

Committee:	Executive	Agenda Item No.:	10
Date:	17 th March 2014	Status	Open
Category	2. Decision within the functions of Executive		
Subject:	Consultation Policy		
Report by:	Information & Engagement Manager		
Other Officers Involved	User Engagement Officer		
Director	Joint Executive Director		
Relevant Portfolio Holder	Cabinet Member for Customer Services		

RELEVANT CORPORATE AIMS

CUSTOMER FOCUSED SERVICES – Providing excellent customer focused services

SOCIAL INCLUSION – Promoting fairness, equality and lifelong learning.

STRATEGIC ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT – Continually improving our organisation.

The development and adoption of a Consultation Policy covering consultation with customers, residents and other key stakeholders ensures that consultation is undertaken fairly, legally and in accordance with best practice principles.

TARGETS

None specifically.

VALUE FOR MONEY

Consultation when carried out effectively can provide information to help us improve and plan the delivery of our services, enhance the relationship between the Council and its key stakeholders and communities, and enhance our reputation. This policy clearly sets out our principles and defines responsibilities for undertaking consultation. Adherence to this policy helps us to achieve these benefits whilst reducing the risks against the potential negative impacts of poorly planned and executed consultation.

THE REPORT

The policy applies to all consultations undertaken by or commissioned by the Authority with employees, councillors, customers, residents, members of the public, businesses, visitors and any other external stakeholders. A separate process led by Human Resources and Payroll exists for employee consultation in relation to pay and conditions.

Bolsover has very good mechanisms in place for undertaking consultation, keeping effective records and holding consultation evidence. To complement these systems it has been recognised that it would be useful to have a formal policy on consultation to:

- Strengthen our commitment to undertaking consultation in accordance with our Duty to Consult and best practice principles.
- Demonstrate our ongoing commitment to Customer Service Excellence of which consultation and engagement are an integral part of the Standard.
- Clearly define responsibilities for consultation.
- Provide clear guidance to ensure that consultation is undertaken fairly and legally.

It needs to be recognised that in the future the Authority may be required to consult on more contentious proposals as a result of reduced funding and making difficult choices. This policy clearly sets out our principles and defines responsibilities for undertaking consultation. Adherence to this policy will help us to achieve the benefits of effective consultation – provision of information to help us improve and plan the delivery of our services, enhance the relationship between the Council and its key stakeholders and communities, and enhance our reputation - whilst reducing the risk against the potential negative impacts of poorly planned and executed consultation, for example, a legal challenge can be brought against a council decision if that decision was informed by consultation which was considered to be unfair or unlawful. A number of public sector authorities have faced legal challenges to their decisions as a consequence of deficiencies within their consultation processes. This can potentially result in a delay in implementing a decision and the costs associated with that.

The policy has been put together from relevant statutory duties and guidance, legal sources and working practice.

The policy focuses on the Gunning principles (see below) and contains a number of important points in relation to these principles.

1. Consultation must take place when the proposal is still at a formative stage;
2. Sufficient reasons must be put forward for the proposal to allow for intelligent consideration and response;
3. Adequate time must be given for consideration and response; and
4. The product of consultation must be conscientiously taken into account.

These principles were established during a school closure case (R v Brent London Borough Council, ex parte Gunning (1986) in which the consultation document was determined to be misleading on the question of cost.

The policy's principles at appendix one has been shaped by these and government guidance.

The policy statement makes reference to the role of Elected Members and the need for relevant Members to be briefed about consultation events and activities.

Elected Members (and senior managers) are also referred to as 'decision-makers' within the policy and have a specific responsibility to:

- To give genuine and conscientious consideration to the representations received through consultation and to take into account when finalising any proposals and making decisions.

The policy has been circulated to Joint Assistant Directors and Middle Managers for consultation over a three week period. The comments received from this exercise have been considered and incorporated especially strengthening the references to the Bolsover Partnership. The policy has also been taken to SAMT.

The policy was taken to the Improvement Scrutiny Committee on 24th February 2014 where its contents were noted.

ISSUES/OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

Comments of the Director (**Delete from final version if no comments received**).

IMPLICATIONS

Financial: None
Legal: None
Human Resources: None

RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. That the Consultation Policy be approved

REASON FOR DECISION TO BE GIVEN IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CONSTITUTION

To seek formal approval of a Council Policy

ATTACHMENTS: Y
FILE REFERENCE: N/A
SOURCE DOCUMENT: N/A

BOLSOVER DISTRICT COUNCIL

Consultation Policy

Insert Date Month/Year

This Policy addresses the following Corporate Aims (show those which are appropriate to this policy only):



COMMUNITY
SAFETY



CUSTOMER
FOCUSED SERVICES



ENVIRONMENT



REGENERATION



SOCIAL INCLUSION



STRATEGIC ORGANISATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT



Equalities Policy Statement

Bolsover District Council is committed to equalities as an employer and in all the services provided to all sections of the community.

The Council believes that no person should be treated unfairly and is committed to eliminate all forms of discrimination in compliance with its Equality Policy.

The Council also has due regard to eliminate discrimination and to proactively promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different groups when performing its functions.

Access for all

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اگر آپ کو یہ دستاویز سمجھنے میں مدد کی ضرورت ہو یا یہ بڑے حروف یا ترجمہ کی شکل میں درکار ہو تو برائے مہربانی اس صفحے کے آخر میں دیے گئے نمبر پر ہم سے رابطہ کریں۔



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CONTROL SHEET

Document Details	Comments / Confirmation (To be updated as the policy progresses)
Title	Consultation Policy
Document type – i.e. draft or final version	Final
Author of Policy	Information & Engagement Manager
Location of Policy – i.e. L-drive	L:Drive
Member route for approval	Improvement Scrutiny Committee
Cabinet Member (if applicable)	
Risk Assessment completed (if applicable)	
Date Equality Impact Assessment approved	4 th February 2014
Partnership involvement (if applicable)	
Policy Approval i.e. Executive/ Council Planning Committee	Executive
Date Approved	
Date Policy due for review (maximum three years)	March 2017
Date forwarded to Strategy and Performance (to include on Intranet and Internet if applicable to the public)	

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Consultation Policy

1. Introduction

Consultation is the process by which we seek advice, information and opinions about our strategies, policies and services to inform our decision-making and design good services. This includes many familiar activities such as surveys, public meetings and user and resident forums. We make decisions influenced by the knowledge we have gathered through consultation.

Effective consultation can help us to:

- Target services at what people want and need
- Plan services better to give users what they want and expect
- Improve the delivery of services and take up of services
- Test options for service change
- Prioritise services and make better use of limited resources
- Set performance standards relevant to users' need

Local authorities are under a general Duty of Best Value to “make arrangements to secure continuous improvements in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.”¹

For the purpose of deciding how to fulfil their Best Value Duty, authorities are under a Duty to Consult² representatives of a wide range of local persons. Authorities must consult representatives of council tax payers and persons liable to pay non-domestic rates, those who use or are likely to use services provided by the authority, and those appearing to the authority to have an interest in any area within which the authority carries out functions.

When considering changing funding to local voluntary and community groups and small businesses the authority should include those organisations in their consultation.³ This should apply at all stages of the commissioning cycle, including when considering the decommissioning of services. Authorities should actively engage the organisation and service users as early as possible before making a decision on the future of the service, any knock-on effects on assets used to provide this service and the wider impact on the local community.

¹ Section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 (as amended by s137 of the Local Government & Public Involvement in Health Act 2007).

² Section 3(2) of the Local Government Act 1999.

³ Best Value Statutory Guidance September 2011.

It is important to note that whether or not a public body was required to consult, if it does so then the consultation must be carried out fairly and in accordance with the Gunning principles:⁴

5. Consultation must take place when the proposal is still at a formative stage;
6. Sufficient reasons must be put forward for the proposal to allow for intelligent consideration and response;
7. Adequate time must be given for consideration and response; and
8. The product of consultation must be conscientiously taken into account.

The consultation process must be substantively fair and have the appearance of fairness.

Equality and diversity are integral to the consultation process. We need to take on board the public sector equalities duties⁵ not to discriminate and to advance equality of opportunity when undertaking consultation exercises. The general duty requires public authorities to have an adequate evidence base for its decision-making. Consultation and engagement⁶ can assist with developing the evidence base. The specific duties go further and require listed bodies to publish information about the engagement they have undertaken with persons with an interest in furthering the aims of the duty, including the development of equality objectives.

Engagement and consultation is a key strand to the Customer Service Excellence Standard.⁷ This standard sets a national framework which can be used as an improvement tool for those organisations wishing to achieve customer service excellence. There is also the option of seeking formal recognition through the formal assessment process.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all consultations undertaken by or commissioned by the Authority with employees, councillors, customers, residents, members of the public, businesses, visitors and other external stakeholders, for example, other agencies and contractors.

A separate process led by Human Resources and Payroll exists for employee consultation in relation to pay and conditions.

The policy covers all statutory and non-statutory consultations.

⁴ As derived from the court case R v Brent London Borough Council, ex parte Gunning (1985) 84 LGR 168 at 169.

⁵ As contained within the Equality Act 2010.

⁶ Engagement is a broad term intended to cover the whole range of ways in which public authorities interact with their service users and their employees over and above what they do in providing services or within a formal employment relationship. It may be focused on a specific issue or on service delivery or workforce issues more broadly. (Engagement and the equality duty: A guide for public authorities – Equalities and Human Rights Commission).

⁷ The Government's national standard for customer service excellence which is overseen by the Cabinet Office.

3. Principles

The Government's guidance⁸ sets out the principles that Government departments and other public bodies should adopt for engaging stakeholders⁹ when developing policy and legislation. The principles apply to all public bodies.

The governing principle is proportionality of the type and scale of consultation to the potential impacts of the proposal or decision being taken, and thought should be given to achieving real engagement rather than simply following a process.

The guidance goes on to make a number of important points under the following headings:

Subjects of consultation

There may be a number of reasons to consult: to garner views and preferences, to understand possible unintended consequences of a policy or to get views on implementation. It should be part of strengthening policy making and should involve understanding the effects of the policy on those affected. The objectives of any consultation should be clear.

There may be circumstances where consultation is not appropriate, for example, for minor or technical amendments to regulation or existing policy frameworks or where adequate consultation has taken place at an earlier stage. However, longer and more detailed consultation will be needed in situations where smaller, more vulnerable organisations such as small charities could be affected.

Timing of consultation

Engagement should begin early in policy development when the policy is still under consideration and views can genuinely be taken into account. There are several stages of policy development and it may be appropriate to engage in different ways at different stages.

Timeframes for consultation should be proportionate and realistic to allow stakeholders sufficient time to provide a considered response. The amount of time required will depend on the nature and impact of the proposal, for example, the diversity of interested parties or the complexity of the issue, or external events, and might typically vary between two and twelve weeks. The capacity of the groups being consulted to respond should also be taken into consideration.

Making information useful and accessible

⁸ The Cabinet Office produced a new set of Consultation Principles in July 2012.

⁹ Refers to all parties who may have an interest in a consultation exercise or could be affected by the proposal being consulted on

It needs to be carefully thought through who needs to be consulted and that the consultation captures the full range of stakeholders affected. Information needs to be disseminated and presented in a way likely to be accessible and useful to the stakeholders with a substantial interest in the subject matter.

Information provided to stakeholders should be in an easily understandable format, use plain language and clarify the key issues, particularly where the consultation deals with complex subject matter. Consideration should be given to more informal ways of engaging that may be appropriate, for example, email or web-based forums, public meetings, working groups, focus groups, and surveys, rather than always reverting to a written consultation. The medium should be appropriate for the subject and those being consulted.

Transparency and feedback

The objectives of the consultation process should be clear. To avoid creating unrealistic expectations, any aspects of the proposal that have already been finalised and will not be subject to change should be clearly stated. Being clear about the areas of policy on which views are sought will also increase the usefulness of responses.

Sufficient information should be made available to stakeholders to enable them to make informed comments. Relevant documentation should normally be posted online to enhance accessibility and reuse.

Consultation and legitimate expectations

Based on the Gunning principles a number of important points taken from legal sources¹⁰ are noted below:

Proposal at a formative stage

The decision maker cannot consult on a decision that it has already made. It would be unfair to do so but also pointless.

This principle does not mean that the decision-maker has to consult on all possible options of achieving a particular objective. A decision-maker can consult on a 'preferred option' so long as it is prepared to change course if persuaded to do so subject to the outcome of consultations.

Sufficient reasons to allow for intelligent consideration and response

Consultees should be made aware of the basis on which a proposal for consultation has been considered and will thereafter be considered. Those consulted should be aware of the criteria that will be applied when considering proposals and what factors will be considered decisive or of substantial importance at the end of the process.

¹⁰ Consultation and legitimate expectations by Clive Sheldon QC, January 2012, Consultation by Jonathan Auburn, 4-5 Gray's Inn Square, London, 2012.

Consultees must be given sufficient information to enable them properly to understand the proposal and respond to it.

If information provided to consultees is incorrect or misleading, or does not give the true reasons for putting forward the relevant proposals, then this may constitute a sufficient flaw in the consultation process to lead to a quashing of the subsequent decision.¹¹

Although there is no general obligation to disclose unpublished internal advice or representations from other consultees, that remains subject to the overarching requirement to give sufficient reasons for consultees to be able to respond intelligently. If a proposal has been informed by private representations, those representations should be made available to consultees.

Adequate time for consideration and response

Unless statutory time requirements are prescribed, there is no necessary time frame within which the consultation must take place. If a decision-maker wishes to depart from its policy on time-frame (where it has one) then it should have a good reason for doing so. Otherwise it may be guilty of a breach of a legitimate expectation that the policy will be adhered to.

Decision-makers will have to form a judgement as to what period of time is appropriate for the consultation exercise in issue. Where there has been prior discussion about the issue then it may reasonably decide to limit the time for formal consultation. On the other hand, where the information to be disclosed is complex, or not well known to those consulted upon, it may consider that a greater period of consultation is called for.

The product of consultation must be conscientiously taken into account

The decision-maker must give genuine and conscientious consideration to the representations received. The product of the consultation exercise must be taken into account in finalising any proposals. The decision-maker must embark on the consultation process prepared to change course if persuaded by that consultation process to do so.¹²

The decision-maker does not have to read personally every response provided in the consultation process. However, where a summary is provided, this will need to be comprehensive and accurate. It is always sensible to make available to the decision-maker all of the underlying materials, so that they can access them if they wish.

A set of key principles for consultation by the Authority, drawn from best practice and guidance, are included in Appendix 1.

¹¹ e.g. *R v Brent London Borough Council, ex parte Gunning* (1986) – a school closure case in which the consultation document was misleading on the question of cost.

¹² *R v Brent London Borough Council, ex parte Gunning* (1986).

4. Statement

Taking into consideration the above principles each year an Engagement Plan will be put together of the external consultation activity planned for the financial year including external satisfaction measurement activities.

The plan will provide a centralised source of information for use by employees, partners and Elected Members. A version of the plan will also be published on the website as a way of raising awareness of upcoming consultation events and activities.

The plan will contain a mix of regular consultation groups such as the Young Voice (Youth Council) and consultation events such as the Equalities event held every two years, as well as one-off consultations identified as being required within the financial year.

In spring each service area will be asked each year to consider their consultation requirements and to provide relevant details for the plan. Each autumn the plan will be reviewed and updated to reflect any changes to planned consultations and to provide evidence for completed consultations. At the end of each financial year the plan will be fully updated and evidenced.

At the important times of the plan's life cycle a progress report will be taken to the Improvement Group¹³ to ensure that information, learning and best practice is gained from consultation activities.

A consultation proposal form will need to be completed in respect of each new consultation proposal.

http://ericssrv.bolsover.gov.uk/intranet/index.php?option=com_remository&Itemid=755&func=startdown&id=84

This will enable all key aspects of the consultation to be considered, for example, who to consult, what information to provide, how best to consult, timescale, and planned in good time. It is essential that any consultation proposal form is completed before the consultation process begins to enable the consultation principles to be adhered to and to give the User Engagement Officer adequate time to consider the proposals and to provide advice. Ideally covering letters, copies of consultation questions and any other relevant documents will need to be submitted also.

The User Engagement Officer is also available to provide advice at any stage of a consultation. It is advisable to seek advice early in the process and ideally before you start your consultation especially if you have not undertaken an exercise before. The User Engagement Officer can help you complete the consultation proposal form, provide practical assistance with running consultation events and support with ad-hoc consultation exercises.

¹³ A corporate working group which considers matters relating to Customer Service Excellence, People and Performance, and Equalities and Diversity.

For a significant consultation exercise a working group approach is recommended which includes officers with relevant expertise. From a corporate perspective this is likely to include the Communications Officer and the Equalities Improvement Officer as well as the User Engagement Officer¹⁴. Putting together a consultation plan may be useful to ensure that all key principles have been considered and evidenced.

The Council is committed to consulting with key stakeholder groups and has in place a number of key corporate consultation mechanisms to make this easier:

Residents

The Council has a panel made up of approximately 1000 residents who have agreed to take part in postal surveys. Some panel members have also expressed an interest in participating in face to face consultations and some have expressed interest in specific topics. The panel is broadly representative of the district's demographic profile (for over 18's).

Young People

The Council has a youth council called the Young Voice which is made up of 36 youth councillors (aged 11 to 16). Six elected pupils from each secondary school within the district (Frederick Gent, Heritage High, Tibshelf, Shirebrook Academy, Stubbin Wood and Bolsover) make up the youth council. The aims of The Young Voice are to build on existing consultation with young people to inform improvements to service delivery, to engage young people in Bolsover in local democratic processes and institutions, to provide schools with a learning tool to enhance the teaching of citizenship and to develop a positive image of young people.

Older and Disabled People

The Council has an Equality Panel which consists of a small number of older and/or disabled people. The Panel helps us to meet our statutory equality duties to involve and consult with individuals and interest groups. The Equality Panel has an important role in scrutinising some of our Equality Impact Assessments, which are a tool for driving service improvements. They also provide feedback on their experience of our services.

A list of consultation methods is contained at Appendix 2.

The Equalities Improvement Officer maintains a database of local voluntary groups which may be useful for identifying relevant stakeholders for some consultation exercises.

In addition the Council can utilise its local partnership mechanisms to raise awareness of consultation, and tap into established networks to widen stakeholder involvement and participation.

¹⁴ Officers located within the Customer Service and Improvement Department

Partners

Bolsover district has a strong and effective local partnership “Bolsover Partnership” comprising of four sectors (Public, Private, Community and Voluntary) who come together collectively or as individual thematic groups to drive local regeneration and service improvement. The Partnership also seeks to influence policy change or Government legislation through wide engagement of the above sectors to the benefit of the local community.

Community Voluntary Partners

Community Voluntary Partners are the Infrastructure Organisation for the community and voluntary sectors for the district and a key member of the Bolsover Partnership. They are a local organisation funded by the Council¹⁵ and covered by a Service Level Agreement which ensures they provide a route of consultation in all aspects affecting local communities across the district. They can provide a consultation route on behalf of the Council to local communities affected by any consultation proposal.

Elected Members have a role in both representing the Council and representing their community. As such it is important that relevant Cabinet Members are briefed about consultation events and activities within their remit and relevant Members are briefed about any consultation events and activities scheduled to take place locally in their ward. This will help ensure that relevant Members are suitably informed and enhance the public perception that the Council acts coherently.

The consultation process has strong links with equalities – could the proposal potentially have any equality impacts and the implications for the consultation exercise as a result, the need to ensure that the consultation exercise is accessible to all through use of the equalities statement, practical consideration of venues and paying for travel and other expenses are all relevant factors which may need consideration. Reference to the relevant corporate equalities documents is recommended.

Effective communication is also essential for a successful consultation exercise – clear and understandable information at each stage of the consultation process not only adheres to our principles but makes for a meaningful exercise which more people will hopefully participate in. This will require an effective communications plan including all relevant stakeholders both internal and external to the Council. It is advisable to inform the Communications Officer early in the process to maximise the benefits from communication. Reference to the Approval Route for Communication (User Engagement and Customer Satisfaction) is also recommended - http://ericssrv.bolsover.gov.uk/intranet/index.php?option=com_remository&Itemid=755&func=fileinfo&id=34.

¹⁵ Receives grant funding from the Council - <http://www.bolsover.gov.uk/data-transparency.html>

Data protection considerations need to be taken into account also. If we are collecting personal information through a consultation exercise then we need to ensure that a relevant 'fair obtaining' notice is included notifying the consultee of how this information is to be used. The guidance on the use of fair obtaining notices contains further information.

5. Responsibility for Implementation

A good understanding of the policy will ensure that consultation exercises are carried out consistently and fairly throughout the Authority.

The Customer Service and Improvement Departmental responsibilities are:

- To provide advice and guidance on consultation matters to Officers, Managers and Elected Members.
- To consider and approve consultation proposals.
- To co-ordinate, update and report on the annual Engagement Plan.
- To maintain a consultation database for external and internal use.
- To deliver and support the Young Voice.
- To deliver and manage the Citizen's Panel.
- To deliver and support the Equalities Panel.
- To support ad-hoc consultation exercises in conjunction with departmental service areas (subject to resources).
- To liaise with the Partnership Team over the use of the local partnership mechanisms (where appropriate).
- To accurately record responses to consultation exercises undertaken, to make recommendations based on those responses and to make available to decision makers in summary form and in full.

Departmental service area responsibilities are:

- To undertake consultation exercises and activity in accordance with the policy.
- For those undertaking their own consultation exercises, to accurately record responses to consultation exercises and to make available to decision makers in summary form and in full.
- To forward all consultation proposals to the User Engagement Officer in good time for consideration and approval.
- To use the consultation results and comments to inform a decision, finalise a proposal or produce an action plan for improvement to service delivery.
- To publicise the results and the actions to be taken following the consultation exercise to the target audience.

Decision Maker responsibilities are:

- To give genuine and conscientious consideration to the representations received through consultation and to take into account when finalising any proposals and making decisions.

Improvement Group responsibilities are:

- To consider and approve corporate consultation proposals.
- To receive regular reports on consultation exercises undertaken and their results via Engagement Plan and Customer Service Excellence reporting.
- To share and learn from best practice.

6. Glossary of terms

Consultees/Stakeholders – Refers to all parties who may have an interest in a consultation exercise or could be affected by the proposal being consulted on. All those whom we need to ensure have an opportunity to participate in a consultation exercise.

Decision Makers – Those parties who will be using the outcome of a consultation exercise together with other information to make a decision, finalise a proposal or agree actions for improvement. Decision makers will usually be senior managers or elected Members.

7. Appendices

Appendix 1 Consultation Principles

Appendix 2 Consultation Methods

Appendix 1 - Consultation Principles

When consulting we will ensure that the following key principles are adhered to:

- When we have identified a need to consult we will consult early in the process when the issue is still under consideration.
- Raising public expectations of action or change by consulting on issues outside of the Authority's remit or control will be avoided.
- Resources allocated to the consultation exercise will appropriately reflect the potential impacts of the proposal or the decision being taken.
- The purpose and scope of each consultation exercise we undertake will be clearly communicated from the outset and the reasons why we are seeking views outlined. We will state if any aspects have already been finalised and will not be subject to change.
- Careful consideration will be given to whom needs to be consulted including 'hard to reach' groups such young people, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities to ensure that a full range of stakeholders is included.
- We will provide information to stakeholders in an easily understandable format, use plain english, avoid jargon, and clarify the key issues. Where appropriate alternative formats such as braille, large print, tape and minority languages will be used.
- We will make available sufficient information to enable stakeholders to make informed comments.
- We will carefully consider how best to consult and use a range of consultation tools and techniques including informal ways such as on-line engagement, focus groups to ensure that the approach is appropriate for the consultation subject and intended audience.
- Consultees will be given sufficient time to respond to our consultation exercises. We will consider the nature and impact of the proposal and typically allow between two and twelve weeks depending on the complexity of the issue and diversity of interested parties.
- We will give genuine and conscientious consideration to the representations received through consultation. The outcomes of consultation exercises will be taken into account by decision makers when finalising any proposals and making decisions.
- Responses to consultation exercises will be accurately recorded and made available to decision makers in summary form and in full. They will also be kept for audit and inspection purposes in accordance with our corporate retention guidelines.
- Consultation participants will be given clear, accurate and timely feedback as to the overall results of the consultation exercise to which they contributed and the actions or decisions taken.

Appendix 2 – Consultation Methods

Corporate Groups/Mechanisms

Young Voice

The Young Voice is made up of 36 youth councillors; six elected pupils from each secondary school within the district (Frederick Gent, Heritage High, Tibshelf, Shirebrook Academy, Stubbin Wood and Bolsover). The Young Voice meets formally four times a year (October, January, March and June). The aims of The Young Voice are to build on existing consultation with young people to inform improvements to service delivery, to engage young people in Bolsover in local democratic processes and institutions, to provide schools with a learning tool to enhance the teaching of citizenship and to develop a positive image of young people.

Equality Panel

The Equality Panel consists of a small group of disabled people who are members of the Citizens' Panel. The Panel meets each quarter and helps the Authority meet our statutory equality duties to involve and consult with individuals and interest groups. The Equality Panel has an important role in scrutinising some of our Equality Impact Assessments, which are a tool for driving service improvements. They provide feedback on their experience of our services and 'road test' some of our communications, for example, reviewing our [Customer Service Standards](#).

Citizens' Panel

This is a panel made up of approximately 1000 Bolsover District residents who have agreed to take part in postal surveys. The panel is broadly representative of the district's demographic profile (over 18's). Panel members receive two questionnaires per year from the Authority and two from Derbyshire County Council. We run our surveys in May and November each year. We use a mixture of postal and electronic surveys to suit individual needs. Some panel members have also expressed an interest in participating in face to face consultations and some have expressed interest in specific topics.

Other Common Methods

Paper Surveys

Postal surveys involve sending out a paper based questionnaire to respondents who then complete and return it by a specified date. Paper based self-completion questionnaires, either postal or distributed in another way e.g. hand delivered, deposited in our offices, are one of the most popular survey methods available. They are flexible, easy to administer, relatively cheap and can often be successfully carried out in house. Postal surveys are ideal when those you want to survey are widely dispersed across the district.

On-line Surveys

Electronic surveys are similar to postal questionnaires but can include some 'routing' of questions so that respondents giving one particular answer are led down one route to answer further questions, while respondents giving a different answer are led down another route. Electronic surveys can be loaded onto the website for external consultations and onto the intranet for internal consultations. On-line surveys are ideal for respondents who have email and internet access and also for 'open' consultations where we are seeking views from anyone with an interest in the consultation proposal. They are also the quickest and least expensive form of consultation.

Opinion Meter or StandPoint

The opinion meter is a touch screen electronic service device for short questionnaires and can be deployed in a variety of public locations but is particularly successful in reception areas.

Focus Groups/Workshops

This is a small number of people brought together with a moderator to discuss a specific topic in depth. It is usually between 6 and 12 people with the aim of generating a discussion on a topic and collecting information on the preferences and beliefs of the participants. Using discussion rather than formal questions and answers allows for greater probing of views.