

GUILDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

CONSULTATION POLICY

The Council has developed a coordinated and strategic approach to consultation in recent years. A range of different methods has been used, depending on the nature and extent of the consultation, the objectives of the consultation, the timescale and the available budget. As part of this approach, two main methods of statistically valid consultation were set up.

The Residents' Survey

Since 1993, the Residents' Survey has provided ongoing feedback on residents' usage, awareness and perception of the Council and its services. The survey also monitors any changes over time by asking the same questions in each survey. In order to ensure that the views of the young people of Guildford are considered, an accompanying Youth Survey was introduced in 2000.

The Residents' Survey provides a snapshot of public opinion and is carried out using face-to-face interviews with 1,000 residents in their own homes, using a structured questionnaire, with interviews lasting on average between 20 and 25 minutes.

In order to ensure that the sample of the population interviewed is representative of the population as a whole, a random route methodology, with multiple start points, is used. Every ward in the Borough is represented, with wards categorised as urban or rural. Quotas are set for each ward, based on Census data, which show the population to be split almost equally between urban and rural wards. Correspondingly, the survey reflects these proportions.

As well as fulfilling its original requirement, the Residents' Survey has a key role within the Council's Consultation Strategy for best value, has provided data for the best value performance indicators and is used to support the strategic planning process.

The Citizens' Panel

The Citizens' Panel was set up as part of the best value review process to provide informed, considered and statistically valid feedback on the Council's Core Values and Strategic Priorities and on individual services.

A Citizens' Panel of over 1,000 households was recruited in 1998 to track the views of a representative sample of the population of Guildford. The panel is representative of the population of Guildford, based on Census data, has been recruited from all areas of the Borough (urban and rural) and takes into consideration factors such as age, gender, employment status and household tenure.

The feedback from the Citizens' Panel complements the findings provided by the Residents' Survey. Whilst the Residents' Survey provides a snapshot of public opinion about the Council and its services overall, the Citizens' Panel explores issues and service provision in greater detail.

The Panel is also used to explore in detail any issues highlighted by the Residents' Survey, major issues which have been identified as requiring statistically valid feedback or identified by the Council for further consideration.

In addition, the Council has also adopted a “**Hard to Reach Consultation Strategy**” in recognition of the need to identify, approach and consult hard to reach groups in order to ensure that they are included in the policy making process.

In order to ensure that the strategic approach is maintained, the following guidelines apply:

- The Residents’ Survey and Citizens’ Panel continue to underpin any major consultation requiring statistically valid feedback.
- Existing feedback is used as a basis on which to build further consultation.
- A range of consultation methods should ideally be considered and a justification provided for the methods selected.
- Each consultation exercise works within available human and financial resources.
- Clear objectives are set for each consultation.
- Any limitations associated with the methods used are clearly identified and recognised in the final outcome.
- A coordinated approach to consultation is further developed to avoid duplication and over-consulting and to ensure a cost effective approach to consultation overall.
- There is continued support and development of the Council’s Hard to Reach Consultation Strategy.
- Emphasis is placed on the need to build upon and use existing consultations, both those undertaken by the Council and other partner organisations, rather than consult unnecessarily.
- The searchable facility, containing data from all recent surveys, be further developed through the both the Council’s internal intranet (The Loop) and website.
- Findings from any consultation exercises are:
 - widely communicated internally;
 - reported to the Executive and other committees, as appropriate, and through our partnership activities;
 - clearly explained in terms of their statistical validity;
 - used to inform outcomes, service development and the strategic planning process; and
 - publicised through the local press and media, the Council newspaper (*About Guildford*), the intranet and website, the Council’s staff newsletter (*By the Wey*) and the Citizens’ Panel newsletter.
- National benchmarking data is identified in order to set our major consultation findings in a broader context, where possible and appropriate.
- Plain English is used in all consultation exercises.

- High standards of quality be maintained and further developed in all consultations. In order to assist this process, it is suggested that the concept of the establishment of a Kite Mark for Council consultations be explored. This principle would seek to ensure that appropriate standards of consultation are being maintained in line with the Council's Consultation Policy.
- The Council's programme of consultation be reviewed regularly, in the light of changing requirements.