

# Consultation Toolkit

Which way now?



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# Consultation Toolkit

**P**ublic engagement and consultation lies at the heart of Aberdeenshire Council's approach to service improvement and development.

By consulting and engaging with our communities, citizens, customers, employees and other stakeholders we can use the information received to help develop and improve services.

This ensures that our plans, priorities and actions are informed by understanding and, when appropriate, responding to those needs.

The drive to a more active engagement of local people in local issues is now stronger than ever. The public wishes to have opportunities to make choices in service provision and input into policy thinking and decision-making.

This consultation toolkit has been designed to provide all the management and operational information required to guide any member of staff through the consultation process.

The toolkit's list of approaches and methods to involve citizens is not an exhaustive list of ways to involve the public but merely a list of the most common approaches undertaken.



# I.0 The Consultation Vision

A culture of genuine, meaningful and effective engagement and consultation will be the core of Aberdeenshire Council's approach to service implementation, improvement and development, ensuring that all citizens within Aberdeenshire have real opportunities to influence decision making.

## This will be achieved by:

- Developing a culture of open, transparent and effective consultation
- Co-ordinating consultations through the use of the consultation database on Arcadia which records key information
- Using appropriate methods of consultation for different target groups
- Ensuring that the purpose of the consultation is communicated in order to manage expectations
- Utilising opportunities that are offered by use of latest technologies
- Minimising duplication and consultation fatigue with stakeholders
- Promoting the consultation prior to commencement and publicising the results/ feedback in an appropriate method
- Demonstrating viable outcomes from Aberdeenshire Council's consultations.

This places a firm obligation on us all to think about how we should approach consultation in our day-to-day activities.

## I.1 Standards of consultation

Aberdeenshire Council has endorsed the National Standards of Community Engagement developed on behalf of the Scottish Government. These standards demonstrate our commitment to developing and supporting better working relationships between ourselves and the communities we serve.

The standards aim to improve the quality of community engagement by using measurable standards that can be used by everyone involved to achieve the highest quality processes and results. The standards are:

### 1) Involvement

Aberdeenshire Council will identify and involve people and organisations with an interest in the focus of the engagement.

### 2) Support

Aberdeenshire Council will identify and overcome any barriers to involvement.

### 3) Planning

Aberdeenshire Council will gather evidence of the needs and available resources and use this evidence to agree the purpose, scope and timescale of the engagement and the actions to be taken.



#### 4) Methods

Aberdeenshire Council will agree and use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose.

#### 5) Working Together

Aberdeenshire Council will agree and use clear procedures that enable the participants to work with one another effectively and efficiently.

#### 6) Sharing Information

Aberdeenshire Council will ensure that necessary information is communicated between the participants.

#### 7) Working with Others

Aberdeenshire Council will work effectively with others with an interest in the engagement.

#### 8) Improvement

Aberdeenshire Council will actively develop the skills, knowledge and confidence of all participants.

#### 9) Feedback

Aberdeenshire Council will feedback the results of the engagement to the wider community and agencies affected.

#### 10) Monitoring and Evaluation

Aberdeenshire Council will monitor and evaluate whether the engagement achieves its purpose and meets the national standards for community engagement.

On occasion we will ask staff who have recently undertaken a consultation exercise to demonstrate the ways in which their consultation met the national standards.

## 1.2 Why consult people and organisations in the community?

There is a growing awareness that community involvement and active participation from stakeholders is linked to improving the quality and delivery of services.

It is important to ensure that we communicate with communities and stakeholders. Consultation should be a genuine two way process between the council and the consultees where we are:

- Seeking views on proposals
- Involving the public as partners in decision-making processes.

Aberdeenshire Council provides a wide variety of services – many of which the general public may not be aware of, as they do not directly use them. This includes services that vary from real choice (leisure centres and libraries) to no choice (rubbish collection and street cleaning).

The council is also obliged to provide a number of additional services as determined by national legislation (e.g. mental health services, consumer protection).

Furthermore, there are also other council services, which can be almost invisible to the public (e.g. economic development, sustainable development, waste minimisation etc.) but which are vital to promoting a strong and vibrant economy and a good quality of life.

No matter what the service is, we must be engaging in dialogue with the public – effective and meaningful consultation with stakeholders is essential because people want to be involved in what we do.

It is good customer service to involve people and we do have obligations under Best Value legislation and other statutory processes to consult.

We must also feedback the results of our consultations and demonstrate that we have acted on what we identified or else people may feel we are not interested in their views.

## 2.0 Prior to consulting

It is important to define very carefully the aims and objectives of any consultation. It is also essential to know what type of information you hope to get and how you intend to use it.

You should plan your research right through from setting the objectives of the research, formulating questions, to gathering information and analysing results.

Before starting a full-scale consultation exercise, you must identify what information is already available. This may include local recent consultations or other relevant work nationally or in other areas that has taken place recently. Asking for unnecessary information is wasteful of time and resources, as well as annoying for those who are being consulted.

Do ensure that any other data that you use is accurate, reliable, up to date, and that any sources used are referenced.

The co-ordination of activities across the council is important – we need to ensure that there is no duplication of effort and that different parts of the council learn and benefit from the consultation activities that others are undertaking.

As Aberdeenshire Council moves towards a culture of co-ordinated activity and shared information, the use of the consultation database is essential. The database will also act as a co-ordination tool and information store.

The database populates the consultation section of the Aberdeenshire Council website allowing the public to view all consultation activity and receive email alerts to upcoming consultations which may interest them.

In addition, the website also hosts a quarterly round-up of all external consultation activity (upcoming, current, recent results) which is available as an e-newsletter. The newsletter will include information on a consultation only if it has been registered on the consultation database and passed service approval. It is therefore crucial that staff register their consultation in good time to allow for this; we recommend registering your consultation at least 6 weeks prior to it commencing.

Although it can sometimes be difficult to find out what consultations other public organisations are undertaking do consider checking the Community Planning website ([www.ouraberdeenshire.org.uk](http://www.ouraberdeenshire.org.uk)) to see if there is anything planned by partner organisations around that time.

People can get confused and frustrated by organisations undertaking apparently similar consultations at or near the same time.

### 2.1 The Consultation Database

The consultation database should be your first port of call when you have been tasked to carry out a consultation.

All consultation activity must be registered and entered on the database, which enables us to track, promote, record and evaluate all consultation activities.

The consultation database provides easy access details of consultations and should be reference point for sharing good practice. Those planning any consultation activity should refer to the database to see if there has been any similar recent work, or if anyone else is planning something similar.

In addition, the consultations database automatically populates the consultation section of the Aberdeenshire Council website, providing the public with details of upcoming, current and closed consultations which are taking place across the council. The link with the website means that it is important to pay attention to particular fields in the database, as they will be transferred word-for-word to the website. For more information, see our section on Arcadia for “Making the most of the consultation database”.

To ensure that the details on the website are correct, it is critical that all of our consultations are registered on time and are kept up to date with any changes and results.

## 2.2 Stages in consultation

There are six clear stages which you need to consider when consulting with people:

- Decide who to consult with
- Decide what to consult on
- Decide how to consult
- Start consultation
- Evaluate and use the results
- Feedback to participants and other relevant parties.

You must think about why you are consulting and what you are hoping to achieve.

- Is it a statutory consultation – are there other frameworks that you need to work with?
- Identify your objectives – are they **SMART**?
  - Specific
  - Measurable
  - Achievable
  - Realistic
  - Timebound
- Be clear about what you can do with the information that is received. Different people will have different expectations – councillors, officers, participants and communities for example
- Clearly describe how the information will be used, what is on offer and what can change as a result
- Do not raise expectations where there are limited options
- Think about the consultation from the point of view of your consultees
- Consider the resources required – staff skills and time, printing and publishing costs, publicity costs etc. Do you have access to these resources to meet your objectives? If not, you may have to rethink how you are going to consult.

Everyone's time is precious. If you are going to ask someone to give up time for consultation, you owe it to them to make sure that you really need to know their views, that you will use fair and legitimate methods of gathering them and that you will make good use of them.

Remember that you cannot consult with absolutely everyone about everything – do whatever you think an objective observer would think reasonable and appropriate.

## 2.3 Data Protection

When consulting, ideally you should not collect any 'personal data' about the consultees. The Data Protection Act 1988 sets out how information must be processed (processing includes collecting, recording, holding or carrying out any operations on the information or data).

'Personal data' is classed as data which relates to a 'living' individual who can be identified:

- Directly from the data received or
- From data generated in the consultation when it is combined with data already held by Aberdeenshire Council.

It is important that all staff handling personal information are sufficiently aware of the Data Protection Principles of good information handling and that they do not disclose personal information about people without their consent.

The Data Protection principles state that when you collect personal data about people you must take great care with it and you must process it fairly. You must let people know what you are going to be doing with the data you have collected and if requested give them access to what you have collected about them.

In all of Aberdeenshire Council's services there is a data protection service representative – if you are unsure or require further advice about data protection contact your representative in the first instance.

### 2.3.1 Data protection service representatives

**Housing and Social Work:** Amanda Roe

**Transportation and Infrastructure:** Dave Clark

**Education, Learning and Leisure:** Rachel Cowin

**Corporate Services:** Jim Buchan, Andy Lawson, Sandra Hastie, Gail Smith

**Chief Executive:** Malcolm McAuslin, Glenda Gray

**Planning and Environmental Services:** Donald Raymond

For more information on data protection, visit the Data Protection page on Arcadia.

### 2.3.2 Sharing of information:

If your consultation results do not contain any personal data or anything that would lead to anyone being identified then you can share that quite freely with your partners.

However, if you are collecting personal information and passing it on to a partner organisation, you must comply with the Act and the individual must have given their consent for this to happen.

## 2.4 Consultation Ethics

### 2.4.1 Consent:

It is best practice to obtain consent from participants as this means that they know they have the chance to participate and what their role is.

If you are consulting with people with a disability and/or have a hearing/visual impairment or a learning disability that will limit understanding such as they are unable to give consent you should seek consent from a parent or guardian.

If the consultation activity involves persons under the age of 16 the following guidance should be adhered to:

Parental consent must be sought prior to the consultation for any child under the age of 12. If 'personal data' is being collected as part of the consultation then a 'fair processing notice' should be given to the parent/guardian. This notice explains:

- Who the data controller is
- What personal data is being collected
- The purpose the data is being collected and used for
- Who else the information is being disclosed to
- A contact for further information
- How to withdraw from the consultation.

An example of a fair processing notice can be found [here](#)

If your consultation activity involves participants who are aged between 12 and 16 then parental consent to take part is not required. However, information (either a letter or leaflet) should be given to parents/guardian informing them of the consultation their child is involved in and who to contact if they wish further information.

Again, if the consultation involves personal data, the fair processing notice should also be given to the child for their parent/guardian.

If your consultation involves street work with young people you must check their age prior to consulting. All Aberdeenshire secondary pupils have a National Entitlement card which has their date of birth and a photo on it. Those under 12 years old cannot be consulted with unless you have parental consent. If the child is over 12 then provide them with the information for parents/guardians discussed above which informs them about the consultation and who to contact for further information.

### 2.4.2 Withdrawal from the research:

At the start of the exercise it should be made clear to participants that they may withdraw from the exercise at any time. The individual also has the right to ensure that his or her own data, including any recordings taken are destroyed.

### 2.4.3 Confidentiality:

Subject to legislative requirements, including the Data Protection Act, information obtained about a person is confidential unless otherwise agreed in advance. If you cannot guarantee confidentiality the participant must be warned in advance of agreeing to participate.



## 2.5 Deciding who to consult

In all situations where consultation is felt to be the most appropriate way to engage with sections of the population, consideration needs to be given as to who we will consult with and why. All consultation exercises that are carried out should achieve a representative cross section of views across the groups being targeted.

There are some groups who it can be hard to engage with and these are sometimes known as 'Hard to Reach Groups' – for further guidance on consulting with hard to reach groups see section 4.2 and Appendix 3.

When you are consulting with people you need to consider the type of information that you can expect to receive. The table below summarises the types of views and comments that you may get.

Who is being consulted	Comments to be expected
Individual users	Personal views of services as they have experienced it – A snapshot of the service.
User groups/ panels/ meetings	Non-expert view from users of your service can highlight a different perspective.
Representative groups	Considered thoughts and proposals based on good knowledge of the service that you provide and what your users want. These views may be stronger than those of the average user.
General public	General perception of the service. These can be useful indicators of problems and preferences with service provision.
Non – users	Relatively impartial but possibly uninformed views on services useful for testing out proposals and plans.
Staff	Experience of a range of customers' views combined with knowledge about practical aspects of providing the service.

It can be useful to set targets to determine the level of responses that you are expecting from your consultees. This will be beneficial when you evaluate the effectiveness of the consultation exercise.

When setting targets you may want to measure if:

- You received views from those that you wanted
- You were successful in consulting hard to reach groups
- Different groups responded to different methods
- You gave feedback to those consulted
- People who were consulted feel that the consultation was worthwhile.

It is highly likely that you will receive differing views regarding the topic being discussed. You need to be able to demonstrate that all views, opinions and suggestions have been taken into consideration where appropriate and explain the reasons for the decision.

The identified stakeholders with whom the council will consult come under three main categories:

### KEY CUSTOMERS

- Current service users
- Internal customers (other staff)
- People who have an interest in the service but who may not directly receive the service themselves (e.g. family members)

### NON USERS

- People who are dissatisfied or ex customers
- People who are not yet in need of the service
- People who have been denied the service
- People who are unaware of the service.

## OTHERS

- Those subject to regulatory or enforcement functions (e.g. landlords)
- Citizens/ local people
- Councillors/local MPs/MSPs/MEPs
- Local business communities
- Partner organisations (e.g. NHS, police, fire and rescue etc)
- Representatives of particular communities such as voluntary organisations
- Suppliers
- Trade unions
- Visitors to Aberdeenshire, whether temporary or regular (e.g. students, tourists, non resident members of the workforce)

It is often not possible to consult with everyone who will be affected by the potential outcomes of the consultation. Therefore, you need to ensure your sample is representative. Ask yourself the question: Do you think that an impartial bystander would deem your sample as appropriate and reasonable?



## 3.0 Planning your consultation

The council is a large organisation providing a wide range of services and as such there are a large number of consultations which run throughout the year.

As soon as you have identified the need to consult you should look at the consultation database to ensure that your consultation does not clash with any others already planned. This will help to reduce consultation fatigue and, hopefully, increase the number of responses received.

Consultations need to be well planned and timely. You need to ensure that you give consultees adequate time to prepare their response. This will vary depending upon:

- Who you are consulting
- The time of year that the consultation is taking place.
- The level of response/involvement being sought.

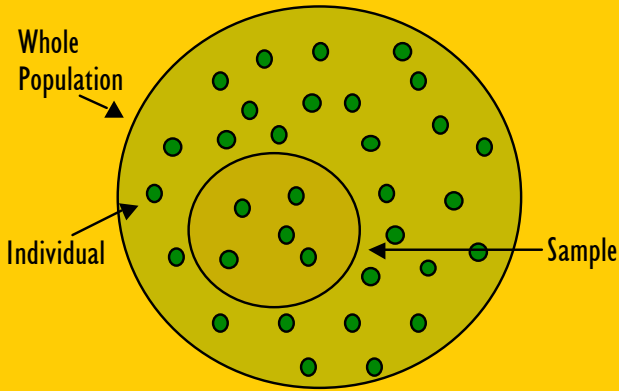
Major consultations should be planned well in advance, as part of your service planning process. Consultations can take longer than expected so ensure you build in adequate time.

The following points can be useful reminders when planning a consultation.

- Ensure that you have allowed enough time to plan the consultation
- Identify when the decision will be made and work out the timetable from this
- Be aware of events that may hinder your responses, such as school holidays, religious events, etc. This information can be found on Arcadia
- Identify the resources that you have in terms of staff and budget
- Involve colleagues who need to be involved, such as management teams, councillors, communication officers, graphic designers etc.
- Plan enough time to publicise and promote your consultation in order to raise awareness
- Ensure that there is enough time available for consultees to consider their response and respond
- Allow enough time to collect, analyse and evaluate the responses
- Ensure that there is plenty of time for feeding back the responses and the outcomes of the consultation, and what is happening as a result, to relevant management teams as well as the wider public.



## 3.2 Sampling



In certain situations, for example when your target group is small or easy to access, then it is sometimes possible to consult with your entire target group. This is known as a census.

In many other situations it will not be possible to consult with everyone, for example due to time or budget constraints, or that, due to high numbers, it would simply be unfeasible to consult with everyone involved.

In situations like these you must then select a sample of the total target group (or population) with which to consult; sampling meaning to collect the views of less than 100% of the population.

There are many kinds of sampling methods, but they can all be grouped into one of two categories;

- Probability (sometimes known as representative) sampling
- Non-probability (sometimes known as judgemental) sampling

### 3.2.1 Probability Sampling

Often when you are conducting research with a sample, you may have to use the data collected to make statistical generalisations and inferences about the whole target group from which your sample has been chosen. If this is the case, then probability sampling must be used.

When using probability sampling the likelihood (or probability) of each person being selected from the total population is known and is (usually) equal. In order to ensure that this is the case, you will need to have a complete list of all the individuals within the target population. This is known as a sampling frame.

For example, if you were to survey the users of a council library, then your sampling frame would be the complete list of library members. Or if you were to survey all council employees, then your sampling frame would be the payroll list.

Of course, it is not always possible to obtain a list of the full target population to use as a sampling frame. In such cases you can attempt to create your own list; however if you cannot be sure that all members of the target population are on the list, then this means that not everyone has a chance of being selected for the sample. If this is the case then your sample might not be representative of the whole target population. This will need to be explained if you make generalisations.

#### 3.2.1.1 Calculating Sample Size

When you want to make generalisations about a population based on the results of the sample, then the larger the sample the lower the likely error in generalising to the population. With probability sampling the sample size needed depends on a number of factors including:

- Confidence Level - How certain do you need to be that the characteristics of your chosen sample will match the characteristics of the total population? Most researchers will choose between 95% or 99%
- Margin of Error - How accurate do any estimates you make from your sample need to be? Most researchers will choose a margin of error of between +/- 3-5%
- Estimated Response Rate\* – What percentage of responses do you expect? Remember that not all of your sample may want to take part in your research.

**\*Please Note: The estimated response rate for your consultation will depend on a number of factors including whether there is an existing relationship with the participants (e.g. council and tenant), how interested in the topic the participants are and the method of research. Even within similar methods there are variations, for example questionnaires; the likely response rate of an internet questionnaire is only 11%, postal surveys are around 30% and telephone surveys around 50-70%**

Calculating sample size can be tricky and time consuming but the following website has a free sample size calculator: <http://www.ezsurvey.com/samplesize.html>

## Probability Sampling Methods:

Once you have chosen your sampling frame and have identified your sample size you should choose one of the following techniques to obtain your representative sample:

- **Simple Random Sampling (Random Sampling)**

This method involves selecting your sample at random from your sampling frame using a random number (or computer).

Firstly, number each case in your sampling frame starting at 0 and then use random numbers to select the cases until you reach your desired sample size.

You can use the following website to obtain a list of randomly generated numbers. All you need to do is enter your sample size and the range of numbers it needs to be between:

<http://www.random.org/integers/>

- **Systematic Sampling**

This involves selecting the sample at regular intervals e.g. every 5th case). To do this, number each case in your sampling frame starting at 0 and then select your first case at random (again, this can be done by picking a random number, or choosing a computer to randomly select one).

Next you need to calculate the sampling fraction. This is the sample size divided by the total population. Then select your next cases using the sampling fraction to determine the interval between each case.

For example, if your sampling fraction is  $1/3$ , then pick every 3rd case after your random first case until you reach your sample size. If your fraction is complicated, you can round down.

- **Stratified Random Sampling**

This type of sampling is similar to random sampling, however you must first divide the sampling frame into two or more strata (divisions or sections) before selecting the cases. The variables for stratification will be based on characteristics for which you want to correctly represent within your sample, for example males and females, part time and full time, a combination of both, etc, etc.

After you have divided up the cases into strata, you then select the cases for the sample using random numbers or systematically (from the sampling fraction).

- **Cluster Sampling**

Cluster sampling makes use of the natural groupings which occur in a population. For example dividing up a population by area or businesses by the industry they work in. To do this, divide your sampling frame into clusters and number each cluster (not each case). Then select the clusters using random numbers or systematically (from the sampling fraction).

### 3.2.2 Non-Probability Sampling

It is often the case when conducting research that you do not have a sampling frame from which to choose your sample, meaning that you are unable to determine the probability that each case would be selected.

Non-probability sampling means that you will select a sample based on judgement. Non-probability sampling methods include

- **Quota Sampling**

Quota sampling is a non-random sampling technique which tries to be representative of the population by selecting a calculated number of cases to represent various groups within the total population. For example gender, age, social class etc.

Quotas are calculated using available data (since a sampling frame might not be available) and are relative to the proportions in which they occur in the total population. E.g. if 20% of your total population are male, aged between 30-44 and middle class, then your quota to meet for these criteria would be 20% of your total sample size.

- **Self-Selection Sampling**

Self selection sampling is when the researcher allows each case in a population to identify themselves as wishing to take part. The researcher will typically advertise the need for participants and then the individuals will respond.

Typically, those who offer to take part will have strong feelings or opinions on the issue and so are keen to get involved. Whilst this is what the researcher wants (people who enthusiastic about taking part), it must also be noted that the respondents may be biased and may not be representative of the total population.

- **Purposive Sampling**

Purposive sampling entirely depends on the judgement of the researcher – the researcher selects cases which he or she thinks will best enable them to answer their questions. For example choosing extreme or atypical cases to investigate, choosing typical cases or choosing specific cases to discuss a particular theme, etc. The nature of this sampling method means that it cannot be considered statistically representative to the total population.

- **Snowball Sampling**

Snowball sampling can be used when the researcher is having difficulty in identifying members of a population. Typically, the researcher will make contact with two members of the population and will then ask these two cases to help to identify other cases, and so on until the researcher reaches their desired sample.

- **Convenience Sampling**

Finally, and perhaps the most simple of sampling techniques, is convenience sampling. This is when the researcher chooses the most convenient people to participate in the survey. For example, a researcher conducting a street survey can use convenience sampling and will simply select members of the public who are willing to stop and take part. Again, this will not be representative of the total population.

### 3.4 Consultation methods

There is a variety of methods available for staff to use to engage with stakeholders. This section of the consultation toolkit provides an overview of the main consultation methods available; both qualitative and quantitative. It will give you general information about each method and the advantages and disadvantages in order to help you select the right methods.

3.1.1 **Quantitative methods** (e.g. surveys): These provide statistical information using samples of people. The results tend to answer the “how many?” or “what?” type of questions.

Question formulation is crucial to the success of questionnaires: if your questions are not clear you may not get the information you are looking for.

3.1.2 **Qualitative methods** (e.g. interviews and focus groups): These tend to be more interactive and discursive in nature enabling you to gain an understanding of issues. These tend to look at the “why?” and “how?” type of questions.

Since qualitative methods allow you to explore people’s attitudes, behaviours and motives, it is more time consuming and does tend to involve less people.

Since a smaller sample number is used it cannot provide statistically reliable results, although it allows us to better understand people’s attitudes and opinions.

Qualitative and quantitative methods, although different, are often complementary. The best and most useful consultations are developed using a combination of the two techniques.

The following is a set of questions, which may help to guide you in the direction of appropriate methods to use:

- **If you need your responses to be representative then consider:**
  - Face to face interviews
  - Postal surveys
  - Citizens' panel
  - Telephone survey
  - Staff feedback/survey
  - Service user panels
- **If you need to get a response from as many people as possible then consider:**
  - Planning for Real® event
  - Public meeting
  - Face to face survey
  - Citizens' panel
  - Postal survey
  - Telephone survey
  - Web survey
  - Staff feedback/survey
  - Service users panels
- **If the issue is complex then consider:**
  - Planning for Real® event
  - In depth interviews
  - Focus groups
  - Public meetings
  - Face to face survey
  - Staff survey/feedback

Details of these methods are in the appendices at the end of this toolkit, including summaries of advantages and disadvantages and helpful checklists.

### 3.5 Use of external consultants

There may be instances when it is appropriate to employ an external consultant. Including when:

- There is a lack of expertise within the organisation
- The timescale for the work to be done is too tight with other demands
- Objectivity, credibility and sensitivity are so important the results will be more credible when conducted externally.

If an external consultant is required then the council's procurement guidelines must be followed in the tendering process.

## 4.0 Accessibility

### 4.1 Everyone can participate

It is important to ensure that when consulting with the range of communities (both geographical and interest) across Aberdeenshire we take on board as many views as possible. This is done to ensure we understand differing views within communities, which may impact upon a decision or how a service may be developed. In order to engage with as broad a range of people as possible, we must ensure that our consultations are accessible to all, so that all those who wish to participate are able to.

When running your consultation please take time to consider the following elements which may affect its accessibility:

#### How your consultation is conducted:

- Remember, its best to use a range of consultation methods – particularly when you are trying to engage with a range of different groups. In particular, be careful with the use of online surveys; for the majority of the time, they should be used in conjunction with other methods, not just used alone.

#### Getting the message out there

Consider the following:

- Can your consultation publications (including electronic media) be made available in different formats if necessary? For example different languages, with subtitles (for videos), larger text, Braille?
- If you are holding events such public meetings or open days will you need an interpreter for those who speak other languages, or British Sign Language? Will you need any equipment for those who are deaf or hard or hearing, for example an induction loop system? Can speakers be easily seen for those who lip-read?
- If you are having presenters or speakers at the event make sure they are will informed and sensitive to the issue and consultees. Think also about who is conducting any meetings – participants may be less keen to air their true feelings in front of a council officer as opposed to an a person who is independent of the matter.

#### Location, Location, Location!

If you are staging an event as part of your consultation, consider the following when choosing a venue:

- Make sure the venue is neutral to participants.
- Is the venue accessible? For example is there a suitable amount of parking available for the number of people you expect to attend? Is the venue accessible for wheelchair users or those with walking difficulties?
- Is the venue easy to locate and travel to? Have you provided directions? Will you provide temporary signs? Do you need to provide transport?
- Will you be providing refreshments at the venue? If so, remember to cater for a range of dietary requirements (e.g. vegetarian, allergies, religious customs)
- Do your consultees have particular requirements, for example a crèche, if you are consulting with mothers?

#### Timing is everything

The timing of your consultation within the overall timeline of the decision or issue is critical.

#### **The consultation must run when there is still time for the views and opinions collected to make a difference and before any decision on the issue has been made.**

Any consultation that runs too late, or on an issue that has already been decided will be viewed as tokenistic – consultees may feel like a decision has already been made and that the consultation is “just for show”. The public will be quick to spot token consultations. In addition to causing severe damage to the council’s reputation, a token consultation from one service is likely to negatively affect participation rates for all other council consultations.

In addition to this, consider the following when planning the dates for your consultation (and timings of any events):

- Think about your particular consultees; what times are likely to suit them best? Weekdays or weekends? Evenings or daytime?
- Try to avoid events on, or holding consultations over holidays, festivals and religious events.
- Try to provide a variety of times for consultees to get involved; e.g. a series of open days, or multiple sessions throughout the day.
- Why not provide the option of an online survey for those who cannot attend at the chosen times?

## 4.2 'Hard to Reach'?

Not every community has the same views on what they need from the council.

It is important to bear in mind that different groups will have very different and specific needs depending on language barriers, literacy ability, access, cultural differences and different levels of understanding etc.

It is often the case that some people within certain groups are identified as having experienced exclusion from the consultation exercise - these communities are often called "hard to reach" groups.

Yet how many of these groups are truly hard to reach? Or is it just that the consulting body has not put in enough effort or thought into how to reach them.

When consulting with these groups, you may need to take some additional factors into consideration to ensure that there are no barriers to their involvement.

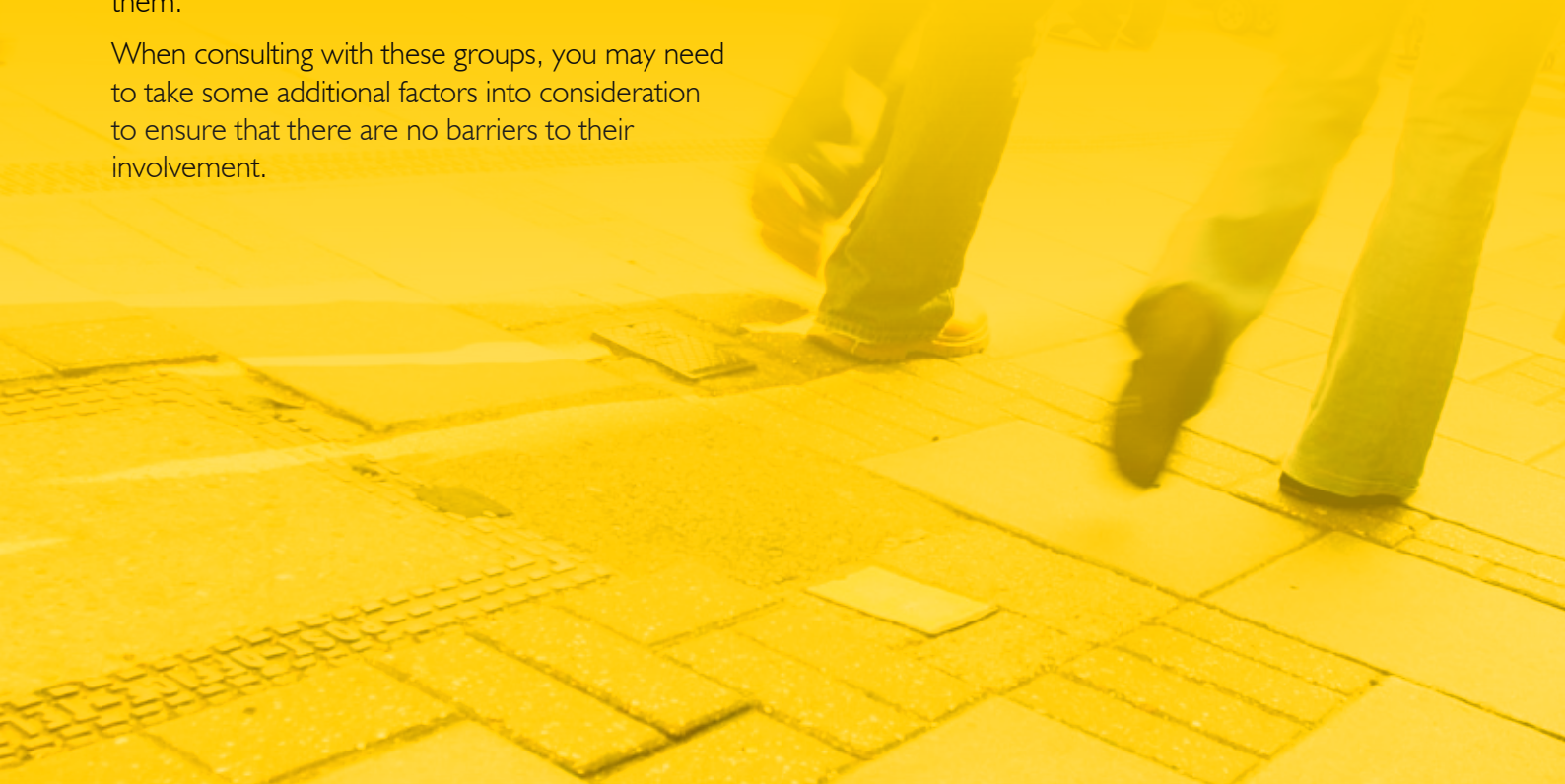
Some of the key groups for Aberdeenshire Council are listed below (this list is not exhaustive).

1. Ethnic minority groups
2. Young people
3. Older people
4. Disabled people
5. Faith groups
6. Lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender people
7. Migrant workers
8. Travellers

This Toolkit has details of some of the factors which may need to be taken into consideration for each of the groups listed above. These can be found in Appendix 2.

Although we suggest considerations you may need to take into account when consulting with people in these groups, it is important not to stereotype. Remember that within these groups are many subgroups that will have their own individual characteristics and considerations.

The way in which the consultation is planned and carried out will determine whether such barriers are overcome and whether everyone in the community gets a fair chance to have their voice heard. Make sure that before you begin your consultation that you are fully aware of and understand all the groups you are consulting with.



## 5.0 Analysis of results

Once your consultation period has concluded, the full range of views collected through the various consultation methods used should be acknowledged and included in the results. The results of the consultation and other supporting information should be examined carefully before any decision is made.

Analysing the results of a consultation can be a time consuming exercise and adequate time should be allocated to this in the planning stage – don't underestimate just how long this can take.

The precise method of analysis will depend on the consultation methods that have been used. Quantitative data is the easiest type of data to analyse in terms of producing statistics and graphs and then interpreting the results.

The responses should be turned into an electronic format which usually requires inputting them in a computer package resulting in easier analysis. Suitable packages include Microsoft Excel, Access or specialist packages such as SPSS.

If you have been using an online survey with Survey Monkey, you can also use this to analyse your results. With Survey Monkey you can create tables, charts and graphs, as well as cross tabulating data (comparing two variables) and filtering results. You can also export the data collected in Survey Monkey into other programs such as excel. For more information, see the Survey Monkey Help Center.

For access to the corporate Survey Monkey account, please contact the Consultation & Engagement Officer on (725) 5424.

When analysing qualitative data you must ensure that an accurate and complete record of all the responses received is kept for only as long as required.

Where you have used several qualitative methods to capture the views of stakeholder groups it can be beneficial to collate the responses into groupings. These may include community or voluntary groups, employees and local businesses etc.

In order to comply with the Data Protection Act, any feedback that is being provided must be anonymised.

### Checklist

- Ensure that you have allowed sufficient time to analyse the results
- Identify clear key messages from your analysis
- Consider how you will balance conflicting results
- Ensure that you are complying with the Data Protection Act
- Feedback given should include both short and long term actions
- Don't forget to add your results to the consultations database.**

## 6.0 Reporting Results

Now that you have completed your consultation and analysis, you need to produce your results.

Bear in mind that although you have just one set of results, you may need to produce them in different formats depending on who your readers will be. The results you need to produce for Senior Management Team will be different from what you may need to produce for committees and again from what you need to feed back to participants and stakeholders. Consider the following:

- The length of the feedback - you should always complete an overall report with full analysis, discussion and recommendations. However for some groups, it may be appropriate to produce an executive or summary report.
- The format of feedback – would it be better to explain the results in a report, a presentation, a newsletter, etc?
- Again, if you have not already done so, remember your consultation record – update the consultation database with your results and remember to attach any supporting documents (e.g. reports).

**Ensure to leave enough time to produce your results in the various formats you need**

### 6.1 Communicating Results

Communicating your results and any subsequent actions and outcomes of your consultation is a crucial part of the consultation process and should not be forgotten about.

For more information on communicating results, please see the information on promoting your results can be found in section 8.2, view the Communications Toolkit or contact the Communications Team.



## 7.0 Evaluation of consultation process

Evaluation of consultation activity undertaken is important as it allows us to learn more about what makes a successful consultation. Effective and planned evaluation can:

- Inform us what worked well and what didn't
- Identify unexpected outcomes
- Highlight what needs to be applied to future consultations
- Demonstrate that the consultees contributed to service development/improvements
- Assess whether the consultation was cost and resource effective.

Evaluation is an important aspect of all consultations and you should consider how you are going to evaluate your consultation from the planning stage onwards.

The evaluation stage of the consultation is as important as the consultation activity itself and requires the same focus and attention. The evaluation should be thorough and transparent.

When you are carrying out a consultation it is important that you can explain clearly what has changed as a result of the consultation and how the contribution has informed the decision making process.

In order to further evaluate the consultation it should be split into three areas that should be considered for measurement:

### Process

- Did you get views from all the different groups you wanted?
- Did different groups respond to different messages?
- Did you give feedback to those consulted? How was this achieved?
- Did people feel that the consultation was worthwhile?
- Were the methods right for your objectives?
- If more than one method was used – which worked better and why?
- Did you get the required response rate? Was the response representative?
- Was the timetable you set realistic, and did you stick to it?

### Costs

- Was it value for money?
- Did you manage to stay within budget? If not, why?

### Outcomes

- Did the consultation make a difference?
- What has actually changed as a result of the consultation?

It is also important that you give participants the opportunity to evaluate the consultation exercise. The key points you may wish to cover include:

- Did they understand why they were involved in the exercise?
- Was it made clear what the consultation could and could not influence?
- Was the information provided:
  - Pitched at the right level?
  - Detailed enough?
  - Written in plain language, and easy to read and understand?
- Were all the arrangements suitable to encourage participation?
- Did participants feel the consultation was fair, balanced and that their views were considered?
- Did participants receive adequate feedback? Do they know what has changed as a result of the consultation?
- Is there anything in the consultation process that could be improved?
- Has being involved in this consultation changed the way participants feel about the service.

The National Standards for Community Engagement can also be used to evaluate consultation exercises against. Did you meet the standards throughout the consultation process – which areas worked well and where was there room for improvement?



## 8.0 Communications support

### 8.1 Pre consultation publicity

Pre-publicity for all consultation exercises is encouraged in appropriate circumstances so that anyone with an interest in the topic has an opportunity to comment on it.

It should be determined prior to publicising the consultation whether it is an open or a restricted consultation. (Restricted due to the user group such as service users at a day centre.)

There are a variety of methods that can be used to publicise your consultation activity. The methods used will be dependent on the target audience that you are trying to reach as well as the resources available.

The communications toolkit should be referred to prior to submitting information to the communications unit.

**News releases** are an important tool for engaging with the media and for promoting positive messages from Aberdeenshire Council. You are expected to prepare a draft containing all the relevant points and submit this to the communications unit. The release will then be prepared for distribution.

**Weekly papers:** (Ellon Times, Buchan Observer, Donside Piper etc.) Aberdeenshire has a large network of weekly newspapers covering the majority of communities. The weekly press is particularly useful for targeting specific communities, or for targeting coverage on an area by area basis. Research shows that the Aberdeenshire weekly press is very well read, and so is a good target for any consultation activity.

**Daily press:** The two main daily newspapers serving the north-east are the Press and Journal and Evening Express. The Press and Journal publishes a number of editions each day, with two of these (Aberdeenshire and North-east) best serving Aberdeenshire. The Evening Express's distribution lies much closer to the boundaries of Aberdeen city.

Both papers tend to give coverage to Aberdeenshire news, but more so the Press and Journal. Coverage varies, however, and consultations are more likely to gain publicity if they are of a large scale, or perhaps unique in Aberdeenshire. Publicity supported by strong photo opportunities or interviews may be the best approach for these publications.

**National press:** Several of the national newspapers have district offices in the north-east (e.g. The Scotsman, The Herald). While it is possible to target consultation information to these papers, their news agenda is set in a 'national' context, and so any publicity would depend on the consultation in question having a very strong news angle. Consultations which could result in Aberdeenshire Council's approach to an issue being changed may be the best focus for these groups.

Further information can be found in the Communications Toolkit

**Radio and television** are extremely effective communications tools. The broadcast media – television and radio – tend to focus on the 'big' stories of the day. Therefore, coverage of consultation activity will need to focus on those which are particularly innovative, large-scale or quirky to gain the interest of this section of the media. Again, interview and photo/filming opportunities should be borne in mind when considering approaching this group.

There is no cost for submitting a news release to the media. However, it is important to note that there is no guarantee the media will wish to use the information. This is particularly worth considering when dealing with the broadcast media, whose news agendas are tight and can change at very short notice.

Another option is to place information as an advert, which would guarantee the use of the information, although funding would need to be identified for this purpose.

**Aberdeenshire Live** is a network of TV screens placed in schools, community centres, area offices and some office reception areas and supermarkets.

The communications team provides the corporate content for the screens, which includes interesting news and information from across Aberdeenshire.

The audience for Aberdeenshire Live depends on where the screens are located but can include employees, members of the public, business visitors etc. Therefore it may be an appropriate method to promote your consultation.

Further information can be found in the Communications Toolkit

**SQ** Aberdeenshire Council's employee magazine is produced four times per year (March, June, September and December). It is an excellent way of getting your message across, as it is available to all employees, either electronically or in paper format.

If you feel that your consultation will be of interest to employees throughout the council then please click [here](#) for further information.

**Core Brief** is a tool used within the council to communicate key messages. It is not a tool that should be used for general communication purposes although if your consultation contains corporate messages or the results lead to new initiatives being introduced then further guidance can be found in the Communications Toolkit.

## 8.2 Post-consultation publicity

The people who have been asked to participate, as well as those involved in the exercise or project research and its preparation, need to be informed of the changes made following consultation, research and participation.

It is essential that feedback is given to participants. They have given you their time and their views and expect to be told that they were considered during the decision making process and shown how the final decision ultimately made took their views into consideration.

Your feedback message needs to be clear and follow an agreed method: "We asked ... you said ... we did".

Be aware that not everyone in our local communities will agree with each other; there are likely to be differences of opinion. If there are

times when the consultees' views diverge it is particularly important to provide clear feedback. Balanced feedback can assist individuals who do not like the decision that has been reached to feel that the process has given them a fair hearing.

Remember that you should also communicate your feedback by updating your results on the consultation database, as this automatically populates the consultation section of the Aberdeenshire Council website.

The consultation database also links in with the Communications Officers, informing them of communications support you have requested and assists with more effective planning of communications activity around consultations.

There will be a wider audience who should also be made aware of the results of the consultation and what the decision and resulting action is. Once the information is prepared the communications unit can be approached to publicise it through the appropriate media.

For the media mentioned earlier, and particularly the broadcast media and national press, the greatest coverage may be generated once the consultation has been completed. The media tend to be interested in changes that have been made in a local authority, rather than the process of gaining the views that have led to that change.

Further information regarding the support that the Communications Unit can provide can be found in the Communications Toolkit.

## 9.0 Useful contacts

If you require any further help or guidance please contact the relevant person listed below.

Consultation and Engagement Officer 01224 665424

Corporate Policy Officer (Equalities) 01224 664414

Community Planning Support Officer (Citizens' Panel) 01224 664316

Corporate Communications 01224 665108

### Service consultation co-ordinators

Housing and Social Work Liz Hamilton

Transportation and Infrastructure Carol Simmonds

Education, Learning and Leisure Rachael Cowin

Corporate Services David Currie  
Hilary Birnie

Chief executive Lynne Gravener

Planning and Environmental Services Gillian Buchanan

General communications enquiries:  
communicatebetter@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

### Data Protection service reps

Housing and Social Work: Amanda Roe

Transportation and Infrastructure: Dave Clark

Education, Learning and Leisure: Rachael Cowin

Corporate Services: Jim Buchan,  
Andy Lawson,

Sandra Hastie, Gail Smith

Chief Executive: Malcolm McAuslin,  
Glenda Gray

Planning and Environmental Services: Donald Raymond

### Other websites that you may find useful for providing further guidance are:

[www.ouraberdeenshire.org.uk](http://www.ouraberdeenshire.org.uk)

(source of information on the community planning partnership and the work that is being taken forward to achieve better outcomes for Aberdeenshire communities.)

<http://arcadia/intranet/itradpub.nsf/0/0186D52848A67C8A80257409003386CF?OpenDocument>  
(Equalities information in Arcadia)

<http://www.scdc.org.uk/national-standards-community-engagement/>  
(National Standards for Community Engagement)

[www.capability-scotland.org.uk](http://www.capability-scotland.org.uk)  
(Provides information and support to those adults, children and families with disabilities)

[www.stonewallscotland.org.uk](http://www.stonewallscotland.org.uk)  
(Supporting the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community.)

[www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)  
(Working towards reducing inequality, promotion of human rights and building of good relationships.)

[www.grec.co.uk](http://www.grec.co.uk)  
(Grampian racial equality council – supporting work in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire.)

[www.improvementservice.org.uk](http://www.improvementservice.org.uk)  
The Improvement Service was set up to support improvement in the efficiency, quality and accountability of public services in Scotland through provision of advice and consultancy, project management and support for learning and sharing of knowledge

<http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=1>

(The IDeA works for local government improvement so councils can serve people and places better.)

<http://www.sns.gov.uk/Reports/Report.aspx?ReportId=2&AreaTypeId=LA&AreaId=110>  
(Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics)

# Appendix I

## Methodologies

This section provides further information about some of the methodologies commonly used across Aberdeenshire Council, but is by no means an exhaustive list. Each technique is explained with the advantages and disadvantages highlighted and a checklist of points to consider if using the technique.

### I Focus groups

Focus groups usually consist of about 7 – 15 people who are brought together to discuss issues in depth, test out public reaction to new policies, and stimulate ideas that might not otherwise be obtained, etc.

The participants should be representative of the target group; membership is usually by people who have experience in common and are able to talk about the topics being discussed.

Focus groups are more structured than workshops; they are focussed by either the topics that are discussed or by membership (people who have experiences in common).

The discussion is then guided by an independent facilitator who introduces the topic under review. The aim is a session is characterised by a frank and probing discussion which produces creative and spontaneous thoughts.

Focus groups help you understand why participants hold a particular view or why they have responded in a particular way. They also work well with and complement other consultation techniques such as surveys.

However, focus groups are not representative of the population and this needs to be considered prior to using as no weighting can be given to the issues raised.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Flexibility allows participants to raise issues	Non-English speakers may feel excluded
May identify solutions to problems	Sample may be too small or provide biased results
Participants feel valued and participation is encouraged potentially generating lots of information	The output is not quantitative which may be an issue if you are looking for statistical analysis.
Able to target specific groups including previously excluded groups	Confident or overbearing individuals may prevent others in the group from participating
Facilitator can also interact which means that they can probe for further information	If synergy of the group is negative then it may result in the workshop turning into a moaning session
Draws on local issues	Feedback will not be typical views of all service users
Can include people who do not read or write	If using an external facilitator, this may be expensive.
Can be a productive source of ideas for subsequent questionnaires.	

**Costs:**

Venue

Printing costs

Equipment hire, if required

Travel expenses

Refreshments

Staff or contractor cost if being used

Facilitator training if required

Analysis and presentation of findings

**Checklist for using focus groups:**

- Plan how many focus groups you need to arrange. It may be best to have different groups for different areas ages, etc. depending on outcome sought
- Identify your budget for running the focus groups
- Identify and book suitable venues (remember to consider any access issues, catering, toilets, availability, etc.)
- Fair recruitment should be used to invite and recruit focus group members
- Develop the structure and a series of questions to guide the discussion
- Identify a facilitator and note taker (have they been trained?)
- The note taker should be there purely to record the proceedings
- Identify and ensure that people get the information required prior to attending.

## 2 Service user panels/groups

Service user panels and groups are a good way of keeping in contact with service users and recognises the right of users to have input into the management of services.

These tend to be regular meetings of a representative sample of service users that invite feedback on the quality of a service or related topics.

They should represent a broad base of service users.

Meetings are organised for groups of people (10 – 30, depending on the subject matter) and prior to the meeting each panel member should be sent a prepared information pack. The form the meetings take depends on the topic being discussed.

Following the meeting, a questionnaire can be issued to all panel members and the replies fed into the service's decision-making process.

Service user panels are used mostly to inform planning and prioritising of a specific service.

Prior to initiating a panel or a group meeting it is essential to determine the rights of the group to make recommendations or share in the decision making so that all parties involved understand the purpose and scope and limitations of the group.

These meetings can be useful when:

- Requiring feedback on personal services where sensitivity to the individuals needs is important
- Trying to identify the concerns and priorities of the experts who use the service
- Involving service users in discussions regarding the management and development of a particular service.

Advantages	Disadvantages
If the same participants are used over time they can help evaluate changes	Can be time consuming
Allows participants to raise issues most important to them	Requires commitment from both the organisation and the participants
With the use of interpreters most people can participate	A self selected sample may not be representative
Helps to identify solutions to problems	A small number of people may dominate the group
Allows issues to be explored in depth as participants are well informed and also participants can be used as a sounding board for ideas and plans	If too many issues are discussed there may not be much time for debate. Service users may just have time to give their view and not the reasoning behind it
Can target specific groups	Risk of staff becoming complacent. They may think that is all the consultation that they need to do
Panels can be useful for views on resource allocation and priorities.	Panel members may begin to feel part of the organisation over time, and their perspective may become less critical and less focused.

**Costs:**

Venue

Printing costs

Equipment hire if required

Travel expenses

Refreshments

Staff cost, if being used

Facilitator training, if required

**Checklist:**

- Is a new panel required or are service user groups already established?
- Define the purpose of the group. Be clear who will consider the outcomes of the discussions and where the final decision will be made.
- Consider who decides which issues go to the group
- Recruit the user group, between eight and 10 people
- Use of a trained facilitator to manage the discussion
- Reporting back: participants need to be aware how the consultation is progressing after giving suggestions.

### 3 Community Planning Partnership Citizens Panel

This is a demographically representative panel of local residents which can voice opinions on services in the local area and influence decision makers.

Citizen panel members are used as a sounding board to test specific options or proposals, and to assess local services and develop views about future needs and goals.

The panel is a useful tool to track the views received over time and to monitor changes in opinions.

There are currently 1,250 Aberdeenshire residents who sit on the panel and are consulted regularly on matters of local concern. Four surveys per year are sent out and panel members are often invited to take part in focus groups.

Surveys are aligned, where possible, to the five themes of community planning:

- Community wellbeing: housing and social work, health, community safety, antisocial behaviour etc.
- Jobs and the economy: economic development, employment, social economy, land use planning etc.
- Lifelong learning: community learning and development, adult learning, etc.
- Sustainable environment: carbon management, climate change, transport, waste, etc.
- Developing our partnerships: cross cutting issues such as communications, access to services and community capacity building, etc.

If you are interested in using the panel to consult, contact the Community Planning Support Officer on (01224) 664316.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Provides a representative snapshot of the views of the population	May be only the more interested people that take part and can become less representative over time
Response rates are consistently higher than for voluntary surveys as members choose to take part	Question topics must fit into one of the five themes of the panel
Membership and responses can be analysed by area	Non - English speakers may be excluded
Cheaper and quicker than one off surveys	Reflects your agenda rather than those of the communities
Used by a partnership of agencies and the results shared amongst these partners	Requires commitment from participants
Participants can be asked the same questions over time, allowing any changes in opinion to be apparent.	The subject needs to be seen as important to the members
Reaches a large number of people	Younger members tend to drop off the panel so the age demographic increases over time
Participants feel valued and are likely to contribute.	The panel needs to be refreshed on a regular basis as well as maintained to ensure that contact details are correct.

The panel is funded by all partners so potential uses of the panel by one partner have to be balanced against the need of others.

#### Checklist:

- Recruiting panel members: specific methods need to be used to ensure that members are representative of the population as a whole – The Community Planning Partnership is responsible for this.
- Identify where the consultation fits in with the five themes of the panel
- Speak to the Community Planning Support Officer regarding timescales and the preparation work to be done.

## 4 Public Meetings

A public meeting is a high profile meeting in a community venue providing an opportunity for all members of the public to express views about an important issue for a community.

This is one of the most open forms of consultation because of the scale and nature of public meetings. The venue must be universally accessible for disabled users, individuals with special needs, etc.

Public meetings are arranged for members of the public to find out about and express views on a particular subject. Public meetings should:

- Provide information
- Seek views, preferences and ideas from the public
- Encourage interaction between groups.

Pre-publicity is crucial to the success of the public meeting. Support for this can be sourced from the Corporate Communications Unit.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Opportunity for many views to be given	The outcome of the meeting may be inconclusive
Can provide a high profile response to a issue of high importance	May be seen as tokenism if comments are not taken seriously
Used carefully, public meetings can complement other consultation methods	Needs a lot of organisation and publicity for the event
Provides opportunities for people to comment or challenge on matters that affect them directly or indirectly.	Relationship between the council and attendees can become strained if the meeting is contentious
Offers a transparent way to demonstrate public consultation and build good relationships	Public meetings can have a low attendance, and those people who do attend often have a particular concern or view, which is not necessarily representative of the population as a whole
Opportunity to test out any proposed developments, to gauge the level of potential opposition and identify opportunities for joint working	Attendees lack of knowledge about the service or the council's strategic priorities may limit the discussion
Enhances accountability as it offers an opportunity for the public to challenge us directly	Contributions may mainly be regarding local, topical or personal concerns, not necessarily representative
If well structured, can help to identify solutions to problems	Host or chairperson needs to be able to control the meeting, including potentially disruptive people
Communities and other organisations explore options together and formulate solutions which are mutually beneficial.	May face a 'them and us' mentality, particularly during the question and answer session.
	Risk of trial by media.

**Costs:**

Venue

Printing costs

Analysis and presentation of findings

Travel expenses

Refreshments

Facilitator training, if required

**Checklist:**

- Think about the issue(s) that you wish to discuss. People are more likely to come if they are concerned about or directly affected by the issue(s)
- Think about where and when to hold the meeting. Consider peoples' general working and family commitments
- Ensure that you have clear objectives for what you hope to achieve and how you are going to move the outcomes forward
- Be aware that you are unlikely to attract a representative sample of the population as participants tend to be retired or middle aged, therefore you should really consider more than one consultation method
- Think about using a short questionnaire at the public meeting where those that attend could give you additional information
- Plan how you are going to publicise the event
- Remember the practical sides to your planning. Expected numbers, location, time, accessibility, refreshments etc.
- Ensure that there is a note taker present.

## 5 Consultation days, exhibitions and roadshows

Consultation days, exhibitions and roadshows are relatively informal occasions when users and potential users can find out what you do, meet staff, ask questions, etc. This format of consultation can also be used to promote council policy, plans and strategy.

There are circumstances when it may require a more formal approach such as formal presentations and discussions.

These sessions can serve a variety of purposes and can take the form of either a one-off consultation activity, or a series of consultation activities.

These meetings are a useful method if you want to make yourself accessible and approachable and want participants to be involved in the work you are doing.

Depending on the topic of the consultation, it may be beneficial to take the exhibitions or roadshows into various communities within Aberdeenshire.

Key messages can be conveyed in a variety of ways, such as:

- Information stands
- Displays
- Videos
- Slideshows
- Question and answer sessions.

Consultation, exhibitions and roadshows tend to offer participants the opportunity to ask questions, take on board information and provide views at the same time.

As these meetings require a large amount of pre publicity and can be quite costly they are often most effective when used to source views on high profile issues.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Gives public the choice of when to attend, if held at various locations	As participants are self selected the sample may not be totally representative of the target population
May arouse interest by giving the public something to see and do, and therefore may attract a larger audience	Unless a small survey is completed by participants there will be no statistical information to analyse
Can be a source of useful comments and suggestions	Cost is variable depending on what you do and turnout that you get
May assist in building relationships	Volume of responses depends on attendance
Can help you contact potential users and non users for views	People will need to be interested to attend the event
Gives you quick feedback	People attending a exhibition or an event may not necessarily want to provide their views. They may only be there to find out what is going on.
Face to face consultation gives a sense of involvement	
If you use a survey as well, you will get some further information, including demographics of those attending	
A wide range of information can be available for participants and they can choose what they wish to read.	

**Costs:**

Venue

Printing costs

Equipment hire, if required

Travel expenses

Refreshments

Staff costs, if being used

Displays

Delegate packs, if being used

**Checklist:**

- An appropriate venue needs to be considered: location, accessibility, availability of refreshments, etc.
- Timing of the event: think of working people, families with commitments and time of year (for example school holidays)
- Publicise the event. This needs to be done in plenty of time, using a variety of methods
- Plan how you are going to receive feedback from the participants

## 6 In-depth Interviews

Interviews are a flexible and adaptable way to collect detailed feedback or data from your target audience.

One of the most important parts of the interview, and interviewer training and briefing, is to develop instant ways of engaging the respondents' interest and attention to create and sustain 'rapport' at the right level. It is then important to leave the respondent feeling that something worthwhile and interesting has been accomplished.

There are three degrees of formality:

1. **Structured:** this uses a pre-determined set of questions with the responses given being recorded in a standardised fashion by the interviewer. This tends to produce mainly quantitative information.
2. **Semi structured:** A set of questions is worked out in advance but the interviewer is able to leave out inappropriate questions, add questions if required and probe in more detail if necessary.
3. **Unstructured interview:** This is when the interviewer has a general area of interest to cover but lets the conversation develop naturally without the aid of predetermined questions.

In-depth interviews can be useful for handling sensitive issues as they allow a rapport to be built up prior to discussing thoughts and feelings which may not be revealed using other methods such as group discussion.

Generally, in-depth interviews tell you what people think and why, and also allows you to explore in details their motives, details, attitudes and behaviours. However, they will not provide you with accurate statistics.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Can allow for modification at the interviewer's discretion	May be subject to bias from interviewer
Provides a framework for discussion	Time consuming
Allows for exploration of issues and provides qualitative information	Interviewers need to be trained, leading to cost and resource issues
Good technique for including those not typically included in consultation activity e.g. people from hard to reach groups	Cost is high per response rate/individual
Useful for obtaining views from people who are not comfortable speaking in a group	Need to interview a sufficient number of people for answers to be generalised in group discussion
Helps to explore sensitive issues	If the interview is too prescriptive, it may appear there is a hidden agenda
If using structured interviews it allows you to compare the data	Interviewer may cheat by not completing the questionnaire properly
If semi or unstructured interviews are being used they allow views and perceptions to be explored in more depth.	The interviewer, if not trained, may introduce bias to the interview.

**Costs:**

Venue

Printing costs

Equipment hire, including voice recorder if required

Travel expenses

Refreshments

Interviewer costs

Interviewer training, if required

Interviewer briefing

Data and transcription analysis and presentation

**Checklist**

- Location: where are these interviews being held? On the street, at individuals' homes?
- Have the relevant Disclosure Scotland checks been undertaken?
- Consider lone working needs – seek advice from personnel if required
- Identify who you are targeting and how you will then recruit them
- Identify how many interviews will be done and when they will be occurring
- Plan how you will analyse the responses that come in
- Prepare the framework for discussion
- Ensure the structure is in place. Include key things that you must question, then the things that are flexible dependent on how the discussion goes
- When conducting the interview, ensure questions are posed in a non-threatening, clear and straightforward way
- The interviewer must be motivated and interested throughout the interview
- Make arrangements to record or make notes with the interviewee's permission.

## 7 Self completion / postal surveys

Postal surveys are often used when a wide range of views are required across a variety of topics.

The questionnaire design is crucial to the success of the survey, poorly designed questions will not give you the information that you are looking for and will be wasting the time of consultees.

This method involves posting a questionnaire to respondents at random from a large sample and asking them to complete and return their responses to you.

Postal surveys are used for a wide range of surveys from service feedback to larger, high profile surveys.

Bear in mind that surveys may tell you what a proportion of people think about something but unless you plan your questions carefully, it won't tell you why they hold these views.

Questionnaires and surveys can also be used following qualitative research to determine priorities and issues of importance to respondents.

There is a possibility that the response rates can be low. Try and improve these rates by planning the process: design the questionnaires well and include a covering letter informing participants why you are doing the research and how the feedback will occur. Include pre paid postage envelopes for returning completed responses. A reminder letter or token incentives (when appropriate) may also encourage participation.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Provides a consistent format for data analysis	Response rates can be low. Those who respond may have different views from those who don't
Can be sent to a large number of people – randomly or targeted	Respondents may be put off if the questionnaire is too long
Replies can be provided anonymously	May end up with incomplete or 'don't know' responses.
If a statistical sampling method is used then this is a good method of obtaining statistically reliable data	The person completing the survey may not be the person to whom it was sent to
Allows you to analyse large amounts of data quickly – good for rural areas	Not the best method to elicit qualitative information
If the same questions are used in later surveys it allows changes in responses to be tracked	Poorly designed questionnaires may produce misleading results
Respondents can complete the questionnaires in their own time which may lead to a considered response	Difficult to get the views of the disadvantaged minority groups who may make up small parts of the community. May also exclude those with reading/writing difficulties
The interviewer can not influence the results	No one on hand to ensure the form is completed correctly

**Costs:**

Printing costs

Pre paid envelopes

Cost of pilot survey

Any prizes or incentives being used

Reminder letters, if being used

Staff time: planning, admin, inputting, etc

Posting

Data analysis and presentation

**Checklist**

- Preparation: understand what the purpose of your research is and what you are trying to achieve
- Plan and structure your questions well: poorly designed questions may result in the failure of the exercise
- Pilot your questionnaire with a small group: Do your questions make sense? Did you get the information that you were looking for?
- Check your questions: what will you do with the results? If they have no purpose, don't ask them
- Maintain confidentiality: allow people to make comments anonymously and ensure it is clear on your documents that opinions will not be published in any way that identifies individuals
- When designing your questionnaire ensure that it is well laid out and uses an appropriate print size
- Think about the different formats that you may have to provide the survey and the results in, for example, Braille, different languages, etc.

## 8 Telephone Surveys

Telephone surveys are used to gather the views of a sample of people to act as an indication of the views of the whole population. Respondents are usually called randomly and asked to answer some carefully worded questions, confidentially. The results are then analysed.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Most people are familiar with this technique	Can be expensive if using a contractor
Can reach a large number of people	Time consuming to organise
Can target specific groups	Inflexible – agenda set by researcher
Can collect high volume of responses	Non-English speakers may not be able to take part
Respondents are not easily influenced by pressure groups	If the sample is too small or biased it may not provide statistically reliable results
Extracts a response there and then from people	Can not explore and issue in depth
Can be fast and fairly inexpensive if using staff	Response rates may be low
Interviewer is able to explain any ambiguities, motivate the respondent and build up a relationship	Might be confused with unwanted 'telesales' calls
	Reliability dependent on skill of interviewer to reduce potential of bias.

### Costs:

Interviewer/staff time

Cost of calls

Inputting or responses

Data analysis and presentation

### Checklist

- What information do you need? Is a survey the best way to do this?
- Produce a short statement describing the aim of the survey and what will happen with the results and how feedback will be available
- Know what budget is available for the consultation
- Plan your sample size and the sampling method that you are going to use to recruit respondents
- Design your survey and questions
- Pilot the questions: is it clear? what information are you asking for and are you getting the right information required back in the responses?
- Plan adequate time for designing, piloting, final draft, printing, calling people, analysing results, making decisions and providing feedback.

## 9 Online Surveys

Online surveys are growing in popularity. Like postal questionnaires, they allow you to ask large numbers of people their views. They can also include some routing of questions, so that respondents giving one particular answer are led down one route to answer further, specific questions.

Aberdeenshire Council is currently using Survey Monkey as the corporate tool for creating and conducting online surveys.

A corporate account exists and can be used by staff for surveys which are not collecting personal data. The account details can be accessed by contacting the Consultation and Engagement Officer on (01 224) 665424 or by emailing [communicatebetter@aberdeenshire.gov.uk](mailto:communicatebetter@aberdeenshire.gov.uk)

Advantages	Disadvantages
Can often be longer than a postal survey	Not everyone has access to the internet
Larger number of people can be contacted at low cost	There is little or no control over who completes the survey
Very easy to conduct in-house	Literacy problems may put people off completing the survey
Can be relatively inexpensive	May not achieve a representative sample
The data can be analysed for you	
They are not as time consuming or labour intensive for the consultee	
They can be completed at a time that suits the consultee	
They do not require trained interviewers	
Response rates are quicker	
Avoids postal costs	
Useful tool when covering a wide geographical area	
High broadband access and usage in Aberdeenshire	

### Costs:

Time for designing the questionnaire

Cost of own account if you must collect personal data (required to meet requirements of data protection)

Data analysis and presentation

### Checklist:

- Identify the complementing consultation methods: online surveys ideally work best with another method alongside it
- Design the questions carefully: think about the type of information you are looking for
- Pilot the questionnaire to ensure it is structured correctly
- Plan how you intend to publicise the survey: how will people know that it exists?
- Plan how you intend to feed back: let people know when the process is complete so they can access any feedback. If it is an anonymous survey contacting participants directly is not possible.

## 10 Written Documents

This method is designed to provide a formal means by which people can be invited to comment on policies, plans and/or proposals.

The style of the document will depend on the intended target audience. Documents should be concise, clearly laid out and written in plain language, avoiding jargon, which will be understood by the intended audience.

If you use a contact list for circulating documents, then it is important that the list is maintained on a regular basis.

It is useful to provide a template with questions or at least topics you would like a response to, providing there is an “any other comments” section. This has the advantage of giving some structure to the response and helps people through the key issues. The disadvantage is that people can feel eased towards a particular conclusion.

Advantages	Disadvantages
The document may be seen as the starting point in the consultation	Can be seen as ‘done deal’
Can be used as a means of disseminating information	A document can become outdated quickly
Keeps the public aware of the issue	People may doubt whether commenting on a document will lead to change
Opportunity for you to make a statement	Can be perceived as expensive
Gives you considered views of respondents based on accurate information	Low response rate
Relatively easy to organise	Can be time-consuming
Allows issues to be explored in depth	Requires strong commitment from participants to read and respond

### Checklist

- Ensure that there is an opportunity for respondents to actually make a difference
- The information that you are providing needs to be accurate, understandable and targeted
- Identify your target audience and how you are going to reach them and think about which communication methods may be appropriate
- Produce summary documents which highlight key points for respondents
- Be realistic about the timescales that you are setting: respondents need time to read, digest and respond
- The accompanying letter and information should include a summary of the document, how to provide comments, a final date for submitting comments and details of how feedback will be given
- After the consultation has occurred, the results have been analysed and decisions on any actions have been made, ensure that you inform respondents of what has happened.

## II Planning for Real®

Planning for Real® is the process developed by the Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation which participants make or use a 3D model of their local area as a visual prompt to discuss relevant issues e.g. community safety, traffic issues, housing, vandalism, provision of play facilities, etc.

Planning for Real® is used to facilitate better community involvement in the planning process. It has been promoted in Aberdeenshire by the Community Planning Partnership, which has seen it as an activity for communities to lead on and be committed to. A range of community representatives and council staff have been trained in its use and it should not be used without reference to them

It allows people to see the impact of changes and possibilities that they had not thought about by moving models around.

Ideas that are generated at the session are prioritised and an action plan produced for the decision makers to take away.

Planning for Real® is a useful tool when you are trying to:

- Establish local peoples' priorities in the development of a community action plan
- To establish views about a particular issue (e.g. what to do with a derelict piece of land).

Advantages	Disadvantages
Involves local people about decisions within their local area	Requires a large amount of planning and organisation
Does not rely on the written word so is more inclusive: e.g. children, people for whom English is not their first language	Results can be difficult to collate as you get a lot of information quickly
Very visual: people can see plans	May be dominated by more vocal members of the group
Provides a lot of information quickly and can help raise awareness of issues	May produce results that are difficult for organisations to respond to and needs careful facilitation
Promotes discussions of real issues and allows local people to make decisions	Expensive to run
Encourages participation by people of all ages and backgrounds	Time consuming
Involves, empowers, informs and responds	Analysis of feedback to participants can be time-consuming
Non controversial way of mixing ideas and to give feedback on ideas already in the pipeline	Some suggestions may be unrealistic, for example developing in a conservation area.

**Costs:**

Publicity

Staff time: prior, during and after

Hall rental

Refreshments

Transport, if appropriate

Child care provision, if appropriate

**Checklist**

- Ensure you have the time to commit to the process
- Manage expectations: be clear about any limitations you may face at the start of the process
- There must be the buy-in of the decision makers
- Plan the sessions: how many do you need and where will they take place?
- Have you planned the promotion and publicity of the event and feedback?
- Are there adequate resources available: time, materials, money etc?
- Decide whether lists of options are to be provided or will this be left open for the group?
- Be clear what will happen with the suggestions from the group.

## I2 Community Forums

A community forum generally follows the same format as a focus group except it tends to have more individuals involved.

Community forums are used to engage with groups of people and/or service users and/or communities. There is more in depth discussion, more time for question and answer sessions and debate around the issue(s).

The issue(s) discussed must be of importance to the forum group. The meetings may be held regularly as a means of feedback and open channels of two-way communication.

Advantages	Disadvantages
The group is able to focus upon specific issues and provide more detailed information about it	Risks turning into a group of regular contributors rather than a group which identifies new ideas
It is an interactive process which builds relationships with groups	Accessibility needs to be considered in terms of location, venue and time
Individuals in the group are knowledgeable about the subject and should provide informed opinions	May not be a representative sample of the population
Once the forum is established it can be held on a regular basis if required	Forum may be dominated by certain individuals if not facilitated well
Likely to have more individuals willing to be involved as they have personal and local knowledge	
Promotes joint working if working with partner organisations	

### Checklist:

- Plan the forum to be held at a location, venue and time accessible to the participants
- Publicise the event well in advance
- Ensure that the agenda is agreed in advance and that it is issued to all attending in good time
- Communicate clearly to everyone what the meeting has to achieve.

### 13 Workshops

Workshops are a formally organised group brought together to exchange and gather information about an issue.

Workshops provide an opportunity for groups/ individuals to look at and participate in the development of plans for an area, project or service. They can be targeted at specific groups or individuals in a community or can be left open.

Workshops can take the shape of small discussion groups, which can be run over a number of sessions as appropriate.

Participants explore and add various options to the topic(s) being discussed and either reach consensus or present a range of options.

They can be used in a variety of circumstances. A key difference is that they can be used to bring together the public, partners and other stakeholders.

Workshops tend to have more participants than focus groups and run for a longer period of time.

Advantages	Disadvantages
A large number of people can participate as they can be split into smaller groups	They require a large amount of organisation
Opportunity to share information	Require trained/experienced facilitators which may be costly
Opportunity for joint working with partner organisations	Can be costly and time consuming
Participants are able to ask questions and both parties can explore issues in depth	Can be dominated by those who are most vocal if not facilitated well
Encourages participants to share knowledge and experiences	
They create a shared purpose which may result in buy in	
Can be useful for people with disabilities and impairments	

#### Costs:

Publicity

Staff time: prior, during and after

Venue

Refreshments

Transport, if appropriate

Child care provision, if appropriate

#### Checklist

- Organise trained/experienced facilitators
- Consider the timing of the event – childcare, work commitments etc
- Ensure that the location and the venue is accessible
- A note taker should be present
- Arrange how feedback will be given

# Appendix 2 – Engaging ‘hard to reach’ groups

This covers some key groups who sometimes need additional considerations to reach. Each group has been listed with key factors that should be taken into consideration when consulting.

## I Ethnic Minority groups

When engaging with Ethnic Minority groups the following factors should be taken into account:

- That many different ethnic groups have their own languages and culture. Find out what their needs are for translation and interpretation.
- Be proactive in providing information about consultation activity in different formats.
- The Aberdeenshire Council's Race Equality scheme <http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/about/equality.asp>
- Avoid using inappropriate language or terminology.
- Consider the timing of the meetings.
- Be aware of any cultural needs that will need to be addressed. For example, it may be appropriate to hold separate meetings for men and women, or beware of cultural differences if providing catering.
- Ensure that the venue is accessible. Don't assume everyone has access to a car. Consider providing transport if appropriate.
- Avoid tokenistic gestures or initiatives.
- Don't let fears of making a mistake prevent consultation. If in doubt seek advice.

## 2 Young People

There are a number of reasons for developing good processes for engaging with young people ranging from practical considerations in good service delivery to complying with statutory duties.

Involving people in consultation activity provides many benefits including their ability to have a greater impact and to change the world around them.

When engaging with young people the following should be taken into account:

- Decide and be clear about the issues you wish to consult on.
- Decide if any staff training is required.
- Decide which methods are appropriate to use.
- Ensure adequate resources are available.
- Plan how you will publicise the event.
- Consider the timing of the event and location in terms of accessibility.
- Consider the language that you are going to use – ensure it is jargon free.
- Think about reward and recognition for those who may take part in the consultation.
- Ensure where possible and practical that ideas from young people are put into practice.
- Plan how you intend to feedback the outcomes of the consultation activity.
- Remember parental consent. This must be obtained for participants under 12 years old. However parents must be made aware of the consultation and it's purpose if consulting people between 12 and 16 year old. Further information can be found in section 2.4.

The Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnerships Youth Engagement Strategy “Valuing Young People” endorsed by Aberdeenshire Council provides further advice for engaging with young people.

### 3 Older People

The number of older people is increasing in our society. The following factors should be taken into consideration in your planning stage to aid a better response rate:

- Be aware of the number of older people in your area, the organisations who work with them and the networks that support them.
- Use facilities and places that are accessible for older people.
- Consider the time of year and day. You are less likely to have a good response rate during winter, for example.
- Do not make assumptions about older people's abilities, experience or knowledge that they may or may not have.
- Involvement needs to be relevant to people's stage of life and associated needs.
- Ensure that the print, format and content of documents or papers for consideration are accessible and readable.
- The pace of the involvement needs to be geared to the needs of older people.
- Plan to give all older people opportunities to be involved, e.g. people in residential care, those who are housebound, etc.
- Involve older people through an appropriate feedback mechanism. For example do not assume that everyone will have access and be able to use internet and email. But equally, don't assume they don't just because they are older.
- Use plain language: avoid jargon, abbreviations and acronyms.

### 4 Disabled People

Impairments or disabilities that individuals have should be taken into account and accommodated.

Remember that disability is not always physical. Some people may have learning difficulties and your activities would need to take this into consideration.

There may also be some people who are involved in consultation who have literacy needs. They may require support if all the consultation activity planned is based on written documents.

It is important to research and prepare for consultation activity for people with disabilities. From this research you should identify appropriate methods for consultation.

The following factors should be taken into consideration:

- Research which organisations and support networks already exist.
- Be proactive about accessibility so that people do not have to ask for support.
- Ensure that there is appropriate access to services and buildings wheelchair access to buildings, for example.
- Provide sign language and interpreters if required.
- Use plain language, diagrams and illustrations.
- Bear in mind that some people may not be able to physically handle papers.
- Plan an appropriate amount of time for the consultation activity and allow time if you need to organise the translation of documents into a suitable format.
- Ensure that sessions are held at a convenient time as people may have work and family responsibilities.
- Be careful when people bring advocates or supporters – ensure the views expressed are those of the participants.
- Refer to the Disability Equality Scheme <http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/about/equality.asp>

## 5 Faith Groups

Engaging with faith groups within our communities is important. The following factors will help represent good practice:

- Be aware of the dates of religious festivals and the timing and places of worship.
- If dates of festivals or worship can not be avoided a separate room should be set aside for prayers.
- Try to include a wide range of faith groups within your consultation activity.
- Be aware and sensitive to the differences between faiths.
- When holding a consultation event remember to consider the following:
  - Dietary requirements
  - That the premises are suitable (avoiding licensed premises or places where alcohol is consumed)
- Consultations may be best avoided during a period of fasting but if necessary it should be limited to half a day in the morning to minimise lack of concentration and fatigue.
- Certain religions have restrictions in relation to contact between the sexes, you may need to consider holding a separate women-only group with female staff and facilitators present.

## 6 The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community

When consulting with the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender (LGBT) community you should be aware that the consultees' sexual orientation may not be known in the wider community therefore the consultation activity should be handled with appropriate confidentiality and sensitivity.

The following factors should be taken into consideration:

- Ensure confidentiality.
- If holding a meeting, ensure that it is held in a suitable place at a safe time.
- Make the most of LGBT organisations and local networks.

- Include positive messages about LGBT people in all communication with all community groups. Remember, LGBT people might be young, old and/or from black, ethnic minority communities, have a disability or be a member of a faith group.

## 7 Migrant Workers and Gypsy Travellers

The following factors should be taken into consideration with these groups:

- Ensure any location and venue is accessible.
- Consider that some people may be working long hours or shift work.
- Some consultees may not have a permanent address.
- Be sensitive to their situation – do not apply a label to them.
- Consultees may not have access to a computer.
- There may be fear or mistrust that will need to be overcome.

Gypsy Travellers are a recognised racial group and the requirements of the council's race equality scheme apply to them. The council supports the GTEIP (Grampian Travellers Education and Information Project) who can give additional advice on consulting gypsy travellers.

There are many considerations identified above (although this is not an exhaustive list) for consulting with equality groups. It is clear that consultation works best when equality issues are considered from the start and ways of identifying the groups are included.

The best approaches involve improving access to consultation activity by ensuring that you use a mix of consultation methods to help you to get the views of "hard to reach" groups.

# Appendix 3 Evaluation checklist

The following checklist can be used when evaluating the consultation activity and process.

## Checklist for evaluation

- Did everyone (staff, consultees, partners etc.) understand the consultation?
- Did you consult the right people?
- Did you manage to reach your target number of responses?
- Did you manage to reach hard to engage groups?
- Did the publicity material work?
- Was the level of information provided suitable?
- Were you able to produce the information in a variety of formats if requested?
- Was the consultation exercise accessible: venue, language, layout etc?
- Did you use the best mix of consultation methods?
- Did some consultation methods work better than others?
- Did the timescale that you planned work?
- Is the process that you used transparent?
- Was feedback provided in sufficient quality and depth?
- Was the budget allocated adequate?
- Has it led to change in policy or improvement in service?
- Upon reflection what would you do differently?

The amount of work put into answering the questions listed above should be proportionate to the size & importance of the consultation that has been carried out.