

Effective Consultation

Gravesham Borough Council recognises that building a cohesive and sustainable community requires involving all of the community in consultation work carried out around policy and service provision and delivery. Gravesham has recognised that to achieve this there is a requirement to reach out to people who are less likely to participate in conventional forms of involvement. The council continues to work hard in this area to develop initiatives to improve community engagement with Minority Ethnic groups.

A People Bank was developed by the council, initially to represent residents, with a strong focus on ensuring good representation from minority ethnic groups, and with the opportunity for involvement in consultation surrounding housing related policy. A Reading Group has emerged from this initiative. This group ensures that all information material is accessible to all tenants, particularly those from minority ethnic communities.

The council are currently developing a Residents Panel for the borough, which will be consulted regularly using a range of consultation methods on a variety of policy issues. The panel has been recruited through postal questionnaires with additional face to face interviewing methods to ensure that it is fully representative of our community in Gravesham.

At the council's flagship community festival, the Big Day Out, a Council Village was developed to enable residents to talk informally to staff and Councillors about council related issues that affect them. In addition to this the Cabinet are now holding several of their formal meetings away from the Civic Centre in various local meeting places around the borough. These Cabinet Roadshows enable local people to engage with the political process, and provide a platform for leading figures in the council to demonstrate commitment to the race equality agenda.



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Process of Consultation	Tool	What it is used for	Toolkit Sheet Available
Key skill	Planning	Making sure consultation runs smoothly and options are considered.	✓
Key skill	Monitoring and evaluation	Making sure the process is working the way you want it to [or working differently!], finding out what the achievements and outcomes were and if it should be done that way again.	✓
Key skill	Meetings	Communication. Could result in quick win relationship building and the start of long term relationships with communities and shows alternative options.	✓
Key skill	Facilitation	Making a meeting or a series of meetings run well.	✓
Key skill	Presentations	Communication. Can be a quick win to inspire confidence and to get people involved and enthusiastic.	✓
Key skill	Clear and jargon free writing	Communication. Can be the difference between communication working very well or failing.	✓
Informing	Producing a leaflet or poster or newsletter	Communicating, informing and also empowering if community members are involved. Language, style, audience and delivery of message are key elements.	✓
Informing	Events and information stalls	Face to face communication and informing where people go such as markets, shops or events.	✓
Researching	Questionnaires and surveys	Researching community need at different levels, places and with different people.	✓
Researching	Community, resident involvement and citizen panels	Researching needs on a variety of levels, uses profiling to eliminate consultation fatigue and increases involvement levels of those who are less likely to participate in conventional methods of consultation and involvement.	✓
Consulting / learning	Focus groups	More in depth analysis of a specific issue for consultation and learning. Can also be used to target one off issues that need addressing.	✓
Consulting / learning	Events	Larger scale consultation/discussion of issues using different methods and workshops etc. Can assist in building community place and pride.	✓
Consulting / learning	Consultation on written policy plans/ strategies	Various ways to consult in a range of different ways.	✓
Involving	Participatory appraisal	Consultation and community empowerment for a wide range of people.	✓
Involving	Planning for real	Consultation and involvement in planning and development of ideas by the community for the community.	✓
Involving	Round table workshops or partnerships	Face to face community consultation and involvement of communities and partners with councillors, officers and organisations.	✓
Supporting community action	Project or capacity building initiatives	Long term empowerment projects or strategies of diverse communities.	✓

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Top Tip	Purpose
Be a good listener	At the heart of community engagement is developing good relationships, open and clear communication, networking and listening and learning to understand the diverse people and places that we are working with. It is essential that communication be carried out clearly.
Be flexible	Community engagement can be difficult at times as what may work in one area with certain groups of people may not work as well with others. There are no absolutes or simple answers to every situation, be mindful that no 'one size fits all' a meaningful outcome is sought.
Value diversity	Think about the situation, what you have and don't have and what your required objective may be. Remember the diversity of where you live, young people, older people, disabled people, genders, and ethnic and faith groups.
Communication	Keep an open mind to community engagement and consultation. Different types of engagement are appropriate at different times. Treat the people that you are consulting with as experts, learn from them, be flexible and don't be afraid to make mistakes. Listen, communicate clearly and honestly and always feedback to those who helped you in your journey, they need to know where they influenced the outcomes.
Apply principles of diversity	Equality and diversity are two main principles of community engagement and consultation. They should underpin any engagement activity and should be at the heart of policies, practices and procedures. Take time to apply diversity and equal opportunities to what you are planning as it will be the key to your success.
	For Further Top Tips on Community Consultation see the table over the page. If you want more detailed sheets on any of the subjects contained within the table please contact us and we will be happy to forward these onto you.

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