

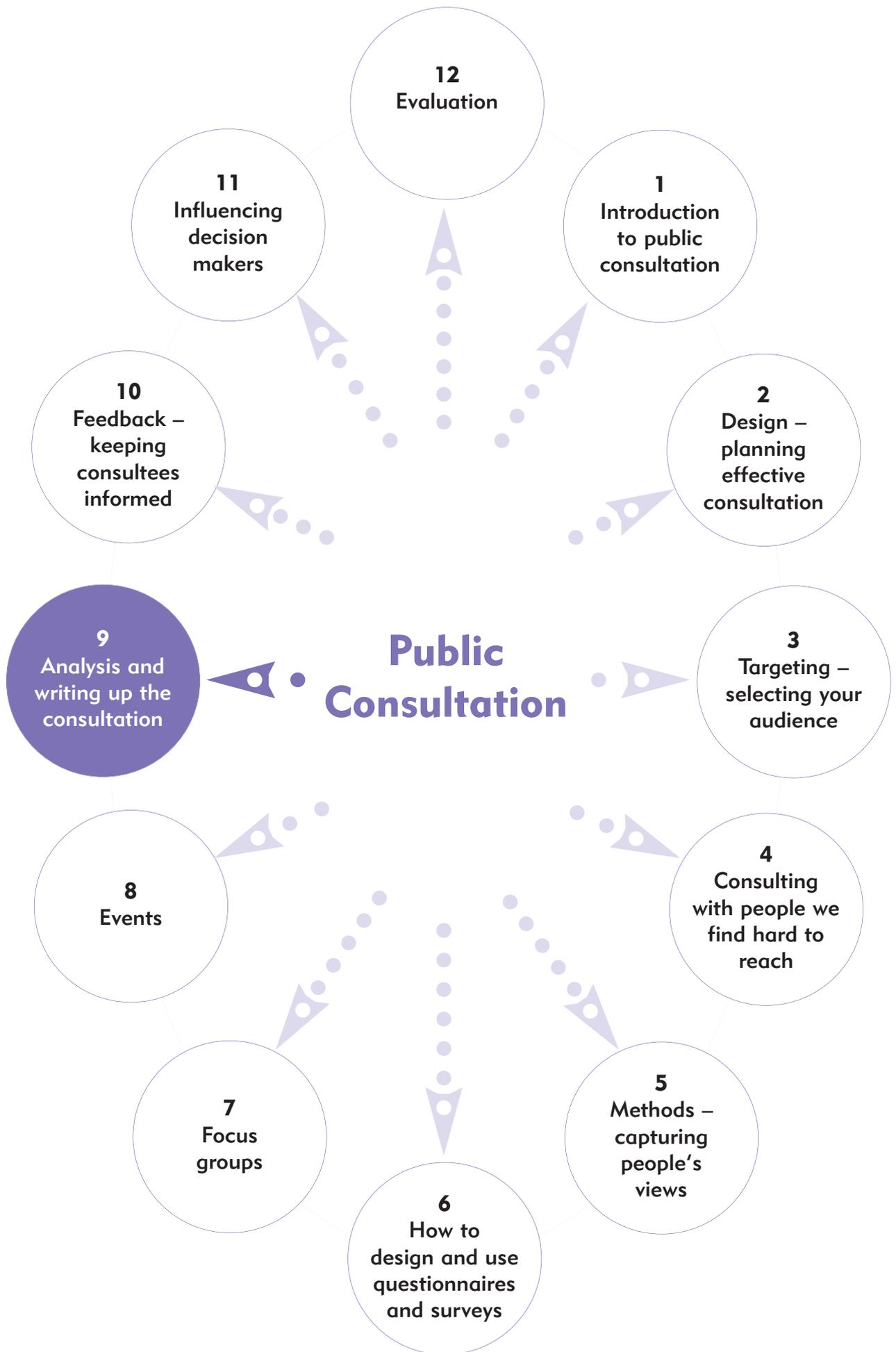


Nottinghamshire
County Council

Consultation in Nottinghamshire Analysis and writing up the consultation



guide 9





Contents

1. Introduction	4
2. The consultation report	4
3. Analysis and interpreting results	4
4. Evaluating conflicting opinions	5
5. Elected representatives' views	6
6. The key issues log	6

Introduction

You should know in advance of doing your consultation how you are going to code, input and analyse your data. This is a complex process and you may need specific software to make sure results are accurate and are effectively presented and understood.

Depending on the subject and scale of the consultation you may need to present your findings in a variety of ways. But as a general rule, you should expect to produce the following:

1. A formal consultation report for decision-makers and key consultees. This should include analysis and descriptive statistics if applicable, together with a record of key issues.
2. A summary report that may be more accessible to decision-makers and participants, and be sufficient for the general public and those not directly affected.
3. A press release may also be helpful to communicate with the general public (contact corporate communications for assistance with this).



The consultation report

The consultation report is one of the simplest ways of communicating the results, and ensuring that all parties are kept informed. The report serves three purposes:

- It informs managers and decision-makers of the findings (outputs) of the consultation
- It provides feedback to participants in the consultation process
- It allows the findings to be shared with partner agencies and other interested stakeholders.



Analysing and interpreting the results

Quantitative data is easier than qualitative data to analyse but is likely to need some knowledge of statistical procedures. It is generally acceptable to use frequencies of occurrence and percentages as many people understand and relate to these statistical measures. You should be able to design your analysis so that you can break down the top line figures to produce 'cross-tabs' (tables that show results by area or demographics, such as age, gender and ethnicity). This will assist in identifying significant patterns or trends, and is important in ensuring service delivery meets the needs of all communities.

Qualitative data (from interviews, focus groups, meetings) is more difficult to analyse as it is not structured. It is often helpful to group together the themes that have been raised to help identify key issues.

You will need to apply rules and skills in research methodologies and statistical significance when using frequencies and percentages. You will need to show in your analysis when your results are significant and require further investigation or study, and when they should be disregarded. If possible you should put your results in context, for example by comparing satisfaction figures to national or countywide benchmarks or other external trends.



Responses from different consultation methods should be recorded and reported separately. Do not amalgamate the results from different methods. A petition may gather a large number of signatures but these may also be the people who filled in a survey or wrote letters in response to the consultation. A meeting with key stakeholders is unlikely to involve as many people as a survey of local residents but the expert view, if ignored, might mean a decision cannot work. Responses to different methods should appear in a logical order in the consultation report – generally by type and size of response (e.g. self-completion questionnaire, on-line questionnaire, letters, petitions, consultation meetings).

When conflicting results arise from different methods, it is for the decision-makers to assess which should be given precedence.

When showing percentages make sure they are calculated from the total number of responses received (rather than any subset). It is essential that you remain objective when interpreting findings and drawing inferences. Your analysis may come under scrutiny from participants and other key stakeholders, especially if the subject is politically sensitive or controversial. You must therefore ensure you are able to justify any conclusions you come to.



Evaluating conflicting opinions

Local communities can be very different, so consultees will frequently express a divergent range of views. This is particularly likely on a controversial issue where views may be sharply polarised. Even where views are generally consensual significant differences may emerge where more than one consultation method has been used. This may happen, for example, if a service is considered desirable by the population as a whole, but no one wants it sited in their own locality, such as a new recycling centre. Similarly, a consultation method could prove unhelpful, for example a local meeting, if it attracts a small number of opponents but does not excite supporters enough to attend.

In resolving conflicts decision makers should take into account the nature of the decision to be taken, the impact of that decision and the reasons why they were asking for the views of others in the first place.

Resolving conflicts will always require a judgement call as there are no hard and fast rules about balancing different views or methods of consultation. In the end making preferences between conflicting opinions is a matter for the decision making process.

Clear feedback is particularly important when there is no consensus view. It is essential that individuals who do not like the decision that is eventually reached should feel that the process has given them a fair hearing and their views have been understood.





Elected representatives' views

You should make sure the views of local councillors (and other elected representatives) who respond to consultations are recorded separately in the consultation report. Elected representatives' views should be recorded openly in the report and comments and suggestions should be attributed to the person making them.

The key issues log

At the end of the consultation report a list of the key issues arising from the consultation should be presented. This list comprises all the issues that the decision maker needs to take account of in coming to a decision.



Copyright:

All County Council copyrights are reserved. The supply of Council information does not grant the applicant the right to re-use the information in any way that would infringe the copyright on that information.

For any wider use, the County Council may choose to allow the re-use under licence. This enables the County Council to ensure it is not used in a manner which is inconsistent with the County Council's copyright.

Nottinghamshire County Council's consultation standards

1. A consultation mandate should be completed and approved by your departmental co-ordinator/ champion before the start of any consultation. *(Guides 2 and 11)*
2. The consultation should be logged on the County Council's consultation database. *(Guides 2, 10 and 11)*
3. For key decisions a public engagement plan should be published with the forward plan. *(Guides 2 and 11)*
4. In planning a consultation, the specific communication needs of groups and individuals who are often otherwise excluded should be considered. *(Guides 3 and 4)*
5. A minimum of 12 weeks should be allowed for consultation on major decisions. *(Guide 2)*
6. The name, address and contact number of the person responsible for the consultation should be published on all consultation materials. *(Guides 2 and 10)*
7. The consultation material should make clear by what date responses are required, in what format and to whom they should be sent. *(Guides 2 and 6)*
8. The consultation should include a face-to-face element where consultees are able to meet, question and put their views to the decision-maker(s). *(Guides 4, 5, 7 and 8)*
9. Any venue selected for a consultation event should meet the Council's accessibility code. *(Guides 4 and 8)*
10. Any complaints about the consultation, questions asked, materials or time allowed should be noted in the consultation report. *(Guides 9, 10 and 11)*
11. A notice of decision should be published for each consultation. *(Guides 10 and 11)*
12. Feedback regarding the responses, the Council's decision and how the consultation influenced it should be given to consultees. *(Guides 4, 7, 9, 10, 11 and 12)*



Contacting us

email **consultation@nottscc.gov.uk**
phone **0115 977 2937**
fax **0115 977 3886**
post **Chief Executive's Department, County Hall,
West Bridgford, Nottingham NG2 7QP**
internet **www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk**
published **May 2007**

This publication can be made available
in alternative formats and languages
upon request.