

Research & Consultation Strategy

1. Background

The purpose of this strategy is to outline how Kirklees Council consults with all members of the community (i.e. residents, employees, businesses, interest groups, community groups) in decision making and to ensure that the views of the community are used to improve service and policy development.

The standards and principles outlined in this document are mandatory for all those undertaking research and consultation.

2. Aims

- To ensure that the council is aware of what research and consultation activities are taking place.
- To raise the standard of research and consultation that takes place throughout the council.
- To reduce the risk of consultation fatigue in the community, whilst maintaining an open dialogue with all stakeholders.
- To provide open and accurate feedback to participants on actions taken following research and consultation activity.
- To support a process of informed, honest and transparent decision making.
- To ensure that council officers and councillors are aware of what is required by them when undertaking research and consultation.

3. Standards of research and consultation

All research and consultation activities undertaken by, with or on behalf of the authority must adhere to the following standards:

- The identities of respondents must not be revealed without their consent to anyone not directly involved in the research/consultation or used for any other purposes.
- Nobody should be directly affected or embarrassed as a result of participating in a research or consultation process.
- Respondents must not be coerced or subjected to unwelcome intrusion and must have the right to privacy and to withdraw their co-operation at any time.
- Research and consultation activities must be honest and objective.
- Research and consultation methods and findings must not be used to mislead.
- All written or verbal assurances made by anyone involved with commissioning or carrying out a project must be factually correct and honoured.

- Those undertaking research and consultation activities must always show proof of identity to respondents, giving their name, telephone number and details of where they work.
- Children under 16 must not be consulted without the consent of a responsible adult.

4. Principles of research and consultation

All research and consultation activity must follow three basic principles:

4.1 Use resources efficiently

- Research and consultation is expensive. All such activity must be co-ordinated to avoid wasteful duplication.
- Research and consultation can be a lengthy process and should therefore be considered at the earliest possible stage of a project.
- Research and consultation must be properly planned and project managed.
- Where appropriate the results should be shared with other services and partner organisations.

4.2 Respect people's time and opinion

- Only carry out research and consultation when there is an identified need.
- Don't consult unless you mean to act on the results.
- Report the results to the people consulted and to the wider community.
- Act on the results (or explain why you have not acted) and tell people what you have done and why.
- Don't mislead people e.g. over the amount of time or level of commitment required or over the extent to which their opinions will influence decisions.
- Respect people's right not to be consulted.

4.3 Follow best practice

- Use plain language and avoid jargon, acronyms and technical terms wherever possible.
- Use the most appropriate and methodologically sound methods.
- Consult with all appropriate sectors of the population, even if it is not easy to identify or contact them. Make sure you try to include black and minority ethnic (BME) communities; disabled people; and people of different ages, gender, religion and sexual orientation in your research.
- Conform to legal standards, e.g. Freedom of Information, Data Protection and Race Relations Act.
- Conform to professional and service specific standards e.g. Statement of Community Involvement and Research Governance for Health and Social Care.
- Ensure that the equality, diversity and community cohesion impacts of planned research and consultation activities are assessed using the appropriate tools.

5. Coordinating consultation and engagement activities

The coordination of research and consultation activity within Kirklees is made possible through the council's Accessing Consultation and Engagement (ACE) database, which can be found on both the intranet and the Kirklees website. Any member of staff planning to undertake research and consultation activities, in any form, is required to:

- 5.1 Search the ACE database to check whether:
 - o the information required is already available
 - o the research or consultation activity could be undertaken in partnership with another service/department
- 5.2 Submit details of all new research/consultation activities to the ACE database which will be sent to the Corporate Research and Consultation team for quality assurance before being uploaded to the intranet or website.
- 5.3 Read and be familiar with service specific and statutory guidance on carrying out research and consultation.
- 5.4 Read and be familiar with the Research and Consultation guidelines on the intranet/ website to ensure best practice is followed.
- 5.5 Seek out appropriate training and advice on research and consultation by contacting the Corporate Research and Consultation team who will either provide you with the appropriate support or refer you to the appropriate service.
- 5.6 Update the ACE database with any changes and, most importantly, the results and outcomes of your consultation activity.
- 5.7 Ensure that research and consultation is actively used to inform decision making.
- 5.8 Ensure that those consulted receive prompt feedback about actions that have taken place as a result of the research and consultation activity (or reasons why they have not). This feedback must be given in ways that are appropriate for the target audience.

6. Monitoring and evaluation of the strategy

The effectiveness of this strategy will be monitored via the ACE database and via six-monthly reporting to EMG. Examples of good and bad practice will be highlighted through this process. The ACE database will also be used to provide information on research and consultation activity for the customer intelligence section of the quarterly performance report to EMG.