

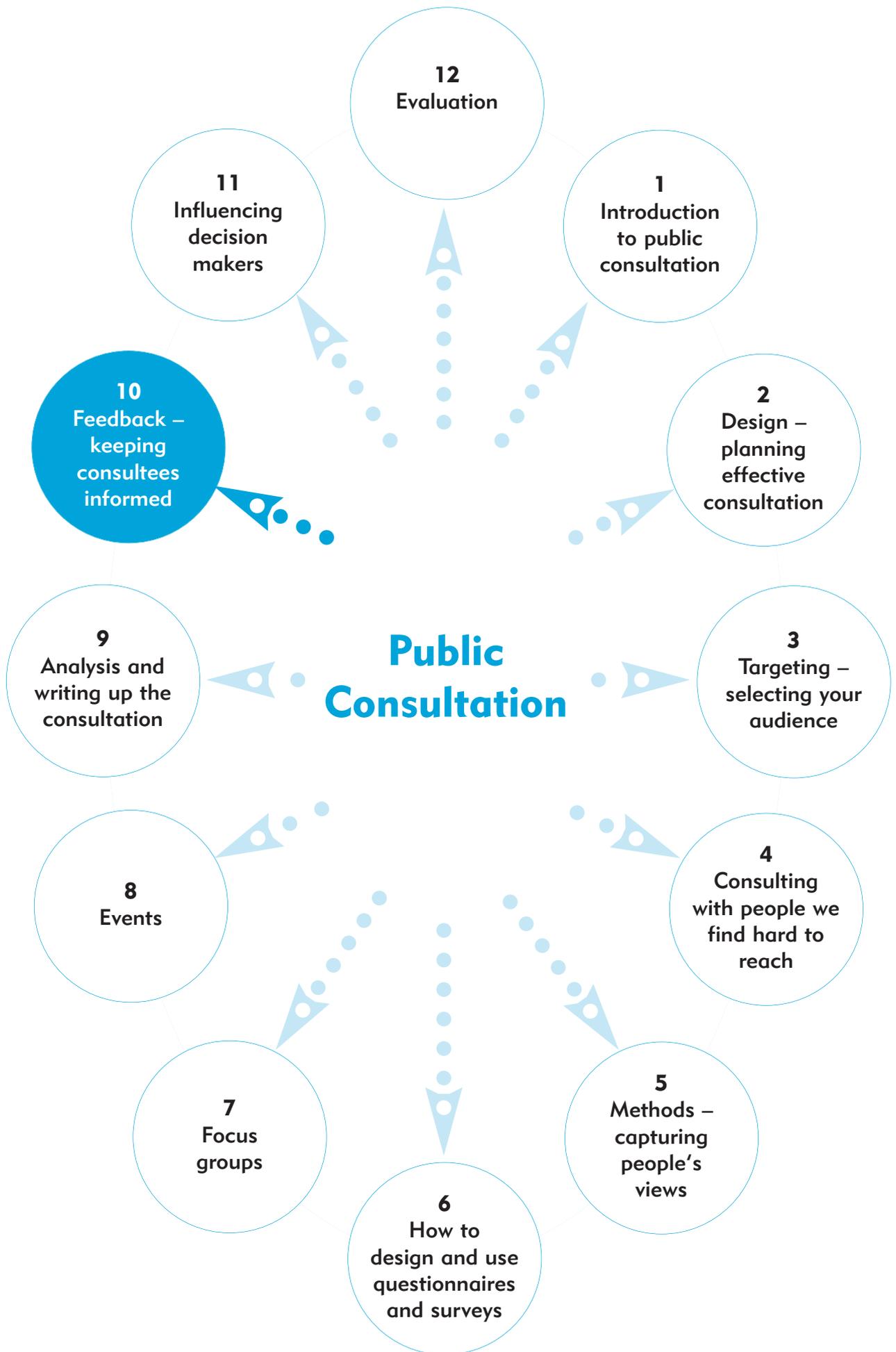


Nottinghamshire
County Council

Consultation in Nottinghamshire Feedback - keeping consultees informed



guide **10**





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Introduction

Consultees need to know the results of any consultation they have been involved in and what happened or what decision we made as a result.

Feedback

The key to effective consultation is the involvement of the people you are consulting and their ability to see the influence they have had over decision-making. This means ensuring they are not simply used as a sounding board, but are aware of the results of the process, and how the information they gave is used.

Getting the feedback stage right is critical to keeping consultees motivated and in encouraging them to participate again in the future. It also demonstrates that we respect their views even if a subsequent decision is contrary to their wishes. Honesty helps build relationships for the Council into the future.

This requires feedback in three-parts:

1. A response to the consultation – what people said. This is the output from the consultation process itself
2. The Council's decisions or actions – the formal outcomes of the consultation
3. A reconciliation of the two so that participants can see how the Council considered the issues they raised and why the Council came to its choice.

Decision makers and key consultees may also want to know the methodology that was used so that they can judge for themselves the reliability of the conclusions drawn.



When feedback should be given

Outputs

As soon as practical after the consultation is closed a report on what consultees have said should be produced. This is needed in any case to inform the decision making process but it should also be provided to consultees, if necessary in summary form with the full report being available on request.

Outcomes

When the decision or action has been agreed, this too needs to be communicated to consultees. It should be accompanied by a brief explanation of the issues addressed in coming to a decision and the reasons why a particular choice was made.

It is invariably best to give feedback as soon as possible to reassure participants that you received their response and to demonstrate your commitment to keep them informed. In the case of feedback on outputs it may be helpful to provide it to participants after the specific events that they were involved in rather than hold all feedback on outputs until the end of the consultation. For example, if a meeting is held at the start of the consultation it may be better to send a brief summary of the event with thanks to all participants immediately afterwards rather than relying on using a general report on the consultation several weeks later.

Often the final decisions of the Council on the issue consulted on may take place several weeks after the close of the consultation. To bridge the gap and continue to provide the reassurance participants appreciate, it is useful to:

1. Explain in all consultation materials when and how feedback will be given (inviting participants to select their preferred method)
2. Provide a contact name, number, email and address if people wish to make an enquiry



3. Publicise the fact that up-to-date information on the consultation and the issue in question can be obtained from the Council's website (offering a precise URL wherever possible).

If feedback is delayed for whatever reason, some means of telling participants and providing details of the revised arrangements should be found. This can be quite difficult, but it helps to have published contact details and a recognised regular web presence.

The sooner feedback is given the better. There is also a need to retain and keep feedback information on the Council's consultation database for a significant time after a consultation. This is because participants may forget what happened, non-participants might acquire an interest in the issue, a similar issue may arise elsewhere or the project may develop further and people may want to refer back to what happened earlier. It is good practice to keep information available for two years following the consultation – after that time people tend not to feel that the views expressed then carry as much weight.



Who needs feedback?

Feedback is necessary for the audience originally identified for the consultation and in particular for respondents and key stakeholders.

Different audiences will want different levels of information. For example, residents may be interested in just the headline findings of a residents' attitude survey but may want greater detail of a consultation on a controversial development in their area.

How to give feedback

Feedback is best given in the way that consultees would prefer, so where possible they should be asked to indicate their preference. This may be in the way that they were originally engaged or by a more direct simpler method. So if views were sought through a face-to-face meeting you should consider providing the outcome in a similar manner, unless consultees indicate otherwise. Feedback to an internet response could be given by email.

In addition to participants, the general audience also needs to be considered. In particular, key stakeholders need to be informed even if they have shown no previous interest in participating themselves. Similarly, members of the general public and staff may need to be told about the results.

It is useful to establish regular consultation 'notice boards' – places where the council posts notices about consultations coming up or completed and the decisions that have followed. These don't have to be physical locations, they can be web sites where people become used to finding relevant information on consultations because information is always posted there and is regularly advertised in consultation materials. That way, if consultees miss out on one communication, there is an obvious and familiar place for them to go to keep up to date with developments.



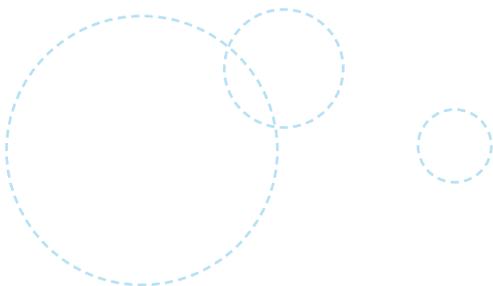
How much feedback to give

The Council will normally draft a formal report on a consultation, giving details of the methodology used and the responses received. This can be published and used to let stakeholders know the results of the consultation and it can be summarised for a more general audience. A letter simply setting out the highlights of the consultation may suffice to let people know what responses have been given to the Council. Recipients can be invited to request the full details and the consultation report can be published on the website.

The outcomes can be similarly publicised – again the formal decisions of the council are supported by council reports and minutes and these may be useful for key stakeholders, while summaries may be sufficient for a general audience.

In addition, you should consider the added value of:

- regular meetings with key stakeholders
- regular emails to staff and a feature in staff newsletters and websites
- articles in council and/or residents' newsletters
- press releases to the local media.



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Nottinghamshire County Council's consultation standards

1. A consultation mandate should be completed and approved by your departmental co-ordinator/ champion before the start of any consultation. *(Guides 2 and 11)*
2. The consultation should be logged on the County Council's consultation database. *(Guides 2, 10 and 11)*
3. For key decisions a public engagement plan should be published with the forward plan. *(Guides 2 and 11)*
4. In planning a consultation, the specific communication needs of groups and individuals who are often otherwise excluded should be considered. *(Guides 3 and 4)*
5. A minimum of 12 weeks should be allowed for consultation on major decisions. *(Guide 2)*
6. The name, address and contact number of the person responsible for the consultation should be published on all consultation materials. *(Guides 2 and 10)*
7. The consultation material should make clear by what date responses are required, in what format and to whom they should be sent. *(Guides 2 and 6)*
8. The consultation should include a face-to-face element where consultees are able to meet, question and put their views to the decision-maker(s). *(Guides 4, 5, 7 and 8)*
9. Any venue selected for a consultation event should meet the Council's accessibility code. *(Guides 4 and 8)*
10. Any complaints about the consultation, questions asked, materials or time allowed should be noted in the consultation report. *(Guides 9, 10 and 11)*
11. A notice of decision should be published for each consultation. *(Guides 10 and 11)*
12. Feedback regarding the responses, the Council's decision and how the consultation influenced it should be given to consultees. *(Guides 4, 7, 9, 10, 11 and 12)*



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