsletter was generally eye catching. To date there has been a good response from the questionnaire, with, as expected, particularly high returns coming from the supermarket events and schools. Translation and redesign of the newsletter took far longer than anticipated, but it was regarded as essential

Lessons learnt:

- Ensure that you have a clear brief of style, target audience and how it will be distributed;
- Allow enough time for drafts, inclusion of photos, design time, printing, and particularly translation if necessary;
- Is it really a newsletter or a means of summarising existing information more succinctly?; and
- Ensure that it is designed in a way which makes it easy to read or to pick key information from.

**Main Benefit of a newsletter is that it is a good means of getting information to a mainstream audience. Main drawback is that it is not an effective means of informing hard to reach groups. Your budget will dictate the quality, format, style and ability to translate a newsletter.**

*For further information contact: Melanie Ormesher, Police Community Consultation Worker, Chief Executive's Department, Ext 5194*

## FACT SHEET 9

## PARTNERSHIPS

### What

Partnerships can be formal or informal arrangements for working together towards a shared goal or purpose.

They can be a valuable way of getting closer to local communities, public bodies and service partners such as voluntary organisations. **A real partnership gives all parties an equal say in the decisions that affect them.** The better and closer the partnership, the harder it will be to assess the relative value of each other's contribution. In this situation it is vital that all parties feel they are getting more from the relationship than would have been the case if they had acted separately.

**The type of partnership described above involves a shift in the location of decision making (i.e. the Council is sharing its decision making role with others). It therefore goes well beyond "consultation" in terms of the degree of involvement which people are being offered. It is essential that before any action is taken you check out whether this type of approach is appropriate. In some cases it may be in conflict with the statutory responsibilities of the Council.**

When establishing a partnership, some form of agreement is necessary, if only to clarify:

- roles, responsibilities and boundaries;
- how the views of all key stakeholders will be obtained from the outset; and
- what will be done to build trust, through formal meetings and information exchange.

### When

Informal partnerships seem to work best when the project is specific and can be achieved quickly. Where the task is complex and involves a wide variety of interested parties, then it may be necessary to formalise the partnership through a constitutional framework such as a trust or a simple contractual agreement.

**Resources**

The tasks of establishing and maintaining a partnership can involve a very significant commitment of staff time. There is also a need to consider costs of venues, ensuring staff have skills, transport, childcare and caring allowances, guest speakers, researchers, and administrative support.

**Potential Audience**

Anyone could potentially be involved in a Partnership. To ensure 'equality' all partners need to be equally informed, therefore written materials need to be in the appropriate languages, styles and formats. Interpreters may have to be used and be given information prior to meetings, to ensure that their own knowledge of the topics under discussion are understood in order to make an appropriate translation. Members of the Partnership who are not Officers, may need further support outside the meeting so that they can take on board new issues and topics that they may not be totally familiar with. The environment where the meetings or sessions take place should be agreeable and meet the needs of all the people involved in the partnership. If these kinds of issues are not considered you may unintentionally exclude people and therefore the notion of working in 'partnership' will be compromised.

*Useful contacts: Policy Unit Manager Ext.4189  
Regeneration Unit Manager Tel : 0161 633 2000*

*Useful references: "Take you Partners": Report of Hearing Exercise into  
Partnership Working (Local Government Association)  
Contact Doug Jones Tel:020 78843037*

*Effective partnerships for managers and board members: A guide  
to working in cross-sectoral regeneration partnerships.  
Civic Trust, 15 Carlton House Terrace, London, SW1Y 5AW.  
Tel: 020 7930 0914 Price £15*

## **FACT SHEET 10**

## **VOLUNTARY LEARNING NETWORKS**

### **What**

A Voluntary Learning Network consists of people who establish formal links with each other because they have a shared concern or concerns. However, it is not a fixed set of relationships and may develop and change over time. People join because they feel they can learn and receive mutual support. It adapts itself not by top management dictate but in response to the concerns it is trying to address.

A basic example would be your own personal network of people to whom you turn to for advice and support. However, a network can also link staff providing a service to service users, non-users and other agencies to address the need to improve a service.

The links can be established through meetings, newsletters, seminars and other shared events and techniques such as planning for real exercises.

### **When**

Voluntary learning networks are useful when you want to build up support for an initiative or for change. By bringing like-minded people together you can identify issues for change and develop a momentum to encourage others to join with you.

### **Resources**

There will need to be a focal point for the network so that people wanting to join can contact someone. There also needs to be systems to enable the sharing of information. These can include mailing lists, newsletters, meetings, focus groups or seminars.

The basic resources are officer time, cost of duplicating information, postage, cost of venues and possibly speakers.

**Potential Audience** A clear understanding of the concepts of Voluntary Learning Networks should be given to all participating in the process. Access to resources should be made available to all, with access to the venue and timing of meetings being arranged at the convenience of the members. There should be advertising in community centres in different manners e.g. different languages or in Braille etc.

**What**

Public meetings are usually open to anyone who has an interest or 'stake' in the issue or topic under discussion or anyone who is likely to be affected by the proposals being considered: for example, the annual Health Authority meetings provide an opportunity for stakeholders (individuals, community groups, service users, voluntary and statutory agencies) to put forward views and comments on health priorities.

Public meetings can also be 'targeted' at specific sections of the community, for example disabled people and their organisations.

**When**

Public meetings have an important role in a strategy for communicating with the public. They are particularly useful when you want to share information with a wide range of people and clarify proposals under consideration. Public meetings can also be used to gain feedback and comments prior to making decisions.

However, on their own they should not be considered as effective consultation. Many people who have an interest in an issue cannot attend meetings and even if they do, they may feel too intimidated to speak.

**Resources**

You will need a budget to meet publicity costs for advertising and promoting the meetings using different media such as newsletters, leaflets, local radio, mailing lists etc., venue costs and a contact point for people to gain further information on the meetings. You will also need to think about how information will be made available to the audience; for example, whether or not you will provide written information, reports or handouts.

The meeting will need to be effectively chaired. Speakers need to be encouraged to keep to the issues which the meeting was intended to address. There is a danger that a few contributors will dominate the meeting, thereby preventing others from voicing their views. It is important to remember that a public meeting involves a very large investment of time by the attendees and that the organisers have a responsibility to manage the business of the meeting to ensure that it achieves its objectives.

You should ensure that the venue is physically accessible (e.g. loop systems, wheelchair access) and that adequate parking, including disabled parking, is available. The meetings should also be accessible in terms of signers and interpreters and consideration should be given to transport, carers allowance, child care costs, and feedback after the meeting.

**Potential Audience** Careful thought should be given to the potential audience for any public meeting. The aim of the meeting should be to maximise the attendance from this potential audience. Consideration should, therefore, be given to any factor that may affect attendance. For example, such factors may include:

- the time at which the meeting is held;
- the venue for the meeting;
- access to the venue;
- transport to and from the meeting;
- where and how the meeting is advertised; and
- communication during the meeting etc

Of course, prior knowledge of the potential audience such as, for example, how it differs by age, ethnic origin, sex, social class, disability etc. will help in evaluating these factors and planning your meeting.

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## **Case Study: Lees Road and Royton Bus Lanes**

### **Introduction**

The Environmental Services Committee at its meeting in June 1999 instructed that consultation be undertaken on bus priority schemes suggested for Lees Road, Salem and Oldham Road, Royton.

### **Consultation Procedure**

Questionnaires on these two suggested schemes were distributed to residents in the area, adjacent public buildings and shops and handed out on the bus services.

Plans were included within the consultation documents, with larger more detailed drawings being displayed in the public buildings.

A contact telephone number was given.

Previous experience of public meetings dominated by a few forceful people led to a reluctance to go down this route.

However, in the case of the Lees Road scheme, a few members of the public arranged a meeting in a local public house and asked that Members and Officers of the Council be present.

In order to ensure that the relevant facts were disseminated at a public meeting this invitation was accepted.

In Royton a different approach was taken. Here a staffed exhibition of the proposals was organised by the Council, particularly to discuss the landscaping elements of the proposals.

### **Public Meeting Arrangements**

Due to the circumstances, the location and timing of the meetings in Lees could not be of the Council's choosing and publicity was informal. Public houses were chosen as convenient locations, although lighting, acoustics and display space were poor.

The meetings were timed for Sunday lunch-time and Thursday afternoon and evening.

Attendance in Lees was good, with perhaps 50 people attending, whilst Royton had an attendance of about 20 people.

The meeting in Lees was dominated by a handful of people. There was little opportunity for officers to explain the details of the suggested scheme until the end of the meeting. At a public exhibition there would have been more opportunity for discussion between officers and individual local people.

Following the consultations, petitions were raised against both the Lees and Royton scheme. Proposals were subsequently submitted to the Council.

### **Outcome**

The consultation exercise, including details on the public meeting and petitions, was reported to Committee.

After the Committee decision, all consultees and petitioners were informed of the decision, including what changes had been made to the original proposals as a result of the consultation exercise.

The petition in Royton may lead to further public meetings.

### **Lessons to be Learnt**

For the proper running of a public meeting a **skilled chairperson, a set agenda/timescales** is essential to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to give their views, and to act as a facilitator to encourage views to be presented.

A public meeting can be stressful and demanding in situations where proposals are provoking vociferous opposition. More than one officer may need to attend to respond to all the questions.

The proceedings need to be accurately recorded.

The public exhibition allowed focused and constructive dialogue to take place.

*For further information contact: David Slater, Technical Services  
Department Ext 4359*

**What**

An effective complaints system enables the service providers to identify the need for changes to the service on a continual basis. However, a complaints system can be effective in this way only if there is a commitment to complaints providing the organisation with an opportunity to learn. There must also be a commitment to the principle that the customer has a right to complain.

Research shows that when things go wrong most people want an apology, things to be put right if possible and action to prevent a recurrence of the problem. Listening to individual complaints and alleviating any bad experiences by doing so is part of an effective system.

Of course, not every complaint is justified, but it is essential that there are effective procedures for investigating them and that responses to them are not defensive. This should include an opportunity for the complaint to be discussed with the relevant decision makers (i.e. the people who can change the service) and a guarantee of feedback within a reasonable time to the person complaining.

The procedure can also include arranging for the complaint to be referred to a third party who can act as mediator and facilitator.

In addition, the pattern of complaints should be monitored to identify how the service needs to be improved.

Within an overall complaints system it is possible to involve users in identifying the changes that need to happen to improve the service. In particular it is possible to do this in a way that shows users that they and their views are valued. For example, the case study shows how a complaint can be referred to a third party who can act as mediator and facilitator.

**When** This should be an on-going process which is regularly reviewed to make sure it is working well and to identify the benefits.

An effective complaints system enables users to have an input into service improvement when they see a problem rather than having to wait until the service provider decides to consult.

It might be particularly beneficial to bring in a third party when a user has had a particularly bad experience in using a service. As well as helping to improve the service, the process can help to heal any distress that has been caused.

**Resources** Staff time is needed to raise awareness of the benefits of an effective complaints system, to process the complaint and to respond to the complainant.

There may be a resource requirement in changing the service in response to a complaint but as the case study shows, resolving a complaint may save money. You may need to ensure that staff have skills for mediating and facilitating complaints.

**Potential Audience** The ability for people to make a complaint by different means e.g. verbally, in writing or via E-mail should be made available together with the provision of speakers of other languages who can discuss the complaints. If it is necessary for person to person contact, the possibility of visits being made to the complainant where access/transport may prove difficult should be considered.

**This fact sheet presents general information on the benefits i.e. principles of complaints procedures.**

**Readers should however be aware that complaints procedures are already in place and their use is encouraged. Complaints about Social Services care are channelled through a statutorily required procedure. The same is true for appeals against planning decisions and complaints against schools. All other complaints should be handled by the Councils Corporate Complaints Procedure.**

**Refer in the first instance to your departments Complaints Officer.**

## **FACT SHEET 13    IDEAS BOX**

- What**                      An ideas box is a suggestion box for encouraging customers to tell us how we can improve our services.
- When**                     This form of consultation should only be used to complement other more structured forms of consultation, such as surveys or focus groups.
- How**                        The following is a suggested approach to using ideas boxes:
1. Ideas boxes should be strategically placed at accessible points across the borough.
  2. Boxes should be clearly labelled to encourage customers to contribute, and invite personal contact if they wish.
  3. The suggestions and comments should be looked at regularly by a nominated officer to:
    - note the suggestions;
    - pass it on to the appropriate person or team for action or comment;
    - acknowledge the customer's suggestion;
    - monitor progress; and
    - ensure that the customer is aware of the outcome.
  4. Offer some incentive to the customer for contributing suggestions.
  5. Provide a form for the customer to fill in so that they do not have to start with a blank sheet of paper. A sample form is shown below, which can be adapted to meet your own needs:

**Name**

**Address**

**Tel No.**

**Date:**

**How do you think we can improve the service to our customers?**

**Would you like to discuss this with a member of staff? Yes/No**

**Any other comments/suggestions?**

**This suggestion will be passed to XXX within 7 days. You will receive an acknowledgement of your suggestion within XXX days.**

## **Customers who contact by phone or in writing**

All customers should be given the opportunity to make suggestions for service improvements. The above form is really aimed at people visiting council offices. The form can easily be adapted to accommodate all customers.

Customers who contact the authority by phone could be advised of the scheme, and sent an ideas form to complete.

Customers who write in could be sent a form automatically when they receive a reply to their letter.

### **Advantages of using ideas boxes:**

- Can be made available to everyone who uses the service;
- Often encourage spontaneous immediate responses to the service received;
- Concerns expressed tend to be genuine, rather than 'trying to think of something because they have been asked a question';
- Additional way of encouraging continuous customer involvement, to complement other forms of consultation.

### **Disadvantages of using ideas boxes:**

- Not a representative sample;
- Many suggestions will not be possible (too costly, impractical, legislative restrictions);
- May be used as a 'sounding box' by some customers who do not have a suggestion, but simply a complaint';
- Incentives may result in a small financial cost.

## **Feedback**

All customers should receive an acknowledgement of their idea, together with an approximate time by which they will receive more information or confirmation of the outcome. It may be that a suggestion is pursued, but doing so involves committee approval and maybe large initial costs, and therefore there may be a considerable delay before implementation. The customer should be made aware of this.

If the idea is considered impractical, too costly or restricted by legislation, the customer should also receive feedback on this. The customer should know that the authority has taken the idea seriously.

## **FACT SHEET 14    HOT LINES**

### **What**

These are telephone lines set up for a specific purpose. They are useful as a consultation technique to complement other more structured methods. They can be set up in a number of ways, depending on what you want to achieve. Some examples are listed below:

- A tape-recorded message for general views or comments;
- A tape-recorded set of questions with time for the customer to answer; and
- A member of staff answering the phone and asking the customer a set of questions.

The results can then be collated with other consultation results and included in the action plans resulting from the findings.

### **Advertising**

Hotlines should be carefully advertised in such a manner that all customers are aware of them. Simply putting an advert in the local press will not be sufficient; one-off advertising campaigns are not enough to ensure that customers are constantly reminded that the hotline is available for their use. Campaigns to advertise the hotlines should be run regularly throughout the time they are available. Please seek advice from the Publicity and Marketing Section of the Chief Executive's Department.

### **Examples of advertising methods include:**

- Posters in libraries, local supermarkets and other public places;
- Leaflets with Council Tax bills and Benefit forms;
- Local press releases;
- Local radio advertisement; and
- Posting on the Internet.

### **Advantages of hot lines**

- Quick and simple to set up;
- Most households and businesses use phones, so access is wide;
- Able to reach all areas of the community; and
- Results can complement other forms of consultation.

### **Disadvantage of hot lines**

- Continuous advertising is needed;
- Tends to be little take up, even though widely available;
- Results not representative of the whole community; and
- Will usually need to be part of a wider programme of consultation in order to provide a fuller picture of public attitudes.

## **FACT SHEET 15**

## **CITIZENS' JURIES**

<b>What</b>	<p>Citizens' juries normally consist of between 12 to 25 members of the public recruited as representatives of the community to deliberate about and make recommendations upon particular issues. They are not a research tool. They are set up by a commissioning body (in this case the Council). Since the jury is expected to give very in depth and thorough consideration to the issue, and to have considered a considerable volume of expert evidence, the commissioning body would normally attach considerable weight to its findings.</p>
<b>When</b>	<p>Juries are particularly useful as a means of exploring major complex issues. They are likely to sit for 4 or 5 days per issue. During this time they hear evidence, challenge experts, and deliberate. A new jury is assembled for each separate "case", so as to ensure that the membership is appropriate to the issue under consideration.</p> <p>They prepare a report to the Council on their deliberations and give recommendations for action.</p>
<b>How</b>	<p>To run a citizens' jury takes particular skills and expertise. It is recommended that you take professional advice or use an independent body with experience and skills in this area of work.</p>
<b>Potential Audience</b>	<p>The jury should be representative of the community to which the issue relates. As an example, a jury might be an appropriate way of considering the value of opening a "one-stop shop" as an access point in a remote part of the Borough. The jury should consist of a representative sample of people living and working in that area. Amongst the witnesses might be officers and users with experience of the operation of one stop shops in similar situations in other areas. All members of the jury should be able to relate to the issue in hand, as they would be affected directly or indirectly by the final outcome.</p>

The process for encouraging people to volunteer as potential jury members will depend upon the issue to be considered (e.g. is it local or Boroughwide), but might include:

- advertising in the local paper;
- contacting a local residents' committee;
- through a Citizens Advice Bureau (if it is a benefit related issue);
- door-to-door recruitment; and
- selection from the electoral roll.

It is important to ensure that jurors demonstrate real competence and ability to deal with decision-making dilemmas.

#### **Advantages of citizens' juries:**

- time is available for jurors to deliberate and consider the problem in depth;
- opportunity to question and scrutinise evidence of experts and key stakeholders;
- independent of the authority and other interested stakeholders;
- able to make an informed recommendation;
- brings 'fresh thinking' to a problem;
- jurors become well informed.

#### **Disadvantages of citizens' juries:**

- Juries can be costly, often costing many thousands of pounds. For example, the Institute for Public Research (IPR) recommends that jurors are paid a flat fee (of say £50 per day);
- Organisation of meetings is time consuming;
- Arranging speakers and a good chair for each session is important and costly;
- Only appropriate for major developments and major policy issues;

## **Feedback**

Again it is important that the jury members are made aware of the final outcome and thanked for the work they have undertaken. The jury's contribution to the final decision should be recognised.

## **FACT SHEET 16**

## **RESIDENTS' PANELS**

<b>What</b>	<p>This is a representative sample of local residents. It is normally made up of between 200 - 2,500 local residents to provide a good representative sample of the local community. The views of the panel are normally discovered through questionnaires.</p>
<b>When</b>	<p>Residents' panels can be asked to give feedback on work undertaken by the Council, to regularly review services, or to express opinions on proposals for the future.</p> <p>Residents' panels can be a very effective consultation method if they are properly run and maintained. They are, however, costly to administer and time consuming to maintain. It is recommended that they are maintained and run corporately, rather than by individual services. One approach is to compile a "long list" of people willing to serve, and ask each person to indicate broad topics of interest to them. This allows individual services to enlist panel members who have previously expressed a particular interest in the topic which they wish to explore. The existence of a panel can be extremely useful as an aid to Best Value consultation.</p>
<b>How</b>	<p>There are a number of approaches to recruiting a panel. You may wish to undertake interviews in person or by phone of a sample of residents of the Borough, or send questionnaires to either a sample or, indeed, every household in the Borough. Sending recruitment questionnaires to every household may, in fact, be the easiest and least time-consuming option.</p>
<b>Potential Audience</b>	<p>It is crucial to get a good representative sample of local residents to ensure that the responses you receive are true to the population of the Borough. You may wish to publicise the fact that you are planning to recruit a panel to encourage positive replies. You will need to get information, say, from the census to check whether the panel members reflect the age, sex, ethnicity etc. of the Borough's residents as a whole.</p>

When planning to set up your panel, you should allow for a 'drop-out' rate. You may wish to have a reserve list to help maintain the response rate if a number of people decide they no longer wish to be included.

If you decide to send a recruitment questionnaire to a random sample by post, the sampling must be done using a recognised sampling technique to ensure that the sample is randomly selected. One example of this is a systematic random sample, where every 10<sup>th</sup> name from a set of records that are the most accurate available is selected.

When you send out your recruitment questionnaire, it is important to send a covering letter or leaflet inviting people to participate and explaining what a citizens' panel is.



## **Case Study: Residents' Panels - Oldham 200**

### **1. Background to Oldham 200**

The Oldham 200 Project adapts the “Research Panel” model of consultation to ascertain the views of local people via questionnaires and focus groups. A Research Panel is a “scientific sample” of people from the community. Once recruited, panel members are usually consulted by questionnaires, but they may be brought together at times for discussion of issues.

Officers within the Social Services Department began to develop the project in 1997. Two questionnaires have been completed by panel members. The results have been analysed and reports prepared.

The funding available for the project is £5,000 per annum, therefore only a panel of 200 people can be maintained. In Bradford Council a similar Research Panel has been set up comprising 2,000 local people at an annual cost of £25,000 per annum.

Oldham 200 builds on the good practice of ‘joint working’ between Social Services, Health Care Agencies, departments within the Council and the Voluntary Sector, where each agency commissions questions within each questionnaire and works in partnership on the same consultation exercise.

The lead Officer for the Project is the Joint Policy and Planning Co-ordinator based within Social Services.

### **2. Setting up a Research Panel**

People are selected to the Oldham 200 Research Panel from names and addresses on the Council Tax Register. Officers from the Council Tax Section were asked to select a random sample of names and addresses of local residents from across the Borough. For our Panel of 200, we originally contacted 2,000 people, as we worked on a 10% response rate. We sent people information on the Project via a leaflet and requested that they complete a recruitment questionnaire which had been enclosed.

A Freepost Service was set up for people to return questionnaires. Envelopes were printed with our Freepost address on and a logo for the Project designed and used in all the literature we sent out.

Once the recruitment questionnaires were returned, coded and analysed, our Research Panel was selected.

### **3. Questionnaires**

Each agency involved in the questionnaire commissions 5/6 questions, via a commissioning form. We encourage agencies to submit fairly “closed” questions that require just a tick box response. Once all questions are finalised, the questionnaire is compiled and piloted.

The questionnaire is then sent to panel members as with the recruitment questionnaire, a deadline of 2 weeks is given for completion and return. After 2 weeks the people who have not returned their questionnaire are sent a reminder.

In order to address translation issues, an offer of assistance in completing the questionnaire is given by the Oldham NHS Trust Ethnic Health Team. The more personal approach in offering translation was considered more effective than just the questionnaire being produced in other languages.

### **4. Analysis**

The Research and Development Officers within Social Services are responsible for overseeing the Project’s co-ordination and analysis of the research information. The completed questionnaires are coded, inputted onto the computer and then analysed. Following the analysis a report on the methodology and the main findings is put together.

### **5. The Findings**

Once the report is printed it is distributed to all the agencies involved. Those agencies that directly commissioned questions are asked to formally respond to the findings. Their responses are then fed back to the Panel via an Oldham 200 Newsletter.

### **6. Maintenance of the Panel**

In order to maintain the numbers of people on the Panel between each new questionnaire being devised and distributed, smaller recruitment exercises are undertaken.

## **7. Limitations of the Project**

This form of consultation does take time in planning and production of questionnaires and reports. Representation on the Oldham 200 Panel from the ethnic minority communities is 9%, somewhat lower than their proportion of the Borough's population. This method of consultation therefore, may not be the most appropriate way of consulting with ethnic minority communities.

*For further information contact :  
Julia DeLoughry; Health Partnership Manager,  
Social Services Department Tel:0161 911 4806*

## FACT SHEET 17 USING INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

### What

The revolution in ICT has resulted in many public organisations changing the ways in which they function and communicate with their citizens. It is estimated that around 95% of households have a telephone and along with new ICT developments such as the cellular phone and the internet the ordinary citizen can now access diverse information relatively inexpensively, conveniently and speedily. Consequently there is a growing section of the population that is ICT literate and increasingly demands accurate up-to-date information to be delivered via this medium.

Local Authorities are responding to the demands of this electronic information age. Newcastle City Council is installing electronic information kiosks throughout the City Centre and outlying neighbourhoods. Information at the touch of a screen is available on a range of council and commercial services and activities. Over 75% of local authorities have developed websites.

### When and How

The following extracts, from the shortlisted entries to the Local Government Association website awards competition 1999, illustrate the various functions and potential of websites:-

*London Borough of Lewisham - <http://www.lewisham-visibledifference.org.uk>*  
interactive on-line site designed to invite dialogue on the environmental concerns of residents re litter, graffiti, abandoned vehicles, etc., including "before and after" photos to demonstrate subsequent Council action.

*Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council - <http://www.millennium.walsallgfl.org.uk>* "Windows on our World" Local Agenda 21 website, designed to involve all the borough's school age pupils in establishing a "Domesday record" of key aspects of Walsall's heritage and environment at the Millennium.

*Suffolk County Council - <http://www.suffolkcc.gov.uk> extensive information on democracy at work, including committee agendas, minutes and papers, "have your say now" on-line consultation area, virtual council chamber and popular "graffiti wall" for virtual debate and comments.*

In Oldham the council's website *<http://www.oldham.gov.uk>* has been established for over a year and with around 20,000 'visits' every week it is an information site of some consequence. The ongoing development of this site means that it must be considered as one means of communicating with Oldham's residents.

### **Potential Audience**

There is an important caveat to the use of ICT, in particularly the internet, as a means of consultation and communication – the majority of households in this country do not have access to a PC ( just over 1 in 5 households currently have access to a PC). Some of these will be households who cannot afford a PC and/or households containing elderly people. In effect this means that while ICT can be utilised as a means of communication – it must be complemented by other means which would not automatically exclude a section of the community.

However, it is likely that the proportion of households accessing the internet will rise considerably in the near future. This will be due to the rapid development of ICT technology, for example, it is now possible to get cable television with internet and e-mail facility, alongside initiatives aimed at increasing the number of low income households with access to PCs. It is, therefore, anticipated that it will become increasingly important as a means of communicating with citizens.

*Should you wish to consider placing information on Oldhams' website then please contact, in the first instance,  
Chris Andrews, Press and PR Officer, Ext 4708*

## FACT SHEET 18    COMMUNICATIONS    /    PUBLIC    RELATIONS CONSIDERATIONS

Communication is arguably the most important element of good and effective consultation. It is about:

- consulting the right grouping;
- being honest;
- being clear why the consultation is necessary;
- what is likely to result from the exercise;
- being clear in the language used with respondents - do we mean consultation or is it really information provision;
- being transparent about the processes that will be followed including feed-back consultees can expect for their efforts and subsequent evaluation.

The public's perception is that the Council only plays lip service to such a notion of consultation and that decisions are presented to them as a fait accompli (note public perception, reaction and criticism of and to the Bus Priority Lane schemes).

The Council's main priority in devising a Corporate Consultation Strategy must be to address the credibility factor where the public is concerned. This can be achieved by demonstrating greater transparency of our processes and intentions, by making information more available and accessible on an integrated and coordinated basis and keeping the public informed of follow-up decisions and actions. Crucial to this would be greater partnership working between departments, drawing on the most appropriate specialisms to deliver the most effective consultation package.

Existing media or channels available to the Council to aid and assist effective consultation are considerable. They include the Oldham Evening Chronicle, Oldham Advertiser, Manchester Evening News, Mossley and Saddleworth Reporter, Middleton Guardian, Rochdale Observer, Revolution FM, Radio Cavell, BBC GMR, Asian Sound, Asian News, Daily Jang, The Oldhamer, Central Issues, Oldham Chamber newsletter, Oldham worldwide web, Council meetings, Councillors' and MPs' surgeries, Council tenants newsletters and annual reports, Council Tax notifications, staff newsletters and pay packets, tenant associations and other user group forums and meetings, Friends of Oldham Park forums, recreation, arts and culture events, eg public exhibitions, libraries, GPs practices and area housing and social services offices and reception areas. Any integrated consultation exercise is likely to involve several of the media here listed and even possibly others which are not.

*For further information please contact, in the first instance, Chris Andrews,  
Press and PR Officer, Ext 4708*

**PLEASE NOTE THAT FURTHER EXAMPLES OF INNOVATIVE CONSULTATION AND CASE STUDIES WILL BE ADDED TO THE GUIDE ON AN ONGOING BASIS.**

**IF YOU HAVE ANY EXAMPLES THAT COULD BE SHARED, EITHER FROM YOUR OWN OR OTHER PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES, PLEASE CONTACT THE PERFORMANCE DIVISION OR YOUR CONSULTATION NETWORK REPRESENTATIVE.**

## SECTION 4 - SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION METHODS

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages	When used
Survey - face to face (e.g. door to door)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>statistically sound - control of respondents means it will be representative of the 'population' as a whole</li> <li>results easy to report back</li> <li>can compare with other surveys (both internal and external), previous findings and future benchmarks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>respondent cannot "interact" if questionnaire is rigidly structured</li> <li>little time for respondents to consider responses/deliberate or add their own thoughts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>when hard figures are needed - trends and benchmarks</li> <li>when issues are already known but need to be quantified</li> </ul>
Survey - telephone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>quick form of consulting residents - results back swiftly</li> <li>can target groups which are often excluded</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>can seem "distant" from respondents</li> <li>tightly structured questionnaires can constrain consultees responses</li> <li>will miss those without telephones - also cannot be used for certain special needs audiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>when quick consultation process needed</li> </ul>
Survey - postal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>cheap</li> <li>allows you to be seen to consult large numbers of people</li> <li>good for certain groups who are interested enough to respond to a questionnaire; also for sensitive/confidential subjects</li> <li>can target groups which are often excluded</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>often unrepresentative - certain groups more likely to respond</li> <li>tightly structured questionnaires can constrain consultees responses</li> <li>possibly poor response rates</li> <li>no control over who completes the questionnaire, or in which order questions are answered</li> <li>get produce scant or token responses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to demonstrate that you consult</li> <li>when little budget available</li> <li>for treatment of certain sensitive subjects</li> <li>where high level of interest anticipated</li> </ul>
<u>Group discussions</u> e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>focus groups</li> <li>quality circles</li> <li>voluntary</li> <li>learning networks</li> <li>stakeholder meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>enables people to express why, not just what</li> <li>discussion can follow the mood of the audience - not prescriptive</li> <li>in groups, respondents can use each other as springboards to generate new ideas</li> <li>useful for evaluating communications materials</li> <li>useful for in-depth analysis of how a</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>cannot be used to extrapolate results to whole population - not statistically reliable</li> <li>usually only meet for two hours</li> <li>more "vocal" people used to meetings may shout others down</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>for diagnostic research</li> <li>when you need to understand (reasons for attitudes/ behaviour) and generate new ideas</li> <li>before a quantity survey, to identify the issues to quantify</li> <li>after a quantity survey, to investigate any results that are unclear</li> </ul>

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages	When used
	<p>service is perceived</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• can help to include groups which are often excluded</li> <li>• may help address conflicts of interest</li> <li>• may be useful for complex issues</li> </ul>		
In-depth interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• in depth response - can probe to a greater extent</li> <li>• good for sensitive subjects where people may not respond to a structured questionnaire/group discussion</li> <li>• also good for people confident in one-to-one situations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• one person may be reluctant to “bare their soul” without backup</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• getting a “feel” for the issues</li> <li>• initial research for sensitive subjects among “senior” people</li> </ul>
Citizens’ Jury (small group of people meet for a period of days)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• enables participants to make an informed judgement</li> <li>• encourages active citizenship</li> <li>• empowers, involves, informs participants</li> <li>• dynamic interactive process (valuable for officers and politicians)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• small numbers of citizens are involved</li> <li>• can be difficult to get a truly representative group to give up the time</li> <li>• participants’ views may become unrepresentative of the community they are drawn from as a result of being “informed” about all the facts/issues</li> <li>• recommendations may not be higher quality than those elected Members would make with the same information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• when a problem needs informed public input</li> <li>• when there is a specific (relatively small scale) question to answer</li> <li>• when the will exists to action the Jury’s recommendations - whatever they recommend</li> </ul>
Citizens’ Workshops (small groups of people meet for one day)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cross-section of public work together for one day</li> <li>• encourages active citizenship</li> <li>• participants develop stronger, more relaxed working relationships than in a focus group - allows more in depth understanding of attitudes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• still qualitative with all its associated problems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• where the public’s input is needed over a day</li> <li>• less expensive than a jury but more in depth than a focus group</li> </ul>

<b>Method</b>	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>	<b>When used</b>
Citizens' Panel (large group recruited via self completion survey or face-to-face interview)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>once set up, a cost-effective resource for all types of consultation</li> <li>encourages active citizenship</li> <li>panel members may become "advocates" of the authority</li> <li>a tangible resource for building relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>panel members become "atypical" so tracking is not advisable over a long period</li> <li>panel members may often be self-selecting and unrepresentative without careful checking and weighting of results</li> <li>large amount of administration and maintenance involved</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>involvement without over-expense</li> <li>when different agencies want to work in partnership</li> <li>for encouraging citizenship</li> </ul>
Written word - letter/leaflet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>can go to all residents since relatively inexpensive</li> <li>can explain the Council's view and rationale for a certain position, but must also invite views</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>cannot control responses - they may not focus on the issue upon which you were seeking views</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to reach a wide audience whilst also ensuring that the information is clearly and consistently communicated</li> </ul>
Public meeting (Issue based - Borough wide)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>any citizen can attend</li> <li>forum for explanation and discussion</li> <li>gives publicity to the issue</li> <li>can generate new ideas</li> <li>provides opportunity for citizens to "have their say"</li> <li>provides opportunity for Members to publicly share their views</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>may only attract those affected by the issue</li> <li>activities or those used to public speaking may dominate discussion</li> <li>requires skilled chairing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>where the issue needs a public airing and publicity</li> <li>to explain the issue and encourage debate</li> <li>where no "data" is required</li> <li>to provide citizens with the opportunity to have a say</li> </ul>
Public meeting (Issue based - neighbourhood level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>involves, informs and empowers the local community</li> <li>good indicator of local feeling</li> <li>may provide new information and local knowledge concerning issue</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May be dominated by the most articulate or vocal</li> <li>Contributions may stray onto other issues - officers need to be prepared for this</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>when the issue requires local community involvement</li> </ul>
Public meeting (General - through local assemblies)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>will obtain views of local citizens as opposed to customers</li> <li>publicity and feedback mechanisms already in place</li> <li>costs of meetings accommodated by local assemblies budgets</li> <li>chairing of meeting already established</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>may not give the issue enough profile or time as one item on an agenda</li> </ul>	

<b>Method</b>	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>	<b>When used</b>
Exhibition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>displays/options can be clearly set out and presented all at once</li> <li>feedback forms/questionnaires can be filled in - cheap fieldwork</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>responses may be shaped by presentation of a limited range of options</li> <li>people who are unable to attend (due to timing or inaccessibility of the venue) will be excluded.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>when responses needed to visual display materials</li> <li>when there are specific options to present</li> </ul>
Planning for real	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>involves, empowers, informs respondents - sense of local ownership</li> <li>takes respondents through the physical planning process and enables them to visualise options</li> <li>many residents can take part - no upper limit</li> <li>catches the interest of those involved</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>takes a lot of planning, administration, time and resources!</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>when physical planning issues are to be explored</li> <li>when the involvement of the whole community is needed/desirable</li> <li>when the decision will be actioned/the will is there</li> </ul>
Results from previous consultation (internal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>cheap and (usually) quick way to get hands on data</li> <li>if already used, data has "credibility" attached to it</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>will only contain answers to question that was asked - possibly not the one you want to ask</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>when quick and cheap data is needed</li> <li>when you want to base your research on others' approaches</li> </ul>
External Data Sets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>gives external (national?) comparisons/benchmarks - where to aim for</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>again, may not ask the questions you want to answer</li> <li>not at local level unless breakdown can be obtained</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>as above</li> </ul>
Media e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>press release</li> <li>radio interview/ phone in</li> <li>TV report/interview</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>quick and responsive</li> <li>useful when need to "broadcast" information and give a large number of people an opportunity to respond</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>only goes to established audience - not universal/representative</li> <li>usually doesn't elicit a broadly based response</li> <li>media can put their own slant on a story</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>when the story needs to go out!</li> <li>when the emphasis is on information - will usually need to be used in conjunction with other consultation methods to produce a high level of response</li> </ul>

<b>Method</b>	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>	<b>When used</b>
<p>Less formal consultation views received by elected members</p> <p>via front line staff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• free-ranging</li> <li>• cost-effective</li> <li>• a relaxed structure can allow new ideas to emerge</li> <li>• taps into knowledge</li> <li>• values staff, builds commitment and involvement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• not statistically reliable</li> <li>• can lead to over statement of a particular point of view is possible - e.g due to concerted lobbying</li> <li>• less formality in terms of timescales and structure may that information is anecdotal and sporadic rather than systematic</li> <li>• scepticism if not “seen to act” on the information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to get a continuing “feel” of local opinion</li> <li>• to complement other processes</li> <li>• where there is strong contact between service users and staff</li> <li>• when there is a firm commitment to act on information provided as appropriate and feed back on this to staff.</li> </ul>
Conferences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reaches out to specific interest groups</li> <li>• captive audience</li> <li>• can get feedback through cost effective self completion questionnaire</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lowish response rates unless completed on site/given time/incentives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• when a specific defined audience is to be consulted</li> </ul>
Referenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• asking the whole of the population</li> <li>• comprehensive!</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• expensive - lots of administration</li> <li>• the wording of the question(s) is absolutely crucial. Trying to reduce complex issues to simple questions requiring YES/NO answers can be extremely difficult.</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• when crucial to ask the whole population of their views - very important issues, but ones with clear cut options!</li> </ul>

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