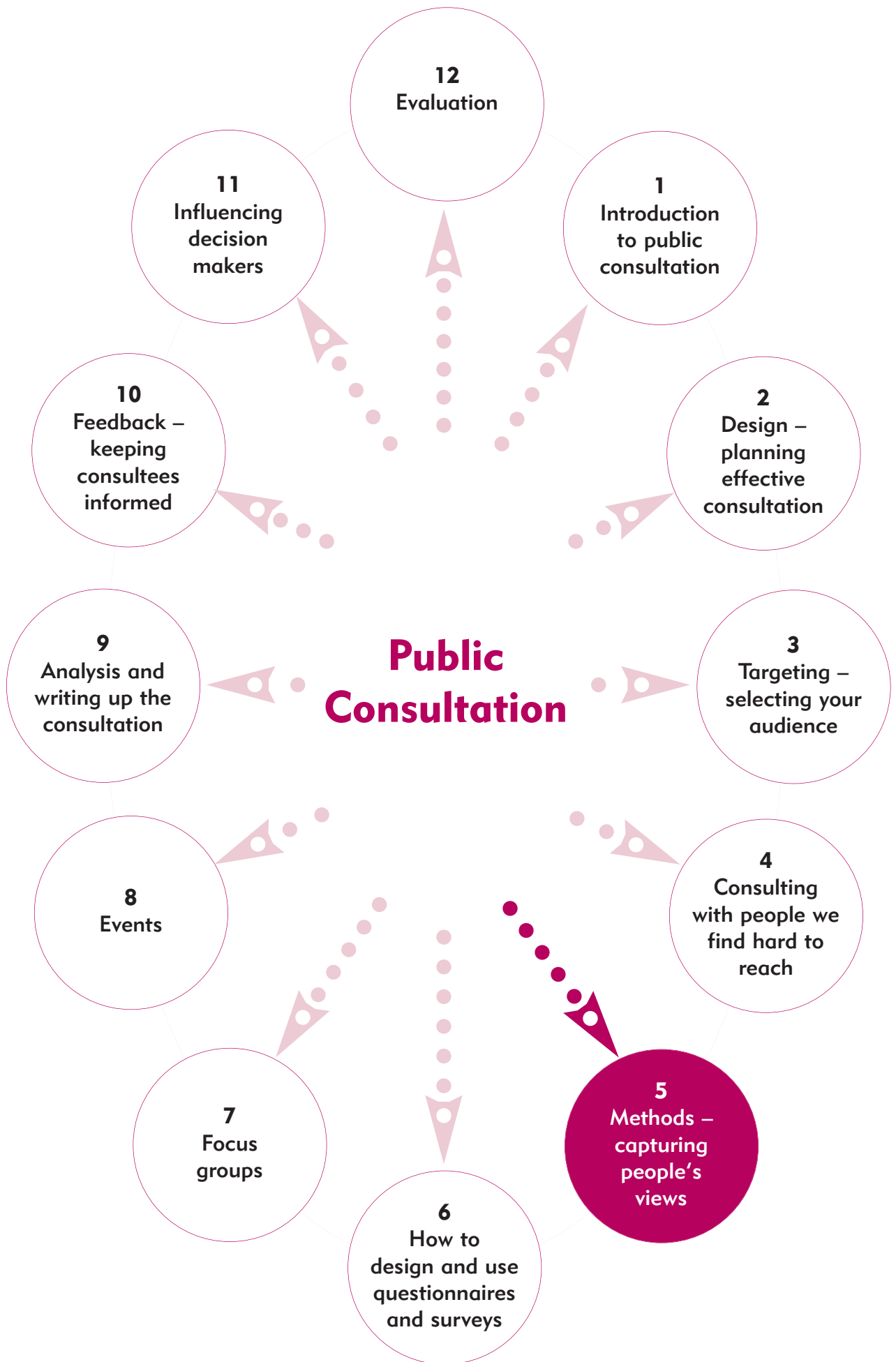


Nottinghamshire  
County Council

# Consultation in Nottinghamshire Methods - capturing people's views



guide 5





## Contents

1. Introduction	4
2. Combining consultation methods	4
3. Face-to-face, print and new technology	5
4. Record keeping	8
5. Consultation methods	8
Summary of consultation methods	9
Consultation methods comparison	10



## Introduction

There are a huge variety of consultation methods available. To narrow down and select the most appropriate methods for a specific consultation a number of factors need to be considered.

1. What am I trying to find out?
2. From whom do I need this information?
3. How would they like to respond?
4. What information do they need before they can respond?
5. Do we need something besides a simple exchange of information?
6. How will I record this information?
7. What resources do I need and have?
8. How much time do I need and have?
9. What has been done before to gain similar results? Was it successful?

## Combining consultation methods

Usually the best solution is to use a mix of methods. People have different interests and requirements. To gain the attention and response from your target audiences it is essential to communicate with them by a method they hear and allow them to respond by a method of their choice.

Pre-consultation discussions with key stakeholders and small-scale pilots may help make these choices easier.

### *Passive/active communication methods<sup>1</sup>*

Some communication methods like meetings, exhibitions and websites are essentially passive. Organising them can be a major task but attendance/visits depend on how well they are publicised and how relevant and attractive they are. This means you need to take action to get people 'through the door'.

More active media such as letters, posters, brochures and leaflets are delivered directly to the public and push the message and opportunities out to the audience. These methods can often be used on their own and do not require additional activity to generate responses.

Passive methods should always be supported by active methods to encourage participation. For example posters are seen as people go about their normal business and they are effective in publicising events and opportunities to respond.

### *Existing and new methods<sup>2</sup>*

When planning any consultation it is tempting to reuse a familiar, favourite method, typically a self-completion survey, but to ignore existing consultation mechanisms such as regular council publications, forums and community partners.

This should be avoided and the requirements of each consultation, the needs of each audience and the experiences gained in previous consultations should be used to continually improve the standards of consultation we achieve.

Wherever possible, established or existing mechanisms should be used. Time and resources have been spent to create them and relationships are built on what has gone before. Making good use of existing consultation mechanisms helps strengthen relationships and can often be quicker than employing new methods. New methods can be employed to improve on the coverage achieved and to increase participation.

Don't forget about the media too – they can be an extremely cost effective way of providing information, promoting consultation and encouraging feedback.

<sup>1</sup> Table 4 column A (page 9) records whether a consultation method is active or passive.

<sup>2</sup> Table 4 column B (page 9) records whether a consultation method is normally existing or new.



## Resources

Consultation can be resource intensive and in selecting the methods to be used the available resources need to be taken into account.

The main resources required are:

1. information (particularly who is interested in this subject and how do we contact them)
2. staff (including design, technical support and administrative help)
3. time (particularly to plan and organise the consultation, provide sufficient time for consultees to respond, responses to be interpreted and feedback given)
4. money (to deliver your consultation, for example producing consultation material)
5. venues
6. equipment (particularly audio-visual equipment and induction loops).

## Timescales<sup>3</sup>

Some methods are inexpensive, simple to use and quick to employ. Others may be quite costly, require specialist help or take weeks to prepare. Looking at the timescale available for a consultation will help determine whether a particular method is practical.



<sup>3</sup> Table 4 column C (page 9) records whether a consultation method is normally quick and inexpensive.

<sup>4</sup> Table 4 column D (page 9) records whether a consultation method is primarily face-to-face, print or new technology.

## Face-to-face, print and new technology<sup>4</sup>

28 methods are described in Table 5 (page 10). Each method has different strengths and uses. A key difference is whether they are face-to-face methods, involve printing, or new technology.

### Face-to-face methods

Face-to-face methods are the most effective for consulting with the public and stakeholders. Such methods are more interactive and flexible and they also allow issues to be discussed in greater depth – allowing the decision-maker's position, the issues and the consultees' views to be better understood.

There are a variety of face-to-face methods and one or more should feature in any consultation.

**Table 1 Face-to-face consultation methods**

Action planning	Exhibition	Open day
Art and poetry workshop	Focus group	Public meeting
Citizens jury	Forum	Roadshow
Citizen panel	Interview	Seminar
Community meeting	Local community group	Site visit
Conference	Neighbourhood forum	Workshop or group discussion
Consultation committee	One-to-one meeting	

### Print methods

Printed materials can be quickly distributed to a large number of people allowing consultations to be more extensive than with face-to-face methods alone. They can also be targeted to various audiences encouraging specific stakeholders or groups to respond. Printed materials can carry or advertise response mechanisms.



**Table 2 Useful types of printed material**

1 Letter	Personal letters are the best means of encouraging a response and they can accompany other materials including response mechanisms such as surveys and reply cards.
2 Leaflet	Usually the least expensive but still reasonably effective for providing information or advertising response mechanisms. Can include reply slips.
3 Newsletter	Long consultations may warrant a series of leaflets with their own branding. Some audiences may be already served by their own newsletters, which make them a good means of communicating with them.
4 Brochure	Brochures are a good means of supporting complex consultations particularly those that can be illustrated with pictures, maps and plans e.g. transport and planning consultations.
5 Consultation paper	Consultation papers are often used in specialised or technical consultations, usually among key stakeholders, where written comments are simply requested on the original papers and reports. These require no additional editorial or design input, but usually involve sending out large quantities of material.
6 Banner	Banners and A-boards can advertise nearby events and can also advertise websites and phone numbers for responses.
7 Poster	Posters are the best reminder medium, communicating a small amount of key information, but often, and in a specific location. They are an inexpensive and highly effective as a means of advertising events or response mechanisms e.g. phone numbers and websites.

The most common print-based method of consultation is a survey. A printed questionnaire generally accompanies an explanation of the subject of the consultation, asks a few questions and offers space to allow consultees to express their own opinions.

Most consultation methods require some degree of print or media publicity and the following five would be difficult to use without it.

1. Citizens panel (once recruited panels are generally consulted via self-completion questionnaires).
2. Feedback form and comment box.
3. Referendum/Poll.
4. Survey.
5. Text messaging (usually requires advertising through leaflets and posters to invite a response because of the difficulty of obtaining the numbers needed to use text messaging as a means of communicating directly with consultees).



### *New technology methods*

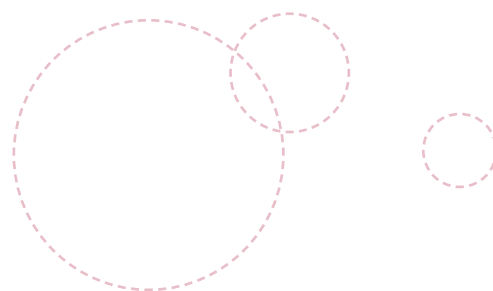
New technology encompasses virtual methods and the internet as well as telephone, video and DVD. These methods are increasingly accessible to the general audience and can add impact to a consultation. They are often as simple, user friendly and inexpensive as more traditional methods.

**Table 3 The 'new' technologies**

1 DVD	A good method of adding visual impact to a consultation. Particularly useful for combining consultation materials in a variety of formats to form a single product that can be distributed door-to-door (e.g. audio-visual messages, printed materials, translations and links to the internet).
2 Internet/website	A powerful venue accessible 24/7 to an increasing majority of the population. Excellent means of displaying large quantities of information and a good base for highly interactive consultation methods e.g. chat rooms, on-line forum and on-line discussions, noticeboards and surveys. Also a great place to present feedback.
3 Telephone	A quick and effective means of contacting consultees, particularly key stakeholders. But also a popular means of providing a quick response through phone votes, one-to-one discussions etc.
4 Text messaging	Difficult to obtain the numbers necessary to make this a broadcast medium but easy to use as an attractive means for consultees to respond to simple consultations. May be particularly attractive to younger audiences or for capturing the views of people going to and from work.
5 Video	A good way to add visual impact to a consultation and introduce subjects in meetings of all kinds. Can also be used as a method of response through video diaries and documentaries.

### **Keep consultation accessible**

Always bear in mind the possible need to provide translations, sign language interpreters, use text phones, provide captioning or subtitles for deaf people on videos or DVD's and ensure that IT is fully accessible. Also always use plain language and clear well spaced print.





## Record keeping

Print methods are usually simplest for recording the views of consultees and provide a transparent and accessible account. Most face-to-face methods pose a degree of complexity. The views of participants at any event can be recorded through feedback forms and comment boxes. Notes can also be taken during the event and sometimes it is acceptable to record events on audio or videotape.

But records don't always have to be taken. The benefit of many face-to-face methods is in the direct interaction between decision-makers and consultees – allowing people the opportunity to question motives and facts and express their view and particularly their strength of feeling. It may be very difficult to capture that, so the presence of the decision-makers to hear it for themselves may sometimes have to suffice.

Face-to-face events can also be used as an opportunity to remind consultees that they can make a recorded response by other means e.g. feedback forms or questionnaires. Where records are kept they should be summarised in the consultation report and kept safe in case they are later required for inspection.

All records should be kept for at least a year and should be made available if requested. Full details can be found in the Council's record management policy, which is available on the intranet.

If consultation is part of an equality impact assessment (Service Diversity Review - SDR) the records and reports should be entered into the SDR system and published as usual.

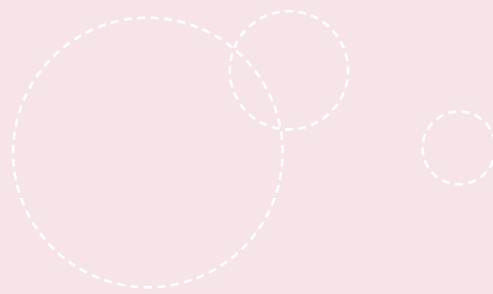
## Consultation methods

The next part of this guide sets out information on 28 different consultation methods. It briefly lists the main strengths and weaknesses of each method.

There is no right and wrong method of consulting but each method can be used well or not so well. Your own experience of what works well and what you are comfortable with is important, as are the views of your key consultees.

Look at the nine questions set out at the beginning of this guide. The answers will help you select one, or more usually the right combination, of consultation methods that will secure you the information you need.

Ensure that the methods you choose can be accessible to everyone.







**Table 4 Summary of consultation methods**

	Active or passive	Existing or new	Quick or slow	Face-to-face print or new technology	Details on page
1 Action planning	Active	New	Quick	F	10
2 Art, drama and poetry workshop	Active	New	Quick	F	10
3 Chat room, on-line forum or discussion	Passive	New	Slow	N	10
4 Citizens jury	Active	Existing	Slow	F	11
5 Citizens panel	Passive	Existing	Slow	F/P	11
6 Conference or assembly	Passive	Existing	Slow	F	12
7 Consultation committee	Passive	Existing	Slow	F	13
8 Email or on-line response	Passive	New	Slow	N	13
9 Exhibition	Passive	New	Slow	F	14
10 Feedback form and comment box	Passive	Existing	Quick	P	14
11 Focus group	Active	Existing	Quick	F	14
12 Forum	Passive	Existing	Slow	F	15
13 Interview	Active	Existing	Quick	F	15
14 Local community group	Passive	Existing	Quick	F	16
15 Neighbourhood forum	Passive	Existing	Slow	F	16
16 Neighbourhood meeting	Passive	Existing	Quick	F	17
17 One-to-one meeting	Active	Existing	Quick	F	17
18 On-line survey	Passive	New	Slow	N	17
19 Open day	Passive	Existing	Quick	F	18
20 Public meeting	Passive	New	Slow	F	18
21 Referendum/Poll	Passive	Existing	Slow	P	19
22 Roadshow	Active	Existing	Slow	F	19
23 Seminar	Passive	Existing	Quick	F	20
24 Site visit	Active	New	Quick	F	20
25 Survey or questionnaire	Passive	Existing	Slow	P	21
26 Text messaging (SMS)	Passive	New	Slow	P	21
27 Video diary or documentary	Active	New	Slow	N	22
28 Workshop or group discussion	Active	Existing	Quick	F	22



**Table 5 Consultation methods comparison**

Method	Description	Strengths	Weaknesses
<p><b>Action planning</b></p> <p>A <i>Planning for real toolkit</i><sup>™</sup> is available from the Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation at <a href="http://www.nif.co.uk">www.nif.co.uk</a></p>	<p>The events are structured and enable local people who are affected to come and participate in creating a solution.</p> <p>In <i>Planning for real</i><sup>™</sup> issues are focussed around a 3D model plan of a neighbourhood that attendees can manipulate to show what they would like to see happen.</p>	<p>An interesting way to tackle complex local problems.</p> <p>Interactive and entertaining for participants.</p> <p>Can assist in gaining honest and broad opinions and local residents feel involved and well informed.</p> <p>Can help create a consensus within a local community.</p>	<p>Time and resource intensive.</p> <p>All the difficulties of ensuring that a representative group attend.</p> <p>The model restricts the number of participants that can be consulted. Non-attendees may feel excluded.</p> <p>No guarantees that the results will be acceptable to affected parties or workable.</p> <p>May delegate too much control and has an uncertain outcome.</p>
<p><b>Art, drama and poetry workshop</b></p>	<p>Group activity using artistic media to express views on an issue.</p> <p>Almost any medium can be used including collage, drama, film or poetry.</p>	<p>Using alternative media can help engage otherwise disinterested or hard to reach groups.</p> <p>A refreshing alternative to traditional methods.</p>	<p>May not be taken seriously by decision-makers.</p> <p>The fun of being involved can quickly turn to disappointment if decision-makers do not appear to listen (essential to get sign up from decision-makers prior to use unless the activity is spontaneous).</p>
<p><b>Chat room, on-line forum or on-line discussion</b></p>	<p>An on-line meeting where people can discuss, question and answer.</p> <p>Can be open or moderated.</p> <p>Can feature a council spokesperson or decision-maker.</p>	<p>Allows consultees to participate from the comfort of their home.</p> <p>May attract young people.</p> <p>Very flexible method. Questions can be posted, themes set, new streams developed, guests invited, and interviews given.</p>	<p>Difficult to attract sufficient participation quickly enough to make them viable or interesting.</p> <p>Difficult to sum up what people had to say (but see on-line surveys).</p>



Method	Description	Strengths	Weaknesses
	Chat rooms and forums are generally established/regular on-line venues.	<p>Provides an insight into people's views long before a formal consultation could be concluded.</p> <p>Some people are able to express themselves more clearly and confidently on-line where they can be anonymous.</p>	<p>Requires a considerable amount of time for planning and technical know-how.</p> <p>May exclude people who are visually impaired or have no access to the internet.</p> <p>Anonymity can cause difficulties in analysis.</p>
<b>Citizens' jury</b>	<p>A small panel of non-specialists invited to meet and examine a complex issue.</p> <p>Involves them calling for people and papers, hearing presentations and evidence, questioning witnesses and experts and then reaching a conclusion.</p> <p>Usually held in public like a public inquiry.</p>	<p>An interesting way of involving people in decision making.</p> <p>Flexible in respect of the numbers and time involved.</p> <p>Particularly useful for contentious issues where the decision maker does not have a preferred outcome but would like to generate a broad consensus.</p> <p>Demonstrates a commitment to involving people in decision-making.</p>	<p>Quite time consuming and resource intensive (though only for a short time).</p> <p>May set a precedent about how much involvement stakeholders have and how much say they get in the outcome.</p> <p>No guarantee that the results will be acceptable to those affected.</p> <p>No guarantee that results will be conclusive or workable though generally sensible proposals do emerge.</p>
<b>Citizens' panel</b> (Nottinghamshire Listens)	<p>A group of people selected using various demographic criteria to reflect the broader population of the area.</p> <p>From October 2007 the County Council is running a citizens' panel of 8,000 people (1,000 per district and the city).</p>	<p>A fast and generally reliable method of obtaining a representative opinion.</p> <p>Typically panel questionnaires are returned in higher numbers than a general survey.</p>	<p>The cost of a citizens' panel can be prohibitive.</p> <p>Requires strong staff support to maintain a good relationship with panellists otherwise their response rate and interest decline rapidly.</p>



Method	Description	Strengths	Weaknesses
	<p>It is available for all public sector bodies to use up to six times a year.</p> <p>Depending on the consultation task, the panel may be sent self-completion questionnaires by mail or e-mail and members may be invited to join focus groups.</p>	<p>Samples of the panel may be used to gain insight into the views of sections of the community.</p> <p>Can act as a focal point for consultation work.</p>	<p>Over time panel members acquire more information than the rest of the public, so their responses become less typical (generally they need renewing every 3 years – this can be by thirds each year).</p> <p>Non-members may feel ignored.</p>
<p><b>Conference or assembly</b> (sometimes called stakeholder conference)</p>	<p>A formal opportunity to meet, present information on an issue, debate and otherwise exchange views with a large number of people.</p> <p>May be broken down into workshops and group discussions.</p> <p>Feedback forms and comment boxes may be used to capture views. Particularly useful for involving stakeholders in decision-making.</p>	<p>Offers a high profile means of getting information across to an interested audience allowing the use of audio-visual support.</p> <p>‘Breakout sessions’ during the conference allow for specific aspects to be looked at in depth and various means of gauging opinion to be used.</p> <p>A good symbol that the Council is serious about involving interested parties in decisions on an issue.</p> <p>Allows a high degree of interaction through question and answer sessions.</p>	<p>Limited attraction to the general public. Attendance may vary and disappoint if the issue, venue or publicity fails to create interest.</p> <p>Restricted invitation and/or self-selection of attendees mean they are not usually representative.</p> <p>Time consuming to arrange and may be costly to set up.</p> <p>Difficult to sum up views except by formal votes that may over-simplify complex issues.</p> <p>Requires a significant investment in staff time including availability on the day (usually out of hours).</p>



Method	Description	Strengths	Weaknesses
<p><b>Consultation committee</b> (sometimes called liaison meeting)</p>	<p>A permanent mechanism for key stakeholders to discuss developments in their area of interest.</p> <p>Membership should be drawn from representative key stakeholders, or geographic area or a specialism (such as education and transport)</p>	<p>Properly constituted brings together important and representative stakeholders</p> <p>Offers a means of getting information across to an interested audience. Shows Council is serious involving interested parties in decisions on an issue.</p> <p>Allows a high degree of interaction through question and answer sessions.</p>	<p>Without proper resourcing to set up/refresh self-selection of attendees can mean they are not representative of key stakeholders.</p> <p>Time consuming to arrange and may be costly to set up.</p> <p>Requires resources and staff time (can be out of hours) to record views through minutes/records of formal votes.</p>
<p><b>Email or on-line response</b> (see also on-line survey)</p>	<p>Invitation to respond by email or on a consultation website.</p> <p>Usually requires an on-line presentation of the subject of the consultation.</p> <p>May be accompanied by an on-line survey.</p>	<p>Relatively inexpensive, quick, easy to arrange and available 24/7</p> <p>Can be used in conjunction with other survey types.</p> <p>An essential part of a consultation website if it is a focal point for relations with stakeholders or the public.</p> <p>Great to gauge attitudes in advance of a more comprehensive survey.</p> <p>Easier for busy people to participate without the commitment of traditional methods.</p>	<p>May be difficult to prevent multiple responses from the same person using different email addresses.</p> <p>Some key groups, such as tenants or older people, have lower access to technology so their responses may be limited.</p> <p>Relatively inaccessible except for people who are already frequent visitors to your website.</p> <p>On-line responses are seldom representative of the whole population. Response rates are usually quite low though better from younger audiences.</p>



Method	Description	Strengths	Weaknesses
<b>Exhibition</b>	<p>An opportunity to see what is proposed, meet staff and ask questions (where staffed).</p> <p>Views normally captured by feedback forms and comment boxes.</p>	<p>Good method of opening up to a key audience, explaining what's going on and plans for the future.</p> <p>Visual aids encourage people to take part and communicate.</p> <p>Where staffed may help build relationships with a key audience and provides an opportunity for one-to-one discussion and questions.</p>	<p>Can be costly and (if staffed) requires a significant investment in staff time.</p> <p>No guarantee that the target audience will attend so requires considerable publicity.</p> <p>Difficult to capture what people think.</p>
<b>Feedback form or comment box</b>	<p>Pre-printed reply slip or card with a few short questions and space for any other comments.</p> <p>Commonly used for service users or attendees at meetings and events.</p> <p>Returned by post, over the counter or to comment boxes.</p>	<p>One of the simplest methods and easy to understand.</p> <p>Quick to arrange and inexpensive.</p>	<p>Consultees rarely see the results of feedback forms and may question their effectiveness.</p> <p>Lack of deadline undermines any sense of urgency.</p> <p>Seldom seen as anyone's top priority.</p>
<b>Focus group</b>	<p>Originally a market research technique involving the observation and recording of a facilitated free-form discussion on a particular issue by members of a target group.</p> <p>Usually 6-12 participants but wise to hold at least two groups to minimise idiosyncratic results.</p>	<p>Relatively quick and easy to arrange.</p> <p>Useful for providing insight into issues. Helps get behind the views of a target group and understand their motives and desires.</p> <p>Provides an opportunity to hear explanations, reasoning and new opinions.</p>	<p>Requires an experienced facilitator otherwise difficult to keep discussions focused.</p> <p>Video and audio recording may be regarded as intrusive and sinister.</p> <p>It is often difficult to 'read' a free-form discussion. Analysis may be complex and time consuming.</p>



Method	Description	Strengths	Weaknesses
	<p>When used in consultation participants should be informed of the purpose of the exercise and ideally involved in reviewing the focus group report.</p>	<p>A good means of taking the pulse of a target audience and getting an idea about their strength of feeling on an issue.</p>	<p>Outputs can often be regarded as subjective or even disputed.</p> <p>Consensus may not be reached.</p> <p>Can be expensive.</p>
<b>Forum</b>	<p>A regular opportunity to meet, present information on an issue, debate and otherwise exchange views with a local community.</p> <p>Works well as a local event or an event where participants have a lot in common.</p> <p>Enables a community to find out and express their opinion on a particular issue.</p> <p>Views normally captured through questions, feedback forms and comment boxes.</p>	<p>A good symbol that the Council is serious about involving local people in decisions on an issue.</p> <p>Allows important local issues to be regularly presented.</p> <p>Through questions and answers a forum can offer a good opportunity to clarify issues.</p> <p>Can help understand the nature of local views and allow decision makers to hear them at first hand.</p> <p>Helps demonstrate good faith and accessibility. Puts a public face on 'bureaucracy'.</p>	<p>Meetings need to be well managed to avoid confrontation when discussing controversial subjects.</p> <p>Limited attraction to the general public. Attendance may vary and disappoint if the issue, venue or publicity fails to create interest.</p> <p>Difficult to sum up views except by formal votes that may over-simplify complex issues.</p> <p>Requires a significant ongoing investment in staff time.</p>
<b>Interview</b>	<p>An interview is a structured one-to-one discussion around a set of questions</p> <p>Usually conducted on a sample of a larger population.</p> <p>Designed to gather information and gain some understanding of the answers.</p>	<p>Interviews are a very flexible method of gathering information from a small population.</p> <p>They allow supplementary questions to be asked so getting behind initial answers to identify reasons and motives.</p>	<p>Interviews may require an experienced interviewer – hence added expense.</p> <p>Interviewees may not be representative of the whole community.</p> <p>Analysis is complex and time consuming.</p>



Method	Description	Strengths	Weaknesses
	<p>May be conducted face-to-face, via the telephone or on the internet.</p> <p>Views captured by audio or video recording and notes.</p>		<p>The quality of the information gained depends on the knowledge of participants.</p> <p>Can be costly.</p>
<b>Local community group</b>	<p>Attendance at/observing meetings of established and independent local organisations.</p>	<p>A good way of 'getting out into the community' without the cost and uncertainties of setting up your own meetings.</p> <p>Can build a good relationship with community groups and recruit their help in disseminating and capturing information about what local people think.</p>	<p>Groups are often small and unrepresentative.</p> <p>May be difficult to attend as many meetings as required to really get to know the area.</p> <p>Difficult to capture the views expressed and to assess and balance all the views identified.</p>
<b>Neighbourhood forum</b>	<p>Regular meetings where local representatives or the general public can have their say about decisions or things that are happening.</p> <p>Designed to offer a two-way flow of information.</p>	<p>Provides a focus for local consultation.</p> <p>Enables a community to express their opinion on local issues.</p> <p>Can build a good relationship with a community and increase participation.</p>	<p>May create expectations that are difficult to deliver.</p> <p>Difficult to sustain a good relationship with a large number of groups.</p> <p>May create expectations that may be difficult to manage. Politicians and managers may be unwilling to meet local demands.</p> <p>Can be resource intensive over the longer term.</p> <p>Over time it can just become 'part of the bureaucracy' rather than adding anything new.</p> <p>Difficult to sustain when there are insufficient issues to discuss.</p>





Method	Description	Strengths	Weaknesses
<b>Neighbourhood meeting</b>	<p>Gathering of individuals to hear about or discuss a local issue.</p> <p>Enables a community to find out and express their opinion on a particular issue.</p> <p>Usually designed to offer a two-way flow of information.</p> <p>Views normally captured through questions, feedback forms and comment boxes.</p>	<p>A relatively quick and inexpensive method of engaging with people.</p> <p>Allows an important local issue to be presented in a structured way and supported by audio-visual aids.</p> <p>Through questions and answers a local meeting can offer a good opportunity to clarify misunderstandings.</p> <p>Can help understand the nature of local views and allow decision makers to hear them at first hand.</p>	<p>Usually difficult to engage people from a sufficiently wide variety of backgrounds.</p> <p>Meetings need to be well managed to avoid confrontation when discussing controversial subjects.</p> <p>Tend to be time consuming for staff to attend several meetings and provide the necessary follow up.</p> <p>Difficult to formally capture the views expressed.</p> <p>Can be unrepresentative.</p>
<b>One-to-one meeting</b>	<p>A direct meeting between the consultee and the decision maker.</p> <p>Usually used with key stakeholders and with agreed agenda.</p> <p>Recorded through a note of the meeting.</p>	<p>Probably the best and simplest method of consultation.</p> <p>Simple to arrange, highly flexible.</p> <p>Quick and suitable for addressing almost any subject in the desired depth.</p>	<p>Works well only with a limited target audience or a few key stakeholders.</p> <p>Can be time consuming depending on the number involved.</p> <p>Non-attendees may feel left out.</p>
<b>On-line survey</b>	<p>A structured set of questions available on-line (usually in the form of a short questionnaire).</p> <p>Designed to gather and compare information.</p>	<p>Relatively inexpensive, quick, easy to arrange, available 24/7.</p> <p>Cuts out the need for data in-putting because it is done automatically as people respond.</p> <p>Can be a useful means of testing the water or piloting a self-completion questionnaire.</p>	<p>Attention spans on-line tend to be shorter, so fewer questions can be asked.</p> <p>Difficult to prevent multiple responses from the same person using different email addresses.</p>



Method	Description	Strengths	Weaknesses
	Requires an on-line presentation of the subject of the consultation and corporate communications to promote it.	<p>Can be used in conjunction with other survey types.</p> <p>The questions asked can be tailored to the person completing the survey.</p> <p>A useful part of a consultation website if it is a focal point for relations with stakeholders or the public and response rates will improve as web use increases.</p>	<p>Not everyone has access to the Internet so responses may be skewed or limited.</p> <p>Relatively inaccessible except for people who are already frequent visitors to your website.</p> <p>On-line surveys are seldom representative of the whole population.</p> <p>Response rates are usually quite low. Need a lot of publicity.</p>
<b>Open day</b>	<p>An opportunity to look around, find out what is going on, meet staff and ask questions without the distractions of a normal working day.</p> <p>Views normally captured by feedback forms and comment boxes.</p>	<p>Good method of opening up to a key audience, explaining what's going on and plans for the future.</p> <p>May help build relationships with a key audience.</p> <p>Provides an opportunity for discussion and questions.</p>	<p>Requires a significant investment in staff time.</p> <p>No guarantee that the target audience will attend. Attendees are unlikely to be wholly representative.</p> <p>Very difficult to capture what people think.</p>
<b>Public meeting</b>	<p>Gathering of individuals to hear about or discuss an issue.</p> <p>Enables the public to find out and express their opinion on a particular issue.</p> <p>Usually designed to offer a two-way flow of information.</p>	<p>A traditional and relatively inexpensive method of engaging with people.</p> <p>Allows an issue to be presented in a structured way and supported by audio-visual aids.</p> <p>Through questions and answers a meeting can offer an opportunity to clarify misunderstandings.</p>	<p>Need to be well managed to avoid confrontation when discussing controversial subjects.</p> <p>Sometimes difficult to handle hecklers, the odd highly talkative participant and sometimes local politicians.</p>



Method	Description	Strengths	Weaknesses
	Views normally captured by questions, show of hands, note of questions, feedback forms and comment boxes.	Can help understand the nature of people's views and allow them to express them to key decision makers.	Not a reliable means of judging a public response.  May fail to reach excluded communities for example non-English speakers and can be intimidating to a surprisingly large number of people.
<b>Referendum/Poll</b>	<p>A formal poll generally on a straightforward issue offering a choice of a limited set of options (typically YES or NO).</p> <p>Can be undertaken by post, by phone or on-line (traditional ballot boxes and polling stations tend not to work as well outside of elections).</p> <p>Advisory referenda can be considered a consultation method but in others the decision is determined by the results of the poll.</p>	<p>Provides a clear result from a straightforward generally accessible method.</p> <p>Provides people with an opportunity to participate, and the high profile of the poll may stimulate debate.</p> <p>On-line and phone polls are relatively inexpensive and quick to set up.</p>	<p>Polls by post are costly and those by other means are less representative.</p> <p>Can oversimplify complex issues or trivialize consultation.</p> <p>Little guarantee that results will be representative or acceptable to affected parties.</p> <p>Need to be managed carefully to avoid undermining the role of elected members or appearing to abdicate the decision.</p>
<b>Roadshow</b>	<p>A mobile exhibition covering a variety of venues providing an opportunity to see what is going on or proposed, meet staff and ask questions.</p> <p>Views normally captured by feedback forms and comment boxes.</p>	<p>Good method of taking an issue to the people that it affects.</p> <p>Can help build relationships with a local audience.</p> <p>Provides an opportunity for one-to-one discussion and questions.</p> <p>Visual aids encourage people to take part and communicate.</p>	<p>Requires a significant investment in staff time.</p> <p>No guarantee that the target audience will attend.</p> <p>Difficult to capture what people think.</p>



Method	Description	Strengths	Weaknesses
<b>Seminar</b>	<p>A formal opportunity to meet, present information on a particular issue, debate and otherwise exchange views with a small number of people.</p> <p>May be broken down into topics and group discussions.</p> <p>Views normally captured by note of questions, feedback forms and comment boxes.</p>	<p>Allows a large amount of information to be provided to an interested audience and allows the use of audio-visual support.</p> <p>Suits complex issues and useful for building relationships with stakeholder organisations.</p> <p>Allows a high degree of interaction through question and answer sessions.</p>	<p>Limited attraction to the general public. Attendance may vary.</p> <p>Difficult to sum up views except by formal votes that would over-simplify complex issues.</p> <p>Restricted invitation and/or self-selection of attendees mean they are not usually representative.</p> <p>Requires a significant investment in staff time.</p>
<b>Site visit</b>	<p>A tour, inspection or familiarisation visit to an area or site by decision makers.</p> <p>Stakeholders can be invited to add to the information gained.</p> <p>Usually quite informal.</p> <p>An established mechanism in most planning departments.</p> <p>Not effective as a formal consultation method but a useful way of getting background information.</p>	<p>Simple to arrange at little cost.</p> <p>A good way of building a relationship with stakeholders allowing them to let decision makers know what they think in an informal way.</p> <p>Establishes that decision makers are accessible and interested.</p> <p>May help reassure residents about environmental concerns and anxieties.</p> <p>Provides an opportunity to clarify issues personally.</p>	<p>If too many attend it can be difficult to hear and communicate with all attendees.</p> <p>Vulnerable to the vagaries of the weather (though bad weather underlines the commitment of the decision makers).</p> <p>Very difficult to formally capture the views of stakeholders.</p>



Method	Description	Strengths	Weaknesses
Survey or questionnaire	<p>A structured set of questions asked of a particular audience (usually in the form of a questionnaire).</p> <p>Can be by sample or of the whole population. Designed to gather and compare information.</p> <p>May be conducted face-to-face, at meetings, on the phone, on the internet or by post.</p> <p>Views captured on completed questionnaires.</p>	<p>Relatively inexpensive, flexible and easy way of capturing the views of a large population.</p> <p>Surveys can be done via self-completion questionnaires and returned by Freepost.</p> <p>Telephone surveys can guarantee the necessary response rate and target a structured sample.</p> <p>Service users or members of the public can be involved interviewing other service users or their peers.</p>	<p>You need to get it 'right first time'. It can be difficult to find out why particular opinions are held unless you know what the opinions are in advance (Questionnaires may therefore need to be piloted, adding to the time and resources involved).</p> <p>Face-to-face surveys may require trained staff.</p> <p>Self-completion questionnaires are seldom representative of the whole population and often have low response rates.</p>
Text messaging (SMS)	<p>Usually involves allowing consultees to respond by text.</p> <p>Information is usually provided by traditional means – posters may be particularly useful.</p> <p>Where a significant number of mobile numbers are known the invitation to participate can also be sent by text.</p>	<p>A new way of engaging large numbers of people in relatively simple consultations.</p> <p>Particularly useful for time pressured consultees and arguably a younger audience.</p> <p>A quick method of getting results from a poll.</p> <p>A text message is quick to read and easy to reply to.</p>	<p>Difficult to provide adequate information about the question set particular by text.</p> <p>Unlikely to be representative.</p> <p>Obtaining addresses can be difficult – users need a mechanism to register their interest (easier to use text messaging when addressing a national audience – a sample of addresses can be obtained relatively inexpensively).</p>



Method	Description	Strengths	Weaknesses
<b>Video diary or documentary</b>	<p>A do-it-yourself presentation by a group of consultees giving an audio-visual account of their views.</p>	<p>Highly engaging and popular particularly with young people.</p> <p>Vividly portrays what people think.</p> <p>Works well for smaller consultations or where the views of a particular group may otherwise be overlooked.</p> <p>Makes a great change from a written representation or report.</p>	<p>Not always taken very seriously by decision-makers.</p> <p>The fun of being involved can quickly turn to disappointment if decision-makers do not appear to listen.</p>
<b>Workshop or group discussion</b>	<p>A discussion on a particular issue with members of a target group.</p> <p>Usually 6-12 participants.</p>	<p>Relative quick. Easy and inexpensive to arrange.</p> <p>Doesn't usually require an experienced facilitator.</p> <p>Provides an opportunity for in-depth debate and reasoning.</p> <p>Useful for issues requiring more than a simple YES or NO answer. Helps get behind the views of a target group and understand their motives and desires.</p> <p>A good means of tapping the pulse of a target audience and getting an idea about the strength of feeling on an issue.</p>	<p>It may be difficult to sum up the discussion.</p> <p>Results are subjective and may therefore have little validity.</p> <p>Groups are seldom representative.</p> <p>It may be difficult to attract excluded groups to a general discussion.</p> <p>Results can be manipulated by the amount of information provided.</p> <p>Can be time consuming.</p>

**Copyright:**

All County Council copyrights are reserved. The supply of Council information does not grant the applicant the right to re-use the information in any way that would infringe the copyright on that information.

For any wider use, the County Council may choose to allow the re-use under licence. This enables the County Council to ensure it is not used in a manner which is inconsistent with the County Council's copyright.

## 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)*



### Contacting us

email [consultation@nottscc.gov.uk](mailto:consultation@nottscc.gov.uk)  
phone **0115 977 2937**  
fax **0115 977 3886**  
post **Chief Executive's Department, County Hall,  
West Bridgford, Nottingham NG2 7QP**  
internet [www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk](http://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk)  
published **May 2007**

This publication can be made available  
in alternative formats and languages  
upon request.