

Consultation Toolkit



Introduction

South Somerset District Council is committed to listening to local people and enabling residents, partners, visitors and businesses to shape their area and the services they receive. We're genuinely interested in what people think because we want people to inform what we do.

It is important that consultation is carried out in a coordinated and robust manner. This toolkit has been put together to help ensure that the processes we follow within SSDC are consistent, fair and thorough. Please note that the toolkit does not replace any procedures that are currently in place for statutory consultations e.g. Local Plan.

This Guide is an accompaniment to our new Consultation platform 'Citizen Space' and should be read before embarking on a consultation/survey.

Is it a consultation or something else?

A consultation is a three-stage process:

1

**Informing
people of
proposals**

2

**Asking for their
views**

3

**Considering those
views before
making a final
decision**

Can people influence a final decision with the views you're asking for?



Yes

If the answer is yes,
Yes, it is likely to be
a consultation



NO

If you're simply sharing
information or gathering
market intelligence, it is
likely not to be a
consultation exercise



Why consult?

- Inform decision making
- Identify priorities
- Test out an idea
- Identify service improvements
- Seek information on the impact of decisions

Do I need to consult?

An 'express' duty to consult is likely to be when:



The law says we must consult ahead of a particular decision or action



The law gives councils 'statutory guidance' to consult on something



We have our own policy of consulting on something

Has it already been done?

Before you embark on the process you need to find out if something similar has already been done, either here or in another organisation, or if the information you want can be included in another process. You might also want to consider if it is something that might be suitable for an annual residents' survey.

The reasons for this are simple. It avoids consultation overload (the same people being contacted more than once) and makes the best use of scarce resources.

Our duty to consult may also be 'implied' as part of our general duty to act fairly.

Fairness depends on the particular circumstances of any case so there are no hard and fast rules, but there could be an implied duty when:



We've promised to consult before making a specific decision



We've consulted on this decision in the past



The impact of the decision on affected individuals is serious therefore it is important that those affected have their views considered in the final decision



A decision alters the existing position and individuals legitimately expect that they will continue to enjoy some right, protection or benefit.



Where the impact of a decision is not severe or where we have cushioned the blow of a decision with alternative arrangements we're less likely to have a duty to consult.

If you're unsure about a duty to consult or if you're planning a consultation, it's important get advice from Strategy and Commissioning before you begin to plan. Contact the Team at consultation@southsomerset.gov.uk

SSDC's commitment:

We will:



Consult when proposals are still at a formative stage



Give sufficient reasons for any proposal to allow intelligent consideration and response



Give adequate time for consideration and response



Take responses into account when finalising decisions

What should my consultation look like?



To ensure we comply legally and guarantee consistency, we need to follow some principles. The following bullet points provide a useful checklist to support this.

- Consultations should be clear, simple, concise and transparent
- A clear introduction must explain; What the proposals are, What you expect comments on, What will happen as a result.
- Be clear what questions you are asking and limit the number of questions to those that are necessary.
- Make the questions easy to understand and easy to answer.
- All communication online or in print must use open, plain language to reflect the council's tone of voice and to make your consultation effective.

Consultations should have a purpose

- Do not consult for the sake of it, ask the Strategy and Commissioning team whether you have a duty to consult.
- Consult about policies or implementation plans when the development of policies or plans is at a formative stage.

Consultations should be informative

Give enough information to ensure that those consulted understand the issues and can give informed responses. If necessary summarise the information to make it easier for people to understand but also give people the option of reading the full report should they wish to do so.

Consultations are only part of a process of engagement

Consider whether more informal ongoing engagement is appropriate using both digital tools and open, collaborative approaches like co-design.

Consultations should last for a proportionate amount of time

There is no minimum or maximum period. It depends on the proposals, the impact any decision may have and the number of people you are consulting. Consulting for too long will unnecessarily delay plans or policy development. Consulting too quickly will not give enough time for consideration and will reduce the quality of responses. Typically, depending on the type of consultation, it will be open for between 4 and 12 weeks. Avoid holiday periods and local or national election periods (purdah).

Consultation results /outcomes should be published

The outcome of consultations should be published on 'Citizen Space' and you should provide feedback to those who have been involved. We need to tell people what, if anything, has happened as a result of the consultation – 'You Said-We Did'. Feeding back results and outcomes will help establish relationships and trust, will enable residents, partners and stakeholders to see how we value their views and should also encourage further participation.

Consultations should be targeted



Consider a full range of interested parties (stakeholders) when deciding who should be consulted. This may include residents, businesses, visitors, partner organisations, faith, voluntary and community groups.



Consider how to tailor consultation to the needs and preferences of particular groups, such as younger and older people, people with disabilities and those that may not respond to traditional consultation methods.



Consider targeting specific groups if appropriate. Ensure that they are aware of the consultation and can access it.



Consult stakeholders in a way that suits them.

Equality & privacy considerations

SSDC is committed to considering equalities in the consultations we undertake. We will consider whether we need to gather information against any of the protected characteristics listed in the Equality Act 2010.

In addition to the protected characteristics set out by the Act, SSDC believes it is also important to consider Carers, Gypsy and Travellers, rurality, low income and the Armed Forces community as part of its work around equality.

Consultation with equality groups may itself be an identified requirement as part of completing an Equality Impact Assessment.

Protected characteristics as in the Equality Act 2010:



Age



Sexual
Orientation



Disability



Sex /
gender



Religion
or Belief



Pregnancy
& maternity



Gender
reassignment



Marriage
& civil
partnership



Race (including
ethnic or national
origins; colour;
nationality)

Don't forget GDPR

The council is subject to General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 and as such, all consultation will be conducted in accordance with this legislation.





How do I undertake a consultation?

Here are a few helpful tips:



Allow enough time to plan and run your consultation



Develop a consultation plan



Decide the most suitable method for consultation



Undertake a stakeholder mapping exercise to decide who to consult



Work out how you will promote your consultation (press releases, social media, emails)



Encourage people to give frank, honest views



Monitor the level of responses and promote / target as necessary



Ensure analysis and reporting effectively summarises the responses to the consultation



Decide how the data will be fed back to participants



Update Citizen Space on what has happened as a result of the consultation via the 'You Said We Did' page.



Contact Strategy and Commissioning for advice and guidance consultation@southsomerset.gov.uk

Consultation methods



Surveys
- online, telephone,
paper, face
to face



Focus
groups



Workshops



Interviews



Interactive methods
to consult with
different groups
(e.g. youth groups)



Exhibitions



Polls on
website /
social media



Text
responses



Public
meetings

You can use more than one type of consultation methods if appropriate.

Strategy and Commissioning will be able to help advise on the most appropriate methods and can also link you up with an experienced 'Consultation Buddy'

For an extensive range of consultation techniques please visit the website of the UK's leading public participation charity 'Involve'. This contains comprehensive details of 58 different methods with further links on to other websites where appropriate.

Go to the Involve website

Surveys

When undertaking questionnaire based surveys these must be produced, and published on our new consultation platform 'Citizen Space'

Each service has a Citizen Space admin that can help you to produce your questionnaire and who must quality assure and sign off the survey before it is published.

The list of service admins and the services they are responsible for can be found at the back of this tool kit.

There are also a set of 3 companion guides on using 'Citizen Space' which can be found on the Staff Portal under Introducing 'Citizen Space' - Our new consultation tool. These are



Making an online
survey in 'Citizen Space'



Analysing consultation
in 'Citizen Space'



Publishing results in
'Citizen Space'



Good questionnaire design

The formula for effective survey research involves three key elements:

- Asking questions of the right sample of people (representative and appropriate)
- Asking the right questions to elicit the answers you seek
- Using the data correctly (accurately, and without misrepresentation)

Some basic principles:

- You should always tell participants the purpose of the data collection
- You should also ensure that:



The design and content of data collection processes are appropriate for the audience being researched



That participants are able to provide information in a way that reflects the view they want to express, including don't know/ prefer not to say where appropriate



That participants are not led towards a particular point of view



That responses are capable of being interpreted in an unambiguous way



That personal data collected are relevant and not excessive

In summary, will the participants:

- Understand the questions and /or the answer options?
- Be willing to answer the questions?
- Be able to answer the questions?



Survey do's:

- ✓ What am I really trying to find out?
 - ✓ Your research objectives should be the primary consideration when deciding which questions to include and which to leave out.
 - ✓ How long does the questionnaire need to be?
 - ✓ You should limit the question to things that you really need to know. It can also be unhelpful to seek views on topics that will ultimately not influence the decisions we make or the priorities we set, as this could create unrealistic expectations.
 - ✓ Who will be answering the questions?
 - ✓ Will the people who read the questionnaire be mixed in terms of their knowledge of the subject, their literacy and language skills, their health conditions and their backgrounds?
 - ✓ What order should the questions be in?
 - ✓ You need them to flow naturally rather than jumping from one thing to another. You might want to start by understanding the person's familiarity with the topic of the questionnaire section
- e.g. frequency of contact with a particular service – before you ask about their experience or view of it. Within each section the questions should start broad, before narrowing in focus, so that you can understand the specifics.
- ✓ What do I need to know about the individuals who respond?
 - ✓ You should consider asking some demographic questions so you understand more about the person and can analyse the data by a variety of characteristics. Personal or more sensitive questions should be positioned towards the end of the questionnaire, since people are less likely to complete the other questions if they are put off straight away.
 - ✓ Be specific when you ask about factors like frequency, so saying “daily”, “more than once a week” and so on, rather than “regularly”.
 - ✓ Test understanding and clarity of the questions on someone who is not involved in the project and who can look at it with fresh eyes.



Survey don'ts:

- ✖ Avoid using jargon, acronyms, abbreviations and specialist terms.
Avoid phrasing in the negative, particularly where you are asking how much someone agrees or disagrees with a statement
- ✖ Avoid double-barrelled questions (asking two or more things within the same question) that create ambiguity and complexity that could leave a respondent unclear of what you are asking
- ✖ Avoid any question wording that could “lead” the respondent to a particular answer.
- ✖ If you want to check unprompted awareness of something, be careful not to bias the outcome by mentioning or describing that thing earlier in the questionnaire.

Useful contacts

For more advice or guidance go to:

Cabinet Office
www.gov.uk/government/publications/consultation-principles-guidance

The Consultation Institute
www.consultationinstitute.org

Strategy and Commissioning
consultation@southsomerset.gov.uk

Citizen Space service admins



David Crisfield
Strategy &
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Martin Hacker
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Anna-Maria Lenz
Strategy &
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Jonny Davey
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Steph Gold
Strategy &
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Also supporting: Strategy & Commissioning (including Council Plan, Spatial Planning, Residents Survey, Equalities, Civil Contingencies, Elected Members etc.), Support Services, Property Services, Commercial Services & Income Generation, Arts (including Octagon & Westlands), Environmental Services (Lufton and Crematorium) and Economic Development and Regeneration.



Shirley Courage
Environmental
Health &
Licensing



Josh Bennett
Environment
Team



Leigh Rampton
Housing, Revs &
Bens, Community
Safety, Health &
Wellbeing,
Community
Resilience and
Social Inclusion



Rachael Whaites
Countryside



Debbie Haines
Play Areas, Youth
Facilities, Holiday
Activities, Pest
Control and
Parish Councils

SSDC System admins



Martin Hacker
Strategy &
Commissioning

Full admin rights
across Citizen
Space



David Crisfield
Strategy &
Commissioning

Full admin rights
across Citizen
Space

If you can't see your service listed and need help with a survey please contact Martin Hacker or Dave Crisfield in the first instance.