# Consulting with People

## Customers / Stakeholders / Residents / Partners

# The Toolkit

# Introduction : Consulting People

**Welcome to the Toolkit :**

It will help you to consult and involve people in what we do.  It is designed to lead you through what you will need to do.  It contains simple tools to enable you to consult effectively

**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

**The 7 Key Rules of Consultation – the Melton approach :**

When consulting on your service – Melton's 7 Key Rules of Consultation are to help you focus on what is involved – keep these in mind throughout your consultation project

**First of all - ensure you have approval before moving forward with your consultation proposal …**

**Follow the Consultation process …**

**Before starting a consultation exercise, ensure that you have completed a Consultation Request Form and had your proposal approved by your Head of Service and the Head of Communications**

| Management Team – Lead Officer | Reason for Consultation : New Initiative, Policy Change, Budget Setting, Service Improvement, Accountability |
|---|---|
| Lead Officer | Complete Consultation Request Form |
| Head of Communications | When approved, Consultation exercise added to Annual Consultation Plan |
| Lead Officer | Follow 7 Key Rules and Toolkit to carry out consultation |
| Lead Officer | Results of Consultation publicised |
| Lead Officer | Complete Consultation Feedback Form |

# Our Commitment : The 7 Key Rules of Consultation

It is our aim to work within the following rules following when carrying out any consultation :

**1.  Time consultations well and allow sufficient time to respond**
Consultations should be timed to allow the results to influence policy/proposal development
Wide scale public consultations, eg borough-wide or large parts of it, should run for a period of 12 weeks and for no less than 6 weeks
Reasonable time will be allowed for people to respond to a consultation

**2.  Clearly present relevant information and encourage informed opinion**
The consultation should clearly state the proposal, why we are consulting, and how we will use the findings
The consultation should provide enough information to enable consultees to give an informed opinion and not simply an instant reaction
This information should be written in plain English

**3.  Be well targeted and reach out to seldom heard groups**
The views of those people/areas most affected by the proposal should be sought
Attempts should be made to listen to the views of non-users, especially when service changes are being consulted on
Attempts should be made to include the views of groups frequently excluded or overlooked
Consultations should consider the needs of people with impaired sight or hearing or people whose first language is not English

**4.  Offer genuine options and ask objective questions**
Where options are offered, they should be realistic and deliverable
Surveys and questions should be written in an objective way allowing people to express their views

**5.  Be well planned, managed and coordinated**
The Council's Consultation Toolkit contains step-by-step instructions to enable us to effectively manage consultations

**6.  Be well communicated**
We will publicise consultations and make attempts to let people know they are happening
Major consultations – eg. borough-wide or affecting a large number of people – will be publicised by the Council's website, press release and in Council publications such as 'Melton Mail' and the Tenants' Newsletter

**7.  Provide fair, accessible feedback**
We will publish the findings of consultations and later how they have been used
The findings will be reported in a balanced way

# Time for action : The need to involve

**The need to consult people on what we do for them is becoming more and more important …**
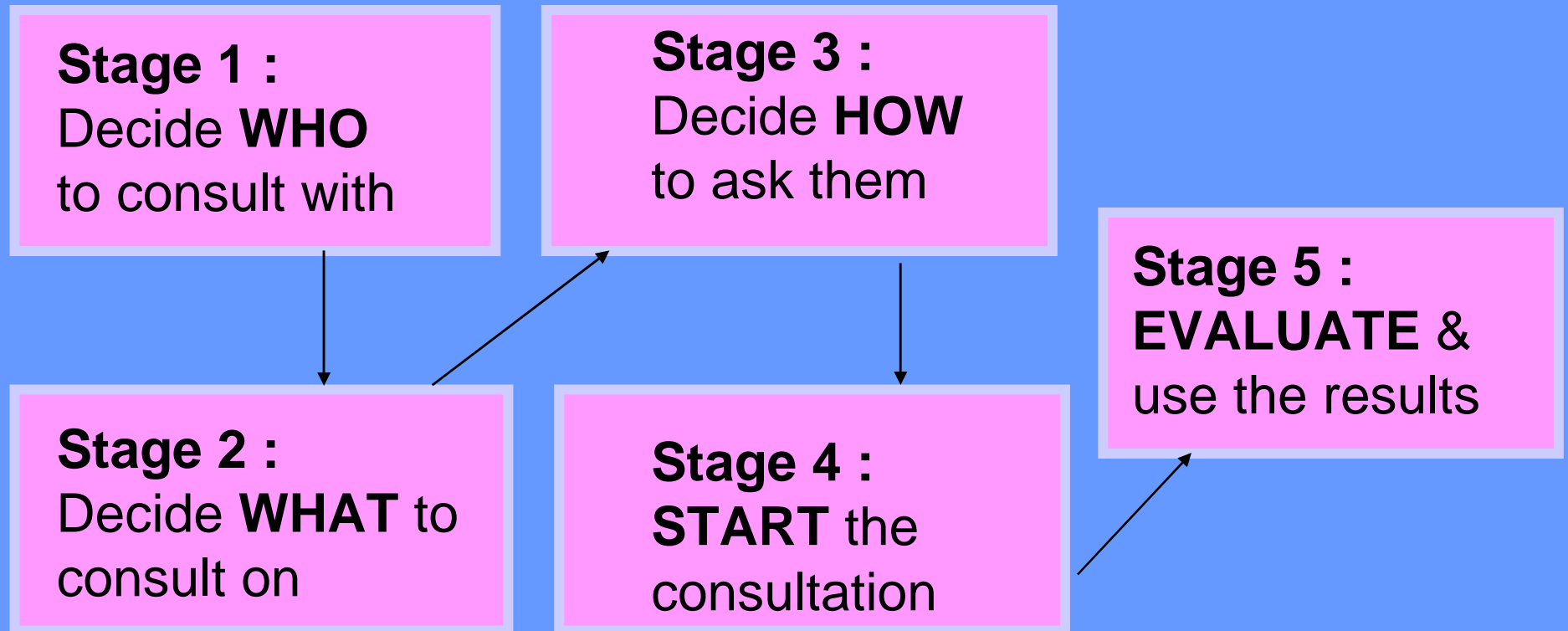
Because :

- We are a customer focused organisation
- Local people are less likely to accept poor quality services or decisions they disagree with
- Councils must act on the results of consultation
- It's the law

Legislation makes it our duty to consult our local people on all aspects of our services.  Also we must be able to demonstrate that we have acted on what we have found out, and that we've improved our services as a result …

# The 5 Stages of Consultation …

These 5 stages are the agreed framework for consultation at Melton Borough Council. This toolkit will give you the tools to work through the key stages …

**Stage 1 :**
Decide **WHO**
to consult with

**Stage 2 :**
Decide **WHAT** to
consult on

**Stage 3 :**
Decide **HOW**
to ask them

**Stage 4 :**
**START** the
consultation

**Stage 5 :**
**EVALUATE** &
use the results

## Stage 1 : Deciding WHO to consult

- Everyone involved in a service has a view on how it could be improved. Non users, staff, Councillors, suppliers, local people, partners, 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, 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 the smallest service unit that's appropriate eg. Pest Control not Environmental Health
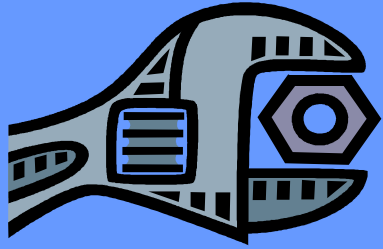
**Tools 1 & 2** : That follow on the next pages should help you to map out who your stakeholders are. The first is a checklist to give you some ideas of who your consultees should be and the second is a reminder to make special efforts to listen to certain types of people who are sometimes harder to 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 (eg. for Equality Impact assessments)**

Tip

**You cannot consult with absolutely everyone about absolutely everything - do whatever you feel an objective observer would think reasonable and appropriate …**

# Stage 1 : Mapping Stakeholders & consulting the 'hard to reach'
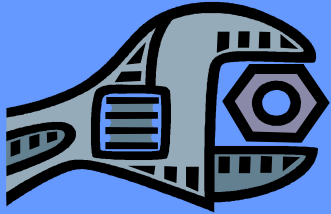
**Tool 1 : Use this checklist to draw a simple map of your stakeholders**

## Key Customers
- People who pay directly
- People who pay indirectly (eg. through council tax)
- Users of 'collective' services (eg. roads, street lights) – think 360 degrees
- Internal customers (eg. 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 (eg. landlords)
- Residents/local people
- Businesses
- Interested agencies – voluntary, private, public sector
- People affected by policies or development (eg. planning)
- Local Councillors, Neighbourhood/Ward Partnerships, MP's, carers advocates, community boards etc
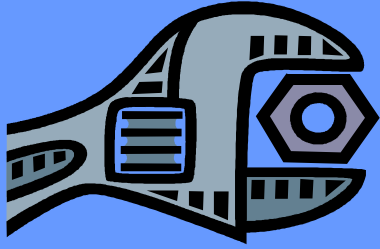
# Tool 2 :
# Consulting with 'Hard to Reach' groups

**For lots of reasons, you will need to make particular arrangements to find out some people's views …**

Firstly, be clear who you want to reach – 'hard to reach' groups may vary depending on the nature of your consultation and what you are trying to find out…. whose views do you want?

When you know which groups you wish to talk to, remember that groups are not homogenous

## Ask Others

Is anyone else in the Council or other organisations (eg. the PCT, Police) already consulting with the group you wish to reach? You may be able to use their consultees. Otherwise, does anyone else want to reach the same group as you – you may be able to do joint consultation and save resources

Think which organisations may already be in touch with the group that you wish to reach, eg. the Youth Offending Team of the Council, voluntary organisations such as Age Concern etc. They may be able to put you in touch with the group you want to talk to, or give you advice on how to reach them

## Think Creatively

- Everyone can be reached somehow
- Think about what the group you are trying to reach does, reads, where they go etc – can you use this information to find a way to reach them?
- Reaching a group may be as simple as changing the venue, format or time of a meeting for example changing to a venue with an induction loop for those with hearing loss, using an interpreter for those whose first language is not English and changing times to fit round school times if trying to reach parents
- Reaching a group may often involve going to them instead of expecting them to come to you, eg. going to a 'drop in to talk to homeless people, going to a skate park to talk to young people

## Remember Other Barriers

- Remember that you may have to overcome suspicion or mistrust of the Council, fears of not being listened to, or disinterest

- You may also need to take time to build a relationship with groups of people including those from 'hard to reach' groups

## Stage 2 : Deciding WHAT to consult on

Once you have identified the people you need to consult with, you can start thinking about what questions to ask - here 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?
- 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
- If possible, include the 2 Corporate Questions relating to Customer Service and overall satisfaction with the Council so that we can assess customer opinion across all consultation and monitor trends

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 …
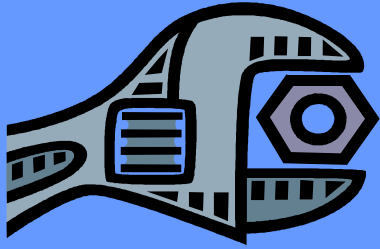
## Tool 3 :
## Think about your objectives for consulting

**Which of these do you want to do …**

- Compare and challenge the existing service

- Look for unmet 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 …**
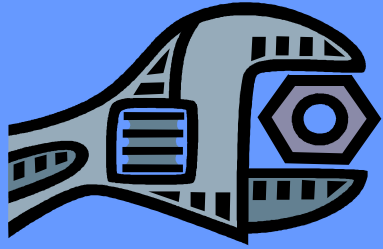
**Tool 4 :**
**Ideas for Question**

**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 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?
- What is your opinion of the Council's customer service (Corporate Question)?
- Are you satisfied with the Council overall (Corporate Question)?

Tip

**Ideally, you should even consult people on which questions to ask …**

## Stage 3 : HOW to Consult

**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 Tools 5 and 6 in the next section to select some possible consultation methods (eg. focus group, survey etc)
- Think especially about the **different needs** of different people you wish to consult with – and get a representative sample
- The Government say that we must 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
- 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
- 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 (eg. do a follow up phone call or survey card a few days later)

You will probably need to use a mix of **'quantitative'** methods (eg. surveys where we can measure satisfaction or opinions/surveys numerically) and **'qualitative'** methods (eg. focus groups where we look for more in depth opinions or quality improvements)

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

Think of the environment and the Council's aim to be paperlight when deciding on your method.

Tools 5 and 6 should give you some ideas

*Tip*

**You can ask for questions to be incorporated into other Council surveys …**

*Help*

**Phone  502441 or email sevans@melton.gov.uk if you need help …**

# The 3 Models of Consultation

There are 3 models of consultation and each one has a different purpose.  It is important for you to know and to make it clear to people at the outset whether the Council is information sharing, consulting or encouraging participation in decision-making.  The 3 models of consultation are :

**Public Information  *'Here's what we are going to do'***
Public information is about the Council informing people of its intentions, procedures and practices. This level of consultation will underpin more active participation and will often act as a precursor to other levels. However, in isolation it is only appropriate where a range of options regarding the items under discussion is not available

**Public Consultation  *'Here are our options, what do you think?'***
Public consultation is where people are invited to express their views, usually on a range of options and on which the Council is willing to use public opinion as an important criterion for deciding upon a particular course of action

**Public Participation  *'We want you to help us develop our options and decide our actions'***
Public participation is where people have a significant voice in the planning and decision-making process.  Public participation, as a consultative measure is only appropriate either where no pre-determined decisions have been made or where the Council is willing to be led or influenced by public feedback

## Stage 3 : What methods to use and when
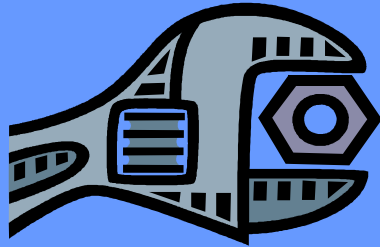
**Tool 5 : Research has shown that different people prefer different consultation methods**

### Here are a few clues :

- The most popular methods generally are 'having the information sent to them' and 'surveys' ie. home based consultation
- There is much less support for public meetings or anything that involves leaving the home
- People on higher incomes are more likely to favour being on panels/ groups etc.
- People on lower incomes are generally less keen on getting involved and feel 'information poor'
- Young people like focus groups and street interviews
- Older people often like Neighbourhood Forums
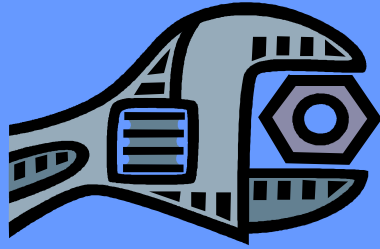
## Tool 5 :
## Consultation Methods continued …

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 information as well
- **Focus Groups** explore issues in details from the customer's point of view - they are good for getting common sense opinions on complex issues
- **Telephone Surveys** are great when you need a quick response and have simple questions
- **Personal Interviews** are often the most statistically reliable method because you can control the number and type of people that you ask

*Tip*

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

## Stage 3 : Different types of consultation available
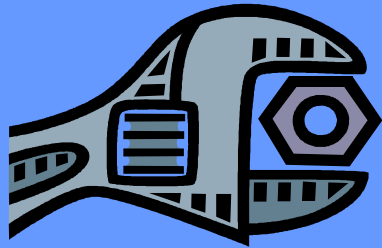
**Tool 6 :**

**The following table shows the main methods of consulting and involving people that you could use …**

Please view the information on the next two pages to assist you in thinking of which method(s) you might want to use which best suit your aims …

| 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. | Views of just a few may be misleading. People can change when in groups | 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 |

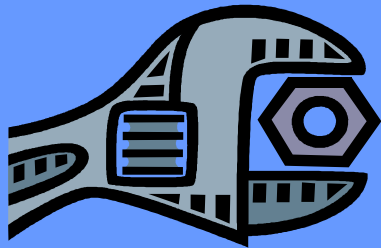| Method | Description | Pros | Cons | Costs |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Simulations | Proposed arrangements or ideas are tried out in role-play with stakeholder representatives | May get good idea of complex and unpredictable possibilities. Shares points of view | Needs good facilitation and running. 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 view 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 expensive 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 local minority – often negative | Medium |
| Mystery Shoppers | Researchers go into service delivery process as users | Combines user perspective with consulter's questioning. | Does not involve real users (normally) | Low |

| Method | Description | Pros | Cons | Costs |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Advice Leaflets | Advice on - service & process - how to get involved, who to contact etc | Reaches users - content is relevant | Relies on customer effort for feedback | Low |
| Newspapers | Promotion of consultation activities and results | Easy to arrange. Reaches lots of people | Relies on customer effort for feedback | Low |
| Reports | Detailed information on subject and changes - able to comment on content before implementation | Easy to arrange – relies on good literacy skills and high interest in subject | Time consuming – does not always involve users | Low |
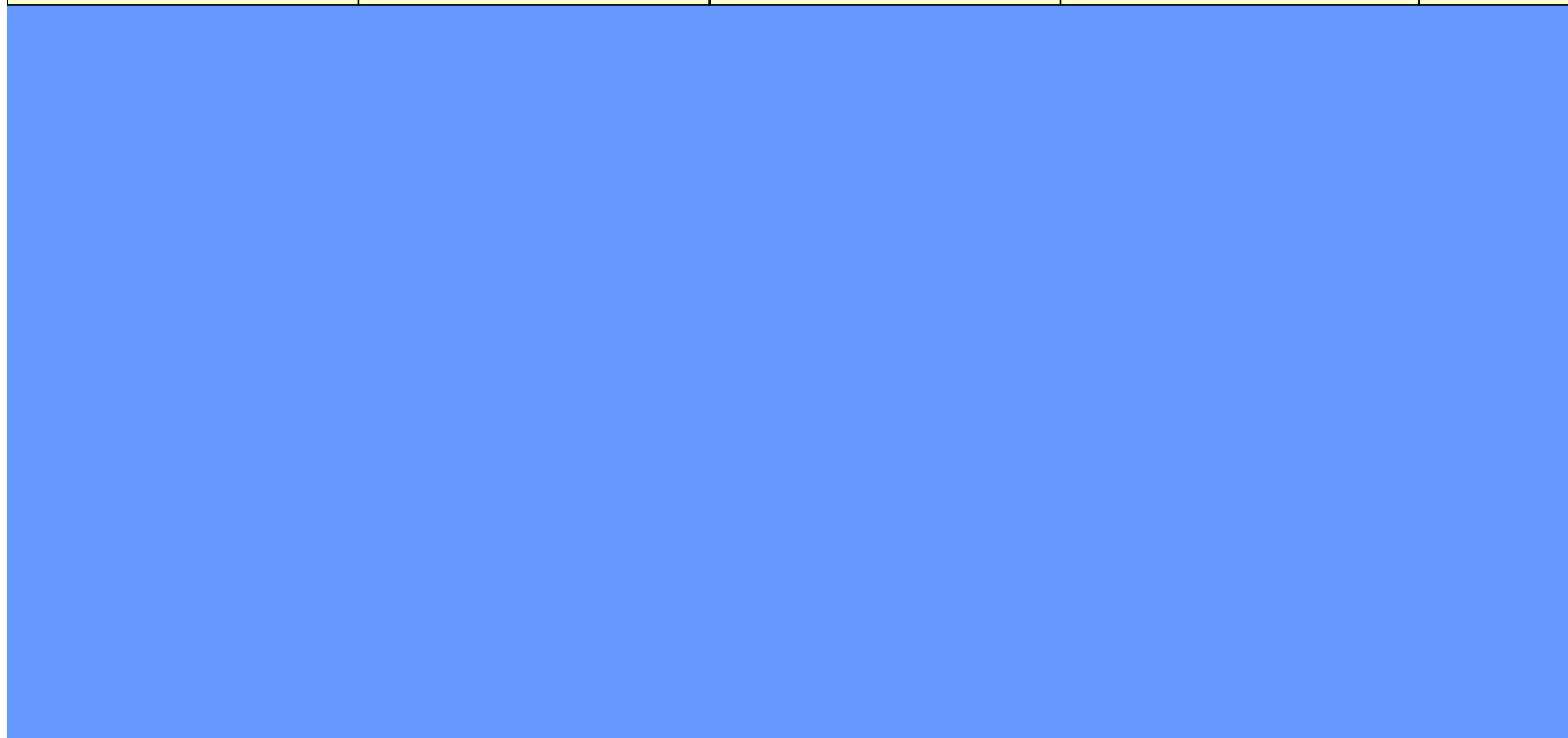
1. Users on committees / panels
2. Neighbourhood appraisal
3. Large scale community events
4. Policy conferences
5. Community associations
6. Round tables / users forums
7. Citizens juries
8. Deliberate focus groups
9. Tenants associations
10. Focus groups
11. Referendums
12. Simulations
13. Residents panel
14. Neighbourhood forum
15. Public meetings
16. Specific surveys
17. Ongoing surveys
18. Residents survey
19. Video box
20. Electronic polling
21. Quality check phone calls
22. Complaints and suggestions
23. Mystery shopper
24. Advice Leaflets
25. Newspapers
26. Reports

**INVOLVING**

**CONSULTING**

**INFORMING**

**Stage 3 : Quick method selector**

**Tool 6 : This chart shows the more usual consultation methods. The higher up the list the greater the level of public involvement**

## Stage 4 : Start the Consultation

You should now be at the stage where you can actually **implement** some consultation.   It is important that we 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 to oversee the consultation process and use of results …**

# Stage 4 : Standards for Consulting
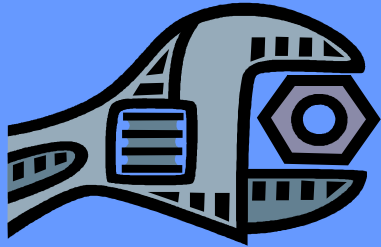
**Tool 7 : Before you start**

**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
- When and 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 eg. 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 lead on the consultation
- Successfully built consultation into your service review and planning process

## Stage 4 : Start the Consultation

## Pitfalls 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!
- 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 - if you consult with a range of stakeholders, they will often have opposing views. Councillors will decide how to respond – bearing all these views in mind
- Don't just put on an event (eg. a focus groups) and expect people to be interested and flock to it. You may need to work hard to engage and you may have to go to them
- If you only allow people to write in on an issue you may just get unrepresentative responses
- Ensure the time allowed is long enough to allow a representative response
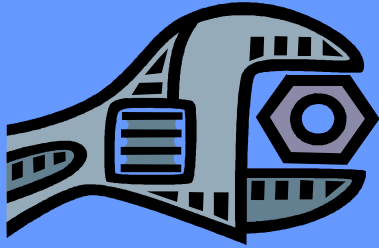
## Just before you start – think about these things again :

**Do you know …**

- who to consult – have you thought of everyone
- who's views will be most influential
- you have thought of the 'right' issues to focus on
- which model of consultation you are applying
- you have selected the most appropriate methods
- is the timescale realistic to allow meaningful feedback
- how much it will cost and where the money is coming from
- what decisions will be affected and when
- you have thought about the Data Protection Act and how it might relate to your consultation

*Tip*

## Make it short and sweet
**A Council recently 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 = £1,200 per response = not best value!**

**Stage 5 : Evaluate and use the Results**
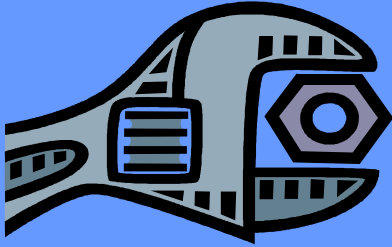
**Tool 9 :**
**What happens after the consultation?**

- Don't underestimate the amount of effort required to analyse the data collected or write reports

- Look at the broad picture painted by the range of consultation you have done. Where is there consensus or conflict?

- 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 have 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 (eg. ideas for changes to the service)

- Don't be too concerned if the method failed – seek advice and try again!
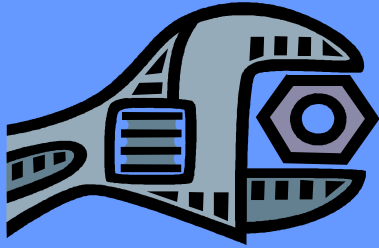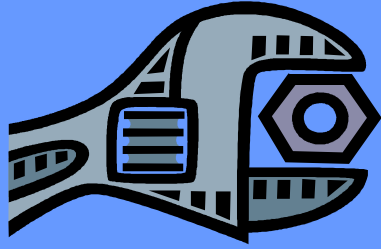
## Tool 10 :
## Evaluating Consultation

**Local government generally has been attacked for never 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 realistic, transparent and kept to
- Was the consultation accessible (eg. translations, plain English etc)
- Did you get to the right stakeholders and 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 …**

**Tool 11 :**
**Making sure the results of your consultation are heard**

The whole point of consultation is to ensure that the views of customers and stakeholders are taken into account …

This can be at service level, when deciding on say changes to the way a service operates.  Consultation could also be used at a higher level eg. customer views about the priority of a service could be useful to Members in deciding on the Council's priorities and budget

So decide who needs to hear the results of your consultation …

- Consultees
- Council Staff
- Management Team
- Members
- Partners
- Other Organisations
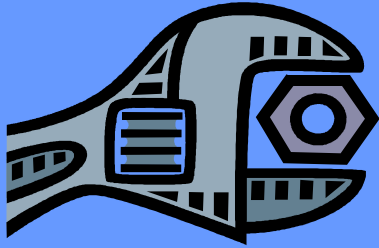
## Tool 12 :
## Feeding back results

Too often people are not given feedback about the consultation that they have taken part in (including how the consultation influenced decisions) - this is disheartening for people and does not encourage them to take part again

So :

● Where peoples names and addresses are known, get in touch to give results of the consultation

● If this is not possible, use methods such as the Council's Website or the local press

**Feedback is another way to increase people's confidence in the Council …**

**REMEMBER** to fill in the Consultation Feedback Form at the end of your Consultation project …

# You're not on your own …

Use the following hotline to ask about :

- Any personal advice you need on any respect 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 MBC and with our partners
- What groups are being consulted and what future consultations are planned
- The best type of consultation to use

## Consultation Hotline : 01664 502441
## sevans@melton.gov.uk