STOCKTON-ON-TEES
BOROUGH COUNCIL
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Consultation
A Tool Kit for Officers

Surveys and Focus Groups

Surveys & Focus Groups

Contents

Surveys & Focus Groups

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this Consultation Toolkit is to provide officers with a practical guide to help with consultation initiatives. The Toolkit examines issues to be considered when undertaking consultation exercises and considers in more detail two of the principal methods of consultation, specifically surveys and focus groups.

2. CONSULTATION IN STOCKTON-ON-TEES

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council is committed to effective consultation with residents, service users and all other interested parties, to ensure that they have the opportunity to be involved in the planning and prioritising of our services and are at the heart of our decision making processes.

The Authority's commitment to consultation is reflected in a number of key Corporate Strategies, namely:

- The Consultation Strategy
- The Concordat for Communication and Consultation with Members
- The Partnership Strategy for Local Councils

A ***Guide to Effective Consultation*** has also been produced and is widely available to Members and officers.

3. CORPORATE CO-ORDINATION OF CONSULTATION

The Policy and Performance Standards Unit (PPSU) undertake co-ordination of consultation initiatives throughout the Authority. PPSU produce an Annual Consultation Plan (updated monthly), which provides details of consultation initiatives currently underway within the Authority. The purpose of this Plan, (which is accessible via the Intranet), is to:

- Ensure that Members and officers are informed about forthcoming consultation events
- Avoid unnecessary duplication of time and resources by enabling consultation exercises to be combined where appropriate
- Assist officers to identify corporate resource implications

PPSU are also responsible for the effective operation of Stockton's Residents' Panel, (Viewpoint), which comprises over 1,000 residents and which is used regularly for consultation purposes. Additionally, PPSU offer practical guidance and support on all aspects of consultation, (including input into Best Value consultation exercises), and can advise on methodology, sampling, design of questionnaires etc.

4. THE ROLE OF MEMBERS

The representational and scrutiny role of Members is crucial to the consultation process in terms of their formal involvement in:

- Local community initiatives
- Community planning
- The Best Value process
- Performance Management

Equally, their role as community leaders gives Members a major input into the consultation process and Members will play a key role in many consultation initiatives by:

- Instigating consultation initiatives
- Providing feedback from their involvement in local groups, partnerships and Forums
- Utilising their unique relationship with residents

For copies of any of the documents detailed above or for advice on consultation please contact Policy and Performance Standards Unit on 393011, **e- mail PPSU@stockton.gov.uk**

5. PRINCIPLES OF CONSULTATION

There are a number of basic principles, which underpin public consultation exercises. Following these principles will help ensure that the most appropriate consultation technique is selected. This should result in the consultation exercise being a rewarding process for participants and ensure that subsequent decisions are informed by community views. The basic principles of consultation are:

- Remove barriers to involvement by ensuring the process is anti-discriminatory
- Involve people as early as possible in the process
- Clarify the nature of the consultation exercise
- Ensure that people have sufficient appropriate information to contribute to the consultation process

6. FIRST STEPS

Key Questions

Before beginning any form of consultation it is essential to consider the following key questions.

WHY CONSULT?

WHAT IS THE SUBJECT FOR CONSULTATION?

WHO IS TO BE CONSULTED?

WHAT IS THE TIME SCALE?

WHAT TRAINING AND SKILLS ARE REQUIRED?

HOW WILL THE PROJECT BE EVALUATED?

WHAT RESOURCES ARE REQUIRED?

WHAT WILL BE THE NEXT STEPS FOLLOWING CONSULTATION?

Why Consult?

What is the consultation exercise intended to achieve?

Reasons for consultation are likely to fall into three categories:

- **Information:** to provide information and opportunities for the public to gain an understanding of the Council's policies and priorities
- **Learning:** to listen and learn from the public
- **Involvement:** to provide the opportunity for the public to be actively involved in the decision making process

Deciding into which category a particular exercise falls is the first stage in identifying which consultation techniques are appropriate.

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What is the subject of the consultation?

- **Information:** what is the message to be conveyed?
- **Learning:** what is it that the authority wishes to learn from the consultation exercise?
- **Involvement:** what decision is being made / what issue is being explored?

Who is to be consulted?

- Who is to be consulted and what methods will be used to ensure the desired groups become involved?
- Is the consultation to be carried out with the 'general public' or will it be targeted at specific groups?
- Are there mechanisms to ensure 'non-joiners', (people who may be excluded i.e. through social disadvantage, race, disability), can participate?

What is the time scale?

- If the consultation exercise is being carried out to inform a particular decision, establish when the results are required and plan accordingly
- Ensure the project is planned well and keeps to the project plan. Build in time for 'surprises'. (For further information on project planning techniques contact Training Section on 393043).

What training and skills are required?

- What skills are needed?
- Is training required to enable the consultation to be carried out effectively?
- Is it appropriate to consider using outside assistance to ensure the project is completed effectively?

What resources are required?

- Have the costs of the exercise been realistically estimated- staff and other resources?
- Have appropriate resources been committed to the project?

Will the exercise be evaluated to ascertain whether the objectives of the project have been achieved?

- **Information:** are mechanisms in place to check that the target audience has been involved?
- **Learning:** what will happen to the contributions made by participants? Where appropriate, were contributions taken into account in the decision making processes?
- **Involvement:** do the people involved feel that progress has been made?

Next steps

Frequency – is the consultation a one-off exercise or will it be repeated in the future?

Feedback - has feedback been given to the participants, the staff involved directly in the project, staff affected directly or indirectly by the outcomes, Members and other relevant parties?

7 METHODS OF CONSULTATION

i) *Identifying consultees*

Prior to commencing any consultation exercise it is important to identify appropriate consultees. It may be worth getting together with colleagues to devise a list of everyone who could be consulted. This list can then be refined to meet the constraints of the consultation exercise (e.g. budget and time constraints).

The list may include:

- People who live in a particular neighbourhood or area (e.g. borough, ward, estate)
- Users of a particular service or facility
- Potential service users / non users
- A particular group of people e.g. council tenants, women, young people
- Various voluntary groups and organisations
- Parish and Town Councils
- Staff
- Trade Unions
- Other public service providers
- Partner organisations

ii) Methodology

When the purpose of the consultation exercise has been identified, the final choice of methodology will depend on a wide range of factors. For example, some techniques are more appropriate for large numbers of participants and others for smaller, more targeted groups. The judgement about fitness for purpose must be made after consideration of individual factors relative to the particular initiative. Some key consultation methods, and their strengths and weaknesses are detailed below.

METHOD	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Advisory referendums	☺ Provide a quick answer to specific questions	☹ Low response rates ☹ Costly ☹ Requires high levels of publicity
Complaints / suggestions schemes	☺ Can help identify recurring weaknesses in a service ☺ Shows a commitment to listening to peoples views, (especially when action is taken)	☹ The information may not be reliable ☹ Can be difficult to identify whether the issue is due to an isolated failure or indicates a more general problem ☹ Only targets current users of the service
Service satisfaction surveys – These may be one-off initiatives, focussing on either specific services or upon the local authority's general performance. May be carried out in a variety of ways, including door-to-door interviews and postal surveys	☺ Easy to conduct ☺ Offers easy access to users of the service ☺ Can focus on key issues	☹ Important that questions are carefully designed ☹ Can be costly if outside agencies are used ☹ Danger of people wanting to complain or to say the right thing ☹ Problem of accessing non users ☹ Problem of low response rates (if postal)
Residents' Panel (Viewpoint) –. The Residents' Panel comprises some 1,000 residents who are demographically representative of the population of the Borough. The Panel can focus on specific services, policy issues or wider strategies.	☺ Reflects the views of the whole Borough ☺ Can tackle complex issues ☺ Reliable ☺ High response rates ☺ Time saving ☺ Can be used in a variety of different consultation methods	☹ Panel may become atypical over time (although 1/3 is replaced each year to combat this) ☹ Panel members may become more aware of Council services and activities than non panel members ☹ Self selected membership ☹ Limit to number of times Panel can be used each year
Focus Groups – Bring together people to talk about specific issues. Need not be representative of the whole population – can be made up of specific groups e.g. council house tenants. Groups usually comprise 8-12 people.	☺ Opportunity to explore issues in depth ☺ Can allow non-joiners to find a voice ☺ Group discussion can generate lively discussion and debate	☹ Direction can be led by one or two people in group if not facilitated carefully ☹ Not a statistically representative way of gathering information

There are a number of other consultation methods which can be used. These include:

- Consultation documents
- Media coverage
- Exhibitions
- Public meetings
- Question and answer sessions
- Interactive websites
- Citizens Juries
- Visioning exercises
- Forums

iii) Issues for consideration

When carrying out any form of consultation it may be useful to consider the following factors:-

- ? Are any other consultation exercises taking place – it may be that other people are also consulting and amalgamation may be possible to save time, costs and over consultation? Accessing the Annual Consultation Plan (Section 3 refers) will provide this information.
- ? Have PPSU been informed of the planned consultation, (to include it in the Annual Consultation Plan and to provide general advice and guidance if necessary)?
- ? Has consideration been given to feedback strategies?
- ? How are the results going to be used to their full potential?
- ? Has evaluation time been built in at the planning stage, to explore the strengths and weaknesses of the exercise and to document any methodological issues raised.

iv) Data Protection

When carrying out consultation exercises it is important to be aware of the Data Protection legislation. This is particularly important in terms of accessing data from the Electoral Register. Guidance notes based upon current data protection legislation can be found in Appendix 1 to this document.

It is advisable to check Data Protection implications with the Legal & Administration Department prior to embarking upon consultation with members of the public.

Further general guidance can be found on the Data Protection website: www.dataprotection.gov.uk

8. Viewpoint –THE COUNCIL'S RESIDENTS' PANEL

The Residents' Panel, (Viewpoint), is made up of a representative sample of the population of the Borough. The panel comprises over 1,000 members, (although boosting exercises are underway to bring the panel up to 1,500 members), and can be used for a variety of consultations; primarily postal surveys, telephone surveys and focus groups.

Each year 3 or 4 full panel surveys will be undertaken, one of which will be used to assist with Best Value Review consultation. Surveys may pick up issues identified by Members and officers and may also include issues generated by outside agencies such as the Police or the Health Authority.

A further panel, made up of young people from across the Borough, is to be established.

Members of Viewpoint may be invited to take part in focus group meetings on specific issues, and will receive regular Newsletters, giving them information on all the consultation exercises that have taken place within a specific period, detailing the findings and any subsequent action taken.

Although Viewpoint is a useful consultation tool, it may not be suitable for all consultation exercises. Contact should be made with PPSU at an early stage to discuss consultation requirements.

9. FOCUS GROUPS AND QUESTIONNAIRES

Focus Groups and Questionnaires are two of the most frequently used consultation methods. The following section of this document provides a step by step guide to using these methods effectively.

Two Pro formas, with supporting notes, are attached at Appendix 2 and 3 to this document – these may be useful for officers approaching consultation via Focus Groups and/or Questionnaires.

If the Residents' Panel is one possible source of consultation, it will be useful for PPSU to have a copy of a completed Pro Forma, - it will assist in determining the appropriateness of consultation via the Panel.

10. FOCUS GROUPS - HOW TO USE THEM

A Focus Group can be used when issues need to be discussed in depth. This may be at the start of a consultation exercise, (to help identify further consultation requirements), or at the end of a consultation exercise, (to explore some of the findings in depth).

Focus Groups can comprise a random selection of people or a group of people with specific characteristics, e.g. people living in a certain area or ward, people with children or people from a specific age group.

Focus Group meetings should take place in venues suitable to the attendees. For example, if consultation with residents in a certain area is required then consultation should be carried out in that area rather than a central venue such as the Town Hall. Venues should be easily accessible by public transport and well sign posted. The venue also needs to be accessible for people with physical disabilities.

Inviting the attendees – This should be done as early as possible. However, if invitations are issued some time in advance, ensure follow-up invitations are sent a week prior to the meeting. In addition, it is advisable to contact participants the day before the meeting to ensure they can still attend.

On the day – Ideally an officer from the Department leading the consultation will be needed, someone who:

- is knowledgeable about the subject under discussion
- is prepared to undertake a short presentation on the key issues
- is able to take questions when required
- will take notes during the meeting.

An independent facilitator will be required, someone who is not involved with the consultation exercise in any depth. Ideally this person will be from another Department.

The Focus Group Meeting - How it will work

ARRIVE	Attendees arrive and are offered refreshments and the opportunity to settle in.
WELCOME	The Facilitator welcomes everyone, explains how the session will work, seeks permission to take notes, details housekeeping arrangements, facilitates introductions etc.
PRESENTATION	The Presenter speaks for a few minutes about the purpose of the meeting, provides any background information and outlines how the results will be fed into the decision making processes.
FOCUS GROUP	The Presenter moves to back of room, (out of eye contact with any attendees), ready to take notes whilst the Facilitator works with the group to address the key issues.
QUESTIONS	At the end of the Focus Group Meeting the Presenter can return to take any questions raised.
CLOSE	Finally, the Presenter hands back to the Facilitator who thanks attendees, explains what happens next, (i.e. whether they will receive a summary letter, a Newsletter etc) and addresses issues relating to payment of expenses where appropriate.

11. QUESTIONNAIRES – DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

Questionnaires can be used to obtain the views of large numbers of people. In general Questionnaires comprise closed questions (tick box type questions), although a few open ended questions can also be included.

Questionnaires are commonly used in quantitative research - research which produces statistics rather than explanations of issues or situations.

i. Involving and informing staff and Members

Many people may have an interest in the survey (i.e. staff and Members) and they should be informed and involved at the outset and at key stages of the process. This will:

- enable respondent’s queries about the survey to be answered
- ensure that people feel part of the process
- engender ownership of the findings
- enhance commitment to address issues identified during consultation

Staff can be kept informed via the staff newsletter, Keeping You In Touch (KYIT) and Members can be informed via the Members Information Bulletin.

ii) Managing the project

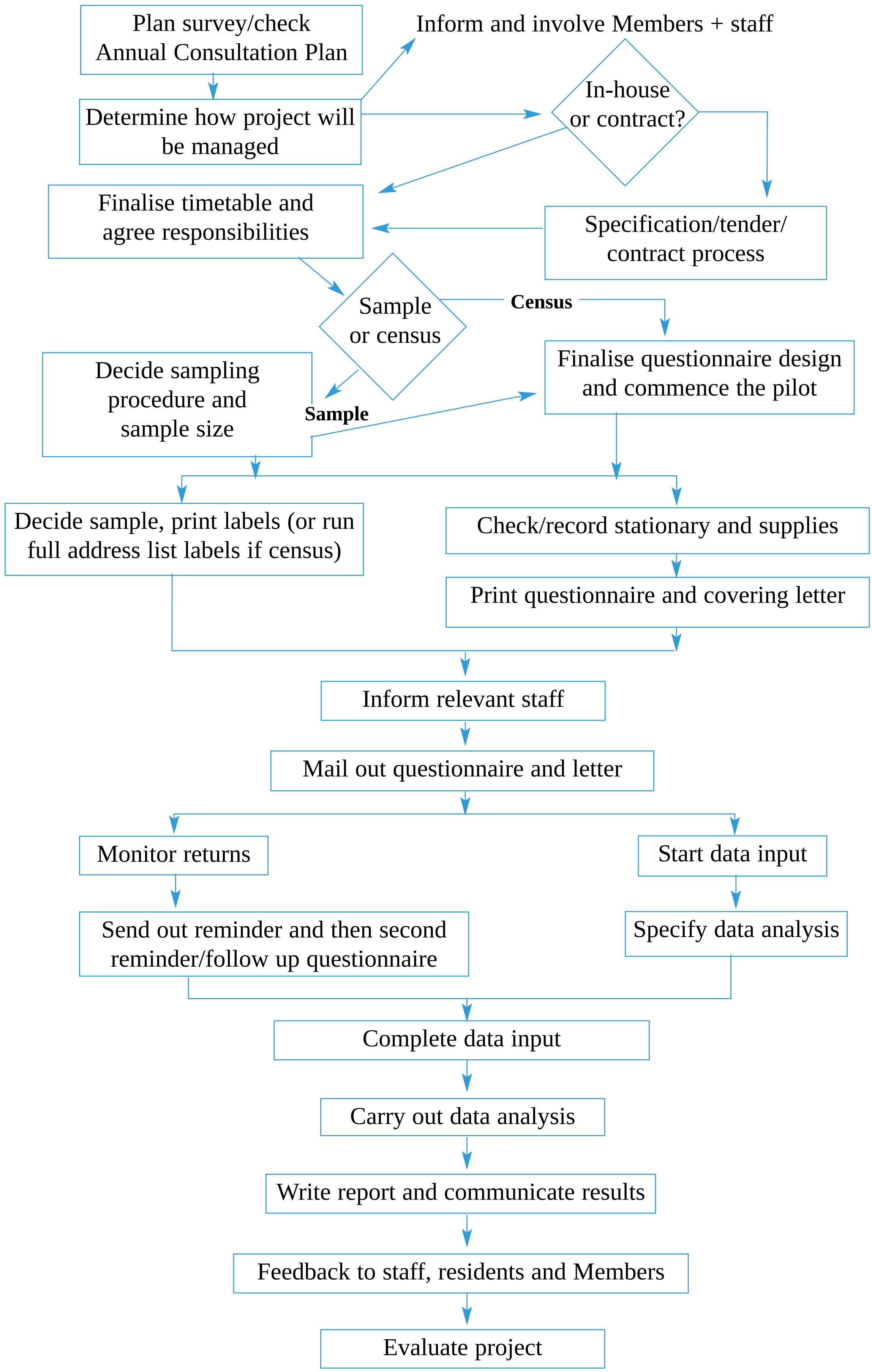
Decisions will need to be made on how the Project will be managed (i.e. which staff need to be involved and how much time will be needed). If may be useful if one person is given overall project management responsibility throughout the survey (for purposes of continuity and accountability), and that they act as the main point of contact for resolving problems. The project manager may need to access other in-house resources required.

iii) Key stages

SURVEY STAGES	TASKS
Planning	Deciding whether to contract out or not, identifying the processes involved, raising awareness, determining resources. Designing and piloting survey
Sampling	Deciding on sampling method and sample size, and drawing the sample (Section vii. refers)
Preparing and distributing the questionnaire	Ordering stationery supplies, printing, (the questionnaire, labels and covering letter), mailing, monitoring returns, sending out reminder(s) where appropriate
Data inputting	Inputting the completed questionnaires into a database (SPSS or EXCEL)
Data analysis and interpretation	Manipulating the data into tables, cross tabulations etc, and interpreting the results
Comparative data analysis	Comparing the results of the survey with information from other authorities or relevant agencies where appropriate
Communicating the results and feeding into decision making	Writing the Report and/or Summary Report, distributing the findings, Action Planning. Feedback to consultees

iv) *Steps in carrying out a postal survey*

The flow chart below shows how these various tasks may interact throughout the life of the project.



v) *Estimating the time required*

It is important to be as accurate and as realistic as possible in estimating the amount of time the survey process is likely to take. Delays at any stage in the process could result in crucial dates for the results of the survey, (i.e. feeding results into decision making process), being missed. An element of flexibility should be built into the planning process to allow for any delays. Generally, design and printing can take up to four weeks, the survey is then "in the field" for some three weeks, data entry can take up to three weeks and analysis of results a further two or three weeks.

vi) *Resources*

Resource issues include:

- **Budgets -** Identification of financial implications and ensuring appropriate financial resources are available
- **Staff time -** Do not underestimate the amount of staff time required at all stages of the project. Calculate staff time fully when deciding between undertaking the survey in-house or contracting out. When estimating costs for in-house work include costs associated with:
  - planning
  - sampling
  - drafting of letters to the selected sample
  - analysis of the data.
- **Stationery -** Including printing or purchasing copies of the questionnaire, the costs associated with sending a covering letter (and any reminder letters) to the selected sample, envelopes, 'envelope-stuffing', postage and facilities for printing and distributing the final report.
- **Software for data inputting and interpretation -** If the sampling, data input, analysis, production of tables and final report are being carried out in-house, appropriate software and staff trained in its use will be required. (SPSS is the specialist package used by many departments).

vii) *Sampling*

The target population and sampling frame – this is the group of people from which a sample will need to be drawn. In the case of a general survey the target population is all local authority residents over 18 years old. For other surveys it may be all council tenants, all residents aged 65+ or all residents living in a certain ward, young people etc.

It is unlikely that a totally comprehensive list of all of the target population will be available. Therefore, there are different sampling frames that can be selected. For most surveys the sampling frame specified is a list of people (or households) which should include all (or most) of the target population. This list should be as comprehensive as possible.

Addresses for general surveys can be drawn from the Electoral Register (although there are currently issues around data protection which need to be addressed - Section 7iv. refers) or from the Postal Addresses File (PAF).

The PAF is available from the Royal Mail:
0131 550 8999 http://www.royalmail.co.uk/paf/

The Electoral Register is good for postal questionnaires particularly. (It is estimated that 95% of the population is in the Electoral Registers). Also, via the Electoral Register the authority has access to the actual name of the person, thus, allowing the probability sample to identify each individual for the sample from the outset. However, even if the questionnaire is addressed to a particular individual the authority will have no guarantee that this person actually completes the questionnaire.

The Legal and Administration Services Department must be consulted prior to any consultation using the Electoral Register

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Probability sampling - Probability sampling is often considered to be the most reliable way to ensure a sample is statistically representative of the target population under study. A probability sample is one in which each person in the target population has an equal, or at least a known, chance (probability) of being selected.

The surest way of providing equal probability of selection is to use the principle of random selection to estimate the precision of the resulting statistic (see below).

What is a non-probability sample?

In order to identify what a probability sample is, it might be useful to give further details about non-probability samples. A non-probability sample is one in which each person in the target population has an **un-equal, or unknown**, chance of being selected.

The most common type of non-probability sample used is quota sampling. As with probability samples, these samples are often drawn from a list of the population. A few of the characteristics of the population are then selected (maybe taken from the census) i.e. percentage of women, men, ethnic minorities and so on. Quotas are then set for each of these groups that correspond to the percentages in the population. Research is completed when enough questionnaires or interviews have been achieved with people who fit the specifications set by the quotas.

Simple random sampling

Each person (or household) in the sampling frame is given a number. None of the people (or households) should appear in the list more than once. Thus, once a person (or household) has been selected he/she should have no further chance of being selected. The process is like drawing balls out of a lottery wheel, for example, for a population of 100,000 people from which we want to select a sample of 2,000 people, the 100,000 numbers will be inserted in the wheel and the first 2,000 numbers would be the selected random sample. When the sampling frame is large the easiest way to generate a random sample is to draw a table of computer generated random numbers. Some of the statistical packages needed for data analysis have a facility for the production of random samples (EXCEL and SPSS).

Confidence Intervals

Surveys produce statistics, which are estimates of the real figure for the population under study. These estimates are always surrounded by a margin of error of (+/- x%). For example, a survey estimate for the general survey may show that 75% of the respondents were very satisfied with their local authority. However, this estimate, due to intrinsic characteristics of sampling, will be surrounded by a confidence interval, say, +/-3%. This indicates that the real figure of satisfaction in that authority's population lies between 72% and 78%.

Sample size

Assistance establishing required sample sizes, can be accessed via PPSU. The table below gives an indication of the sample sizes involved, taking into account:

a. Desired confidence level (95% confident that the estimate was not arrived at by chance)
b. Variance in the population
c. Desired confidence interval (+/- x %)

Desired confidence level: the minimum confidence level required is generally accepted as 95%, meaning that we can be 95% sure that the outcome was not arrived at by chance.

Variance in the population: There might be some information available about variance of the population in previous studies, such as a census, or other published statistics.

Desired confidence interval: the desired confidence interval is key to working out the ideal sample size for a survey. The sample for each of the target populations will be drawn to ensure that the estimated satisfaction for the total sample has a maximum of +/- x% confidence interval (margin of error) around it at the 95% confidence level. As a guide a confidence interval of between +/-3% and +/-5% is recommended for local authority research.

The two most important factors when working out the sample size are: the degree of accuracy required for the sample (confidence interval) and the extent to which there is variation in the target population with regard to the key characteristics of the study.

Confidence interval	Achieved sample
+/- 2.0%	2,500
+/- 2.5%	1,600
+/- 3.0%	1,100
+/- 3.5%	816
+/- 4.0%	625
+/- 4.5%	494
+/- 5.0%	400
+/- 5.5%	330

Although the above table of confidence intervals assumes a simple random sample, it has been widely used as a rule of thumb for other kinds of probability samples.

viii) Maximising the response rate

The success of the survey depends upon a good response rate. The larger the response rate, the more representative the survey will be of the population. A response rate above that anticipated will increase confidence and reliability in the results. A response rate falling short of the anticipated rate may bring into question the reliability and representativeness of the findings.

Factors affecting response rates include:

- the information made available to residents, through media or other means about the importance of the survey
- the immediate impression made when the mailing arrives
- the content and quality of the covering letter accompanying the questionnaire
- the design and appearance of the questionnaire
- the subject matter of the questionnaire
- the size and complexity of the postal questionnaire
- the follow-up strategies to deal with those who do not respond in the first instance
- the timing of the survey
- whether other surveys or questionnaires have been in circulation among residents recently - whether consultees are experiencing ‘survey fatigue’

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There are various actions that can be taken to address some of these factors and maximise the response rate. Some are listed below:

- Publicity
- Clarity of questionnaire
- A short and simple questionnaire
- Limited number of open questions
- Provision for translation services
- Clear and informative covering letter
- Personalised names and addresses
- Pre-paid reply envelopes
- Telephone help line to support questionnaire – with named contact
- Sending out reminders
- Timing
- Briefing staff in advance
- Prizes or incentives
- Piloting the survey before mailing

12. CONCLUSION

It is hoped that this Toolkit will assist officers who are involved in public consultation and will enhance the various statutory and non-statutory consultation mechanisms which are already in place within the authority.

If you would like any further information relating to consultation within the Authority please contact the Policy and Performance Standards Unit.

The final pages of this Toolkit contain:

- Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's Data Protection Policy (Appendix 1)
- Focus Group - Key Questions Proforma and Supporting Guidance (Appendix 2)
- Questionnaires - Key Questions Proforma and Supporting Guidance (Appendix 3)

Appendix One

DATA PROTECTION POLICY

Below is a statement of the data protection policy adopted by Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council.

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council needs to collect and use certain types of information about people with whom it deals in order to perform its functions. This information includes current, past and prospective employees, suppliers, clients, customers, service users and others with whom it communicates. Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council is required by law to collect and use certain types of information to fulfil its statutory duties and also to comply with the requirements of government departments. This personal information must be dealt with properly however it is collected, recorded and used – whether on paper, in a computer, or on other material – and there are safeguards to ensure this in the Data Protection Act 1998.

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council regards the lawful and correct treatment of personal information as critical to successful operations and to maintaining confidence between those with whom we deal and ourselves. Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council must ensure that, as an organisation, it treats personal information lawfully and correctly.

To this end we fully endorse and adhere to the Principles of data protection as enumerated in the Data Protection Act 1998.

The Data Protection Principles are as follows:

1. Personal data shall be processed fairly and lawfully and, in particular, shall not be processed unless specific conditions are met;

2. Personal data shall be obtained only for one or more specified and lawful purposes, and shall not be further processed in any manner incompatible with that purpose or those purposes;

3. Personal data shall be adequate, relevant and not excessive in relation to the purpose or purposes for which they are processed;

4. Personal data shall be accurate and, where necessary, kept up to date;

5. Personal data processed for any purpose or purposes shall not be kept for longer than is necessary for that purpose or those purposes;

6. Personal data shall be processed in accordance with the rights of data subjects under the Act;

7. Appropriate technical and organisational measures shall be taken against unauthorised or unlawful processing of personal data and against accidental loss or destruction of, or damage to, personal data;

8. Personal data shall not be transferred to a country or territory outside the European Economic Area unless that country or territory ensures an adequate level of protection for the rights and freedoms of data subjects in relation to the processing of personal data.

Therefore, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council will, through appropriate management, strict application of criteria and controls:

i. Observe fully, conditions regarding the fair collection and use of information;

ii. Meets its legal obligations to specify the purposes for which information is used.

iii. Collect and process appropriate information, and only to the extent that it is needed to fulfil operational needs or comply with any legal requirements;

iv. Ensure the quality of information used;

v. Apply strict checks to determine the length of time information is held;

vi. Ensure that the rights of people, about whom information is held, are able to be fully exercised under the Act. (These include: right to be informed that processing is being undertaken, the right of access to one's personal information, the right to prevent processing in certain circumstances and the right to rectify, block or erase information which is regarded as wrong information);

vii. Take appropriate technical and organisational security measures to safeguard personal information;

viii. Ensure that any third party processors contracted by the Authority adhere to appropriate controls.

In addition Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council will ensure that:

i. There are persons with specific responsibility for data protection in the organisation.

ii. All subject access requests will, in the first instance, be referred to the Council's Monitoring Officer, who will take reasonable steps to ensure that the request is processed by the appropriate Officer or Officers, unless the requested information is held exclusively by Social Services. These latter requests are to be directed to the Director of Social Services, who will take reasonable steps to ensure that they are processed appropriately.

iii. Everyone managing and handling personal information understands that they are contractually responsible for following good data protection practice;

iv. Everyone managing and handling personal information is appropriately trained to do so;

v. Everyone managing and handling personal information is appropriately supervised;

vi. Methods of handling personal information are clearly described;

vii. A regular review and audit will be made of the way personal information is managed;

viii. Documents and any storage media containing input to and output from systems (paper or electronic) detailing personal information will be held, transported and disposed of with due regard to its sensitivity. Confidential paper output no longer required will be shredded before it is included in the recycling process. The disposal of confidential waste may be arranged with firms who provide a certificated secure disposal service. Individual service areas will be responsible for ensuring appropriate arrangements are made. Where arrangements are made with external companies for paper data disposal, or other media holding personal data then checks must be made to ensure that the arrangements are secure and that disposal certificates are provided and recorded.

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RESPONSIBILITIES AND ROLES

The Data Protection Act 1998 is "an Act to make provision for the regulation of the processing of information relating to individuals including the obtaining, holding, use or disclosure of such information. It places obligations on those who record and use personal data". The Authority will endeavour to apply the spirit of the Act to ALL data operations.

The overall responsibility for the notification of the Council as a data controller and for ensuring compliance with the Data Protection Act rests with the Monitoring Officer in liaison with the Chief Executive.

All employees are instructed to provide for the attention of their Departmental Director of Service or Chief Officer details of any proposal to create a system, paper or automated, which contains personal data for approval and notification before implementation.

Subject Access - An individual is entitled, on making a written request using the approved Data Subject Access Request Form, to be supplied by any data user with a copy of all the information, which forms the personal data held about him or her. A request for subject access must be responded to within 40 days. If it is not, the data subject is entitled to complain to the Data Protection Commissioner. The Monitoring Officer will take reasonable steps to ensure that the appropriate Officer or Officers process all such requests as detailed in i. above apart from those which relate to information held by Social Services. If you receive such a request it must be passed immediately to the Monitoring Officer. If the request relates specifically to information held by Social Services, you must forward the request to the person nominated to process these requests, currently the Director of Social Services.

All employees are advised that any wilful non-compliance with the data protection principles will be regarded as a serious disciplinary matter and may lead to dismissal. This policy will form part of the Authority's Handbook of Personnel Policies and Procedures.

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Appendix Two

FOCUS GROUPS – KEY QUESTIONS PROFORMA

Aims and Objectives	
1) What do you want to find out from a Focus Group? – Why are you really consulting?	
2) What are your specific objectives? What questions do you really want to ask or which issues do you want the Group to consider? (Please continue on a separate sheet if necessary)	
3) What do you intend to do with the findings from your Focus Group?	
The Focus Group	
4) Which officers will be present at your Focus Group meetings?	
5) Have you prepared a brief 5-minute presentation to explain to the attendees why they are here?	
6) Have you arranged for independent facilitator to run your focus group?	
7) Have you prepared any materials that may be required for the meeting, e.g. maps, documents you wish attendees to look at?	
8) Who will be there to take notes?	
9) Will the 5-minute presentation at the beginning of the meeting be verbal or will visual aids (i.e. Powerpoint) be required.	
Logistics	
10) Refreshments	
11) Travel expenses	
12) Is there information that needs sending out prior to the meeting?	
13) When and where will the meeting be held? Are venues booked?	
14) How many meetings will you need to hold?	
15) What composition of people do you require for each meeting?	
16) Has any equipment required been secured?	

Surveys & Focus Groups

Follow-up	
17) Have any necessary reports been produced and have they been circulated appropriately?	
18) Has feedback been given to attendees	
19) If you are using the Residents' Panel, will you need to use them again in the future?	
20) Have you documented the good and not so good aspects of your consultation?	

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Supporting Notes – FOCUS GROUPS

Aims and Objectives

1) **It is essential that the purpose of the consultation is made clear from the outset: What do you want to find out? Why do you really want to consult?**

- What question/s are you trying to answer?
- What issue/s are you addressing?
- What approval are you seeking?
- What do you want to achieve from the consultation?

2) ***What are your specific questions?***

Once you have decided what your overall aims are it is necessary to consider the specific issue/s question/s that need to be discussed/answered. These will be given to the facilitator to address in the meeting and will be the stimulants for discussion. Ideally you are looking for 4-5 key issue/s question/s, with possible subsidiary questions. (1hour 30 minutes is a suitable duration for a focus group meeting. Please bear in mind that you should avoid using jargon and make sure you are using Plain English).

3) ***What do you intend to do with the findings/results of the focus group?***

Knowing where the findings are to be reported will have a bearing upon what you ask and how you ask it. As part of the introduction to the Focus Group meeting, the attendees will need to be told how their opinions will be fed into the decision making process.

4) ***Which officers will be present at your Focus Group?***

It is useful to have an officer present who is knowledgeable about the issues involved and who will be able to answer any questions and give a very brief introduction to the issues being discussed.

Ideally this officer needs to be someone who is actually in the field and who deals with the issues on a day to day basis.

5) ***Have you prepared a brief (no more than 5 minutes) presentation to explain to the attendees why they are there?***

This needs to set the scene for the attendees, explain the purpose of their involvement, what you plan to do with the findings. The presentation should not attempt to lead them in any way.

6) ***Independent facilitator***

To carry out a successful Focus Group meeting you will need an independent facilitator, (someone who doesn't work in your section). Although it is unavoidable that the facilitator may have some knowledge of the subject, the key is for them to act as if they know only as much as the attendees do.

7) ***Materials***

If you require the attendees to look at documents and give feedback, make sure that they have them well in advance with some guidance as to what you want them to do with them.

If you think maps or other visuals would be helpful in the session, make sure they are ready and that the facilitator is briefed.

8) ***Who will be there to take notes?***

Ideally there should be the no more than 2 officers in a meeting. If possible the representative from the department will take notes when the facilitator is speaking and vice versa.

9) ***Presentation mode***

Sometimes it may be necessary for the 5-minute presentation to be a visual presentation (i.e. on PowerPoint). If this is the case please make sure that the facilitator is aware of this and that the presentation is prepared and given to the facilitator well in advance.

10) ***Refreshments***

If the meeting is to be held in the morning/afternoon, make sure tea/coffee/water and biscuits are available. If you are holding a meeting over lunch or in the evening make sure a light buffet is provided (sandwiches, crisps etc – vegetarian and standard). If you are meeting with people from a minority group make sure the catering is appropriate. (i.e. kosher food if meeting with people who are Jewish)

11) ***Travel expenses***

Travel expenses must be paid. Ideally these need to be paid on the day, but if not as soon after the event as possible. Prior to the event it is essential that you make contact with your administration section to make appropriate arrangements, check mileage rates etc.

12) ***Information***

If any information is required prior to the event, (e.g. map to get to the location), make sure it is provided in advance.

13) ***Venues***

It may sound obvious, but make sure the rooms are booked prior to sending out the invitations and confirmations and are not changed subsequently. Some people receive an invitation, do not reply, but then turn up on the day. This means that if you have changed rooms between the invitation and confirmation letter, people may be confused.

14) ***How many groups / composition***

When consulting via Focus Groups it is not advisable to limit yourself to just one session. This is because you are only basing your views on a group of 8-10 people. Ideally you should hold at least 3 sessions (at different times of the day) to cater for different availability of attendees.

15) You may also want to break the Groups into demographic profiles e.g. a group of elderly people, a group of working people, a group of young parents etc. If you break to smaller profiles, or to areas e.g. Billingham, Thornaby, Yarm, Stockton, you may need to hold more than one meeting in each venue to get a cross-section of views.

16) ***Equipment***

When the venue is booked, make sure any equipment required is booked at the same time.

17) ***Report***

Following the event, it is important that you actually report the findings appropriately and that they are used to inform the decision making process.

18) ***Feedback to Attendees***

Following the event you must feed back the main findings to attendees and let them know what action is to be taken as a result of the consultation.

If the Residents' Panel has been used, a summary should be sent out after the event and an article placed in the Newsletter. PPSU will do this on your behalf.

19) ***Some consultation events may be part of a longer process and you may wish to contact people again to talk further about a subject:***

a) If you are hoping to use the Residents' Panel, make sure PPSU are aware of your requirements. That way they will ensure your plans can be co-ordinated where possible with other consultation exercises.

b) If you are using your own 'sample' of people, make sure you keep all their contact information safely (Data Protection issues need to be considered.)

20) **Documentation**

Document the exercise (methods as well as outcomes). This way you will be able to establish good and bad practice to inform future consultations. If a consultation event is particularly successful please let PPSU know so that it can be added to the Consultation Intranet site, and others can benefit.

Appendix Three

QUESTIONNAIRES – KEY QUESTIONS PROFORMA

Aims and Objectives	
1) What do you want to know? Why are you really consulting?	
2) What are your specific objectives? What do you really want to ask / what issues do you want to be considered? (Please continue on a separate sheet if necessary)	
3) What do you intend to do with the findings from the consultation?	
The questionnaire process	
4) What questions do you want to ask and why do you want to ask them?	
5) Time scales – When do you need to know the outcome of the consultation?	
6) What are you going to do with the findings from the consultation?	
7) What sample size do you require?	
8) Who do you want the survey to be sent to? (Specific groups or general population)?	
9) Have you arranged for the questionnaire to be piloted?	
10) Have you made provision to send out reminders after 3 weeks?	
11) Have you arranged for the printing of the questionnaires and the pre-paid return envelopes?	
12) Have you made provision for data entry? If this cannot be done in-house, PPSU have a list of contractors who can assist.	
13) Have you allowed at least 3 weeks for the questionnaire to be in the field (plus reminder time)?	
14) Have you prepared a supporting letter explaining why you are carrying out the survey and providing contact details in case further information is required? This letter should also clearly state the deadline for return and any incentives.	

Follow-up **15)** Have you planned how the results will be fed back to the respondents following the consultation?	
16) Has action been taken as a result of the consultation?	

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Supporting Notes – QUESTIONNAIRES

Aims and objectives

1. What do you want to find out? Why do you want to consult?

   It is essential that you are clear as to the purpose of the consultation

   - What questions are you trying to find answers to?
   - What issue/s are you addressing?
   - What approval are you seeking?

What are your specific questions?

2. Once the overall aim of the consultation has been established, it is necessary to consider the specific questions / issues that need to be addressed. These will form the bulk of the questionnaire. It is not necessary to ask demographic questions if you are using the Residents' Panel as this information is known.

What do you intend to do with the findings from the questionnaire?

3. Knowing what you plan to do with the findings is an important factor in deciding what is actually asked in the questionnaire.
4. What questions do you want to ask? PPSU will be happy to look at any questionnaires and will provide assistance with design if required.
5. Time scale is an important issue when planning a questionnaire, Surveys always take longer than you expect and time should be built in for unexpected situations (e.g. delay on printing)
6. What are you going to do with the answers? Are they going to be used to inform decisions or influence a plan or strategy?
7. How many people do you need to survey (Section 11 vii)
8. Who are the intended recipients? You may have a clearly defined group of people to whom you want to send the questionnaire or it may be a more general survey. This needs to be decided prior to selecting the sample and taken into account when selecting the sample size.
9. Running a pilot of the questionnaire is highly recommended, but, in reality, time restrictions may prevent this. If you cannot pilot the questionnaire, at least test it amongst colleagues to make sure the questions are clear and that there are no obvious omissions.
10. If the response rate is poor, it may be necessary to send out a reminder letter. To do this you must know who has returned the questionnaire. Pre-coding them in some way makes this possible e.g. a number in the top hand corner of the front page which can then be ticked off on return. However, putting actual names on the questionnaire is not recommended as this may deter people from completing the questionnaire (issues of confidentiality). Reminders should be sent about 3 weeks after the initial mail out.
11. If you require people to mail back a questionnaire, you must provide them with a pre-paid envelope.
12. Data entry is a long and tedious process. If there is not the expertise or capacity to do this in-house there are many external agencies that specialise in this. PPSU hold a list of local agencies.
13. Analysis and interpretation of the findings is frequently underestimated. The more detailed the requirements the higher the levels of expertise required. If expertise is not available within your department PPSU may be able to advise or there are outside agencies who can assist.
14. Supporting letters are essential to explain to the respondent why you want them to complete the questionnaire and to encourage participation. This letter should clearly

explain the mechanics of how to complete the questionnaire. The letter should also give a deadline for response and a contact name and number for further information.

15. Feedback should be given to officers, respondents, Members and other interested parties about what has been done / decided as a result of the findings.

16. Action must be taken following consultation. If not respondents will lose faith in the Council and not feel their opinions are valued. If this happens the likelihood of them responding to further consultations is remote.

Issues of questionnaire design

- **Length of survey –** The length of your survey is dependent on the population and type of survey. However, most self-administered surveys should not exceed 4 pages. If the audience is more receptive the survey can be longer (e.g. to the Residents' Panel). In general, the shorter the survey the higher the response, but the shorter the survey the less information you get.
- **Length of questions –** Keep them short - no more than 25 words in a question. Also avoid jargon or technical language, and avoid sounding patronising.
- **Only ask questions where it is possible to do something with the answers.** If it is impossible to change something then do not people how they would like it to be changed.
- **Make the questions as neutral as possible and avoid putting the respondent in a situation in which they feel uncomfortable** e.g. "Did you vote in the last election" is more likely to alienate a non-voter than "Thinking back to the last election, did you happen to vote?" Questions looking for opinions should be asked on recognised scales e.g. strongly agree, agree, uncertain, disagree, strongly disagree, don't know/no opinion
- **Avoid ambiguity in questions**
- **Ask one question at a time -** e.g. a question such as "are the staff helpful and polite?" is 2 questions, staff may be helpful, but not polite!
- **Make things as specific as possible –** Instead of allowing open-ended classifications for questions try to categorise as much as possible e.g. when did you last visit a ****: Was it in the last week, in the last fortnight, in the last month, in the last couple of months, in the last 6 months, in the last year, longer, never.
- **Ensure confidentiality –** and make sure you stick to it. Documentation which can identify a respondent should be kept in a locked cupboard.
- **Design and layout –** Ideally a font size of 13 should be used to account for those with visual impairments. If you are asking open-ended questions ensure there is enough room to answer.
- **Open-ended questions -** these are good to begin to understand why people have responded how they have, but are time consuming to code and analyse. If you require open-ended questions it is a good idea to put them at the end of each section.
  (For example: If you have any comments or suggestions please give them below.)
- **Colour –** The colour of the questionnaire really does make a difference. Yellow paper generates the highest response rates of all colours. If it is not possible to use yellow use a pale colour, but not white.

Surveys & Focus Groups

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