

Consulting people

Customers, stakeholders and citizens

www.portsmouth.gov.uk



The toolkit

- > Inform
- > Consult
- > Involve

Welcome to the consultation toolkit.

It will help us to consult and involve people in what we do. It's designed so that you can 'plug in' your service or issue at the beginning and it will lead you through what you will need to do. It contains simple tools to enable you to consult effectively.

It's the agreed Portsmouth City Council approach.

When consulting on your service or any other issue you will probably need to focus on finding out about the needs, concerns, priorities and satisfaction levels of your current and potential service users and other stakeholders.

Everyone's different.

Everyone has a unique set of needs and views. It's your job to understand and respond to them. This toolkit will help you to put customers at the heart of everything we do.

Call 9284 1120

if you need any help or email
consult@portsmouthcc.gov.uk

Time for action:

The need to consult

The need to consult people on what we do for them is hotting up.

Because:

- Our organisation has chosen, through our policies and general approach to be customer focused.
- Local people are less likely than ever to accept poor quality services or decisions they disagree with.
- The government's Public Involvement in Health Bill means all councils have a duty to consult and involve local people.

That's quite a challenge. More than that, we must be able to show that we have acted on what we found out and that we've improved our services as a result.

These five stages are the agreed framework for consultation at PCC. This booklet will give you tools to work through the key stages.

stage one

decide **who** to consult with

stage two

decide **what** to consult on

stage three

decide **how** to ask them

stage four

start the consultation

stage five

analyse and inform

Stage one: Deciding who to consult



Everyone involved in your service has a view on how it could be improved. Non users, staff, councillors, suppliers, local people, agencies and organisations as well as your key customers will all be full of ideas on how to improve the service.

You will need to work out **who** your stakeholders are and plan to consult them all. **You should start with the main customers/users of your service.** For example if you were to consult on making improvements to a local park, you would probably need to consult with park users, people who live nearby, the wardens, local agencies or groups, businesses, the contractor and people who don't use the park (to find out why not).

You can start here by thinking which service, issue or challenge you want to consult on. Try to think in terms of smallest service unit that's appropriate.

Tools 1 and 2 that follow on the next page should help you to map out who your stakeholders are. The first is a checklist to give you some ideas of who your consultees should be and the second is a reminder to make special efforts to listen to certain types of people who are sometimes harder to reach.

Remember:

- Use a phased approach - who will you listen to first?
- Pilot things and learn and improve as you go
- Keep a record of who you are going to consult and why

You cannot consult with absolutely everyone about absolutely everything. Do whatever you feel an objective observer would think reasonable and appropriate, focusing on your stakeholders.



Use this checklist to draw a simple map of your stakeholders

Key Customers

- People who pay directly.
- People who pay indirectly (e.g. through council tax).
- Users of 'collective' services (e.g. roads, street lights).
- Internal customers (e.g. other staff).

Non-Users

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

Others

- People we enforce against or who are regulated (e.g. landlords).
- Citizens/local people.
- Businesses.
- Interested agencies - voluntary, private, public sector.
- People affected by policies or development (e.g. planning).
- Local Councillors, Neighbourhood Forum, MP's, carers/advocates/community boards etc.



For lots of reasons, you will need to make particular arrangements and extra efforts to find out some people's views.

For example:

- People who have problems reading, writing and speaking English.
- Some people on low incomes.
- Some people from ethnic minorities.
- Some people who are generally 'too busy'.
- Older people.
- Young people.
- People who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- People who are blind or partially sighted.
- People who have mobility difficulties.

You will need to find innovative ways of consulting with these people. Specialist advice on how to do this is available from the Equality and Diversity Unit on 9284 1138.



Once you have identified the people you need to consult with, you can start thinking about what questions to ask. There are a few key points:

- Don't just ask about things that **you** think are appropriate – think from the customer's point of view. What do they want to tell you about?
- Think clearly about your **objectives** for consulting people – why are you doing it? What decisions will it influence?
- Providing value for money means we have to **challenge** the way the service is now and question if the need could be met more effectively. Use consultation to explore this key issue.

Avoid asking about things that are just interesting to know – focus on issues that you can change or strongly influence.

Thinking about the points above should lead you to some ideas about what questions to ask.

Once you have done that use tools 3 and 4 that follow to draft some question areas. You can turn them into finished questions later.

Keep a record of why you chose these questions.



Which of these do you want to do?

- Compare and challenge the existing service.
- Find better ways of meeting your customers' needs.
- 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 ideas or initiatives.
- Look for quality improvements.
- Check opinions, views, attitudes.
- It's probably most of these and some of your own.
- Get more insight into your customers' opinions, views and attitudes.

It's probably most of these and some of your own.



Here are some ideas of the type of question areas you might want to ask

- What do people like most/least about the service?
- Is the standard or level of the service right?
- Is the frequency of the service acceptable?
- Is the service reliable?
- What takes too long?
- What about comfort, convenience, safety factors?
- How good is your customer service (e.g. helpfulness, friendliness)?
- Is the range of services available appropriate?
- Is the service equally accessible by everyone?
- Is there enough information available about the service?
- Is the service good value?

Ideally, you should even consult people on which questions to ask. You could try to get some customers together, maybe using an existing user group or something like a Neighbourhood Forum, to develop the right questions.



By now you should have identified the key stakeholders for your service and thought about what to ask them. You will now be able to decide how to go about it. Some key points are:

- Use tool 5 & 6 below to select some possible consultation methods (e.g. focus group, survey etc).
- Think especially about the **different needs** of different people you wish to consult with – and get a representative sample.
- Try to use a range of methods for each consultation – one focus group will not do. You need to **'custom build'** a consultation solution for each service or issue to make it as accessible as possible.
- Build on what consultation you already have in place, and again look for opportunities to join up with other services/outside agencies.
- Conduct joint consultation where possible (see info about the 'Big List').
- If you are asking about satisfaction with your service, it is usually best to do this as soon as possible after the service has been delivered (e.g. do a follow up phone call or survey card a few days later).
- You will probably need to use a mix of **'quantitative'** methods (e.g. surveys where we can measure satisfaction or opinions/surveys numerically) and **'qualitative'** methods (e.g. focus groups where we look for more in depth opinions or quality improvements).
- Review what existing consultation has already said. Don't reinvent the wheel but don't keep going over old ground. Again, look at the Big List



Different types of people prefer different consultation methods. Also some methods work better for some things than others.

Tools 5 & 6 should give you some ideas.

Some other thoughts are:

- Customer First at PCC co-ordinate all consultation projects across the council. The **'Big List'** is an up to date list of hundreds of surveys etc that others have done at PCC, and a forward listing of planned projects. Please use it to see if there are previous projects which you could get information from, or to link up with a planned project. Use the contact info on the back page to tell us about your projects.
- You can ask Customer First for more in depth advice on selecting methods or we can put you in touch with others who have done similar things so you can pick their brains. E-mail, call us or come along to one of our Consultation Surgeries.
- Our major survey, the Portsmouth Residents' Survey,

Phone 9283 4050 or 9284 1120

or email consult@portsmouthcc.gov.uk for any help you



Local research has shown that different people prefer different tool 5 consultation methods.

Here's a few clues:

- The most popular methods generally are 'having the information sent to them' and 'surveys' (ie) home based consultation.
- Some people like public meetings but others avoid anything that involves leaving the home.
- People on higher incomes are more likely to favour being on panels/groups. They are also most likely to have access to on-line consultation.
- People on lower incomes are generally less keen on getting involved and feel 'information poor'.
- Young people like focus groups and street interviews. There are also specific forums for young people e.g the Council of Portsmouth Students (COPS), the Youth Affairs Website and Rant magazine.
- Older people often like Neighbourhood Forums.



All consultation methods have strengths and weaknesses. Some are more 'representative' than others, some get a more 'in depth' response, some are best if you want a quick response:

- **Postal Surveys** often get a limited response (20% or less) but can be good for when you want to give more information as well. See tool 6A for more information.
- **Focus Groups** explore issues in detail from the customer's point of view. They are good for getting common sense opinions on complex issues. See tool 6B for more information.
- **Telephone Surveys** are great when you need a quick response and have simple questions. The City Helpdesk at PCC can sometimes help you with this.
- **Personal Interviews** are often the most statistically reliable method because you can control the number and type of people that you ask.

Use a mix of these methods to ensure you reach everyone.



This chart shows the more usual consultation methods, most of which have been used by Portsmouth City Council. The further up the chart, the greater the level of public involvement.



Please use these charts to think of which methods you might want to use

Method	Description	Pros	Cons	Costs
Users on committees/panels	Stakeholder involvement in decision-making bodies	Has real power. Shows users perspective of service provider	Users may get too close representativeness	Low
Neighbourhood appraisal/audit	Local people conduct own study and prepare analysis and plan	Involves residents in whole process. Builds skills and local pride	Needs big input in training and support	Low
Large-scale community events	Various. Bring together locals to give views/produce plan	Can take very full view. Can build consensus and pride in result	Also needs much pre work and balancing ideas	Medium/High
Policy conferences	Extended large meeting, including key stakeholders, breaking into smaller workshops	Gets key people focused clearly on issue. Improves partnership and joined-up working	May be too big to achieve consensus or decision. Raises expectations	Medium/High
Community Associations	Management committee for community centre	Builds local partnership, skills and involvement Asks a lot from people.	May miss majority view	Low
Round tables/user forums	Groups of stakeholders meeting regularly to discuss issues	Bring in important variety of views, knowledge, etc. Can build consensus	Need to be well prepared and supported	Low
Citizens' Juries	Extended group discussing issue and hearing/seeking advice	In-depth look at complex issues. Shows how evidence affects views.	Small selected group may lack credibility. Much work	High
Deliberative groups	Participants gather and have information and chance to discuss before giving opinion	Gets various points of view. Allows in-depth consideration. Shows how views change	Requires quite skilled preparation and facilitation	Medium
Tenants Associations	Body of tenants (or other stakeholders?) meeting formally	Very self-led, strong local involvement	May be a minority. May get adversarial	Low
Focus Groups	Group of people talk about issues and share views	Good in-depth look, includes feelings, responses and results of discussion. Can look at certain types of people	People can change when in groups. Views of just a few may be misleading	Medium
Referendums	An open vote on a particular issue for all the public	Easy to understand. Gives a clear message. Open to all in theory	Big effort to set up. Usual turn-out worries	High
Simulations	Proposed arrangements or ideas are tried out in role-play with stakeholder representatives	May get good idea of complex and unpredictable possibilities. Shares points of view	Needs good facilitation and running. Can only involve a few people	Medium
Residents' Panel	List of people who will respond to periodic surveys	Can be quicker and cheaper than one-off surveys. Gets into how views change, who thinks what and why.	Will pick out more interested types not the average person	Medium/High
Neighbourhood Forums	Locally-run bodies which hold public meetings on local issues	Address local issues. Independent image. Can respond to approaches.	Risk hearing only an active minority	Low
Public Meetings	Open meeting called on specific issue	Allow expression of views on important current topic	Can be adversarial and dominated by minority. Not liked by most people	Low
Specific surveys	Various research into customer needs, views, experience, etc.	Done well can be clear, fair and very informative. Can give good figures	Bad surveys can give poor information. May miss certain groups	Varies
Ongoing surveys	Monitoring of satisfaction with eg. high volume service	Brings standards into service evaluation. Shows trends over time. Can contact less vocal users.	Time-consuming	Medium
Residents' Surveys	Wide-ranging survey, hundreds of interviews every 2 years.	High accuracy, credible. Trends over time. Representative sample.	Relatively expensive. Not quick.	High
Video Box	Booth with camera open to public record views.	Allows very expressive feedback. Needs no literacy or third party.	Can be tricky to organise. Scares some people off.	Medium
Electronic Polling	Use internet, etc, to get views, perhaps set up debates	Good potential for debate and live interaction or access at any time from home or public terminal.	IT puts off many people, others have little or no access to the kit.	Low after set-up
Quality Check phonecalls	Quick follow-up to service delivery to check quality/satisfaction	Quick and customer-responsive. Easy to administer	May be too much for customers	Low
Complaints and suggestions	System to make it easy for customers to give feedback	Fairly easy to do. Customer views are key. Promotes satisfaction	Only gets views of vocal minority - often negative	Medium
Mystery Shoppers	Researchers go into service delivery process as users	Combines user perspective with consumer's questioning	Does not involve real users (normally)	Low
On-line surveys	Web-based survey forms for on-line completion	Fairly easy to organise. Offers another channel for consultation	Many people still not online, especially older and less well off	Low

You should now be at the stage where you can actually implement some consultation. It is important that we all stick to some basic standards. Use tool 7 as a checklist.

Some local authorities ask people's views, then:

- Don't tell them what will happen with the results.
- Don't do anything with the results.
- Don't tell anyone the results.
- Do what they planned they were going to do anyway.
- Ask them the same things again next year.

We must make sure that we don't do the same.

TIP You could form a team of users/non-users to work with you

"You need to give us clear reasons why things don't happen."

"The council needs to be honest when it has not undertaken what the community wanted."

Real PCC
customer
comments

"Sometimes the council decide to consult, then ignore."

Before you start

Ensure that consultees know:

- Who is being consulted 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 if they are unhappy about the consultation.

Ensure that you have:

- Used plain English and no jargon.
- Avoided any leading or ambiguous questions.
- Offered a choice of consultation methods.
- Thought about involving 'hard to reach' people.
- Made any special arrangements e.g. interpreters, hearing loops etc.
- Thought about different people's preferences in terms of methods.
- Planned for how the views of different stakeholders groups will be 'weighed up' 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 & planning process.
- A plan for analysing the results, planning the action you will take and communicating the results

There are, of course, lots of risks when consulting.

Some pitfalls to think about are:

- By consulting, you can easily raise expectations that things will change overnight, they won't. Be careful and realistic about the scope for change.
- If you consult on a decision that has already been taken, it will come back to haunt you. People know when we are doing 'token' consultation.
- Expect some conflict and pain - if you consult with a range of stakeholders, they will often have opposing views. It's the politician's role to decide how to respond - bearing all these views in mind.
- Don't just put on an event (e.g. focus groups or policy conference) and expect people to be interested and flock to it. You may need to work hard to engage them. An effective communication plan is key
- If you only allow people to write in on an issue (say following a 'Flagship' article) you may just get unrepresentative responses.

Just before you start – think about these things again:

Do you know...?

- Who to consult - have you thought of everyone.
- Who's views will be most influential.
- That you have thought of the 'right' issues to focus on.
- That you have selected the most appropriate methods.
- How much it will cost and where the money is coming from.
- What decisions will be affected and when.
- That you have thought about the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts and how they might relate

Make it short and sweet

One local council sent a 20 page questionnaire to 180,000 homes at a cost of £100,000. It took 3 hours to fill in and was sent back by just 85 (patient) people. That's £1,200 per response. Not best value for money!

What happens after the consultation:

- Don't underestimate the amount of effort required to process data or write reports. Even if you get an agency to do it you may have a lot of work.
- Look at the broad picture painted by the range of consultation you have done. Where is there consensus or conflict? What are the key messages?
- You will need to adopt some process for making quality improvements (big and small) based on what you have found out, and for taking any big decisions on budgets etc. Make sure you've thought this through, and keep evidence of why you carried out consultation in a particular way (for monitoring purposes).
- Do further consultation to test out your ideas on how to respond to the consultation (e.g. ideas for changes to the service).
- Don't be too concerned if the method failed. Evaluate and try again.
- Communicating the results back to the community is of paramount importance. People have given up their time to participate – make time to report back on the results

What happens after the consultation:

- Develop a communications plan for reporting back the results. You may be able to get some help from your service's communications officer. Call 9268 8595 or 9284 1559 for details
- When reporting back the results, use a range of channels e. g. publications such as Flagship, PCC website, public notices, leaflets and newsletters
- Being consistent about reporting back the results of consultation is one of the main things we need to improve
- A good headline to use when reporting back the results is "you said, we did"

Local government generally has been criticised for not evaluating consultation.

We need to prove we're different.

Use this checklist when your consultation is over:

- Were the objectives understood by all stakeholders?
- Did the methods used match the objectives?
- Could we say that a representative set of views were obtained?
- Was the timescale/process transparent and kept to?
- Was the consultation accessible (e.g. translations, plain English etc)?
- Did you get to the 'hard to reach' people?
- What were the costs (including staff time)?
- Did it lead to a change of policy, service etc?
- How many people will be affected by the changes?

Think about what you could do better next time to make sure customers are at the heart of everything we do.

Hundreds of people across PCC are consulting and there are lots of corporate resources in place. Use the following numbers to ask about:

- Any personal advice you need on any aspect of consultation.
- Web resources to help you.
- Corporate surveys that you might be able to include questions in.
- Sharing best practice and working with others in PCC.
- Training, e.g. how to choose an agency or how to facilitate focus groups.
- If you want a large print version or a tape of this toolkit.

Please use the hotlines below to be better informed on consultation.

- Media, Communications, Publicity 9283 4176
- Equality and Diversity Unit 9284 1450

Consultation hotline 9283 4050 or 9284 1120
email: consult@portsmouthcc.gov.uk

www.portsmouth.gov.uk

You can get this information in large print, Braille, audio or in another language by calling 9283 4050.



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