CONSULTATION TOOLKIT

#abplace2b

Welcome to Argyll and Bute Council's Consultation Toolkit

Argyll and Bute Council is committed to working with as well as for our customers and communities.

Public understanding and involvement are particularly important in times of significant change, as local government is experiencing now:

- local views help the council reach the best decisions about what we do and how we do it.

When and why you should use this toolkit

Please read through this toolkit if you think you need to do a consultation.

This toolkit provides tips and advice on planning, designing and developing effective consultations.

It draws on lessons learned from previous council consultations so we can all do more of what works well.

It also draws from best practice set out in the [National Standards for Community Engagement.]

First key points to check

Do you need to do a consultation?

- Has anyone already carried out a consultation on your topic? Is there information you need already out there?
  - Check the [consultation diary] first to make sure a similar consultations haven't already taken place. This will avoid an unnecessary exercise and consultation fatigue.

- Are you doing this consultation to give an opportunity for the views of people to influence decisions or are you simply providing information?
  - If you are simply providing information, then this is not a consultation. Proper consultation involves asking people what they think, and feeding back what will happy as a result.

Next:

- Have you thought about timing?
  - Check the [consultation tracker] – make sure there are no other conflicting consultations running at the same time.
    Have a look and see if there are any future planned consultations which you link in with.

Check with the [Research and Engagement Officer] if there is any doubt about the points above

Stages of effective consultation

Step 1: Defining what you need to know, what you need to ask and who you need to ask

Step 2: Deciding how to reach the people you need to ask

Step 3: Making the consultation work – planning

Step 4: Analysing the results

Step 5: Providing feedback and evaluating your consultation

Step 1: Defining what you need to know, what you need to ask and who you need to ask

To determine what you need to know from this consultation, you must think about the questions below. Ask yourself and anyone involved in the consultation:

- Why is this consultation being carried out?
- What information do we not have now?
- What information or change do we want out of this consultation exercise?
- What will the information be used for?

Next, you need to be clear on what the consultation is for. You need to identify what the overall purpose of the consultation is, common purposes for consulting are:

- A statutory obligation
- To prioritise future spending
- To shape or change the way a service is delivered
- To measure satisfaction with the service
- To check opinions, views and attitudes
- To check out the reaction to new ideas of initiative

What do you need to ask?

You need to think about what information you need and what is the best way to ask for this information.

There are different types of questions – quantitative and qualitative questions and these will determine the consultation methods you use.

- **Quantitative questions** are good for questions that have very clear, specific answers.
  Questions for example ask: How many? What? Where? Which? When? And the answers are often in the form of numbers or percentages which can be presented easily in charts and tables.

  Examples of quantitative methods are surveys and questionnaires.
  As a general rule, quantitative methods will use very structured questioning strategies which will produce 'closed' questions. Close questions allow data to be coded and processed more quickly and systematically.

- **Qualitative questions** are better if you what to know what people think about certain things and if you need more information. The kind of questions that qualitative methods ask are: Why? How? And answers are mostly in the form of text.

  Examples of qualitative methods are focus groups and interviews.
  Qualitative methods generally use less structured and more open questioning strategies than quantitative methods. Open questions are good for yielding lots of detailed information. However, the data generated is harder to code and takes longer to analyse.

With this, you can draw up a list of questions carefully, based on how you want them presented. If you are unsure about writing questions, check out our guide to writing effective consultation questions.

Who do you need to ask and how to make sure your consultation is inclusive

You must think carefully about who might be affected or interested in your consultation.

Are there certain groups of people who may be affected? Are you seeking views of the whole population, particular geographies or specific communities of interest?

The council is committed to ensuring everyone has equal access to services and equality of opportunity (through having a say on things that matter to them). You also need to make sure that your consultation is inclusive and seldom heard groups are taken into consideration.

We have listed examples of groups of people that you may need to consult:

External Customers	**Internal Customers**
• Those who pay directly for a service • Those we enforce against or who are regulated • Those affected by policies or developments • Community Councils	• Staff • Elected members • Other directorates/services • Trade Unions
Partners	**Particular demographics**
• Community Planning Partnership • Voluntary and Community Sector • Public sector organisations – such as NHS and HIE • MPs, MSPs • Businesses • Contractors	• Women • Men • Children and young citizens • Older people • Families and carers
Seldom heard groups	
• LGBTQI • Minority ethnic communities • Religious/faith groups • Those facing geographical and technological disadvantage • Low income families • Travellers • Victims of domestic abuse	• People with physical disabilities • People with learning difficulties • People with mental health difficulties • People with substance misuse issues • People with long-term health conditions • Unemployed individuals

Step 2: Deciding how to reach the people you need to ask

When deciding on consultation methods to reach your consultees, you should take into consideration the following:

- What are the types of questions you need answered? This will determine what consultation method you use.
- What methods will best suit your target audience? You may need to consider more than one method (for example consultation event and survey).
- What resources are available to you? In terms of budget, resource and services that might help.
- Are you ensuring people can be included – especially those who are seldom heard?

Enabling the seldom heard to take part

Before choosing your method, you should consider if any of reasons below prevent them from taking part:

- Physical inaccessibility (e.g. disability, older or frail people)
- Language (e.g. immigrants and asylum seekers)
- Cultural views and traditions (e.g. ethnic minorities)
- Social expectations (e.g. children and young people who are not often considered as appropriate to be engaged with)
- Geographic remoteness
- Poor or no IT facility

Consultation Methods

On the following pages, you will find a list of consultation methods that we recommend you use. We've listed the pros and cons for each to help you decide what's best for your target group and how to get the information you need.

Consultation Method	Consultation Method Summary	Pros	Cons
Surveys & Questionnaires	• Most widely used method • Undertaken to identify needs and views of a large number of people in a standard format • Often best to use a short and concise questionnaire where people's views on an issue are being sought • Good way of collecting quantitative and qualitative information from local people at a certain point in time.	• Can gain the views of a large number of people • Useful for obtaining quantitative data • In principle data can be compared over time or with results from elsewhere • Useful for identifying and evidencing need	• Need to be well designed and coded to get 'usable' answers • Information may be limited • Do not offer any real sense of community engagement or provide an opportunity for people to exchange views • Can contribute to 'consultation fatigue' if public are surveyed on a number of occasions
Public Meetings	• Large scale communication and consultation on broad topics • Allows for messages to be shared widely and views to be sought	• Enables large numbers of people to have their say • Provides an opportunity to explain processes, give information and gather feedback • Demonstrates openness and transparency • Enables participants to develop networks	• Unlikely to be representative - not everyone has the time or inclination to attend
Consultation Documents	• Regularly used for formal engagement by local authorities and other government bodies to seek formal responses from statutory consultees	• A written document allows the service to set out in detail the whole picture and ask specific questions	• The sheer size and detail in a document can have a negative effect on the people being consulted - people are reluctant to read long documents

	• Provides an opportunity to provide detailed background information on a particular proposal or issue	• A document can also be used to explain complexity and provide background information • Paper based engagement is safe and predictable • Web based processes allow comments on documents and responses to questions to be displayed in full	• A large number of responses can be labour Intensive to collate and analyse • Printed documents can be costly to produce and circulate. • Printed documents may not be accessible to the full community.
Citizens Panel (under review)	• Representative sample of people from a local area who agree to be involved in various engagement activities • Panels normally involve around '1000 plus' local people	• People agree to be on the panel thereby increasing response rates • May allow for some measurement of changes over time • Provides a ready-made sample of individuals to consult with • The composition of panels can be made representative of the local population • Can be delivered on-line	• A turnover of the panel may reduce the validity of 'tracking' over time • Doesn't work well for small specific service related issues • Representativeness of panels can be difficult to achieve
Workshops	• Workshops and focus groups allow people to discuss their ideas in an open and relaxed atmosphere • Can take a variety of different formats, depending on the topic for discussion	• Encourages active discussion in a welcoming environment • Time and resource efficient way of identifying and clarifying key issues	• Require a higher level of officer attendance for facilitation • Can generate a number of discussion topics not planned for • Agenda can be lost to tangential topics
Charrette	• Uses maps and photographs of an area or specific location to illustrate how people view their area; what they like or dislike or improvements they would like to see	• Stimulates discussion • Can build a sense of community ownership • Can help people see and understand their community in different ways	• It may not appeal to a wider community audience • Can be expensive and require a lot of resources • May not be well attended

Deciding how to reach the people you need to ask

Now that you've decided on your consultation method(s), we want to make sure you take measures that will help to overcome barriers that prevent anyone from taking part in the first place. Please build the following considerations:

- Use Plain English. The council's Communications Team can offer support and have produced a guide to help you.
- Facility to translate materials into alternative languages
- Access to interpreters
- Access to translation services
- Ensure you can communicate with people with a hearing impairment
- Audio induction loop systems in meeting rooms
- Accessible buildings
- Holding meetings at times when target audience can attend
- Covering travel costs
- Providing childcare facilities
- Ensure you can communicate with people with learning disabilities
- Try make face to face consultation less formal
- Organise events that have a mixed forms of involvement – for example organise breakout sessions in small groups to give individuals more confidence to express their views or through writing ideas anonymously on post it notes

Reaching your audience

Below are a list of services who may help you get in touch with your target audience:

Communications Team	Communications Team can help you promote your consultation on our corporate social media channels (where young people are most active)
Community Development Team	Community Development Team work with community groups all over Argyll and Bute.
Community Learning	Community Learning Team work with our young people.
Community Planning Partnership	Community Planning Partnership membership includes partners such as NHS, Police Scotland and Fire and Rescue.
Digital Services Team	Digital Services Team can help you promote your consultation through the 'Keep in the Loop Service'. The service has nearly 4,000 customers who have signed up to hear about our latest consultations.

Step 3: Making your consultation work – planning and analysis

Now that you've decided how and who you're going to consult, you need to plan the delivery of your consultation.

From the number of consultations we've undertaken, we've learned a lot of lessons on the way and here are some of the important things you need to think about:

- How are you going to deliver your consultation? Will this consultation be carried out internally or externally?

Once you've decided on who will be delivering the consultation, you need to think more closely about the costs, time and skills required. You need to:

- Allocate an appropriate amount of time to make sure the consultation is done thoroughly
- Understand the capacity required in terms of people and priorities
    - How much officer time required
    - Do you have the skills to carry out and analyse the consultation
- What are the actual costs to deliver the consultation:
    - Cost of producing surveys – in terms of software, printing, postage, analysis
    - Cost of event space – venue, transport, refreshments
    - Publicising the consultation through press and posters
    - Cost of involving people with additional requirements – deaf signer, translator/interpreter

Lastly, you need make sure you have identified potential resources and ability to implement changes required following the outcome of the consultation.

On the next page, we will go through the planning stage of your consultation. This is where you can outline and think about your pre-consultation activity, consultation delivery and post consultation analysis.

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Planning your consultation

You need to ensure there is enough time for effective consultation. Minimum standards for wide ranging consultations is six to twelve weeks.

Below is a consultation timetable for you to use. It is important to build in time for the following tasks. You should always work backwards from the date the decision will be taken to clarify your timescales.
Deadline for action: xxx

Task	**Approximate time guide (adjust as necessary)**
Consultation to be approved by DMT, SMT or appropriate council committee	
Register your upcoming consultation with [Research and Engagement Officer]	
Prepare your action plan: • Decide on **what** you are consulting about • Decide on **who** you are consulting • Decide on your **methods** of consultation • Decide on w**ho is delivering your consultation** • Build in time at the end to **feedback** results after the decision has been taken • Build in time to evaluate your exercise	Take sufficient time to plan your consultation thoroughly
Identify the cost and staff time involved.	Plan for training if required
Decide on who is delivering your consultation – is it being carried out internally or are you using an external organisation? Build in time to: • Prepare a brief • Tender • Interview and select your consultants	Time will vary – do not underestimate these activities
Are you involving other colleagues, external partners, or community groups with your consultation? Build in time for them to contribute.	Allow time for partners to participate in your exercise as appropriate
Depending on your consultation method (e.g. focus groups, public meetings etc.) you will need to organise it. Whether its the venue, people involved and participants asked to take part or the	Let people know the date in advance

Produce consultation material: • Do you need input from Communications Team? • Do you need materials produced in other languages, converted to Braille, produced in different formats?	2 weeks
Advertise and publicise the consultation. Allow sufficient time for distribution. Consider time needed for printing, posting etc.	1-2 weeks
Run the consultation: allow sufficient time for all your key stakeholders to respond. Be aware of times of year when responses may be affected e.g. religious festivals, school holidays etc.	Ideally 6 - 8 weeks for written consultation documents.
Collate, analyse and consider the consultation outcomes	1-4 weeks
Draw up the report of the consultation outcomes and include recommendations/or potential actions going forward. You should prepare different formats to enable feedback to stakeholders	1-2 weeks
Does the report need to be approved by anyone before the decision takes place? If so, allow time for this process	1 – 4 weeks
What is the deadline for the consultation results to be done/reported to appropriate decision making meeting.	Enter date here

Step 4: Analysing the results

Now your consultation is complete, it's time to analyse your results. The first step is to analyse the raw data. The approach used to analyse the quantitative and qualitative data is different. Here is some general advice:

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

In order 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 doi ng this, for example, MS Excel, Access or specialist analysis packages. Some packages such as **surveymonkey** are available in the market with reporting facilities. The requirements you need will be dependent on what method you have chosen and whether you have decided to carry this consultation out internally or externally.

Analysing and interpreting the statistical data requires 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, seek help from the Research and Engagement Officer.

Qualitative Data

For relatively simple consultations, qualitative data can be gathered together under broad headings which will help analysis later on.

Analysing and interpreting quantitative information requires a good level of knowledge 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, seek help from the Research and Engagement Officer.

The next steps are 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 there patterns of response in relation to the responders? For example, because of their protected characteristics; their geographies?

Others questions to think about:

What are the priorities for the public and their expectations?

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

Benchmarking

- Can we show improvement against our own past performance?
- Can we benchmark against other local authorities?

Our expectations:

- What results did we expect?
- Which results were a surprise?

Identifying trends:

- Can we identify any trends – either upwards, downwards or have results stayed the same?
- Can we compare results with others who have asked the same question/used the same method?
- Are we moving in the same direction as national trends?

Producing the results

When producing the results think about:

- Which things can we change in the short term? Identify "quick wins", especially those that can be done within existing budgets or timescales. This demonstrates that you can and will act on the outcomes of consultation.
- 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 findings do not require action?
- Which findings 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 communication? What is the issue? How we will communicate it, to whom and where?

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

Step 4: Providing feedback and evaluating your consultation

It is important that once you have analysed the results of your consultation, you share the results to everyone who has given up their time to take part. If stakeholders see nothing happening as a result of their involvement, they will be disillusioned and less willing to take part again.

Here is a simple guide to follow for providing feedback after your consultation:

1. Thank everyone involved in the consultation – ask the Communications Team to issue a thank you on social media and the website.
2. Summarise your feedback so it can be shared to all those that took part.
   For example, the consultation received x responses and x comments. The most common responses were x.
3. Outline how the council will act on the results of the consultation. It is important that participants know how it will influence policy development or service delivery.
   For example, as a result of this consultation, the council will xxx.
4. Now you can feed back the results to all those involved and tell them what happens next with the findings. You should always remind them why this consultation was important. We recommend using a You Said, We Did format.
5. Feedback the results of the consultation to the Research and Engagement Officer, so it can be published on the council website.
6. Feedback the results to other individuals who may be interested in this information, for example, councillors, appropriate committees, directors, service managers, partner organisations, service users and residents.

Remember different audiences will have different needs and 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

Evaluating your consultation

Effective evaluation can help you find out what did and didn't work and the reasons why. We recommend you undertake a quick evaluation of your consultation. Here are some things to consider:

- What worked well and not so well in your consultation process?
- What would you do differently next time?
- What advice would you give someone about to start their own consultation exercise?

To help us all do what works best when we carry out consultations please tell Research and Engagement Officer by completing the Consultation Evaluation Form which can be found on the Hub.

Feedback

We hope that you found the information within this toolkit useful.
If you have any comments or suggestions for improvements or additional material that you would like to see included, either within the toolkit itself, or in a separate guidance note, please contact:

Genna Lugue
Research and Engagement Officer

Email: planningourfuture@argyll-bute.gov.uk or genna.lugue@argyll-bute.gov.uk

Tel: 01436 658981