

CORPORATE CONSULTATION GUIDELINES

PURPOSE

Public consultation is fundamental to the Government's modernisation programme for local government and is seen as an important element in the process of reinvigorating local democracy. New legislation is requiring local authorities to consult their communities more extensively than they have done in the past. Whilst Newcastle has a track record of public consultation, there is a need for more staff to be involved in the process and therefore a need to ensure that consultation is carried out appropriately and is effective in meeting its objectives. Consultation can be a powerful tool for improving both the quality and cost-effectiveness of services and can bring significant benefits if consultation activities are carefully planned, well designed, competently carried out and then used to inform decision making.

This document has been produced to help officers in the Council plan and carry out community consultation more effectively. It aims to assist officers in securing the benefits that consultation can offer, to facilitate co-ordinated and combined consultation and to get good value from the resources that they invest in it.

WHAT IS CONSULTATION?

Consultation is where views are actively sought out and considered before final decisions or plans are made. It involves an ongoing exchange of views and information rather than a one off event. Consultation can take many forms from one to one dialogue and meetings in local communities to focus groups and surveys, to much larger groups of people. Consultation can be placed on a continuum of involvement, which may be visualised as follows:

Information	Consultation	Deciding together	Acting together	Supporting local initiatives
e.g. publications	public meetings surveys	co-optees, partnerships		delegation of resources

LOW INVOLVEMENT ←————→ **HIGH INVOLVEMENT**

Although represented as a continuum, this does not imply that high involvement is necessarily better than low involvement. Different activities may require different levels of involvement.

WHY CONSULT?

The Council now has a much broader and more extensive duty to consult local people and other stakeholders on the way that services are delivered overall. Under Best Value the local authority must consult stakeholders for the purpose of deciding how to fulfil the duty to secure continuous improvement in services. These duties are in addition to consultation requirements relating to specific

decisions and plans e.g. planning applications, school organisation plans. There has been a move towards a more prescriptive and comprehensive consultation requirement.

Having a statutory duty to consult is not the only reason for doing so as when it is done well and used carefully it can make a valuable contribution to decision making.

- Services can be targeted more appropriately on what people want
- User satisfaction with services can be monitored over time
- Problems arising from proposed changes to services can be identified in advance and avoided
- Residents and other stakeholders can become more informed about the way the City Council works and how it reaches decisions that affect them
- The results of consultation can be used to help make decisions about policies, priorities and strategies
- Local people have an opportunity to be more involved in the democratic process
- It can strengthen the Council's role in community leadership

There are many examples of good practice of how we currently involve communities and there is a need to use and share this experience in future consultations. Some of these consultation activities are detailed in Appendix 3.

WHAT TO CONSIDER?

Consultation will need to take account of: -

Identifying priorities

It is not realistic for authorities to consult continuously about services, so it is important to identify priorities. For example, major policy decisions where the authority does not know much about people's views; controversial decisions that are likely to have a high level of public interest; newly developed services or new statutory duties.

Existing information and structures

- Identify what information has already been collected on public opinion by the authority or other organisations that may be of use
- Consider structures already in place to consult the public e.g. 'Speak Up!' Residents Panel, Tenants Panel and whether consultation can be carried out with other services or organisations
- Consider whether the consultation will be of interest to managers of other services or organisations.

Audience

Deciding who to consult is largely a matter of judgement. Decisions that affect relatively few people may need a small, focused consultation, involving people who already use or could use a particular service. Decisions that affect the whole population need a broader consultation exercise that involves a representative cross section of the population. Decisions affecting a large group of people may need to cover several groups of users and stakeholders. A full list of stakeholders should be identified and should include where appropriate, users, non users, co-providers, partners, voluntary agencies, local businesses, staff, members, Trade Unions, internal and external customers. In particular attentions should be given to hard to reach groups.

A stakeholder database is being created in Policy and Research Services covering a wide range of organisations, community groups and individuals to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of conducting and targeting consultation activities. This will be a live database that will be added to and amended as required.

Cost

Costs of consultation vary according to the methods used and this should be taken into account when choosing a method. Full-scale consumer surveys across the whole authority can be expensive but panel surveys or forums can be relatively inexpensive once the structures are in place. Consideration needs to be given as to whether the consultation exercise is the most effective use of resources and whether the consultation can help to improve value for money or even save money e.g. not providing services that people neither want or need.

Cost-effectiveness can be increased by avoiding duplicate consultation exercises and making widest possible use of the results. Carrying out work jointly with other agencies is worth considering and incorporating public consultation with other initiatives.

Public expectations

When consulting there is a need to make it clear what is on offer and what options are available to local people. If there are constraints on what can be done, this needs to be made clear and explained why this is so. Experience suggests that you are unlikely to motivate users to take part unless they believe services will improve. If consultation is properly designed and organised, it will not generally raise unrealistic public expectations that cannot be met.

Inclusivity

Consultation exercises often need to find out the views of an accurate cross-section of the population as a whole hence they need to be inclusive. Also different sections of the community e.g. ethnic minorities, people with disabilities may have needs or views that are different from the majority and if they are not

consulted their views remain invisible. Appendix 3 includes details of useful contacts.

Evaluation

Evaluating the effectiveness of consultation activities will help you: -

- know whether consultation is genuinely helping you listen and respond to local people
- plan how to improve future consultation activities and
- use resources that are spent on consultation wisely

The main areas to consider are the quality of the consultation exercise, including the extent to which the target audience was reached and the cost.

Appendix 1 provides a consultation checklist flow chart summarising the above.

PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

Purpose

- All public consultation should relate to a decision you are intending to make and that can be influenced by the result of that consultation. There should be a clear statement why it is being carried out and how the results will be used. The way the consultation links to the Council's corporate aims, work programmes and statutory policy framework should also be described.
- Consulting and involving users needs to be a continuous commitment, not a one off project

Existing information

- A thorough search of whether similar consultation has been carried out should be undertaken and taken into account before any new consultation is carried out to avoid unnecessary repetition and duplication. This can be facilitated by Policy and Research Services, Strategic Support Directorate.

Expectations

- It should be clear to consultees what they can change as a result of participating in the consultation or how the information will be used to plan improvements.

Timely

- Consultation should be well planned and timely so that the results of consultation can feed directly into the decision making process.

Clear and concise

- Make sure material advertising meetings is as interesting as possible to encourage attendance and publicise widely.
- Use plain language in whatever method you use and design any material well.
- All consultation documents should be concise, clearly laid out and written in simple language that will be understood by the intended audience, avoiding jargon.
- Pay attention to the design and layout of questionnaires i.e. large print size, space, clear instructions and questions, logical order and personal information at the end, length of questionnaire.

Testing

- Pilot your questionnaires on a small group and avoid leading questions. Don't ask a question if you can't act on the results.

Confidentiality

- Ensure confidentiality and anonymity wherever you can and make clear that you welcome feedback both positive and negative.

Valid

- The consultation needs to be carried out in such a way that the results are valid. Seek advice on technical issues as required e.g. sampling from Policy and Research Services, Strategic Support Directorate.
- Select the most appropriate consultation technique or combination of techniques for the particular exercise that you have in mind (see Appendix 2).

Inclusive

- Ensure that ethnic minorities and other hard to reach groups have an equal opportunity to participate in activities
- Be aware that consultation and involvement of ethnic minorities can be a lot more time consuming, requiring considerably more preparatory work so as to ensure that basic support mechanisms are in place e.g. translation services. Make provision for verbal responses i.e. not exclusively written responses to encourage inclusion.
- In terms of encouraging participation do the following :-

- arrange meetings at venues that people already attend or are in their locality
 - consider providing transport for vulnerable groups
 - consider including the consultation on agendas of regular existing meetings
 - consider providing direct incentives e.g. the offer of a modest prize for participating in surveys
 - provide refreshments and childcare for focus groups
 - provide a nominal sum e.g. £10 to cover travelling expenses of participants attending focus groups and additional expenses to cover childcare if childcare is not provided on site
- Ensure consultation and subsequent feedback are carried out in such a way that consultees feel their views are valued.
 - Ensure consultation exercises are inclusive by:-
 - making large print, Braille or taped versions of questionnaires available to survey visually impaired
 - making sure that public meetings and forums are held in accessible buildings
 - making sure that public meetings are held at appropriate times of day
 - avoid clashes with religious festivals/activities and other major events
 - giving consideration to the need for signers, interpreters etc.
 - making sure face to face interviews are carried out in ways that enables people with hearing difficulties to take part
 - using an interviewer for people who might have difficulty reading or writing
 - ensuring questionnaires can be administered in the appropriate language or provide translations
 - including a reply paid envelope for postal surveys

Feedback

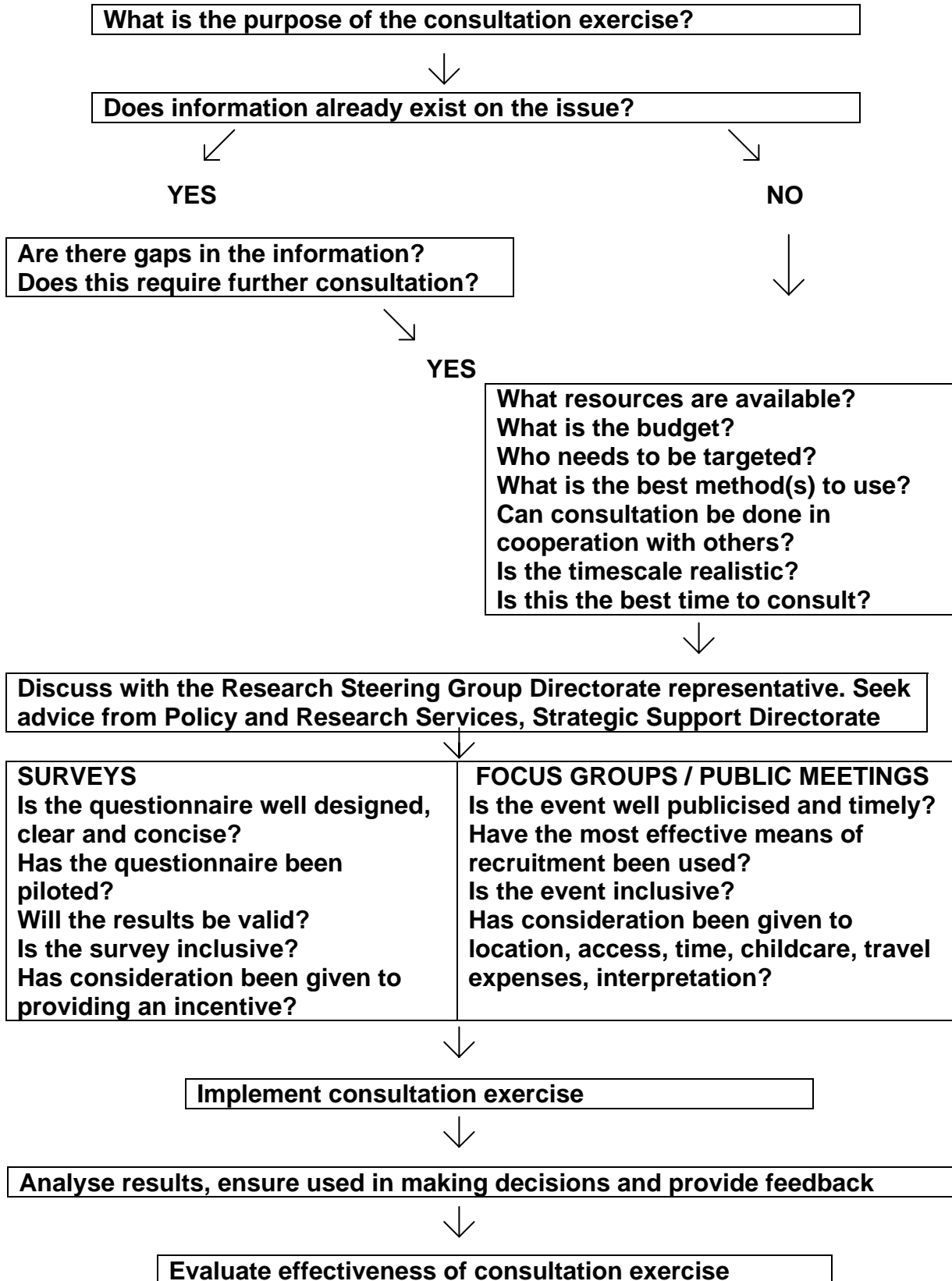
- Provide honest feedback on the results of consultation and make it clear how these results have been used to change things or explain why they have not been used, if appropriate.
- Ensure results are used effectively by taking consultees views into account when making decisions.

Evaluation

- Evaluate the effectiveness of the consultation exercise in terms of responses received, quality, cost, timeliness, whether the intended target audience was reached and usefulness of the results in helping to inform decisions.

- Appendix 1 - Checklist for consultation exercise
- Appendix 2 – Methods of consultation
- Appendix 3 – Consultation good practice
- Appendix 4 – Advice and Contacts for consultation activities

CONSULTATION CHECKLIST



METHODS OF CONSULTATION

The following provides details of different methods of consulting residents. Each has advantages and disadvantages and no single method will suit every occasion. Whilst some traditional consultation techniques, such as public meetings are often insufficient on their own, many long established methods such as surveys, are valuable if done well. A technique is not necessarily better simply because it is new. The key to success is matching the methods used to the purpose of the consultation exercise and the service covered, the communities affected and carrying out the chosen method competently.

PUBLIC MEETINGS – use to get a feel for public opinion on a particular topic/issue and inform the public

Advantages

- Provides local opportunities for people to comment on matters that affect them directly and indirectly
- A convenient and transparent way to demonstrate public consultation / build up good relationships
- Can be used to inform at the same time as getting views of the public

Disadvantages

- People attending unlikely to be representative of the local population
- Contributions will be about local, topical or personal concerns rather than service-wide strategic priorities

OPEN DAYS/ ROADSHOWS/ EXHIBITIONS – use to inform audiences who are relatively unfamiliar with a service or issue

Roadshows and exhibitions enable the audience to find out what you do, meet staff, ask questions and so on or they can be more structured with formal presentations and discussions. Roadshows are similar except that they go out to communities rather than expecting them to come to you.

Advantages

- Gives flexibility in terms of attendance
- Provides a source for suggestions and comments
- Promotes good relations
- Provides quick feedback

Disadvantages

- People who attend are not particularly representative

WRITTEN CONSULTATION EXERCISES – use to get views on detailed and potentially complex information from interested parties

Advantages

- Can provide users with detailed, comprehensive information
- Gives considered views of respondents based on accurate information

Disadvantages

- May get a low response
- Analysing responses can be resource intensive

USER COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS – use to get detailed information from individual users

Advantages

- Helps identify recurring problems
- Provides information on weaknesses and strengths
- Shows users that serious about putting things right

Disadvantages

- Not representative
- Complaints may increase if handling system good

QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEYS – use to get views from a widely representative group, which is statistically reliable. It allows comparative information year on year if the same questions are asked. Can be face to face, postal or conducted over the telephone

Advantages

- A good methods of obtaining reliable statistical information
- Good method of getting the views on non users
- Enables changes over time to be tracked

Disadvantages

- Results unreliable if response poor
- A poorly designed questionnaire can give misleading results
- Difficult to get views of disadvantaged minority groups

FOCUS GROUPS – use to explore issues in more depth

Advantages

- Lets you find out what is important to users
- Groups allow people to spark ideas off one another
- Provides information on what people think and why

Disadvantages

- Does not provide statistical information
- Feedback will not be typical of all users

USER PANEL – use to get user reaction to changes and proposals and ideas for improvement

Advantages

- Useful sounding board to test plans and ideas
- Creates a continuing dialogue with users
- Gives relatively quick feedback
- Helps concentrate on issues from the user perspective

Disadvantages

- Can be unrepresentative
- Requires strong input and commitment from management
- Should not be used as only means of consultation

CITIZENS' PANEL - use as a sounding board to test specific options or proposals and to assess services and develop views about future needs and goals from a fairly representative sample of the population.

Advantages

- More likely to be committed as recruited on a voluntary basis
- Gives relatively quick feedback once set up

Disadvantages

- Response rates are sometimes not as high as expected
- Members become increasingly experienced and knowledgeable and therefore less representative of the population as a whole therefore regular replacement necessary
- Level of drop out quite high

MYSTERY SHOPPING – used to test specific areas of service delivery. Gives you the type of experience a real user would have

Advantages

- Precise and detailed feedback
- Able to highlight particular service areas and investigate problems quickly
- Can be used to commend/motivate staff

Disadvantages

- More applicable to front line, person to person services
- Staff can be suspicious
- Only gives isolated instances and small samples

CITIZENS' JURIES - use to obtain detailed considered views from members of the public on a particular issue. Juries usually made up of 12- 16 lay people who hear evidence from a range of specialist witnesses over several days and draw conclusions.

Advantages

- Provides informed feedback
- Opportunity for members of jury to make a real contribution to public affairs

Disadvantages

- Expensive
- Works best where organisations have already made considerable progress on their consultation
- May not be representative of the views of the general public, who don't have the benefit of expert evidence
- Jurors will not want to commit time and effort unless they are given some undertaking that their views will count

BALLOTS/REFERENDA/DELIBERATIVE POLLING – use to get a clear mandate for a particular action. People are asked to vote either for or against an option or a limited number of options.

In deliberative polling, a representative sample of people is initially polled on an issue. They then learn more about the topic through being given information, asking questions and participating in discussions and at the end of the process are polled again

Advantages

- Easy to interpret the results
- Increasingly easy for people to participate

Disadvantages

- No qualitative information, you only get a yes/no answer
- Results can be based on superficial uninformed responses but no way of finding out
- Can be expensive
- Often gets low turnout

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY e.g. Internet, cable television, kiosks. Use to obtain views in new ways, the opportunities offered by new technology can make it easier and fun to take part

Advantages

- Usage spreading rapidly
- Quick response and easy for people to use

Disadvantages

- Excludes significant groups
- Technical problems

PARTICIPATORY APPRAISAL – action research to build up a representative, realistic and inclusive portrait of the issues that matter to a community

Advantages

- Interactive rather than extractive approach
- Uses a variety of methods to elicit the same information to enable verification
- Allows different types of people to contribute in a way that they feel comfortable and to the level and extent chosen by them
- Allows the views of those people who are usually most difficult to reach to be represented

Disadvantages

- Cannot cover a wide range of issues needs to be focused
- Exercise needs to be undertaken by a group of people trained in the techniques
- Time consuming collating and drawing together the information collected to draw conclusions
- Timescale to undertake activity will be variable and will not be evident at the beginning of task

Consultation Best Practice

The Customer Service Centre Experience

Surveys

As a result of an Access Survey for the Civic Centre, there was recognition of the need for external access improvements including ramps, automatic doors, tactile paving and specialised handrails.

The Access Officer from the Disability Forum was asked to review the design of the Civic Centre Customer Service Centre. As a result the disabled toilet was re-designed.

The Civic Centre Customer Service Centre Six Month Review identified that there was not enough directional signage, and there was a lack of awareness about the ICT available. Additional directional signage was put into place, and signs to highlight the location of the Handitill, PC's for public use, and the video conferencing booth.

User comments

Feedback from the Customer Service Centre Comment Cards showed that customers would like to see the number of people waiting in front of them displayed on their ticket, rather than the number of minutes they could expect to wait. The Q-Matic queuing system was amended to show this information for the customer.

Customer Comment Cards also identified a lack of continuity between Council Tax and Generic Officers in the Customer Service Centre. A programme of cross training was embarked upon to create more flexibility in responding to the needs of the CSC customers. The aim to ensure that both CSC Council Tax Officers and CSC Generic Officers are fully trained and able to interchange between 'front desk' duties and the Council Tax desk.

A general lack of awareness amongst customers was identified in terms of the volumes of customers being dealt with. A monthly sheet is now on display in the Customer Service Centre detailing statistical and complaints information.

The Call Centre Experience

User comments and complaints

EnviroCall was able to use data to identify reports from callers about "missed bins" and this was passed back to Environmental Services. Using GIS

technology, they were able to target specific bin collection rounds for improvements to the service.

Survey

A telephone satisfaction survey is used to call back 400 customers a month. This is a large sample of the Call Centre's customers, and it has been identified that customers find it difficult to differentiate between the service EnviroCall provides and the service delivered on the ground by Cityworks operatives. This means that customers' views of the EnviroCall service are often coloured by the level of the 'end' service provided by Cityworks generally.

Libraries

A partnership has been formed with Gateshead Libraries for a project called "First Impressions" that involves staff from one library service reviewing the services provided by the other partner. Best practice is then shared and an action plan for improvements is identified, with collaborative working wherever possible.

Mystery Shopping

A Customer Service Sampling, or mystery shopping exercise is underway to sample the quality of service both before and after the introduction of a change in the structure.

Staff Group

Libraries have set up a new customer service "in-house" group involving staff from different levels within libraries, and from several different libraries across the city. Their remit is to support the new structure in focussing on customer service issues.

Ward Stewardship Programme

Public Meetings

Ward Stewardship is seen as a way to improve the communication link between the Council and its users. The Ward Stewardship programme is a process that can have a direct influence on service delivery at a ward level. It offers the opportunity for residents' priorities to influence both service priorities and investment decisions, and the programme is continually being refined and developed.

The Ward Stewardship initiative began in August 1999, with the intention of involving the community in the development and delivery of Environmental Services. The process is a rolling programme of consultation and action planning carried out via public meetings during the autumn and spring.

Volunteer officers, mainly from operational areas, were given the role of Ward Stewards, their function being to establish a robust communication link between residents, Elected Members and the City Council to ensure public opinion is used when shaping and improving the way services are delivered.

The Ward Stewardship Initiative follows a pre-determined programme each year. Public consultation meetings held in the autumn offer all residents at a ward level the opportunity to comment on Cityworks' delivery of environmental services. Notifications of these meetings are included in a 'Streets Ahead' newsletter sent out one week before the meeting. The dates and venues are all agreed with Elected Members.

These meetings also provide an opportunity for Stewards to report on local performance issues relating to service delivery and enable residents to comment on environmental issues, which are recorded by the Steward. This information is used to build a comprehensive database listing key priorities for future action. Action-planning public meetings, held in spring, allow residents to confirm and prioritise the schemes they would like to see delivered over the summer.

Apart from setting environmental priorities, Ward Stewardship has developed and improved dialogue with residents and other stakeholder groups. Local priorities have also been used to help shape strategies such as the Street Lighting Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and the annual Highways Maintenance Programme.

During the three years of the programme over 300 public meetings have taken place, supplemented by ad hoc walkabouts with Councillors, residents and Ward Stewards in each Ward. This has resulted in the delivery of 876 environmental improvement schemes within neighbourhoods throughout the City. Ward Stewards have reported over 6,041 individual issues to EnviroCall, with 4,887 so far completed

To measure its success in the third year of operation, a full evaluation of the Environmental Ward Stewardship Programme has been undertaken. The findings of this process have helped to formulate an effective strategy to continue the programme in the future, ensuring sustainability and adding value to our concept for effective neighbourhood management. The reason for the research came from a need to develop a more robust, sustainable strategy due to the importance it has in bringing the City Council closer to its stakeholders and taking account of their views in the way we shape and deliver environmental services.

Community Participation Green Paper

Written Consultation Exercises

Consultation on the community participation Green Paper in 2001 took place at a wide variety of venues, using a range of different methods. The aim was to involve and invite responses from as many people as possible, throughout Newcastle. Particular efforts have been made to invite responses from individuals and groups who do not usually get involved in council consultations.

Stalls have been staffed at community festivals, offering local people the opportunity to speak to staff about community participation, as well as taking the consultation to people who would not necessarily attend committee or community group meetings. To ensure the views of socially excluded communities were included in the consultation, voluntary organisations that work with groups and individuals from Newcastle's excluded communities were invited to run workshops with their service users, about community participation.

Many initiatives have taken place in local neighbourhoods, to encourage as many people as possible to be involved in the consultation e.g. community forums, roadshows, information provided to groups and organisations in wards, residential events, planning days and presentations to area and ward committees. Briefings for city council staff have taken place, to help equip them to consult with their service users as well.

The consultation also included a media campaign including press releases to publications read by BME groups, Citylife article and coupon to request the document, community radio debate, poster campaign, internet document and feedback form. Large print and audio-tape versions of the document and translated material were made available.

'Speak Up!' Residents Panel and Tenants Panel

Citizen's Panel

The Residents Panel consists of over 1000 residents of the City who are broadly representative of the City as a whole. The Panel provide a useful sounding board to obtain views on issues such as corporate policy priorities and budget issues. Consultation on these issues over the past couple of years has resulted in more resources being allocated to the areas seen as a priority i.e. Education, Social Services and Environmental Services

The Tenants Panel consists of over 500 tenants, with representation from across the City. The Tenants Panel is quite new and has been established to enable wider involvement of tenants in making decisions to shape the future of Council Housing in Newcastle. Tenants have been consulted about Housing Service priorities and tenant involvement. The survey confirmed that improving modern homes was the number one priority, but that there were other priorities, such as keeping affordable rents that were also very important. These results will feed into the decision on the future of housing management for the Council's homes, which is expected in October 2002.

Residents Survey

Questionnaire Surveys

The Residents Survey is carried out every two years to obtain residents views on their perceptions of council services and the way they are provided. It is carried out in sufficient detail to provide valid data, which permits analysis at ward or

area level. Some information from these surveys can be used to form a time series to measure changes in the Council's performance over time. The results of the surveys identify areas where improvements have been and also areas where there is still considerable scope for improvement. Priorities of residents are identified which assists the Council in identifying key areas that need addressing. The survey undertaken in 2000 included questions asked of all local authorities so enabled wider comparison, in particular with the other core cities. Directorates are asked to respond to the results of surveys and identify how they are going to address the concerns of residents arising out of the surveys, which are reported to area committees.

Planning & Contract Compliance Unit - Social Services

Questionnaire Surveys

A questionnaire has been sent to a sample of service users receiving care at home services and day services. The questionnaire asks about their experience of the care provider and whether they are happy with their service. This information is then fed back to service providers with actions required of them to ensure quality issues are dealt with. This questionnaire is being used for care at home services and will include findings as a focus in the monitoring programme (of the service provider); day services will follow.

Focus Groups

Focus groups have been used successfully for a range of purposes and the following gives an indication of the issues for which they have been used.

- to obtain residents perspectives in different areas of the City of open and green spaces to assess their value and importance to assist in the development of an Open and Green Space strategy for the City
- to obtain staff perspectives of the service they provide, its strengths and weaknesses and how it could be improved to feed into Best Value reviews of the service
- to explore in more detail with staff, issues arising out of the staff survey that require more focussed discussion to assist in addressing the issues involved
- to obtain residents initial reactions, views and concerns to the Government's White Paper on Regional Government to identify the focus for future consultation activities and the information needs of residents

Going for Growth Regeneration Plan

Road Shows/ Exhibitions

Following the publication of the Going for Growth Regeneration Plan in July 2001, meetings were held across the east and west of the City. Local residents

living in these areas, had an opportunity to give their views, raise any concerns and to have any issues explained to them in relation to the Plan. Information was collected during one to one consultations to gauge residents key concerns and views. The results helped to inform the location of the new district heart in the west end and the route of the extended metro/tram link as well as residents concerns and priorities to be addressed.

Sensory Support Unit move to Shieldfield from the Civic Centre - Social Services

Focus groups, independent access audits and open day

The Team Manager Sensory Support arranged 3 meetings at the Civic, one for any sensory support service users, one for deaf and hard of hearing people and one for visually impaired people. They took place at different times to enable people to choose when to attend at a venue that was accessible and known to service users who were used to coming to see the team. Invitations were sent to everyone on the sensory support register and current service users, and transport was provided.

There was a lot of resistance from service users to the move. At the meetings, Social Services did a presentation making it clear that the move was not negotiable and explaining the reasons for the move. People were asked for their ideas about the move and how Social Services could make it better for service users. They suggested an open day at the new building and involvement of service users in planning the alterations to make the building accessible.

As a result independent access audits were carried out on Shieldfield before and after the alterations were done and then service users were invited back to an Open Day at Shieldfield where they could see what had been done and give feedback. Further alterations were made based on the feedback. The Open Day was also used to give information about the service.

Consulting with Children - Social Services

Focus groups

Social Services fund other organisations to consult with service users and carers, such as Disability Forum, Healthy City Project, Who Cares North East. For the Children's Best Value review, Who Cares North East consulted with looked after children living in our children's homes. As they are not employed directly by Social Services the children were able to talk freely. They also know the organisation as it does ongoing work with looked after children. They went to meet young people in the children's homes (with pizzas and refreshments etc)

This exercise ensured that direct feedback and ideas went into the best value review not just the views of staff and adults working with looked after children.

The Children's Accommodation Manager met with a group of the young people to feed back what had happened on the issues they had raised.

For example:

pocket money - the amount of pocket money has risen for all (during the consultation some young people did a short video explaining why they thought pocket money should increase, this was shown at select committee so that councillors heard their views)

decoration of children's homes - request for more choice of decoration and improvements to decoration - the officer responsible for buildings met with the young people and improvements have been made, this is confirmed in homes inspection reports.

transport - young people wanted all homes to have their own vehicle - as current vehicles are assessed as roadworthy and were not due to be replaced until 2002 There had been no changes but young people were given feedback on the situation and the manager told them she would like the homes to have people carriers which were not obviously council vehicles in the future - this is a longer term solution.

Education - improvements were made to facilities and support to young people in care, i.e. access to computers, home work clubs etc and an Educational Achievement Team set up to further improve access to education.

Students in the Community

Participatory Appraisal

Perceptions and views of students and local people in Heaton, Sandyford and Jesmond were obtained. Views were gathered in formal meetings but the majority of interviews were carried out in local venues such as pubs, clubs, metro stations and toddler groups to try and access residents who may not attend structured organised meetings. In this way a wide and representative view could be gathered. Ideas and views of local people about how issues could be resolved or improved were also sought. Timelines were used to review previous student issues. The geographical impacts and seasonal impacts of student housing were explored, the positive and negative drivers and ideas for change using an H-form. A future timeline was also produced for moving forward with participation and consultation and action plans produced

ADVICE AND CONTACTS FOR CONSULTATION ACTIVITIES

ADVICE

- For support and advice on carrying out consultation activities contact Policy and Research Services, Strategic Support Directorate
- To ensure greater coordination of consultation and that staff are kept informed of research activities and the sharing of information a research protocol has been drawn up which staff undertaking consultation should adhere to (see the Research section of the Strategic Support Intranet site)
- A Research Steering Group exists to prioritise and assist coordination of the Council's research work programme. Each Directorate has a representative on the Steering Group and staff undertaking consultation activities should inform their Directorate representative or Policy and Research Services. This will ensure that research activities being undertaken are widely known about and you will be aware if similar consultation exercises have taken place (see Research section of the Strategic Support Intranet site).
- For details of other consultation activities that have taken place refer to the Research database on the Research section of the Strategic Support Intranet site.

CONTACTS

Advice and support on research methods

Policy and Research Services
Strategic Support Directorate

Research Steering Group

Strategic Support	Ann Atkinson
Social Services	Caroline Thomas
Community and Housing	Keith McDonald, Jeremy Brock
EEC	Shirley Bruce, John Edwards
Cityworks	Dave Tinsley, Linda Norris
Education	Deb Tyler, Barbara Moorhead

Customer Service Officer Working Group

Helen Batey	Cityworks
Alison Dyson	Cityworks

Community Participation Officer Working Group

Kate Israel	Community and Housing
Jeremy Brock	Community and Housing

Consultation with young people

Youth Council

The Youth Council has been set up to offer young people aged 13-21 the chance to decide what issues are most important to them and the chance to look at options for taking action on those issues.

Jill Bauld Community and Housing

Consultation with ethnic minorities

Nargis Haq Community and Housing Directorate

Consultation with disabled people

Tony Metcalf Social Services Directorate

Participatory Appraisal

Joanna Humphries Community and Housing Directorate

Interpreters – BSL/English, Deafblind, Lipspeaker, notetaker, speech to text reporter

Communication Support Service for the Deaf, Deafblind and Hard of Hearing
Tel: 211 5094

References

Listen Up! effective community consultation - Audit Commission Management Paper, November 1999.

Involving Users – Improving the delivery of local public services. A report from the National Consumer Congress and the Service First Unit in the Cabinet Office, March 1999

How to consult your users; Why consult? Service First Unit in the Cabinet Office 1998

Community Consultation Strategy - Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

Key principles for good practice in the active involvement of young people – From the 'Hear by Right' document by Harry Wade, Anthony Lawton and Mark Stevenson (Local Government Association and National Youth Agency).