Consultation Toolkit

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Welcome to Dover District Council's Consultation Toolkit

This toolkit has been developed to help ensure that we engage effectively with local communities. It will help us to consult with people about the development and design of Council services and activities. It has been designed to be easy to use and understand, taking you through what you need to do step by step.

The Council has a statutory duty to consult the public on a range of issues. However, having a statutory duty to consult is not the only reason for doing so.

Underpinning this toolkit are three key principles:

- All communities should be involved in the decisions that effect them

- All communities deserve high quality public services, shaped their needs

- Council priorities and strategies should reflect local priorities, needs and aspirations

This toolkit helps us to uphold these principles and is therefore an important part of Dover District Council's agreed approach to consultation.

The Toolkit

This toolkit is designed to be an easy to understand, step by step process. It is not intended to be prescriptive but gives you helpful hints, tips and advice for planning and carrying out consultation work. We do however have minimum consultation standards, to which you must adhere.

The toolkit has been broken down into a six step process:

Step 1
The aims and objectives of your consultation

Step 2
The level and method of consultation needed

Step 3
Who to consult

Step 4
Making sure your consultation is inclusive

Step 5
Planning and doing the consultation

Step 6
Using the results

Minimum consultation standards

When carrying out any consultation you need to achieve minimum consultation standards. These have been developed to ensure there is a consistent, effective and high quality approach across the Council.

Our minimum standards are:

1. You are expected to allow a minimum of 12 weeks for people to respond. (Should a shorter period be needed this should be set out clearly and an explanation given.) This meets COMPACT principles.

2. You must be clear about what your proposals are, who may be affected, what questions are being asked and the timescale for responses.

3. You must ensure that your consultation is clear, concise and widely accessible.

4. You must give feedback on the responses received and give information how the consultation process influenced the policy or delivery of the service.

5. You must monitor your service's effectiveness at carrying out consultation exercises and be able to analyse the degree in which consultations affected the eventual outcome.

Step 1

The aims and objectives of your consultation

Before undertaking any consultation you should prove why you are undertaking it and what it is you want to find out. Think about what you are going to do with the outcomes and what decisions will be influenced. Consultation with the public raises expectations so you need to be sure the people you engage with understand how you plan to use your results. Use the Consultation Brief Form to help you do this, Appendix A. Seek guidance from the Community Development Team and/or the Corporate Communication Team.

Ask yourself and anyone involved in the consultation:

- What are the key aims?
- What information or change is wanted at the end and what do we not have now?
- What type of report do I need to produce at the end?
- What will the information be used for?

Think about your objectives for consulting, engagement and involving – which of these do you want to do?

- Compare and challenge the existing service
- Look for unmet need
- Shape the way your service is delivered
- Measure satisfaction with the service
- Prioritise future spending
- Set targets for the service
- Check out reaction to new ides or initiatives
- Look out for quality improvements
- Check opinions, views and/or attitudes

Think laterally:

- Is there any national/regional/local data or research that could help address what you're trying to find out?
- Check whether other similar exercises have already taken place – you do not want to repeat work that has already been carried out
- What other consultation is being undertaken internally and by our partners – watch out for consultation overload
- Is there any consultation planned soon – you should maximise the opportunity for joined up work.

Think about communication and feedback:

If participants do not see anything happening as a result of their involvement they will be disillusioned, dissatisfied and much less willing to get involved again. Try to avoid this by building feedback mechanisms into your project, in particular to summarise how the consultation has helped shape any subsequent proposals.

Please ensure that you forward a copy of your consultation brief to the Corporate Communications Team. They can help with advice, support and, if necessary, challenge to help ensure that you carry out an effective and high quality exercise.

Step 2:

The level and method of consultation needed

Consultation is just one form of engagement. You therefore need to decide if consultation is the most suitable approach to achieve the outcome needed. Different types of engagement include:

- **Engagement for information (Communication)**
  Letting people know what will happen

- **Engagement for consideration (Consultation)**
  Letting people know what could happen and what scope would be for their comment

- **Engagement for improvement (Consultation)**
  Seeking customers' and service users' views specifically to being about an improvement in services

- **Engagement for involvement (Involvement)**
  Involving people in the development of service standards and delivery

Consultation methods

Consultation methods include:

Method	Considerations	Advantages	Disadvantages
Focus Groups Facilitated group discussion to explore issues in depth and seek views of particular interest groups. Can be used to generate ideas.	• Requires skilled facilitators • Selection of group of prime importance • May need several groups to gain different perspectives • Generally 8–10 people per group	• Allows brainstorming of ideas • Can be designed to involve hard-to-reach groups • Can explore complex issues • Provides in-depth information • Useful for building on survey findings • Allows interaction and spontaneity between participants	• Can be costly and time-consuming • Requires specialist expertise to facilitate discussion • Lack of confidentiality • Can only achieve limited representation • Discussions can be difficult to transcribe and analyse.
Surveys – Telephone Telephone interviews with	• Needs statistical and research expertise to administer and avoid bias • How to access hard-to-reach groups • How to provide feedback to respondents • May need external resources and trained researchers.	• Can ensure a good response rate • Easier to engage with hard-to-reach groups • Can be used to obtain responses from demographically representative sample • Allows issues to be explored in depth • Allows flexible structure of interview • May be used to explore sensitive issues.	• Interviewer cannot respond to any questions • Not necessarily representative • Can be costly and time consuming • Personal safety of field-workers may be at risk • Specific skills are required to conduct the interview • Can be difficult to analyse.

Method	Considerations	Advantages	Disadvantages
Consultation Documents To provide information and invite public submissions or written comments on specific proposals.	• Writing and editing skills needed • Administration of responses/ feedback • Full details need to be provided • Publicise event • Allow time to respond	• Good starting point for consultation • Provides detailed information on the issue • Elicits a considered view	• Can be costly to produce and circulate • Not always read by target audience • Needs to be accessible by all, eg other languages, etc. • May have poor response rate • Resource intensive.
Forums Structured and regular meetings with interest groups. Used to provide information, seek views and develop/endorse local plans and strategies for the community or whole town.	• Needs effective management	• Regular process of engagement • Useful link between partner agencies and local people • Can be used to seek local committed involvement • Relatively cheap	• Attendees are unlikely to represent all views • Can be dominated by the most vocal. • Agenda can be taken over.
Seminars/Workshops A formally organised discussion group to exchange and gather information. Usually in the format of presentations followed by small group discussions, ending in a large group discussion of key issues.	• Requires skilled facilitators	• Opportunity to share large amounts of information • Large numbers of people can participate • Opportunity for dialogue between all key stakeholders • Opportunity to engage in multi-disciplinary discussions • Participants can ask questions and explore issues in detail • Encourages participants to network and share experiences	• Requires a great deal of organisation and specialist moderation skills • Can be costly and time consuming • Can be dominated by the most vocal.
Website Using information technology to inform and gather feedback, eg., online questionnaires	• Access to computers may be limited	• Cost effective • Quick response rate • Easy to keep information current • Potentially wide-reaching • Can be used to engage with some hard-to-reach groups • Useful for panel surveys.	• Will not reach everyone • Requires technical expertise • May exclude some groups, eg., elderly, low income • Results can be unrepresentative.
Public Meetings Formal meetings with scheduled agendas. Used to provide information, seek views and develop/ endorse local plans and strategies for the community or whole town.	• Hold at times/locations to suit target communities • Publicity for event • Clearly defined objective • Defined meeting structure	• Opportunity to provide information and receive feedback. • Builds relationships with local community • Can be used to seek local committed involvement • Relatively cheap	• Attendees are unlikely to represent all views • Large group may be a barrier • Can be dominated by the most vocal • Turnout can be poor • Can be difficult to

Method	Considerations	Advantages	Disadvantages
	• Staffing and facilitation.	• Allows public to let off steam.	separate individual and general complaints.
Exhibitions and Roadshows Used to provide information and to obtain views on specific projects or services.	• Suitable venues • Publicise the event	• Effective in publicising services/organisations • Gives public flexibility to attend • Allows contact with public	• Groups reached dependant on location/ timing of roadshow, exhibition, etc. • Likely to obtain views of a small number of people who are not representative. • Feedback may be limited.

Step 3:

Who to consult

You will need to identify who your stakeholders are and plan how to consult them – this will largely depend on what you are consulting on. Break your consultees down into distinct categories. Think about who your key customers/users are; non-users; as well as others with an interest.

Service Users

- Those who pay directly for a service
- Those who pay indirectly through Council Tax

Specific Non-Users

- People who are unaware of the service
- Dissatisfied or ex-customers
- People who might need the service at a later date

Other Customers

- Internal customers (eg staff)
- Partner organisations
- Elected member

Interested Parties

- Residents/local people
- Interested agencies – voluntary, private, public sector
- Parish councillors, MPs, local businesses, etc

For example, if you were to consult on making improvements to a local play area, you may need to consult with users; people who live nearby; local agencies or voluntary groups; businesses; contractors and people who do not use the play area (to find out why not).

Check the history of community involvement in an area. Is the main culture one of apathy or activism and whether or not there has been a recent consultation exercise in that area. Think about any existing groups and networks you could use to consult with, or disseminate through. Making creative use of existing forums could save a lot of time and resources.

Step 4:

Making sure that your consultation is inclusive

The Council, through its Corporate Plan and Equality Scheme, is committed to ensuring that everyone has equal access to its services and we actively promote equality for opportunity for everyone who lives, works or visits the Dover District.

When carrying out engagement work, Councils and other public authorities have a duty to assess and address the barriers to engagement with groups or individuals who voices are not traditionally heard or recognise.

A Customer Access Review (CAR) is a key tool in policy making and form an integral part of all consultation exercises.

Ensuring Diversity in Engagement

It is essential that community engagement activities reflect the diversity of Dover District's population**.** The term 'hard-to-reach' is widely used to describe those groups or communities who experience social exclusion and disempowerment. They are generally perceived by agencies as being by their nature difficult to access.

However, it is important to note that many of these communities are not actually that hard-to-reach and do not consider themselves as such. It is simply that organisations have not put enough effort into seeking their views.

1. **Defining hard-to-reach groups**

It is essential that when planning your consultation event, that particular consideration is given to engaging with groups that are defined as hard to reach.

A hard-to-reach group is any group or section of the community who it is difficult to access for any reason such as:

- Physical inaccessibility (eg disability, older or frail people)
- Language (eg immigrants to the UK)
- Cultural views and traditions (eg disadvantaged young people)
- Social expectations (eg children and young people who are often not considered as appropriate to be engaged with and who themselves often do not expect to be taken seriously).

Thus, hard-to-reach groups may include:

- Asylum seekers
- Children and young people
- Drug users
- Faith communities
- Gay, lesbian and bisexual men and women, transsexual and transgendered people
- Homeless people
- Minority ethnic communities
- Offenders/ex-offenders
- Older people (especially frail and/or isolated older people)

- People with disabilities
- People with learning difficulties
- People with mental health problems
- People who travel or commute into the area
- Single parents
- Small businesses
- Travellers
- Tourists
- Victims of domestic abuse
- Young men of working age

When identifying your hard-to-reach groups, it is first necessary to break down the local population into specific sectors. You should also remember the overarching need to remain consistent with representing the diversity of the population of the Dover District.

2. How to identify hard-to-reach sectors

The Council's Community Development Team may be able to help in providing demographic profiles of the areas or communities under consideration. However, data may not be available at a level that allows you to identify these hard-to-reach sectors. If this is the case, you may need to talk to intermediary community groups who will be able to provide a different, localised perspective on who are the hard-to-reach groups within your target community.

3. Enabling hard-to-reach groups to take part

Once you have identified and accessed your hard-to-reach groups, it is necessary to take measures that will help to overcome the barriers that prevented them from taking part in the first place. This may involve using interpreters, using visual aides, adapting facilities for disabled people, providing care for dependants', etc.

You should also try to be flexible over the timing, location and transport issues, and also try to use neutral or 'safe' buildings for exercises.

Step 5:

Planning and doing the consultation

Consultation with our communities should inform service planning and decision-making. You will need to establish when the results of your exercise are required to enable deadlines to be met. Please consider availability of Corporate Management Team, Cabinet or other decision-making forums. If the results of your consultation work leads to a key decision then it needs to be included in the Forward Plan. If in doubt always check with the Democratic Services team.

If follows therefore that enough time be allowed for an effective consultation. (NB: The minimum standard is twelve weeks.)

When planning your consultation timetable remember to build in time for the following tasks. (You should work backwards from the date the decision will be taken to clarify your timetable.)

Task		**Approximate time guide**
END	When will the decision be taken? Consultation must be approved by Corporate Communication Team before the exercise starts and reported to them afterwards.	Insert time/date.
↑	Does the report need to be approved by anyone before the decision takes place? If so allow time for this process.	Check with Democratic Services (up to 2 weeks).
↑	Draw up the report on this issue – including consultation outcomes and recommendations.	1 day
↑	Draw up the report of the consultation outcomes – prepare different formats to enable feedback to stakeholders.	2 days
↑	Collate, analyse and consider the consultation outcomes.	1-4 weeks
↑	Run the consultation: allow sufficient time for all your key stakeholders to respond. Be aware of times of year when the response may be affected eg religious festivals, school holidays.	Ideally 8 weeks for written consultation documents. If this is not possible, please explain reasons.
↑	If you are using postal surveys build in sufficient time for reminders, if necessary, to be sent out 1-2 weeks before closing. Build in time to consult with those groups whose voices have not traditionally been heard or recognised.	Allow 2-4 weeks (from receipt) to respond to postal surveys – allow a further week for late returns.
↑	Consider if you need to "pilot" your consultation: if so, allow time for this and any modifications that you may need to make.	2 weeks
↑	Advertise and publicise the consultation: allow sufficient time for distribution. Consider time needed for printing, enveloping, post etc.	2-4 weeks

Task		Approximate time guide
↑	Produce consultation material: • Do you need input from the Design/Community Development/Communications teams? • Do you need materials produced in community languages, converted to Braille, produced in different formats? If so, build this in.	2-4 weeks
	Are you involving other partners/Directorates/agencies in this exercise? Build in time for them to contribute.	Allow time for partners to participate in your exercise as appropriate
	Are you using an external agency to run your consultation? Build in time to: • prepare a brief • tender • interview and select your consultants	Time will vary – do not underestimate these activities.
	Depending on your method of consultation (eg focus groups, public meetings, roadshows, etc) you may need to let people know the date and broad outline of your event or recruit people immediately.	Let people know the date in advance.
	Identify the cost and staff time involved. Build this in to work programmes. Do staff need training to be involved in running this exercise? If so schedule this in.	Plan for training if required.
	Preparing the action plan: • Decide on what you are consulting about. • Decide on with whom you will consult. • Decide on methods of consultation. • Build in time at the end to feedback results after the decision has been taken – do you need to let the Corporate Communications Team know so that media statements can be prepared if appropriate • Build in time to evaluate your exercise.	Take sufficient time to plan your consultation thoroughly.
	Do you need a new exercise? Register your consultation with the Corporate Communication Team.	Use the Consultation Brief Form.
START	Clarify why you are consulting – search the database – can you link up with another exercise with the same timeframe?	Use the Consultation Brief Form.

Step 6:

Using the results

Analysing the results

The first step is to analyse the raw data. The approach used to analyse quantitative and qualitative data is different. Here is some general advice.

Quantitative Data

Quantitative data is the easiest data to analyse in terms of producing statistics and graphs and then interpreting the results.

To effectively and efficiently analyse questionnaires the responses can be turned into an electronic format. This involves inputting the responses into a suitable format for analysis. There are many ways of doing this, for example, MS Excel, Access or SNAP software.

Analysing and interpreting the statistical data needs varying levels of expertise depending upon the complexity of the research. You must be confident that you have, or have access to, the skills required to do this. If in doubt, please contact the Council's Performance and Risk Team.

Qualitative Data

For relatively simple consultations, qualitative data can be gathered under broad headings which will aid subsequent analysis.

Analysing and interpreting quantitative information needs a good level of knowledge upon the complexity of the research. You must be confident that you have, or have access to, the skills needed to do this. If in doubt, please contact the Council's Performance and Risk Team.

The next steps

The next steps is to acknowledge and draw attention to areas of agreement and disagreement, using the results of the consultation. You should consider them carefully, together with other evidence and considerations, before decisions are made.

To do this you should identify key messages. One way of doing this is to think about the following questions:

The overall picture
- What are the main findings?
- Are people satisfied/dissatisfied?
- What are the areas on which there is a majority consensus?
- Where do views and opinions differ?

Are views consistent
- What does the analysis show?

What are the priorities for the public?

- How are we doing on each of these?
- What can we do to meet these?
- What can we do little about?

User expectations

- How are we doing against these?
- How can we improve?
- What can we do little about?
- Data protection – consider storage and use, as stated to people at start.

Our expectations

- Which results did we expect?
- Which results are a surprise?

Benchmarking

- Can we benchmark these results against other Council services?
- Can we benchmark these results against other authorities?

Can we identify any trends

- Any upwards trends?
- Any downward trends?
- Any results that have stayed the same?

Can we identify trends from elsewhere

- Can we compare results with others who have asked the same question/used the same methods?
- Are we moving in the same direction as national trends?

Producing the results

When producing the results think about:

- Which findings do not need action eg low priority or results that are very good?
- Which things can we not change in the short term? How do we tell people? Popular recommendations that cannot be taken forward require an explanation as part of your feedback.
- Which things can we change in the short term? Identify "quick wins", especially those that can be done within existing budgets or timescales
- This shows that you can and will act on the outcomes of consultation.
- Which results highlight the need for action?
- What are the next steps, who needs to know? Does funding need to be identified, is further consultation needed, when can decisions be taken?
- Which results highlight the need for more communications? What is the issue, how we will communicate it, to whom and where?
- Which results highlight the need for further consultation? In some circumstances new alternatives will come to light which may call for further consultation.

This always takes longer that you think so allow plenty of time.

Giving feedback to stakeholders

It is important that you feed back the results of your exercise to everyone who has given up their time to take part. This will encourage them to take part in future consultation exercises. You will also be helping to influence general views or opinions of how good the Council is at keeping local people informed of developments.

If you do not feedback, people will assume the Council doesn't take any notice of what they have said.

In addition to respondents, you should also consider providing feedback for:

- The Cabinet Portfolio Holder
- Local Councillors
- Appropriate Council Committees
- Directors
- Service Managers
- Frontline Staff
- Partner organisations
- Service users
- Residents

Different audiences will have needs so feedback could take different forms and often a mix of techniques is best. Also remember that different audiences will want different levels of information. For example, residents may simply be interested in the headline findings of a satisfaction survey, while a Councillor may want the detailed results for the consultation of a development in their ward.

Possible communication methods include:

- Presentations
- Seminars and workshops
- Summary reports
- Feedback documents to respondents
- Detailed reports
- Through the Council's website
- Through the Council intranet
- Via the local media
- Through the Council's email system
- Residents newspaper or magazine

Consultation Checklist

Double check that you know:

- Who to consult – have you thought of everyone?
- Whose views will be most influential?
- That you have thought of the right issues and questions to focus on.
- That you have selected the most appropriate method(s).
- How much it will cost and where the money is coming from.
- What decisions will be affected and when.

Ensure that you have:

- Used plain English and no jargon.
- Avoided any leading or ambiguous questions.
- Thought about different people's preferences in terms of methods.
- Offered a choice of consultation methods to suit preferences.
- Thought about involving 'hard to reach people'.
- Planned for how the views of different stakeholder groups will be balanced against each other.
- Given people plenty of time to respond.
- Decided who will do the consultation, in-house or an agency.
- Successfully built consultation into your service review and planning process.

Double check that participants will know:

- Who is being involved and why.
- What decisions will be influenced.
- Who will take these decisions?
- When the decisions will be taken.
- How the results will be fed back to them.
- That anonymity will be respected (if requested).
- Who they can contact about the exercise.

Communication Toolkit Activity Brief and Evaluation

Service Area		Responsible Officer		Corporate Priority being addressed	
Consultation, information, engagement or promotion activity				Statutory or Non-Statutory Activity	
Reference Number from Communication Plan				One off or ongoing activity (including frequency)	

This Brief should lead you to make the right decisions by considering all the key issues when developing effective communication activity. The evaluation column will enable you to review how well you did against your brief and provide improvements for the next time you communicate.

Action		Brief	Evaluation
Why are you carrying out this activity?			
What do you want to achieve from the activity?			
How will you measure you have been successful in meeting your achievement?			
Who do you want to contact through your activity?			
What is the timetable for your event, has it changed from that set out in the Communication Plan? (remember the principles of Compact of 12 weeks' consultation)			
What level of activity is required and what method will you use? (see Toolkit pages 5 to 7)			
What resource do you need to achieve your success?	Money		
	Venue		
	Staff		
	Volunteers		
	Materials		
	Other		

Action	Brief	Evaluation
How much of the above resource are you providing and from what sources, including external to DDC?		
How much additional resources do you need to achieve results, and from where?		

Please send a copy of this completed form to the Corporate Communication Team, so they can review it and, if necessary, feedback areas for improvement.