

Consultation Code of Practice

Consultation is based on the principle that people affected by a decision should be involved in the decision-making process. It is an exchange of views, which aims to identify issues, develop or change policies, test proposals or evaluate provision.

1. **Only consult if change is possible.** Public participation includes the expectation that people's contribution will influence the outcome, so only consult if there is scope for change.
2. **Match the scale and type of consultation to its potential impact.** In some cases, there may be no need to consult, depending on the issue, and whether interested groups have already been engaged in the policy-making process. The emphasis is on understanding the effects of a proposal and focusing on real engagement with key groups rather than following a set process.
3. **Give enough time and relevant information to engage meaningfully.** People need to be able to give intelligent consideration to the proposals. Significant public consultations should normally last for at least eight weeks (excluding major holiday periods) and twelve weeks where appropriate.
4. **Don't delay unnecessarily.** Don't delay because you don't have all the answers, consultation may provide some. Engaging early gives people more opportunity to influence the outcome. Be forthcoming with information unless there's a compelling reason not to. Be open about areas where decisions have effectively been taken already.
5. **Make it happen.** Use accessible methods, formats and words that are suitable for the people whose views you want. Take account of ethnic composition, language, disabilities, literacy levels, and cultural norms.
6. **Objective analysis.** Information and views gathered during consultation must be assessed objectively.
7. **Publish the data and the outcome.** Publish data from the consultation online as soon as possible. Within a reasonable time frame, give respondents clear feedback on the consultation outcome and how the consultative process affected the decision.