

## **Bromsgrove District Council Consultation Guidance – September 2007**

### **Introduction**

This document forms part of Bromsgrove District Council's Consultation Policy and is designed to assist you in undertaking your consultation activity.

The Corporate Communications, Policy and Performance team can offer further advice and guidance on consultation issues, including planning and scheduling, selecting appropriate methodologies, identifying consultees and accessing existing networks and forums. The team can also provide practical support for the development, implementation and analysis of consultation. Major consultations will be identified in advance through the Council's business planning process.

The guidance is intended to help Officers uphold the principles of consultation described in the Consultation Policy.

### **Background**

Consultation is all about listening to and respecting the views of other people, even if they are contrary to those you wish to hear. In order for it to be effective, consultation needs to be well planned and executed. If not thought through it can be expensive and time-consuming. It will not always give you the answers you want and it may raise expectations that you cannot meet. Nonetheless, consultation is a crucial element of community engagement and must be conducted so that elected Members can base their decisions on robust evidence gathered from the communities they serve.

Before you start, think about the following questions:

1. Why do you need to consult?
2. What is the scope of the consultation?
3. Who are you consulting?
4. How are you going to consult?
5. What questions should you ask?
6. What are you going to do with the results?

This guidance deals with each of these questions in turn, and will help you plan, execute and feedback the results of your consultation in the most effective way possible.

#### **1. Why do you need to consult?**

It is important to properly establish whether you really need to carry out a consultation exercise. Unnecessary consultation is a waste of resources and is likely to discourage participation in other more important exercises.

Speak to the Corporate Communications Policy and Performance team at an early stage to discuss the purpose, scope and planned approach to your consultation. They will be able to tell you whether the information you're looking for already exists, or if are

there opportunities to link up with other consultation exercises being undertaken across the Council. Consultation can be expensive, so first of all find out what consultation and research has already been done within the Council. Carry out some research before you start. Have other local authorities done similar consultation? Is there existing regional or national research data? There may be lessons to learn: was the consultation effective? Did the methodology provide worthwhile results? Could it have been done more efficiently?

Remember that there are many good reasons to consult, but there may also be issues where consultation is not appropriate. For instance:

- Where the room for manoeuvre is so limited, either by statutory or budget restrictions, that consultation is meaningless;
- Where we have already consulted on a similar issue and where consultation 'fatigue' may set in;
- Where the issue should or could be resolved without needing a process of consultation.

### 2. What is the scope of the Consultation?

This stage involves identifying exactly what you hope to achieve through consultation and defining how you will use the results. Being clear about what you want to achieve, and what outcomes may and may not be influenced by the consultation, will help you to manage the expectations of your consultees.

Make sure that the exercise can influence a decision, policy or strategy. Be clear about the level of influence and any constraints that may affect it.

Your objectives should be clear and linked to your wider planning process; they should be clearly explained to, and understood by, everyone involved in the consultation, including the consultees themselves. Let them know what you are asking them, why you are asking them and what the extent of their involvement will be. This will also help guide your thinking on how you will use and report on the feedback. Remember that the scope of your consultation will also depend on factors such as time and budget.

The 2007/08 business plan template asks Heads of Service to identify planned consultation in the year ahead and define the category of consultation it falls into. All consultation needs to be categorised in this way. The definitions (summarised below) should be reflected in any reports to Members.

<b>Description</b>	<b>Definition – the circumstances under which this category of consultation would be used</b>	<b>Example of this category of consultation</b>
Category A: <b>Information gathering</b>	I am testing out satisfaction with services that will inform future planning. I don't need to make a decision now but I am gathering information that I may use later.	Questionnaire on satisfaction with waste recycling
Category B: <b>Seeking Views</b>	We will be making a decision or planning service changes so we are seeking information/your general views to help us make that decision or plan changes	Consultation on a draft strategy before taking the final version to Members

Category C: <b>Making choices</b>	We have a number of options and are seeking your views/ preferences before making a decision. We are taking a 'vote' on options and your preferred option will be reported to the relevant decision making body	Workshop to obtain views on design options for park facilities
Category D: <b>Generating Ideas</b>	We are seeking your views on an issue that is at an early stage. We do not have definite options at this stage, so we want you to help us generate ideas/options so we can jointly identify and agree a way forward	Consultation to identify the locations of community sports equipment across the Borough
Category E: <b>Participation /Joint Decision Making</b>	Let's jointly agree what needs to happen and how. We will be making decisions together.	Working party to identify suitable amenities and services in a Community Centre.

It is important to remember that Category A is no less valuable or worthy than Category E. This is about a choice as to what is most relevant/ appropriate to the nature of the work the consultation is for. What is vital is that you are clear about the type of consultation you are undertaking before you embark on the exercise. You can find out more about types of consultation under the 'How are you going to consult?' section.

### **3. Who are you consulting?**

It is important to think not only about those people you need to consult, but also about those who need to be involved in the process as a whole, whether as consultees or as stakeholders. Therefore, think about:

- Who will be affected by the outcome of the process?
- Who is ultimately in a position to decide if the process goes ahead or not?
- Who has the skill, knowledge and resources to contribute to the process?

The following checklist may help in deciding who these people above are, and remember that organisations and other bodies can be a useful source of identifying who should be consulted:

- Service users or customers
- Those who receive a statutory or regulatory service
- Non-users
- Beneficiaries, e.g. parents in relation to an education issue
- Non-residents
- Voluntary and Community Groups
- Interest groups (geographic or interest based)
- Representatives of local businesses
- Elected Members
- Umbrella organisations
- Statutory bodies

## Appendix 2

Remember to take account of those individuals who are ‘hard to reach’ – for example, those who are housebound, people with learning and physical disabilities, ethnic minority groups, gypsies and travelers. These members of the community are unlikely to be able to be engaged in consultation through traditional methods, and appropriate action should be taken to ensure that the views of these individuals and groups are not excluded or overlooked.

In identifying a target group of consultees, you will need to consider how important it is that responses are representative of a section of the community, or of the population as a whole. Also think about whether you require in-depth personal responses and records of individual’s experience? Consider using existing groups and networks where possible; this is likely to be more time- and cost-effective than establishing a sample from scratch, but be aware that existing groups may not fully reflect broader opinion.

On completing the consultation you should be able to demonstrate that you have the quantity and breadth of views that you wanted and that you were successful in reaching groups who are traditionally more difficult to engage.

Identifying the people you want to consult will inform the selection of the most suitable methods for your consultation. The table below gives some reasons why some methods may be suitable for reaching particular target groups, and why.

<b>Consultee</b>	<b>Type of consultation</b>	<b>Reasons for suitability</b>
Frequent and regular users of your service  Individuals and special interest groups who know about your service  The general public (if your service or the issue is popular or particularly important)  Staff	Questionnaire-based methods; Draft documents for comment	These consultees are already aware of the issues, are (probably) interested, and don't need detailed additional/supporting information.
Infrequent users of your service  Potential users of your service  Broad interest groups  Non-users	Meetings; Open days; Focus groups; Discussions	These consultees are likely to need more information before they can respond.

Think about the type of response you are likely to get from different groups. Expect different responses from people who are familiar with your service compared with those who do not use it. It may be appropriate to give more or less weight to the views of certain groups, but it will be necessary to explain such action to all stakeholders, clearly and in advance. The table below indicates the types of views you might expect from different people.

Who is being consulted?	What sort of views/comments can you expect?
Individual users	Personal view, or snapshot, as experienced by the individual
User groups/ panels/ meetings	'Non-expert' view from users of your service. Can help you see a different perspective.
Representative groups	Considered responses based on sound knowledge of the service and an understanding of service users needs/aspirations. However views may be more extreme than those of the average user.
General public	General perceptions of service: useful indicator of problems and preferences
Sounding boards (non-users)	Relatively impartial views on proposals: useful for testing out proposals and plans
Staff	Experience of a range of customers' views, plus awareness of the practicalities of providing the service

#### 4. How are you going to consult?

There is no one 'right' method that will work for any given circumstance. All sorts of conditions influence which methods will provide useful information. It is important to understand that different methods may well produce different results: there is rarely, if ever, a single view, and consensus between all users is unlikely.

There are many consultation methods that can be used to seek people's views. Think carefully about the following factors:

- The number of people you need/want to consult with;
- Whether it is more important to get superficial opinions from a large number of people or to get more in depth views from fewer people;
- Whether the views should be representative of the wider local population;
- Whether you only want to involve certain groups or whether you can extend an open invitation to participate;
- How quickly you need the information and what you can achieve within the timescale allocated;
- What financial and human resources you have available;
- Whether you need to buy in expertise

Regular opportunities for consultation are afforded through several Council mechanisms and existing local neighbourhood / issue-based forums. Members and Officers alike should be aware of these and make use of them wherever possible, according to the fit between the category of consultation each mechanism falls into and the aims of the consultation activity itself.

Mechanisms include Bromsgrove District Council's Customer Panel, which is made up of around 1500 residents. It is recruited to be representative of the population, so is

useful when a broadly representative sample of local opinion is needed. The management of the panel is sub-contracted to an external consultant. We have an opportunity to consult our Panel members via a survey twice each year (in May and November).

The Council's contractor can also recruit Focus Groups on specific topics, drawn from Customer Panel members, at any time. These Focus Groups are run by trained Council staff and will normally be framed around service-specific issues and the Council's budget.

The following fora could also be used:

- Two area committee pilots in Waseley/ Beacon and Alvechurch;
- The Equalities Forum and Disabilities Forum;
- Local PACT (Partners and Communities Together) meetings.
- Bromsgrove Partnership's Town Hall Stakeholder meetings (2 per annum)
- Bromsgrove Partnership's an Older People's Project Group
- Bromsgrove Partnership's Young Persons Forum
- Bromsgrove District Council's website – through online survey software.

It is also important to make sure consultees are given adequate time to prepare their response. The length of time will vary depending on the time of year and the level of response that is being sought. Sufficient time should also be allowed for the results of consultation to be collated, analysed and considered, so that the results of consultation feed directly into the decision-making process. Written responses are typically sought within a 4-6 week timescale.

It can be useful to use one method to help development of another; for example a focus group to consider the design of a questionnaire. But when linking methods in this way, it is important to ensure that both samples are representative of the same demographic. (i.e. the focus group would need to be representative of the intended audience for the questionnaire, or their views would be less relevant). Using more than one consultation method will increase both the quality and quantity of information gathered.

Please use the table below to identify the most appropriate form of consultation for you: compare the options available whilst thinking about everything already discussed, and take note of the benefits and disadvantages of each option.

<b>CHOOSING YOUR METHOD OF CONSULTATION</b>				
<b>A. Face to face consultation</b>				
<b>Technique</b>	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>	<b>Using this method</b>	<b>Likely costs</b>
<b>Discussion / Focus Groups</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifies views, expectations and needs of specific target group</li> <li>• Best environment for probing and exploring ideas.</li> <li>• Good way of getting people from excluded community groups together.</li> <li>• Group interaction can stimulate new ideas and thoughts and engender feelings of ownership</li> <li>• Useful for exploring issues in depth, particularly following, or prior to, quantitative research</li> <li>• Personal approach</li> <li>• Provides a non-threatening environment to review sensitive issues, e.g. culture, gender, age.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not representative (small number of people)</li> <li>• Dominant individuals can negatively impact upon group dynamics</li> <li>• Selection of delegates can be difficult</li> <li>• Expensive</li> <li>• People may not turn up</li> <li>• Requires experience of moderating groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choose where a particular group's views are important and where a group has a specific interest in the topic e.g. disability groups/estate residents/ethnic minority groups/young people</li> <li>• Ideally should consist of 6-12 participants</li> <li>• Use to test specific proposals</li> <li>• Needs to be effectively facilitated/ managed. Good practice to select a facilitator who is not part of the service under debate. However it is helpful for a member of staff from the service to attend for the first part of the meeting to provide details on the service and answer any queries</li> <li>• Usually lasts between 1.5 and 2 hours.</li> <li>• Provide enough time and information for people to make considered and informed choices – do not overwhelm people with technical data</li> <li>• Participants can be recruited from a user group, by selecting specialist groups who are likely to be affected by any policy under review, or by contacting participants from previous focus groups who expressed an interest in further participation. You can also randomly select names from the electoral register but expect to send approximately 200 invitations for a return of 10 participants, depending on the level of interest in the topic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Venue/ equipment hire</li> <li>• Independent facilitator</li> <li>• Incentives to attend</li> <li>• Transport</li> <li>• Carers' allowances</li> <li>• Accessibility costs</li> </ul>

<b>CHOOSING YOUR METHOD OF CONSULTATION</b>				
<b>A. Face to face consultation</b>				
<b>Technique</b>	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>	<b>Using this method</b>	<b>Likely costs</b>
			to be discussed.	
<b>Public meetings and roadshows</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Useful for identifying views, expectations and needs of the community</li> <li>• Effective at raising public awareness of the issues and consultation processes through an initial presentation</li> <li>• Can take the issues to all parts of the District</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not examine topics in depth</li> <li>• Self-selecting sample</li> <li>• Lobby groups can dominate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need a specific topic for discussion and something that will generate a significant level of interest among the general public</li> <li>• Needs to be well marketed</li> <li>• Can be difficult to manage – inappropriate for controversial issues</li> <li>• Need to ensure a mechanism for getting something concrete from the exercise. (vote, show of hands etc.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Venue/ equipment hire</li> <li>• Staff costs</li> <li>• Advertising &amp; Publicity</li> <li>• Transport</li> <li>• Accessibility costs</li> <li>• Incentives</li> </ul>
<b>Household face-to-face survey</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High response rates</li> <li>• Allows for longer questionnaires and open-ended questions with fuller/more complete answers</li> <li>• Representative quota sample with higher degree of confidence</li> <li>• Allows use of visual materials</li> <li>• Provides quantified information for decision making purposes</li> <li>• Don't need to worry about people being</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very high cost and time consuming</li> <li>• Does not include people who work in the District but are not residents</li> <li>• Less anonymity, therefore may not get people's true opinions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need interest in the survey topic</li> <li>• Need well presented, courteous interview staff</li> <li>• Effective quota sampling procedure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questionnaire design</li> <li>• Pilot costs</li> <li>• Photocopying/ printing of surveys</li> <li>• Interviewers</li> <li>• Analysis</li> </ul>



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<b>Technique</b>	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>	<b>Using this method</b>	<b>Likely costs</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>able to read and understand written questions</li> <li>• Can reach non-users</li> </ul>			
<b>Face-to-face street interview</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High response rates</li> <li>• Allows for longer questionnaires and open-ended questions with fuller/more complete answers</li> <li>• Representative quota sample and higher degree of confidence</li> <li>• Allows use of visual materials</li> <li>• Provides quantified information for decision making purposes</li> <li>• Don't need to worry about people being able to read and understand written questions</li> <li>• Can reach non-users</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High cost</li> <li>• Shorter interviews than household surveys – restricts content</li> <li>• Less anonymity</li> <li>• Difficult to ensure a representative sample</li> <li>• Older people and younger people less likely to participate</li> <li>• Spoken language barriers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need interest in survey topic</li> <li>• Need well presented, courteous interview staff</li> <li>• Short interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questionnaire design</li> <li>• Interviewers</li> <li>• Pilot costs</li> <li>• Photocopying</li> <li>• Analysis</li> </ul>
<b>Planning for real event</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective at probing and exploring behaviour and ideas.</li> <li>• Good environment for</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involves only a small selection of the population</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need a small group with significant knowledge/ideas relating to the subject</li> <li>• Need effective facilitation and an appropriate setting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Venue hire</li> <li>• Facilitators &amp; staff</li> <li>• Transport</li> </ul>

<b>CHOOSING YOUR METHOD OF CONSULTATION</b>				
<b>A. Face to face consultation</b>				
<b>Technique</b>	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>	<b>Using this method</b>	<b>Likely costs</b>
	priority-setting and reaching reasoned conclusions about use of budget, planning buildings and facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expensive</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accessibility costs</li> <li>Invitations</li> </ul>
<b>Listening surgeries (Drop-in sessions)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Obtains views of cross section of the community</li> <li>Can use different locations</li> <li>Allows use of visual displays</li> <li>Relatively inexpensive</li> <li>Can increase level of awareness of issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Self selecting sample</li> <li>Potentially low response rate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Choose appropriate locations and advertise</li> <li>service manager/staff involvement required</li> <li>make effective use of displays</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>venue</li> <li>incentives</li> <li>staff</li> <li>publicity</li> </ul>

<b>CHOOSING YOUR METHOD OF CONSULTATION</b>				
<b>B. Self completion and telephone questionnaires</b>				
<b>Technique</b>	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>	<b>Using this method</b>	<b>Likely costs</b>
<b>Household postal survey</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All Wards can be selected</li> <li>Allows for open-ended questions</li> <li>Provides quantified information for decision making purposes</li> <li>Anonymous</li> <li>High profile</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Response rates vary – lower response than household/ street surveys</li> <li>Responses may be incomplete/ frivolous</li> <li>More care</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Need a high level of interest in the survey topic</li> <li>Need to keep quite short</li> <li>Need a simple/easy to complete design &amp; layout</li> <li>Postage should be paid</li> <li>Think about giving a reward for responding</li> <li>Use Customer Panel surveys to overcome bias and problems of self-selection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Postage</li> <li>Analysis</li> <li>Pilot costs</li> <li>Printing</li> <li>Questionnaire design</li> </ul>

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<b>Technique</b>	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>	<b>Using this method</b>	<b>Likely costs</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can reach non-users</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• needed in design</li> <li>• Self-selecting sample therefore biased</li> </ul>		
<b>Household telephone survey</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quota sampling</li> <li>• Can be less expensive than face to face (however not markedly less expensive)</li> <li>• Quick</li> <li>• High response rate</li> <li>• Provides quantified information for decision making purposes</li> <li>• Able to directly key answers into computer – speeds up process</li> <li>• Can reach non-users</li> <li>• Don't need to worry about people being able to read and understand written questions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey needs to be short</li> <li>• Answer machines/mobiles affect strike rate</li> <li>• No visual material</li> <li>• Less open-ended questions</li> <li>• Less anonymity</li> <li>• Bias in favour of those with published/accessible phone numbers (no ex-directory, no cable users)</li> <li>• Not all residents have telephones</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need a high level of interest in the survey topic</li> <li>• Need well spoken, courteous interview staff</li> <li>• Effective quote sampling procedure</li> <li>• Care must be taken in ensuring the household is not signed up to the telephone preference service. Use alternative methods in this case.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questionnaire design</li> <li>• Interviewers</li> <li>• Pilot costs</li> <li>• Analysis</li> <li>• Cost of phone calls</li> </ul>
<b>Web-based survey</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anonymous</li> <li>• Can cover users &amp; non-users</li> <li>• Cheaper than postal surveys</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self selecting sample – not representative</li> <li>• May 'miss' certain sectors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need support of IT support staff</li> <li>• Need to buy-in or develop in-house survey software</li> <li>• Need access to internet to complete</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purchase of software</li> <li>• IT support</li> <li>• Analysis</li> <li>• Publicity</li> </ul>

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<b>Technique</b>	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>	<b>Using this method</b>	<b>Likely costs</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not location-dependent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• of the population – i.e those who are not IT literate</li> <li>• Can result in low response rate</li> <li>• Limited opportunity to provide an incentive</li> </ul>		
<b>Schools/ Organisations/ clubs surveys</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can target specific population groups</li> <li>• Can use open ended questions</li> <li>• Can cover all parts of the District</li> <li>• Provide quantified information for decision making purposes</li> <li>• Relatively anonymous</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Response varies</li> <li>• Self selecting sample</li> <li>• Responses may be incomplete/ frivolous</li> <li>• More care needed in design</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need a high level of interest in the survey topic</li> <li>• Keep as short as possible</li> <li>• Use a simple design</li> <li>• Postage paid envelope should be provided</li> <li>• Think about giving a reward for responding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Printing</li> <li>• Questionnaire design</li> <li>• Incentives</li> <li>• Pilot</li> <li>• Analysis</li> <li>• Postage costs</li> </ul>

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<b>B. Self completion and telephone questionnaires</b>				
<b>Technique</b>	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>	<b>Using this method</b>	<b>Likely costs</b>
<b>Non-postal self completion survey</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anonymous</li> <li>• Can cover users &amp; non-users</li> <li>• Cheaper than postal surveys</li> <li>• Can make survey forms available at a range of outlets or through local newspaper</li> <li>• Easy to use Council buildings and facilities for survey distribution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self selecting sample – not representative</li> <li>• Can result in low response rate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To make available through Council buildings need support of Council/centre based staff</li> <li>• Need appropriate placement of posters/surveys and reply boxes</li> <li>• Freepost address required</li> <li>• Need a high level of interest in the topic</li> <li>• Well designed literature/posters etc to promote</li> <li>• Think about a reward for responding</li> <li>• Could be distributed through normal correspondence with service users (for user views)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questionnaire design</li> <li>• Incentives</li> <li>• Printing</li> <li>• Analysis</li> <li>• Insert in newspaper</li> <li>• Publicity</li> </ul>

### 5. What questions should you ask?

The usefulness of a consultation exercise will depend on the questions in it. It is all too easy to omit issues that are important to users, or to generate responses that do not provide the information needed to make a decision. Here are some helpful tips on developing the questions to ask:

- Keep questions succinct and relevant. Don't ask a question if you can't act on the results.
- If you need to ask complex questions use an interview-based consultation method, rather than relying on a self-completion questionnaire.
- Make sure your questions are piloted before they are used to make sure that people can understand them. Consider testing your questions on a small group. Can they understand the questions? Do you get meaningful results? Will the results help you?
- Ensure that the questions are straightforward as there may not be an expert or member of staff on hand to help the consultee (this is particularly important if they are completing a postal questionnaire)
- Questions need to be written in Plain English,
- Multiple-choice answers need to be different enough so that people can make an easy choice
- Think about whether you want the answers to your questions to be quantitative (yes/ no, multiple choice), or qualitative (where the consultee writes down their opinions or experiences in sentence form)
- An introduction to the consultation questions should assume no prior knowledge of the subject
- Don't ask two questions in the same sentence: this creates confusion
- Avoid leading questions

### 7. What are you going to do with the results?

Once you have completed your consultation and collated the responses, you should undertake a thorough analysis of them. In analysing the results of your consultation you will need to identify priorities and highlight these in your communications, i.e. which findings do not require action such as low priority or very good results, which things can/ cannot change in the short term, which results highlight the need for more communication.

The effectiveness of consultation should be evaluated and the results shared to encourage broader lessons to be learned. Evaluation will consider not only the number of responses received but also the quality, cost and timeliness of the consultation and the overall usefulness of the results in helping to inform decisions. Think about what the criteria are for assessing the project:

- How many participated?
- How representative were they in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, disability, housing tenure, employment status etc?
- Did you reach the people who don't normally participate?
- What did participants think about the process?

- Did you get the information you wanted?
- Was the information of a good quality/sufficient depth?
- Was there any impact on decision making?

You may want to use the results:

- In a committee report to assist with decision making;
- In a bid for funding where you have to demonstrate people's support for a project;
- In a strategy document where you want to show that the Council is working in a manner that reflects findings from consultation;
- In a submission for an award where you need to demonstrate support from the community.

In writing a report the full range of views expressed during consultation should be acknowledged and attention drawn to areas of agreement and disagreement. The results of consultation should be weighed carefully together with other evidence and considerations before decisions are made.

Remember that accessible feedback should always be provided to consultees, both on the results of consultation and on how they have been used, in order to encourage greater public participation in the future. It is important to identify the key stakeholders, and decide the best method of communicating the results. In some cases the results of consultation will be outweighed by other evidence or considerations; in such cases a clear and honest explanation of the decisive factors should be included in the feedback. There are a number of ways to feed back to those who have been involved in consultation:

- If the consultation is ongoing you may need a regular newsletter
- Use a meeting to make a presentation to participants and others – this has greater impact and allow people to ask questions
- Summarise the findings and send a summary to participants
- You may need to feed back in two stages – decision making can be lengthy and people expect feedback quickly. So at least feedback the findings and give people an idea about when decisions will be made. Then make sure you provide relevant information once decisions have been made.
- You can use the Councils' magazine, 'Together Bromsgrove' or the Council's website to reach a wide audience.
- Consider too publicising the publication of reports through local media, but do this only where there is a positive message of broad interest to the population, and try to ensure that the coverage relates to the positive action being taken as a result of the consultation, rather than on the consultation exercise itself.

The Corporate Communication, Policy and Performance Team will undertake an annual review of all consultation activity including looking at the lessons learnt both about local people's views and about the actual consultation practices undertaken in the period. These findings will be used to carry out an annual review of both the Consultation Policy and this guidance

### **8. Other considerations: Data protection and Freedom of Information**

Under the Data Protection Act 1998, departments must ensure that personal data is processed fairly. Personal data in the present context will usually just mean names and

## **Appendix 2**

addresses but, depending on the nature of the consultation, might also include other information of a personal nature that makes it possible to identify individuals. To that end, departments must ensure that certain conditions under the Act are met, notably that data subjects (consultees) give their consent to processing (publication), and that they are told the purpose or purposes for which the personal data is being processed.

Under the Freedom of Information Act 2001, individuals will have a general right to access information held by the authority, including, in principle, responses to consultation exercises, subject to certain conditions and exemptions. Relevant exemptions in this context are section 40, which exempts personal information where disclosure would infringe data principles (on which see above) and section 41, which exempts information provided in confidence.

### **Responsibilities**

Overall responsibility of this guidance rests with the Corporate Communication Policy and Performance team. Corporate agreement has been reached through CMT and Cabinet. Any member of staff undertaking consultation must comply with this guidance

### **Date of Application**

September 2007

### **Planned Date of Review**

September 2008

### **Further Advice and Guidance**

Please contact the Corporate Communications, Policy and Performance Team.