

# West Berkshire Council Consultation Strategy (DRAFT)

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## **OVERVIEW**

1. Within a small unitary authority such as West Berkshire Council, time and resources are inevitably tight and we need to use them to best effect. Expertise and experience in consultation is varied across the Council. This strategy will ensure that West Berkshire Council meets its 'Commitment to Consultation'. It aims to put our resources and expertise to best effect through promoting best practice in all our consultative activities, improving the coordination of consultation projects, a greater sharing of knowledge and experience about consultation; and how it feeds into the decision-making process and is used by members and managers to shape evidence-based policy.

## **THE NATIONAL AND LOCAL CONTEXT**

2. The Government's agenda to modernise local government makes it clear that understanding community needs and aspirations is a priority for local councils. The Local Government Act 2000 states that we need to involve customers more in developing and evaluating policy and to consult on all issues that affect them. Other key legislation such as the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000) and the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) place a heavy emphasis on the need to consult with different sections of our community. Similarly, significant drivers exist through the Local Area Agreements and the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment guidance which cites consultation as a key area needing to be addressed by any successfully improving council.
3. But a genuine commitment to improving consultation and community engagement is not driven solely by legislation and performance indicators. There is a direct correlation between how well informed people feel and how satisfied they are with the Council. Good quality consultation demonstrates that involving people builds capacity within communities, leads to better, more appropriately delivered services and a council more closely connected to its communities.
4. West Berkshire Council exists to ensure that quality services are delivered and to lead the community - representing the interests of people in West Berkshire, both now and in the future. Our mandate to do this stems directly from the democratically elected status of our councillors and in order to achieve both, West Berkshire Council is committed to listening to local people and translating those views into action.
5. This has been recently reinforced with the new administration explicitly highlighting consultation as one of its guiding principles and work in this area being driven forward within the Council's Community Leadership strategic priority.

## **WHY HAVE A CONSULTATION STRATEGY?**

6. Consultation, as an activity, is not new to West Berkshire Council – in fact, a number of services have well-established consultation processes. However, the amount of consultation undertaken has increased considerably over the past few years, both

within the Council and in other partner organisations, reflecting the impact of the modernisation agenda.

7. There remains however variation across the Council in terms of experience in consultation, the amount undertaken, the extent to which it is embedded into service / policy development and the extent to which findings are fed back – both to participants and internally – and acted upon.
8. As we seek to engage residents and other stakeholders more and more, a co-ordinated and strategic approach to our activities assumes greater importance. If we do not think coherently about the way we consult, those who are willing to participate risk becoming over-burdened, whilst those who are ‘harder to reach’ are in danger of being systematically overlooked.
9. We need therefore to establish mechanisms for co-ordinating activities, to streamline the consultation process, making sure we get best value for money, that consultation is as inclusive as possible and uses appropriate techniques.

## AIMS OF THE STRATEGY

10. This strategy articulates our ‘Commitment to Consultation’, highlighting key considerations for planning and undertaking consultation exercises and sets the minimum standard for consultation undertaken across West Berkshire Council. Imbedded within our ‘commitment’ are the principles of consultation to which we will adhere. In order to help us meet these, this strategy aims to:
  - **Clarify** what we mean by consultation, its role and purpose and how it is used by West Berkshire Council;
  - Encourage a more **co-ordinated and streamlined approach** to consultation across West Berkshire Council - to make sure we are not duplicating effort, over-consulting specific sections of our community and making best use of what we already know;
  - Ensure **robust and effective** consultation by:
    - Providing and promoting guidance on *good practice* techniques which are *appropriate* to the aims and objectives of the exercise;
    - Providing and promoting guidance on how to actively consider and consult *all sections of the community* with a view;
    - Making sure it is imbedded and *feeds into decision-making* and the service planning / delivery cycle;
    - Facilitating the *sharing and reusing* of findings and results
    - Encouraging the *feeding back* of results to participants and colleagues
    - Making sure we know *whether it made a difference*.
  - A **shared understanding and demonstration** between members, officers, our partner organisations and the public as to why we consult and how the consultation will influence decisions and services.

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY CONSULTATION?

11. The term 'consultation' is often used to refer to a whole range of contacts between the Council and the population it serves. In fact, 'consultation' is only one element within the wider field of 'community involvement'. It can be useful to think of consultation on a 'spectrum of participation' – where at one end people are simply passive recipients of information, to the other end where considerable influence is devolved to (for example) community groups and organisations.

UN INVOLVED	→	→	→	FULLY INVOLVED
<b>Provide Information</b> You let people know what you are planning to do.		<b>Consult</b> You provide information and use the feedback to inform the subsequent decision.	<b>Decide Together</b> You elicit and accept other people's ideas, then choose from the options you have developed together.	<b>Act Together</b> You decide together what is best, then form a partnership to deliver it.
				<b>Support Others</b> You help others to do what they want – i.e. through a framework of grants, advice and support.

## WHEN NOT TO CONSULT.

12. Consultation for its own sake is a waste of public money. It is pointless - even detrimental - unless officers and members are prepared to use and act on the results. It misleads those whose opinions are being sought and ultimately damages the reputation of West Berkshire Council.

13. It is crucial from the outset of any activity therefore to be clear where an exercise falls within the 'spectrum of participation'. Where and how consultation can and will affect a decision should be clearly communicated from the start so that it is universally understood by all concerned.

14. There are many good reasons to consult. However, there may also be times where consultation is not appropriate. For example, where:

- Room for manoeuvre is so restricted (either statutorily, budgetary, or because of other limitations), that there is little real decision-making that the consultation can inform.
- We have already consulted on a similar issue.
- We have already recently consulted specific group of people / organisations.
- The issue should or could be resolved without needing to consult.

## SUMMARY OF KEY UPCOMING CONSULTATIONS IN WEST BERKSHIRE

15. Over the next year or so, West Berkshire will be undertaking a number of key consultation exercises to help inform the development of its plans and policies. A list of all the exercises planned across the council can be found in the Consultation Calendar on the Council website. A few key activities however are highlighted below:

- *Community Plan.* This is a key stakeholder annual consultation exercise used to shape the priorities and actions of the Local Strategic Partnership's Community Plan. There is a formal written consultation amongst partner organisations in the autumn which is then fed back at the annual West Berkshire Partnership Event (last held in March 05). The resulting actions are more widely disseminated through the Partnership's website and in the West Berkshire News.
- *Integration of the Care Trust.* Stakeholder and public consultation to ascertain whether and how to integrate more closely Community Care and the Primary Care Trusts.
- *Local Transport Plan.* This involves a whole programme of public and stakeholder consultation running up to March 2006. A lot of work with the LSP and other partner organisations helped to establish the key transport priorities over the next 20 years or so. Broader public consultation was also undertaken to better understand key influences upon satisfaction and priorities and to ensure that the Plan accurately reflects the needs of the community. The public consultation ran in tandem with similar work for the *Local Development Framework* to ensure similar messages and lessons were being learned.
- *Annual Satisfaction Survey.* This is a survey randomly sampling 5,000 West Berkshire residents. The survey asks questions on perceptions of different aspects of the Council's services such as waste, leisure facilities, education and council tax. The survey provides use with information on how well the council is performing and provides year-on-year measures of satisfaction levels. The results of the survey are used by various services across the Council to monitor performance and evaluate how effectively services are being provided.
- *Cultural Strategy.* This exercise will establish a set of priorities for developing Cultural Services over the next 5 years. It is likely that this will take the form of a number of focus groups with service users – as well as a more formal stakeholder consultation – and will inform the development of Cultural Services towards 2010.
- *Integration of the Children's Trust.* Health, education and social services providing for children and young people will soon be brought together within a unified organisational structure. Consultation is needed to elicit views about the structure of the resulting Trust from service users and from people working in the organisations affected by this change. The consultation will be used to ensure that we develop the most effective arrangements in the new Trust that will achieve improved outcomes for children and young people.
- *East of District Vision.* This will survey people who live in and to the west of Reading to establish priorities which will inform the development of a Vision for the area over the next 20 years. There will be a random sample of 4,000 residents in the autumn 2005 who will be invited to highlight key areas and issues which affect them which can be addressed within the Vision.

## WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL'S COMMITMENT TO CONSULTATION

16. Undertaking any consultation involves a significant amount of commitment both from those organising the consultation and those taking part. It is essential, therefore, that consultation is effective, appropriate and well-managed.
17. This strategy sets out below a number of principles which West Berkshire Council have adopted as minimum requirements to ensure that our public consultation is the most robust and appropriate.

- We will be clear about the **scope and purpose** of any consultation activity and be open about that with those involved.
- We will **co-ordinate** consultation across the Council and the Local Strategic Partnership to ensure best use of resources.
- We will make sure that consultations are **managed effectively** and allow sufficient time to consider responses and be clear and open about how responses have been used.
- We will reflect the **diverse nature** of our district in our activities.
- We will use **plain English** and keep our consultation **jargon free**. Where appropriate we will use formats that make consultation accessible for people with physical, sensory or learning difficulties.
- We will harness the opportunities offered through **new technology** to secure people's views.
- We will make sure that all consultation is **useful** and that decision-makers are **ready and able to act** on the results of any consultation.
- We will **feed back** the results of consultation to those involved, and if appropriate and relevant, to a wider audience.
- We will act as one council by **sharing findings** across the organisation and **linking results** to our corporate priorities as a way of continuous monitoring and evaluation.
- We will **publicise** improvements and changes to services and facilities arising from customer feedback.
- We will act as a learning organisation by monitoring the **appropriateness and effectiveness** of consultation activity and sharing good practice.

## THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF OUR APPROACH TO CONSULTATION

18. Our commitment to consultation is backed up by 3 elements which will help us to develop the way we engage with our communities:
- **This Strategy**, which sets out our commitment to consult, the principles we will adhere to and highlights key areas we need to focus on to improve the way we consult.

- **The Consultation Toolkit**, (available on the intranet) where you can find the detail – a wealth of information on how to plan and organise your consultation exercise, the legal requirements, how to engage groups that are harder to reach, methods to use, how to feed back your results and evaluate your exercises.
- **The Consultation Calendar** (also available on the intranet). A comprehensive database of consultation activities planned, and the results and evaluations of completed exercises - to help us streamline our processes and share what we learn.

19. The *Consultation Toolkit* has been designed to help us in adhering to these basic principles. It identifies critical factors at each stage of the consultation process and should be followed in designing and undertaking any consultation exercise. This includes a *Consultation Project Plan* which should be used when planning, designing and running a consultation exercise. This takes each stage in the process and highlights key issues to be addressed in order to meet these principles. (The Project Plan is included as an annex to this strategy.)

20. The *Consultation Calendar* will enable us to ensure that:

- Opportunities for ‘joining up’ planned consultation exercises are identified.
- We are not duplicating or repeating requests for information.
- Results of consultation exercises are shared amongst staff and with the public.
- Links are identified between consultation and decisions.
- Interests in future consultations can be registered.

## **KEY AREAS THIS STRATEGY SEEKS TO ADDRESS.**

### **What will we consult about?**

21. Consultation is a key tool in policy / service provision. In one instance, as an input - ensuring that services are planned, designed and delivered effectively. In another, as an assessment / evaluation tool, finding out from people what worked – or did not - and why. Consultation is used as a benchmarking tool both with the Local Strategic Partnership, and more widely through Comprehensive Performance Assessments allowing us to compare our performance and progress, both nationally and with other similar authorities. As such, consultation is a critical element within West Berkshire Council’s service planning, delivery and improvement cycle.

22. Consultation topics are likely to come under the following four categories:

- Council policies / budgets.
- Improving service delivery and Best Value.
- Local communities’ needs and Quality of Life issues.
- Particular interest groups.

23. Each directorate will identify consultation exercises planned over the coming year in its Service Plan. This should include information about the purpose of the consultation, when the exercise will take place, and what is the decision making timetable that will follow from the exercise.
24. This information will be extracted from Service Plans. The Lead Officer for the consultation exercise will need to liaise with the Consultation Officer to ensure that their respective exercise(s) are entered on the Consultation Calendar.
25. In developing the consultation exercise, the Calendar will enable you to identify any consultations planned with a similar themes or timescales to which you could link - rather than duplicate effort by starting a separate consultation exercise. It will also identify consultative meetings / fora already planned which could be used for consulting on topics outside their usual remit.

### **How will we ensure that consultation is coordinated and makes best use of resources?**

26. Individual service planning processes will identify what consultation will take place at any given time.
27. Planned public consultation exercises, and any subsequent exercises that arise unplanned during the year, need to be logged on the *Consultation Calendar*. It is the lead officer's responsibility to ensure that consultations are registered and kept up to date as they move through the project cycle from being (i) planned, to (ii) current, pieces of work, to (iii) feeding back the results, (iv) informing the decision-making process and finally to (v) being evaluated.
28. Keeping an accurate record of consultation activities and findings is a crucial element in improving and streamline the way we use and understand what we already know so that we are not repeated asking the same questions time and again. Updating the Consultation Calendar is identified here as a key task within any consultation exercise and this should be included in Lead Officers work profile. **[check what Mark Harris will put in Corp Plan refresh]**.
29. It is expected that the Calendar will be used to identify other consultations planned at similar times and / or consulting similar groups of people. Improved co-ordination will ensure that we are not over-burdening specific sections of the community or stakeholders to respond to different - or similar - exercises at similar times.
30. As highlighted above, the Calendar provides opportunities to identify and join-up consultation and 'piggy-back' exercises onto other events. Examples of this include:
  - Using 'statutory' consultations for wider purposes where feasible.
  - Using community events - such as the West Berkshire Partnership Annual Event or the Royal Berkshire Show - to consult people.
  - Using ongoing consultation mechanisms / fora for issues outside their direct immediate remit.



- Exploring with partners (for example through the Local Strategic Partnership) the potential to coordinate consultation across the District.

31. It is expected that officers carrying out consultation exercises should ensure that they have taken reasonable steps to identify similar projects / relevant information already available before embarking on the exercise. This would include using the Consultation Calendar to see if any previous findings can inform the consultation and using data and research resources – such as the *West Berkshire District Profile* (available on the intranet) and other national, regional and local data sources - to find out what we already know about the issue. *Resource 3* in the Toolkit provides a list of data sources and websites containing key data relevant to West Berkshire.

### **How will we ensure that consultation is effective?**

32. Poor consultation will lead to misleading results which can be just as damaging, if not more, than having none at all. We are striving to ensure a consistently high standard of consultation across all service areas. This includes effective planning, setting clear objectives, using appropriate methods and timescales and making maximum use of results and feeding back what has happened as a result of the consultation to participants.

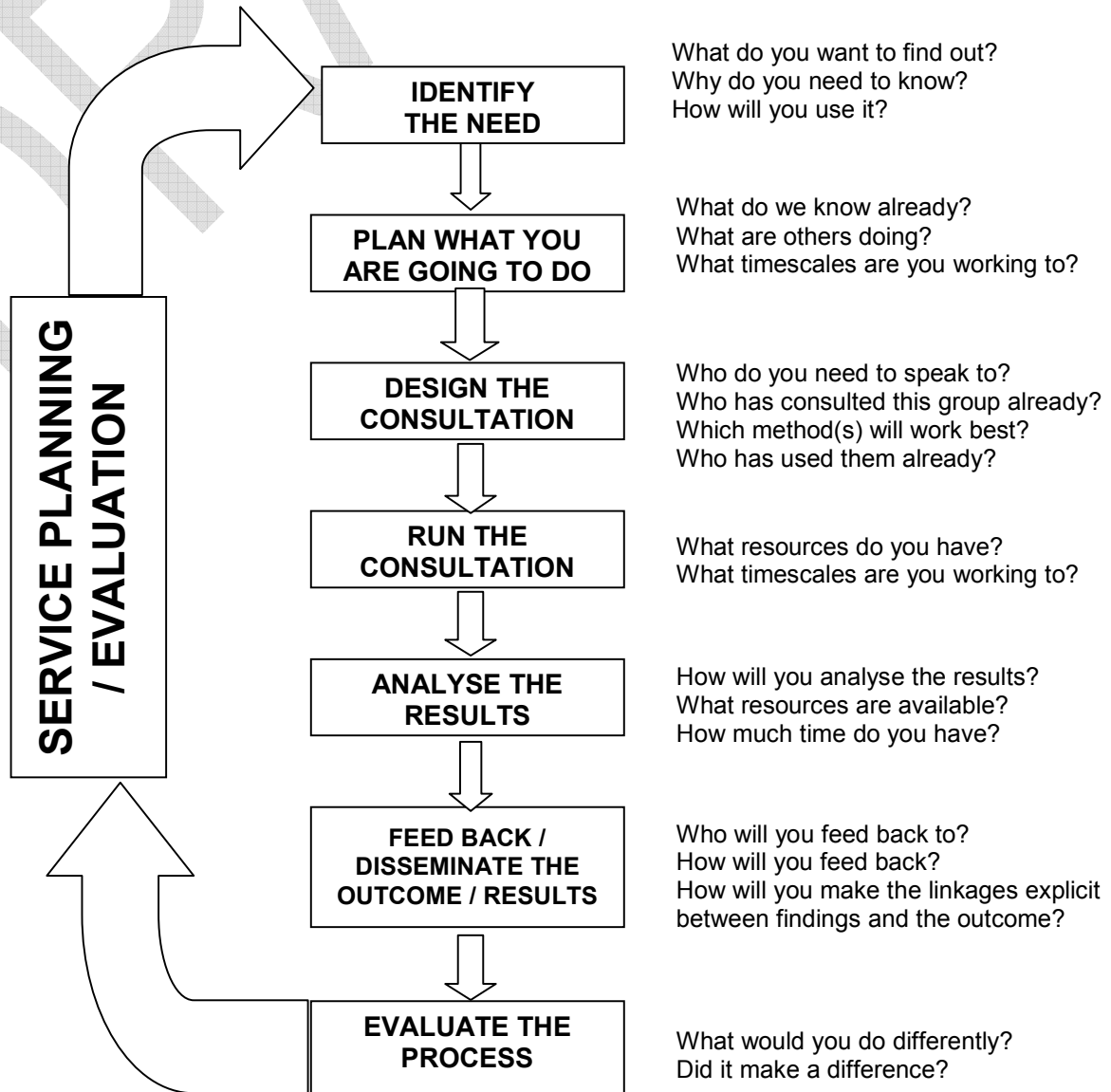
33. Similarly, consultation for its own sake is a waste of public money and resources. It is critical therefore in designing any consultation that the need to gather views is clearly identified and effectively articulated at the earliest stage. In designing any consultations it is crucial that we set out why consultation is planned and what will / can change as a result of seeking people's views.

34. In order to be effective, consultations must feed into specific decision-making processes. Similarly, in developing any exercise they must be: well planned; use methods that are appropriate to the question(s) which need answering; fed back and disseminated effectively; and evaluated to ensure that we know whether it made a difference.

35. The diagram below shows each stage in the process of undertaking a consultation and the key questions which need to be answered. The Consultation Toolkit provides all the information that is needed to plan, run, analyse, feedback, and evaluate effective consultation exercises. The Toolkit provides information about the methods of consultation and involvement available (see *Resource 10*), their relative strengths and weaknesses, how to use the appropriate method for the issue involved, and for where you are on the 'spectrum of participation'. Advice is also included about data protection issues as well as other relevant legal frameworks.

36. It is expected that anyone planning consultation will make use of the Consultation Toolkit, thereby ensuring that high quality public consultation is achieved.

## The Consultation Cycle



### Who will we consult?

37. Everyone who will be affected by a service / policy proposal or change should have the opportunity to have their views heard. It is important therefore that any consultation actively considers the views of organisations and individuals.
38. The views of partner and other stakeholder organisations should be actively sought. Adequate steps should be taken to actively consider the views of organisations

indirectly related to the issue being consulted – as well as those with a direct input. This is likely to include other service providers, but will also include special interest / lobby groups as well as specific individuals – i.e. members, local MPs, the Reading Commission for Racial Equality, voluntary and community organisations, local businesses, the Local Strategic Partnership and so on.

39. If you need to consider the views of individuals – as service users, or as more general members of the public - sufficient care needs to be taken to actively encourage participation from individuals more traditionally underrepresented in consultation. There is no one definition of a 'harder to reach' group of people and will depend on the issue being consulted on. People may be underrepresented for different reasons – for example, they may be difficult to:
- *Identify* – e.g. non-users.
  - *Contact* – e.g. car commuters.
  - *Engage* – because they are disinterested.
40. As such, 'hard to reach' could be defined in any number of ways. Although it is usually expressed in terms of social inclusion issues, it is about ensuring that the views / needs of everyone affected, who wishes to put them forward, have been considered.
41. Different groups will need to be approached in different ways. For example, the way you would approach young people to elicit meaningful and valid responses would be different to the way you would consult adults. Similarly, particular thought needs to be given to how you would identify and approach people with black or ethnic minority backgrounds, or older people, or any particular distinct group to get the best response.
42. There are a number of existing groups and networks we can use to consult with – or disseminate information through. Making creative use of established fora could save a lot of time and resources – as well as making the process of making sure we speak to the right people a lot easier. Examples of existing networks and groups which could be used include Neighbourhood Action Groups, Area Forums, the Older People's Forum, the Involving Young People Group, the Disability Alliance, the West Berkshire Black and Ethnic Minority Forum and so on. More advice and suggestions on this can be found in the Consultation Toolkit.
43. How our services and policies impact on the different sections of our community is already being directly identified through Service Area's *Equalities Impact Assessments*. Consultation plays a key role in this process and this will be taken forward as an explicit element within individual Service Plans. To summarise however, as a council, we will be proactive in involving these groups in our consultation activities. We will
- Provide information in accessible formats and provide access to support for those who need help to participate in consultation.
  - Provide practical advice, information and contacts to those running consultation processes on how best to reach these groups.

- Use existing networks and community organisations where appropriate to seek advice, views and opinions.
- Be creative by using different methods of consultation.
- Join up consultation exercises wherever possible and join with partners to avoid “consultation fatigue”.
- Assess our success in reaching hard to reach groups by including this as a criteria in our evaluation of consultation.

44. The Consultation Toolkit gives you an overview and description of groups of people who are traditionally thought of as ‘harder to reach’, provides some advice on choosing appropriate techniques and further resources to help you engage people more effectively to meet these commitments (See *Resource 6*).

### **How will we share and reuse findings?**

45. Once all the data and information has been collected, what happens next? The way the data is used and shared is just as important as how it is gathered, and is an area which we too often overlook amidst other priorities. Thorough analysis, reporting and feedback are integral parts of the consultation process. Sufficient time should be built into the project plan for these elements of the work, and sufficient resources allocated to cover the costs of this.
46. For consultation findings to be used, they must reach those who have the power to make or influence decisions - for example, elected members, or heads of service. It is crucial that the results are presented in a way which is understandable and appropriate to those who will be using them, otherwise they could be misinterpreted - or not used at all. This may mean presenting results in different formats for different audiences.
47. It is essential that findings are presented accurately and without bias or distortion. A summary of the methodology used to gather the results is an integral part of painting a complete picture of the consultation process that has been followed. It is important that those using consultation findings are aware how representative or reflective they are of the wider community.
48. Findings should always be published and posted on the Consultation Calendar by the person leading the consultation. In this way, the knowledge we have gained as a result of the work we have already done can be easily found and reused by other people wanting to do similar work in this area. Wider circulation can also be made by including articles on the Council website, in Council or LSP publications (i.e. the West Berkshire News, the Reporter or Members’ Bulletins), circulating briefing notes to interested parties, or by issuing a press release.
49. As a rule however, findings should also be fed back (or made available) to those who may have an interest in the results. This could include:
- *Corporate, Management and / or Executive Board* – you may need to report the results of strategic / contentious consultation exercises.
  - *Members* – particularly if the results affect their ward or portfolio.

- *Heads of Service, Team Managers and Senior Management Teams* – particularly where the results affect their service.
- *Front line staff* and other officers.
- *Partner organisations / stakeholders.*
- *Users / residents* and other members of the community.

### **How will we feed back results?**

50. The rationale for public consultation is positive change and improved services. As a minimum therefore you should ALWAYS feed back to those who participated in consultation exercises know to let them know what we have done as a result - what changes have been made in policy and / or service delivery. If participants never find out any further information, they are likely to assume that their input had no effect, are less likely to participate in future, or have a high view of the Council as an organisation.
51. If the outcome goes against the findings of all or some of the consultation, the reasons for this must be explained. If issues or problems are raised which cannot be addressed, the reasons for this should be made clear and a way forward identified if possible. We must be open and transparent about the way consultation findings have been used if consultees are to have confidence in the process.
52. Consultation is a dialogue between local people and the council, and the quality of that dialogue will have an impact on how the Council is perceived. It is important to remember that there are many factors that influence policy in addition to the results of consultation, and this needs to be built into the dialogue so that there is shared knowledge and understanding of this context.
53. Some means of disseminating the outcome of the consultation – both internally and externally – are discussed above. The Consultation Toolkit however provides further, detailed guidance on the sorts of audiences to consider and the different approaches which can be adopted.

### **How will we know if it made a difference?**

54. It is important to evaluate the success of a consultation exercise – otherwise, how will we know if what we did was a success or useful? An evaluation will help those carrying out consultation learn any lessons for next time, and these can be shared with others who may be considering a similar approach in the future. Two main dimensions need to be considered:
- The *quality* of the exercise - were the objectives of the exercise achieved, including the extent to which the target audience was reached, the quality of feedback obtained, the appropriateness of the method used and did the consultation have a positive impact on the authority or the service in question?
  - The *cost* of the exercise

55. The Consultation Toolkit provides further advice on evaluating projects as well as typical questions you should answer. Completed evaluations should be linked through the Consultation Calendar so others can find them easily.
56. In addition to evaluating the success of individual exercises, the Council needs to assess the effectiveness of its overall approach to consultation at a corporate level. This will be done through the annual review of this strategy and will help to ensure:
- *Consistency* in the approach across the Council
  - *Quality* of the consultation that is being carried out to a high standard
  - *Co-ordination* of exercises in terms of sharing information and joint planning/execution of consultation across departments and, where appropriate, with other agencies
  - Appropriate means are being used.

## **HOW WILL WE INVOLVE AND COMMUNICATE WITH PARTNERS?**

57. Many of our partners in the community - both statutory and non-statutory agencies - also need to consult the public about what they do. There are clear benefits in consultation being more joined-up externally, as well as internally. Often we are approaching the same groups or individuals, and working together not only enables resources to go further, but also prevents these consultees becoming overloaded.
58. Often, issues cannot be addressed by the Council working in isolation and working in partnership is crucial to delivering improvements to the residents of West Berkshire. Working together on consultation builds in a joined-up approach from the start, which should lead to a more coherent approach when it comes to tackling the issues. A number of initiatives exist in West Berkshire where closer integration is being encouraged and developed – for example, through the amalgamation of services for example into the Children’s Trust and a Care Trust highlighted above.
59. We are currently in the process of negotiating our Local Area Agreement (LAA) with our partner organisations and the Government Office for the South East. Work is brigaded under the headings of Children and Young People, Healthier Communities and Older People, and Safer and Stronger Communities and will create a number of cross-agency targets to be achieved over the next 3 years.
60. Critical to the development of our LAA is the need to understand issues relevant to local people and to test the relevance of any eventual targets and how these translate into real, discernable differences being made to people’s lives. This process necessitates increased working with partner organisations to develop and coordinate an inter-organisational approach to consultation to inform the targets and assess how they are being achieved.
61. To disseminate the Council’s aims with respect to consultation, we will circulate this document to key partner organisations through the Local Strategic Partnership. Wherever possible we will note consultation being planned by other organisations in the Consultation Calendar so as to raise awareness amongst council officers of other work being carried out.

## **WHAT IS THE ROLE OF ELECTED / PORTFOLIO MEMBERS?**

62. Elected members are often very active in many spheres of the community have a significant role to play in consultation. As decision-makers they use consultation to inform the judgements they make. This may involve balancing competing priorities, or balancing consultation findings with other factors (i.e. resources available). It is important that members explain the way in which consultation has been used to influence a decision or why certain views cannot be accommodated.
63. As local representatives, members use consultation to tap into the views of the residents they serve, in order to help them represent their views more effectively. This role also involves responding effectively to consultation and ensuring that all relevant groups have been involved. The day-to-day contact members have with people in their ward is a form of consultation in itself and is a valuable way of keeping the Council informed of local concerns at a ward level.
64. Elected members are themselves consultees. Individual ward members should be consulted on proposals which will affect the area they represent. Members are often a key group whose views should be sought as part of a consultation programme and the same good practice principles apply here as to any other stakeholder group.
65. Similarly, it may be appropriate to consider local MPs on issues affecting their constituency. MPs will have considered views and be aware of issues relating to their constituents which can usefully be used to inform a specific service or policy.
66. Members – and especially Portfolio and specific Ward Members - will almost always have a key role at some point in a consultation process. It is important to consider at the outset of the process what role this will be and to build it into your plans.
67. Adequate steps should be taken to make sure that relevant portfolio and ward members are aware of and have the opportunity to have an input into consultations. Emails and postal mail-outs should be followed up to ensure that they have been received and that the relevant member wishes - and is able to - comment within the timeframe. (Indeed, this should be standard practice in mailing / emailing out any substantial document for comment / consultation.)
68. Councillors will take an overview role, monitoring the effectiveness and appropriateness of consultation activities and ensuring they are receiving the information they need. They also use research and consultation to monitor the performance of the Council or individual services over time.
69. Portfolio Members will have a special interest in any consultations affecting their specific remit and should be involved in the design and scoping of the consultation exercise and kept informed of its progress. Portfolio and Ward Members will also have an active role in disseminating and communicating the findings of the consultation and how this has been used to inform any subsequent decisions and policies.

## **WHAT IS THE ROLE OF SERVICE MANAGERS / SERVICE AREAS?**

70. The principles and process of consultation are highlighted throughout this strategy document and the Consultation Toolkit. In order to make sure they are implemented to the benefit of all, service managers have a responsibility to:

- Include consultation activities in service plans – either to inform service / policy development, or to assess and evaluate the impact and levels of satisfaction with a service / policy.
- Share good practice and findings by ensuring the Consultation Calendar is kept up to date.
- Ensure Members are kept fully informed of consultations in their wards / portfolios.
- Ensure consultation activities are consistent with the West Berkshire Council Consultation Strategy.
- Ensure staff are enabled to carry out effective consultation exercises.
- Ensure that results are fed back to all stakeholders with clear outlines of how it will be used in service planning / evaluation.

## **WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE CONSULTATION OFFICER?**

71. Most consultation in West Berkshire Council is undertaken by individual service areas. The key role of the Consultation Officer therefore is to provide support and advice to individuals to run effective consultations and meet the principles set out in this strategy. Specific responsibilities are to:

- Develop, maintain and encourage take up of the Council's consultation resources – i.e. the Toolkit, Calendar and webpages.
- Facilitate adherence to our principles of consultation through providing bespoke advice and support on consultation methods to staff planning or undertaking consultation exercises.
- Collate and disseminate six monthly reports to Corporate Board on progress towards this strategy's aims; completed and upcoming consultations and any recent critical findings.
- Monitor the Calendar to identify potential areas of overlap or over-consultation.
- Highlight evidence of particular good practice.
- Develop working relationships between staff undertaking consultation to limit consultation fatigue and duplication of effort.
- Develop working relationships with partner organisations undertaking consultation to limit consultation fatigue and duplication of effort
- Develop and encourage the use of improved methods of communicating to the public, which consultations are current and the outputs and outcomes of previous consultations.



- Investigate new or innovative consultation methods and in particular to explore opportunities to use e-consultation techniques.
- Work with other agencies towards developing a common approach to stakeholder management – for example, through the integration of contact lists and the identification of ‘harder to reach’ communities and groups.

## **CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS AND RISK ASSESSMENT**

72. This strategy sets out the principles underpinning the Council’s step change in consultation, the commitment we are making to consultation and our explicit requirement for all those leading consultation initiatives to be absolutely clear about the level of consultation they are working to. However, the following factors need to be present for the Council to make the required step change:

- A commitment from members and Corporate Board to ensure the required resources are available.
- A willingness from staff to use and follow the resources provided in the Consultation Toolkit.
- Sharing the outcomes of consultation.
- Regular and appropriate feedback to consultees.

73. The consultation strategy is designed to minimise the following risks:

- Lack of feedback from stakeholders on which to base decisions.
- Inappropriate use of limited resources.
- Failure to meet satisfaction targets.
- Inability to meet Community Leadership Corporate Priority.
- Failure to increase our standing in Comprehensive Performance Assessment ratings.

74. The action plan to help us achieve the aims set out in this strategy are provided on the following pages. These will be monitored as part of the six monthly reporting framework to Corporate Board.

## PRIORITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT AND ACTION PLAN

OUTCOME	ACTION Consultation Officer	Progress	ACTION Heads of Service / Consultation Lead Officer	Progress	Comp by
<b>Increased awareness amongst staff, members and partner organisations of our commitment to consult.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Refresh and promote Consultation Strategy, giving emphasis to key priorities.</li> </ul>	√	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Promote Consultation Strategy and associated Action Plan and resources within own service areas.</li> </ul>		Sept 2005
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Visit SMTs raising awareness and take up of consultation resources and upcoming Strategy.</li> </ul>	√			Aug 2005
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Promote Consultation Strategy and associated Action Plan and resources amongst Members and partner organisations.</li> </ul>				Dec 2005
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provide assistance and support in ensure the principles set out in the Consultation Strategy are followed.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ensure the principles set out in the Consultation Strategy are followed in the design and running of consultation</li> </ul>		Ongoing
<b>Aims of consultation and associated Action Plan are communicated and remain relevant and up to date</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Consult on the Strategy with Heads of Service and get Corporate Board approval.</li> </ul>				Sept 2005
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Annual review of Consultation Strategy and action plan</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provide input into annual review of strategy and action plan.</li> </ul>		July 2006
<b>Service and</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Visit SMTs raising awareness and take up of consultation resources.</li> </ul>				Aug 2005

<b>Corporate Planning is informed by consultation and leads to better decision-making.</b>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mainstream use of findings of previous exercises in service planning.</li> </ul>		Ongoing
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider consultation needs as part of the service planning process.</li> </ul>		Mar 2006
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide advice on likely approaches needed and timescales to inform the 'programme of consultation'.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Construct a 'consultation programme' linked to the key decisions the consultation needs to inform.</li> </ul>		Mar 2006
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Register the different activities on the Calendar.</li> </ul>		April 2006
<b>Consultation fatigue and duplication of effort is reduced through better communication and co-ordination.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide calendar on intranet and website.</li> </ul>	√			May 2005
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ongoing publicity and encouragement for staff to make use of the Calendar.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Log individual activities on the Calendar</li> <li>Mainstream use of Calendar to find out what we know already and what is planned to inform the design of the consultation exercise.</li> </ul>		Ongoing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quality check to make sure information remains relevant and up to date.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure that information remains up to date.</li> </ul>		Ongoing
<b>Consultation is better informed by what we already know.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide Calendar giving details of previous work.</li> </ul>	√			May 2005
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mainstream use of the Calendar to identify findings and / or evaluations which can be used to design new activities.</li> </ul>		Mar 2006
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate providing consultation web portal to make it easier to search and extract information on individual exercises.</li> </ul>				Dec 2006
<b>Consultation is robust and is 'fit for purpose'.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote Consultation Strategy and associated resources across WBC.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote Consultation Strategy and associated resources within individual service areas.</li> </ul>		Ongoing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide specific advice on different approaches and how to choose the most appropriate (see Resource 10 in the Toolkit).</li> </ul>	√			May 2005

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mainstream use of Toolkit, Calendar and Project Plan (see Resource 4) in planning and designing individual activities.</li> </ul>		Ongoing	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide advice and guidance on individual consultation exercises where necessary</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contact Consultation Officer to guidance / advice if needed.</li> </ul>		Ongoing	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Visit SMTs raising awareness and take up of consultation resources.</li> </ul>	√			Aug 2005	
<b>Increased capacity to seek the views and actively engage the views of all people.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide resources and guidance highlighting specific groups who are traditionally 'harder to reach' (see Resource 6 in Toolkit).</li> </ul>				May 2005	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide advice and guidance on individual consultation exercises where necessary</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure that consultations make adequate steps to include the range of individuals / organisations who will have a view and interest in the outcome.</li> </ul>		Ongoing	
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mainstream use of guidance in the Toolkit in planning and designing individual activities.</li> </ul>		Ongoing	
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mainstream use of Calendar to find out who has approached a specific group before – have they contacts which could be used? What lessons they have learned?</li> </ul>		Ongoing	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Update Toolkit with relevant and recent examples drawn from Calendar.</li> </ul>				Mar 2006	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify gaps in consultation with harder to reach groups and / or on equalities issues.</li> </ul>				Mar 2006	
	<b>Participants, stakeholders and residents are kept informed of consultation and how this has led to better decision-</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide and maintain a Consultation domain in the WBC website.</li> </ul>				Sept 2005
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participants in specific exercises are directly notified of the results and what has happened as a result of the consultation.</li> </ul>		Ongoing
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Findings / reports are provided through the Calendar.</li> </ul>		Mar 2006	

<b>making.</b>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider wider dissemination of findings through website, council, LSP and / or local press.</li> </ul>	Ongoing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate providing consultation web portal to make it easier for partners, stakeholders and residents remain aware of and take part in consultation activities.</li> </ul>			Dec 2005
<b>We are able to say how consultation made a difference.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide the Calendar to host evaluations.</li> </ul>	√		May 2005
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assist and advise in undertaking individual evaluation exercises.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undertake an evaluation for the exercise so able to say how the work made a difference.</li> </ul>	Ongoing
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Link your evaluation through the Calendar</li> </ul>	Mar 2006
<b>Ensure adequate reporting to Corporate Board and members of appropriate information on consultation and key findings.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Half yearly report to Corporate Board, highlighting activities and findings of consultation across WBC</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure Calendar remains up to date and accurate.</li> </ul>	Sept 2005
<b>Enhanced partnership working around consultation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with partner organisations to identify viability of shared consultation processes and exchange of findings</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with partner organisations to identify viability of shared consultation processes and exchange of findings</li> </ul>	Ongoing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate developing joint consultation statement for LSP</li> </ul>			Dec 2005
<b>Develop use of innovative approaches</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate use of internet and other electronic mechanisms for undertaking consultation</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate use of internet and other electronic mechanisms for undertaking consultation</li> </ul>	Mar 2006
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Apply relevant methods</li> </ul>	Ongoing
<b>Identify skills / training gaps</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop planned response to training needs.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify gaps in consultation skills and associated training needs</li> </ul>	Mar 2006

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## CONSULTATION PROJECT PLAN

This is a quick reference project plan. This has been developed to help you to design, carry out and report back your consultation. This plan is a summary of the [Consultation Toolkit](#) available on the intranet. It takes each stage of the consultation process as it is described in the Toolkit and should be used in conjunction with it.

ISSUE	QUICK REFERENCE TO CONSULTATION TOOLKIT
<b>PRE-PLANNING</b>	
1. What are my aims and objectives?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Set out clearly what you aim to achieve.</li> <li>▪ Use <a href="#">RESOURCE 1</a> for further advice to help you develop your consultation.</li> </ul>
2. What is the decision that I am seeking views on? 3. How will the results influence that decision?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Set out clearly what you are looking for the consultation to feed into and how it will be used.</li> </ul>
4. Who knows / needs to know / would be interested to know about my consultation exercise?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Log your consultation with Jason Teal on the <a href="#">Consultation Calendar</a> so that people know what you are intending to do and when you are intending to do it.</li> <li>▪ Speak to colleagues who you think would be potentially interested in the results.</li> </ul>
5. Am I going out to consult with a group of people at the same time as anyone else? 6. Am I looking at similar issues / questions to anyone else? 7. Can I link up my consultation with someone else?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Look at the <a href="#">Consultation Calendar</a> to see if anyone has planned anything similar, or is consulting similar groups of people.</li> </ul>
8. What do we know about this issue already? 9. Do we already know the answer / part of the answer? 10. Do I need to carry out this exercise at all?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Look at the <a href="#">Consultation Calendar</a> to see if anything similar has been done in the past.</li> <li>▪ Look at other local authority websites to see if they have done something similar. <a href="#">RESOURCE 2</a> lists contact details to help you.</li> <li>▪ Look at national / regional / other data to see if it can inform your project. <a href="#">RESOURCE 3</a> lists useful non-West Berkshire Council data.</li> </ul>
11. What have I learnt about what does / doesn't work in consultation? 12. What methods have I used previously that worked well / badly? 13. What have other people learnt about what worked well / not so well that would be useful for me to know? 14. How will this help me designing this exercise?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Look at the <a href="#">Consultation Calendar</a> to see if anyone has used any of the methods you are thinking of using in the past who could give you some advice.</li> </ul>

ISSUE	QUICK REFERENCE TO CONSULTATION TOOLKIT
<b>PLANNING</b>	
<p>15. When will the decision this consultation feeds into be taken?</p> <p>16. When will the consultation need to end and the analysis be done by in order to effectively influence this decision?</p> <p>17. How much time do I have to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ plan and design the consultation</li> <li>▪ recruit people / send out information</li> <li>▪ collect and chase responses</li> <li>▪ analyse responses</li> <li>▪ report and feedback the outcome of the consultation</li> </ul> <p>18. At the end, how will I determine whether:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the timetable was clear and kept to – and if not, why not?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>RESOURCE 5</b> provides a typical timetable you can use to help you plan your consultation.</li> </ul>
<p>19. What resources do I need to complete this exercise?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Human</li> <li>▪ Financial</li> <li>▪ Technical</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ You may want to come back to this once you have worked through the Toolkit a little more.</li> <li>▪ Think about any assistance you will need to help you to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ design the consultation</li> <li>▪ administer and undertake the consultation</li> <li>▪ analyse the responses</li> <li>▪ write any reporting material</li> <li>▪ provide feedback to participants.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ <b>RESOURCE 11</b> provides some guidance on writing a specification and commissioning work if you intend to contract it out.</li> </ul>
<p>20. Who do I need to consult with?</p> <p>21. Who are my key stakeholders?</p> <p>22. Are there any groups likely to be harder to get views from?</p> <p>23. Are they harder to identify; contact; or engage?</p> <p>24. How will I overcome these barriers?</p> <p>25. Set specific targets for the level of response you want from your different stakeholders.</p> <p>26. At the end, you want to be able to determine whether:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ you have views from all those you wanted</li> <li>▪ you were successful in consulting minority, disadvantaged or under-represented groups</li> <li>▪ different groups responded to different methods</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Map out all the different groups of people likely to be affected by the issue you are consulting on.</li> <li>▪ <b>RESOURCE 6</b> gives descriptions of harder to reach groups.</li> <li>▪ Flag up those who are likely to be harder to identify / contact / engage.</li> <li>▪ Think about how you will can actively recruit these groups. Consider incentives if appropriate. Make sure your approach is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Meaningful and relevant</li> <li>▪ Transparent</li> <li>▪ Stimulating</li> <li>▪ Accessible</li> <li>▪ Addresses peoples fears or concerns</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



ISSUE	QUICK REFERENCE TO CONSULTATION TOOLKIT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ you gave feedback to those consulted</li> <li>▪ the people consulted felt that the consultation was worthwhile.</li> </ul>	
<p>27. What is open / not open to being influenced? 28. Have I made this clear to participants in my consultation material?</p> <p>29. At the end, you want to be able to determine whether:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ your objectives were clear and understood.</li> <li>▪ they were relevant to the consultation itself and linked to your wider planning process.</li> <li>▪ they were explained to, and understood by, all relevant staff and those consulted.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Make sure this is clear to participants – both in any literature and in person, at any events you are holding.</li> <li>▪ <a href="#">RESOURCE 7</a> gives some example wording you can use.</li> </ul>
<p>30. Have I notified members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Whose portfolio this comes under?</li> <li>▪ Whose ward this affects?</li> <li>▪ Have I involved members in my consultation?</li> <li>▪ To act as advocates</li> <li>▪ Who will be interpreting / acting on / feeding back the results?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Make sure you engage members from the outset. Make sure they are clear what you are doing, how it will affect their ward / portfolio and how the results will be used.</li> </ul>
<p>31. Do I need to follow any statutory guidance? 32. Is there any specific guidance I can use?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Make sure you follow any statutory guidance, if relevant to your consultation. See <a href="#">RESOURCE 8</a>. Contact <a href="#">Liz Howlett</a> (Legal Services Manager) on ext 2420 if you are unsure of any issues.</li> </ul>
<p>33. Are there any Data Protection issues likely to be relevant?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ See <a href="#">RESOURCE 9</a>. Contact <a href="#">Sue Broughton</a> (Information Officer) on ext 2747 if you are unsure of any issues relating to Data Protection.</li> </ul>
<p>34. Which methods / combination of methods will I use? 35. What resources do we have internally? 36. Do I need to contract an external agency? 37. What do I need to do in preparation – for example, reserve premises, book interpreters, reprographics etc.</p> <p>38. At the end, you want to be able to determine whether:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the methods used were right for your objectives.</li> <li>▪ if you used more than one method, which worked better than others - and why?</li> <li>▪ you gathered the required information</li> <li>▪ you achieved the desired response rate</li> <li>▪ the sample was sufficiently representative (if it needed to be).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ See <a href="#">RESOURCE 10</a> for a breakdown and description of the main consultation techniques.</li> <li>▪ What technical expertise do you need to assist you developing the consultation?</li> <li>▪ You should also now have a clearer idea of the resources you need to complete the consultation.</li> </ul>

ISSUE	QUICK REFERENCE TO CONSULTATION TOOLKIT
<p>39. How will I analyse the results?  40. What resources / facilities do we have internally?  41. Do I need to contract an external agency?</p> <p>42. At the end, you want to be able to determine whether:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ You collected all the information you needed</li> <li>▪ There was any more information that would have been useful.</li> <li>▪ The process for undertaking the analysis was sufficient.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ See <a href="#">RESOURCE 12</a> for an guidance on identifying key messages.</li> </ul>
PROVIDING FEEDBACK	
<p>43. Have I made clear linkages between the consultation results and how it has influenced the decision-making process?  44. How will I provide feedback to participants? (Make this clear in your consultation material).  45. What information will I send them (e.g. summary, leaflet, report).  46. How will I feed back to colleagues / managers in West Berkshire Council?  47. Who else would find it useful to know the results of my consultation?  48. How will I disseminate / make available the results feedback more widely?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ As a minimum – and as a courtesy – make sure you feedback the results of the consultation to all participants.</li> <li>▪ Make sure that participants know how you are intending to feed back the results to them.</li> <li>▪ Make sure how you feed back is appropriate to the audience.</li> <li>▪ Think about how you will disseminate what you have found out more generally to interested parties.</li> <li>▪ It is a requirement we make available findings under Freedom of Information so as a minimum, link your results through the <a href="#">Consultation Calendar</a>. If you have some findings that you think would be particularly interesting, be creative. You could: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ send the summary to interested colleagues.</li> <li>▪ organise a presentation.</li> <li>▪ write an article for West Berkshire News.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
EVALUATION	
<p>49. Have participants had sufficient opportunity to provide feedback on your exercise?  50. Have you answered the questions you set yourself when designing the consultation?  51. Truthfully and honestly answer the question – What has changed as a result of the consultation?  52. Make available what you have learned for others thinking of doing a similar exercise.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Evaluation is important to allow you / others to learn from your experience.</li> <li>▪ Take some time to think about and write down what you thought went well / not so well / what you would do differently. See <a href="#">RESOURCE 13</a> for some example questions you could pose.</li> <li>▪ Share this with other people.</li> </ul>