LOCALISATION OF COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT TASK GROUP – 1 AUGUST 2012

The first meeting of the Localisation of Council Tax Support Task Group will be held at 5.30pm on Wednesday 1 August 2012 in Committee Room 1 at the Town Hall, Rugby.

Andrew Gabbitas
Executive Director

AGENDA

PART 1 – PUBLIC BUSINESS

1. Appointment of Chairman
   To appoint a Chairman of the Task Group for the 2012/13 municipal year.

2. Apologies
   To receive apologies for absence from the meeting.

3. Declarations of Interest
   To receive declarations of:
   
   (a) personal interests as defined by the Council’s Code of Conduct for Councillors;
   
   (b) prejudicial interests as defined by the Council’s Code of Conduct for Councillors; and
   
   (c) notice under Section 106 Local Government Finance Act 1992 – non-payment of Community Charge or Council Tax.

   Note: Members are reminded that they should declare the existence and nature of their personal interests at the commencement of the meeting (or as soon as the interest becomes apparent). If that interest is a prejudicial interest the Member must withdraw from the room unless one of the exceptions applies.

   Membership of Warwickshire County Council or any Parish Council is classed as a personal interest under the Code of Conduct. A Member does not need to declare this interest unless the Member chooses to speak on a matter relating to their membership. If the Member does not wish to speak on the matter, the Member may still vote on the matter without making a declaration.
4. Update
5. One page strategy
6. Methods of consultation
7. Work plan

PART 2 – EXEMPT INFORMATION

There is no business involving exempt information to be transacted.

Membership of the Task Group:

Councillors Gillias, Mahoney, Mistry, Pacey-Day, Ms Robbins, Roodhouse, Sandison, Helen Walton and Mrs Watson

If you have any general queries with regard to this agenda please contact Veronika Beckova, Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer (01788 533522 or e-mail veronika.beckova@rugby.gov.uk). Any specific queries concerning reports should be directed to the listed contact officer.

If you wish to attend the meeting and have any special requirements for access please contact the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer named above.
Task Group on the Review of the Localisation of Council Tax Support and Benefits Reform

1 August 2012

Briefing Paper

Agenda Item 4 – Update

The Benefits Manager will give a brief oral update on the local of council tax scheme. All of the members of the task group attended the briefing in the Council Chamber on 10 May, and it is not intended to repeat an explanation of why it is necessary to have the scheme and the fundamental issues surrounding its preparation.

As a reminder, however, the briefing paper for that meeting is attached at Appendix 1, updated to take account of changed timescales.

Agenda Item 5 – One-page strategy

A draft one-page strategy for the Council Tax Localisation and Benefits Reform review is attached at Appendix 2.

This review will take place in two phases. The first phase, on localisation of council tax support, needs to be complete by October, so that a report may be made to Cabinet on 19 November.

Corporate Performance Committee has decided that, owing to the timescales involved, the scope of the review will necessarily be concentrated on the consultation, which can take place between 21 August and 15 October, and on making recommendations arising from the consultation, having particular regard to the equality and diversity aspects of the scheme.

The second phase of the review – chiefly on universal credit – cannot yet be properly scoped because so little is known about the Government’s intentions. The one-page strategy for this phase will be prepared later in the year.

Agenda Item 6 – Methods of consultation – with reference to the Community Engagement Toolkit

The council’s community engagement strategy and toolkit was created by a scrutiny task group in 2008. This review produced a substantial body of background papers, which may be explored at:


Much of the content of the Strategy and Toolkit will not be relevant to this review. The task group will be consulting on a draft scheme that will be approved by Cabinet as a basis for consultation 20 August. The task group will therefore not be in the business of, say,
forming a group of residents to work up a scheme from scratch. In fact, the choices available for consultation may be quite limited, not least because of the tight timescale.

The community engagement toolkit provides a community engagement mapping template (Appendix 3) which simplifies the selection of a method, or methods, of consultation appropriate to the level of involvement being sought. This is accompanied by a Quick Community Engagement Method Selector (Appendix 4) which gives a short description of each of the different consultation methods, together with the pros and cons.

The scrutiny officer will take the task group through this process.
Council Tax Benefit replaced by Local Council Tax Support in April 2013

The current scheme

Currently financial support is provided to help residents pay their council tax through the Council Tax Benefit Scheme. Although it is administered by each Council it is a national scheme, with a national legislative framework provided by the Department for Work and Pensions. This means that across the Country support is provided in the same way and those with similar circumstances receive similar amounts of benefit.

Funding for the scheme is provided through a subsidy formula and in the 2011-12 financial year the Council received approximately £6.3 million.

The new scheme

In the Spending Review of 2010 the Government announced that it would localise support for council tax from 2013 and that expenditure would be reduced by 10%. This was then contained in the Welfare Reform Bill.

From April 2013 the national scheme will still be used for customers over pensionable age but for all other customers each Council will need to devise its own scheme.

Reasons for the changes

During the summer of 2011 the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), who are taking over responsibility for Local Council Tax Support from the Department for Work and Pensions, issued a consultation document. In the document the following reasons have been quoted for localising support for council tax:

- Give local authorities a greater stake in the economic future of their local area, and so supporting the Government's wider agenda to enable stronger, balanced economic growth across the country. The Government has considered the situation for low-income pensioners who would currently be eligible for support with their council tax bill and would not expect them to seek paid employment to increase their income. The Government therefore proposes that as a vulnerable group, low-income pensioners should be protected from any reduction in support as a result of this reform.

- Provide local authorities with the opportunity to reform the system of support for working age claimants. In particular it will enable local authorities to align the system of support for working age households much more closely with the existing system of council tax discounts and exemptions, simplifying the complex system of criteria and allowances.

- Reinforce local control over council tax. Enabling decisions to be taken locally about the provision of support with council tax is consistent with a drive for greater local financial accountability and decision-making, including the Government’s proposals for local referendums on council tax levels.
• Give local authorities a significant degree of control over how a 10 per cent reduction in expenditure on the current council tax benefit bill is achieved, allowing councils to balance local priorities and their own financial circumstances. Reducing the costs of support for council tax is a contribution to the Government’s vital programme of deficit reduction. Localisation is intended to help deliver savings of around £500m a year on the current council tax benefit bill across Great Britain.

• Give local authorities a financial stake in the provision of support for council tax. This reform will create stronger incentives for councils to get people back into work and so support the positive work incentives that will be introduced through the Government’s plans for Universal Credit.

Financial impact of the proposed changes

The Government will provide a grant for local authorities to fund the scheme. This will not be ring fenced and therefore any under spend can be used by the local authority to fund other services; however any overspend will fall as a direct cost to Rugby Borough Council, Warwickshire County Council and the Police Authority.

From 2013 the grant paid for Local Council Tax Support will be reduced by 10%; in the last financial year, Council Tax Benefit subsidy will be approximately £6.3m. A reduction of 10% would therefore be approximately £630k based on current expenditure levels.

Within Rugby there are approximately 7,000 households who are currently receiving financial support with paying their Council Tax and 46% of these are pensioners. Since pensioners cannot have the amount of benefit they receive reduced, the 10% saving must be borne by customers who are of working age.

The Council currently receives funding from the Government for administering the existing Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit schemes. However, this funding is likely to be reduced significantly with the introduction of Universal Credit.

In addition to the reduction of the administration grant the Council is likely to see a reduction in the council tax collection rate, and an increase in the amount of money owing to the Council and therefore an increase in the costs of collecting council tax and an increase in the volume of work caused by the impact on the more vulnerable members of the community.

Updated timescale

The Local Council Tax Support scheme must be formally adopted by the Council before 31st January 2013, failure to adopt a new scheme means the current benefit scheme would continue and the Local Authorities would have to fund the shortfall between the level of expenditure and the grant from Central Government.

In order to meet the need to issue Council Tax bills in early March 2013, the timetable for creating and implementing a new scheme is very tight. It was agreed by Members of Cabinet in March to hold a workshop for all Members on 10th May 2012. The aim of the workshop was for Members to gain a deeper knowledge of the principles behind the creation of a new scheme and to identify which customer groups should receive less benefit under the new scheme.
It is intended that a draft scheme will be presented to Cabinet on 20th August 2012; public consultation will then begin on 21st August 2012 and will end on 15th October 2012. A final scheme taking account of responses received during consultation will be submitted to Cabinet on 19th November 2012 and to Council on 11th December 2012 for final approval of the local scheme.

Creation of a new scheme

The government has announced that it will not be providing detailed guidance on how each Council should create its own scheme apart from the fact that pensioners will be protected under the current scheme. It has also announced that schemes can not be amended during the year and must be subject to public consultation.

Principles to underpin Local Council Tax Support

The consultation paper issued by DCLG proposed the following principles;

- Local authorities to have a duty to run a scheme to provide support for council tax in their area.
- For pensioners there should be no change in the current level of awards, as a result of this reform.
- Local authorities should also consider ensuring support for other vulnerable groups (later expanded to include those with families and disabled claimants)
- Local schemes should support work incentives, and in particular avoid disincentives to move into work.

In response to queries raised by local authorities regarding any further guidance the DCLG has recently stated;

"The intention is indeed to lay detailed statements of intent (regulations) before summer, but these will not prescribe how a local scheme should work.

We have been very clear that, given the pressure of time, Local Authorities should now start to look at their caseloads, and how they might develop a scheme in line with local decisions / priorities - they should not wait to start to do this until statements of intent/guidance are issued.

In relation to the making of a scheme - the detailed statements of intent will cover a number of things. For example a) how those of pension credit age should be treated (we intend this to be very similar to the way the scheme works now for those of pension credit age); b) how the default scheme works. The default scheme is intended as a safety net, and will be as similar as possible to the existing CTB scheme. Other than this, the statements of intent will cover issues such as the treatment of funds, how the transition period will be handled and so on. Any authority holding out to design their scheme in the hope of further regulations to be published determining this will have a long wait!"

There are limitations as to what can be achieved especially in terms of year one of the new scheme. One of the key constraints will be the ability of IT suppliers to provide software
solutions to support a new scheme. Many suppliers have already stated that there is not enough time to provide new solutions.

**Minimising the risk**

The tight time schedules provide many challenges and risks. Officers have worked with members of the ruling party to establish a draft scheme that is intended to minimise risk to the Council.

A communications plan will also need to be created to ensure that customers who will be affected by the changes receive clear information about the changes and how the Council will be able to help those who will face having to pay more Council Tax than currently.

**Conclusion**

A lot of work needs to be completed in a short period of time if this major change to the provision of council tax support is to be delivered on time. The changes will lead to a number of residents having to pay more towards their council tax bill and some who currently do not have to pay anything having to pay in the future.

In the meantime if you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

David Wortley  
Benefits Manager  
Rugby Borough Council  
01788 533440  
dave.wortley@rugby.gov.uk
TWO-STAGE REVIEW OF LOCALISATION OF COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT AND BENEFITS REFORM (UNIVERSAL CREDIT)

STAGE 1 – LOCALISATION OF COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT

DRAFT REVISED ONE PAGE STRATEGY

What is the broad topic area?

The implementation of the provisions of the Local Government Finance Bill for the localisation of support for council tax, to replace council tax benefit

What is the specific topic area?

The Local Government Finance Bill contains provisions to localise ‘support’ (ie discount) for council tax. This means that the council, rather than central government, will decide what support to provide and how to provide it, subject to the stipulation that the existing level of council tax benefit available to people of pensionable age must be preserved. The Government’s stated intention is that the support system should protect the most vulnerable people but at the same time ensure that it pays to work.

What is the ambition of the review?

To consult on the draft council tax support scheme and collate and interpret the results of the consultation, including consideration of the equality and diversity aspects. The scope of the review has been narrowed because, following consultation of party groups, the draft scheme is already in an advanced stage of preparation, The draft scheme will be not be released till the agenda for Cabinet on 20 August is published on 9 August 2012.

What are the measures of success of the review?

The final scheme to be operational by April 2013.

How well do we perform at the moment?

There is no localised scheme at present, so no baseline can be drawn.

Potential consultees and witnesses

Consultation will initially be with Warwickshire County Council and Warwickshire Police Authority. This will be followed by consultation with the general public and stakeholders.

Can we learn from other councils?

There may be scope for sharing results, but discussions to date among officers identify that councils will be operating different schemes.

What other help do we need?

Need for task group members to understand the present scheme and the technical details of the legislation.

Revised draft v1.1 23 July 2012
How long should it take?

The final scheme will be reported to Cabinet on 19 November 2012 and Council on 11 December 2012. It is expected that public consultation will end on 15 October 2012. Meetings of the group will need to be arranged after the results of consultation have been analysed in order that they can be fed into the report to Cabinet.

What will be the outcome?

A council tax support scheme that complies with legislation and meets local needs and is as fair as possible within the constraints being placed upon us.

STAGE 2 – UNIVERSAL CREDIT

Stage 2 of the review will deal with the impact of universal credit on the benefits service.

Little is currently known about how universal credit will work, and it is partly because of this that this stage of the review is being timed to take place during the second half of the municipal year. The one page strategy for this part of the review is provisionally in the work programme for the 22 November meeting.

The task group membership for Stage 2 will be the same as that for Stage 1.
## Engagement mapping template

**Theme:** Consultation on Draft Council Tax Support Scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVELS AND ILLUSTRATION OF USE OF TOOLS</th>
<th>TOOL RACK</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Selection of Engagement methods to be considered – others may be added</td>
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### LEVEL ONE
**Information Giving**
- Newsletters
- Website
- Exhibition
- Press
- Fact sheets
- Surveys
- Questionnaires
- Focus groups
- Employee feedback
- Consultation papers
- Public meetings
- Service user panels
- Surgeries
- Physical planning
- Focus groups
- Citizens’ panel
- User comments and complaints
- Forums
- Workshops
- Service user panels
- Stakeholder dialogue processes
- Service user panels
- Public meetings
- Community needs analysis
- Future conferencing / visioning
- Citizens’ juries
- Youth bank
- Local partnership arrangements
- Delegated decision processes
- Referendums
- …plus any others

### LEVEL TWO
**Information Gathering**
- Surveys
- Questionnaires
- Focus groups
- Empower

### LEVEL THREE
**Consultation**
- Consultation papers
- Public meetings
- Service user panels
- Surgeries
- Physical planning
- Focus groups
- Citizens’ panel
- User comments and complaints
- Forums
- Workshops
- Service user panels
- Stakeholder dialogue processes
- Service user panels
- Public meetings
- Community needs analysis
- Future conferencing / visioning
- Citizens’ juries
- Youth bank
- Local partnership arrangements
- Delegated decision processes
- Referendums
- …plus any others

### LEVEL FOUR
**Collaboration**
- Surveys
- Questionnaires
- Focus groups
- Empower

### LEVEL FIVE
**Involve**
- Consultation papers
- Public meetings
- Service user panels
- Surgeries
- Physical planning
- Focus groups
- Citizens’ panel
- User comments and complaints
- Forums
- Workshops
- Service user panels
- Stakeholder dialogue processes
- Service user panels
- Public meetings
- Community needs analysis
- Future conferencing / visioning
- Citizens’ juries
- Youth bank
- Local partnership arrangements
- Delegated decision processes
- Referendums
- …plus any others

### LEVEL SIX
**Empower**
- Consultation papers
- Public meetings
- Service user panels
- Surgeries
- Physical planning
- Focus groups
- Citizens’ panel
- User comments and complaints
- Forums
- Workshops
- Service user panels
- Stakeholder dialogue processes
- Service user panels
- Public meetings
- Community needs analysis
- Future conferencing / visioning
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- …plus any others

| LEARN | Evaluation and Feedback |  |
### Quick Community Engagement Method Selector

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<th>Considerations</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overview and Scrutiny Review</td>
<td>• Has it been suggested by members? • Does it relate to the key corporate themes (clean, green and safe)?</td>
<td>• Will use focused resources and involve members and officers who are determined to ‘make a difference’ • Opportunity for member-led consultations • Links to Executive decision-making</td>
<td>• Small number of issues scrutinised each year owing to in-depth nature of reviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ward Councillor Contact</td>
<td>• Hold at times and locations to suit constituents. • Accessing <strong>hard to reach</strong> constituents</td>
<td>• Good for public relations. • Makes people feel that they are being listened to and that their issues matter. • Enhances the representative role of local councillors</td>
<td>• Limited and unrepresentative perspective</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neighbourhood Forums</td>
<td>• Acts as a focal point for community engagement on a ward basis</td>
<td>• All ward members involved regular meetings • Limited decision making powers allow community access to members and officers</td>
<td>• Can be over-influenced by small number of people • Not truly representative • Difficult to reach consensus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User Panel</td>
<td>• Small size, no more than 12 • Have clear objective and timeframe • Moderation of group</td>
<td>• Gives user perspective. • Group has knowledge, experience and understanding of the issue or service • Ongoing dialogue • Membership can be rotated to maintain a balance of old and new members • Opportunity for direct liaison and feedback between panel members and service providers</td>
<td>• Limited and not necessarily representative perspective • Group can grow too close and lose objectivity • Cannot be used for a wider range of services • Does not address needs of non-service users • May exclude minority groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td>Considerations</td>
<td>Advantages</td>
<td>Disadvantages</td>
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| Referendums          | • Initiated by government  
• Issue should stand on its own (not over-complex)  
• Results usually binding  

A formal poll on a single issue. Asks for a response to a single question. Can be postal or traditional. The outcome (that is, a 'yes' or 'no') is binding.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | • Opinion of entire population can be obtained quickly and efficiently  
• Postal ballots can be used to improve turnout  
• The organisation must act on the outcome  
• All voters are equal  
• Incites discussion                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | • Expensive  
• Limited use  
• Requires publicity to improve response rate  
• Should only be used for issues that require little or no explanation  
• Can only give a yes/no response or a choice between limited options                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Community Needs Analysis | Framework for detailed overview of small area. Involves a range of stakeholders to determine actions following research on complex issues.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | • Provides very detailed analysis of issues thus ensuring decisions is evidence-based                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | • Expensive and time consuming  
• Possibly leads to over expectation  
• Needs to be managed effectively                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Citizens’ Juries      | • Requires skilled moderator  
• Commissioning body must follow recommendations or explain why  
• Need to be clear about how to use results  
• Consensus not required  

Small sample of population (usually paid) who debate an issue in a quasi-judicial setting with witnesses. Aims to obtain informed and considered opinion or verdict on a specific, often controversial issue.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | • Develops deep understanding of issue  
• Can be used to address very complex and controversial issues  
• Participants can be made fully aware but can still come to a decision from a ‘lay’ perspective  
• Public identify with representative citizens                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | • Expensive  
• May not be representative  
• Difficult to include all interest groups  
• Can be time-consuming and resource intensive  
• Not suitable for all issues  
• Extensive preparatory work                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
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| Future Conferencing/Visioning | Considering future scenarios and ways to influence outcomes in uncertain situations. | • Independent and skilled facilitator  
• No pre-set proposals  
• Seeks consensus | • Creates a real sense of involvement by using local knowledge and understanding  
• Can build consensus  
• Promotes community ownership of the results  
• Allows many viewpoints and exchange of information | • Time consuming  
• Resource intensive  
• Can raise unrealistic expectations  
• Costly  
• Difficulty in reaching consensus  
• Can be captured by large interest groups |
| Physical Planning          | Structured consultation method that uses a 3D plan of the neighbourhood to ascertain what physical changes people want for their local area. | • Can be available as a tailored package, so easy to set up  
• Is entertaining and involves those who would not normally participate  
• Makes it easy to obtain honest and wide-ranging opinions  
• Can deal with complex issues | • Difficult to ensure representation  
• Can be a costly exercise  
• Size of the model limits how many people can be involved  
• Numerous models may be required |
| Focus Groups                | Facilitated group discussion to explore issues in depth and seek views of particular interest groups. Can be used to generate ideas. | • Requires skilled facilitators  
• Selection of group of prime importance  
• May need several groups to gain different perspectives  
• Generally 8–10 people per group | • Allows brainstorming of ideas  
• Can be designed to involve hard-to-reach groups  
• Can explore complex issues  
• Provides in-depth information  
• Useful for building on survey findings  
• Allows interaction and spontaneity between participants | • Can be costly and time-consuming  
• Requires specialist expertise to facilitate discussion  
• Lack of confidentiality  
• Can only achieve limited representation  
• Discussions can be difficult to transcribe and analyse |
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| Surveys – Self-completion | Market research exercise used to gather quantifiable information on uncomplicated issues. Can be used to gather views and opinions and to measure attitudes, satisfaction and performance. Postal surveys usually used. | • Effective way of quickly gaining information from a lot of people  
• Analysis relatively straightforward  
• Data can be compared against local and national benchmarks  
• Can be used for sensitive issues  
• Open-ended questions can explore issues in-depth | • Can be labour intensive and expensive  
• Unsuitable for complex issues  
• Open-ended questions difficult to analyse  
• Can yield a low response rate  
• Difficult to engage with hard-to-reach groups  
• Cannot be certain of veracity of responses |
| Telephone Research     | Telephone interviews                                                           | • Can ensure a good response rate  
• Easier to engage with hard-to-reach groups  
• Can be used to obtain responses from demographically representative sample  
• Allows issues to be explored in depth  
• Allows flexible structure of interview  
• May be used to explore sensitive issues. | • Interviewer cannot respond to any questions  
• Not necessarily representative  
• Can be costly and time consuming  
• Personal safety of field-workers may be at risk  
• Specific skills are required to conduct the interview  
• Can be difficult to analyse |
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<tr>
<td><strong>Citizens’ Young Persons’ Panels</strong></td>
<td>• Panel members need to be clear of their roles</td>
<td>• Demographically representative</td>
<td>• Cannot be used for complex issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprise between 500 and 2,500 citizens who are demographically</td>
<td>• Can be conducted in partnership with other organisations</td>
<td>• Readily available ‘pool’ of willing respondents</td>
<td>• Can be expensive and time-consuming to set up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>representative of the population. Used as a sounding board to test,</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Can yield a good response rate</td>
<td>• Risk of over-consulting</td>
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<tr>
<td>assess and develop proposals over an extended period of time.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Relatively cheap once the panel has been set up</td>
<td>• May not be represented as panel self-selecting and want to be consulted</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Can be targeted</td>
<td>• Panel may become experts and conditioned to providing the right answers</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Track views over time</td>
<td>• Panel membership needs to be refreshed regularly</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Consultation Documents</strong></td>
<td>• Writing and editing skills needed</td>
<td>• Good starting point for consultation</td>
<td>• Can be costly to produce and circulate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To provide information and invite public submissions or written</td>
<td>• Administration of responses and feedback</td>
<td>• Provides detailed information on the issue</td>
<td>• Not always read by target audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comments on specific proposals.</td>
<td>• Full details need to be provided</td>
<td>• Elicits a considered view</td>
<td>• Needs to be accessible to all so need to cater for different languages for example</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Publicise event</td>
<td></td>
<td>• May have poor response rate</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Allow time to respond</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Resource intensive</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>User Comments &amp; Complaints</strong></td>
<td>• Make feedback forms accessible</td>
<td>• Easy to set up</td>
<td>• Unlikely to yield positive comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides a system for direct feedback from service users.</td>
<td>• Data confidentiality</td>
<td>• Provides input from service users</td>
<td>• Not representative</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Determining if failures one-off or general</td>
<td>• Can identify weaknesses and strengths</td>
<td>• Essentially reactive to existing systems</td>
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<td>• Formal mechanism for pursuing a complaint</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Forums</strong></td>
<td>Structured and regular meetings with interest groups. Used to provide information, seek views and develop/endorse local plans and strategies for the community or whole town.</td>
<td>• Needs effective management</td>
<td>• Attendees are unlikely to represent all views</td>
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<td>• Regular process of engagement</td>
<td>• Can be dominated by the most vocal</td>
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<td>• Useful link between partner agencies and local people</td>
<td>• Agenda can be taken over</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Can be used to seek local committed involvement</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Relatively cheap</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Advisory Committees</strong></td>
<td>A group to advise partner agencies on policy decisions and services. Group may consist of professionals and/or key stakeholders.</td>
<td>• Define roles and responsibilities</td>
<td>• May not be embraced by general public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Be forthcoming with information</td>
<td>• Members may not reach consensus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Interview members before selection</td>
<td>• People may become experts and/or be unrepresentative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Ensure members communicate with their constituents</td>
<td>• Can only involve limited number of participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Time and labour intensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seminars/Workshops</strong></td>
<td>A formally organised discussion group to exchange and gather information. Usually in the format of presentations followed by small group discussions, ending in a large group discussion of key issues.</td>
<td>• Requires skilled facilitators</td>
<td>• Requires a great deal of organisation and specialist moderation skills</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Opportunity to share large amounts of information</td>
<td>• Can be costly and time consuming</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Large numbers of people can participate</td>
<td>• Can be dominated by the most vocal</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Opportunity for dialogue between all key stakeholders</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Opportunity to engage in multi-disciplinary discussions</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Participants can ask questions and explore issues in detail</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Encourages participants to network and share experiences</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Staff Feedback and Suggestions</strong></td>
<td>Provides a system for feedback and suggestions from frontline staff who deal with the public.</td>
<td>• Train staff to deal with complaints</td>
<td>• Relies on staff participation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Establish feedback systems</td>
<td>• Time consuming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Show you value staff and are open to suggestions</td>
<td>• Not necessarily representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Valuable source of information on service use and users</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td>Considerations</td>
<td>Advantages</td>
<td>Disadvantages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Website</td>
<td>Access to computers may be limited</td>
<td>Cost effective</td>
<td>Will not reach everyone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Using information technology to inform and gather feedback, e.g., online questionnaires.</td>
<td>Quick response rate</td>
<td>Requires technical expertise</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Easy to keep information current</td>
<td>May exclude some groups, e.g., elderly, low income</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Potentially wide-reaching</td>
<td>Results can be unrepresentative</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Can be used to engage with some hard-to-reach groups</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Useful for panel surveys</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Meetings</td>
<td>Hold at times/locations to suit target communities</td>
<td>Opportunity to provide information and receive feedback.</td>
<td>Attendees are unlikely to represent all views</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal meetings with</td>
<td></td>
<td>Builds relationships with local community</td>
<td>Large group may be a barrier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scheduled agendas.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Can be used to seek local committed involvement</td>
<td>Can be dominated by the most vocal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Used to provide information</td>
<td></td>
<td>Relatively cheap</td>
<td>Turnout can be poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and seek views and develop/</td>
<td></td>
<td>Allows public to let off steam</td>
<td>Can be difficult to separate individual and general complaints</td>
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<tr>
<td>endorse local plans and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>strategies for the community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>or whole town.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Publicity</td>
<td>Writing and editing skills needed</td>
<td>Potential for regular updates</td>
<td>Can be costly and time consuming</td>
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<tr>
<td>To provide information and</td>
<td></td>
<td>Can reach a wide audience</td>
<td>May be seen as junk mail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to obtain views on specific</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not always read by target audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>projects or services.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Media coverage may slant the story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibitions and Road</td>
<td>Suitable venues</td>
<td>Effective in publicising services/organisations</td>
<td>Groups reached dependent on location and timing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shows</td>
<td>Publicise the event</td>
<td>Gives public flexibility to attend</td>
<td>Likely to obtain views of a small number of people who are not representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used to provide information</td>
<td></td>
<td>Allows contact with public</td>
<td>Feedback may be limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and to obtain views on</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>specific projects or services.</td>
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