

One-page Summary:

What are 'about you' questions?

'About you' questions ask people to provide some basic information about themselves, such as their gender, age and ethnicity.

Why should I collect this information?

Asking 'about you' questions can help with understanding the needs, service use, perceptions, satisfaction, behaviour and lifestyle of different members of the community. 'About you' questions can also help to profile the people that apply for jobs with the council, get promoted, take up training, get dismissed from their job or are involved in a grievance process. They provide information that helps the council to meet its legal duties under equalities legislation and improve its services.

How and when should I use 'about you' questions?

'About you' information is best collected through paper or online forms, as this helps to ensure confidentiality. However, sometimes it may be appropriate to ask 'about you' questions either on the phone or in person. **Do not collect personal information just for the sake of it.** 'About you' questions should be included only if they are appropriate and the data will be used. When designing forms and questionnaires, the number of 'about you' questions should be proportionate to the number of 'core' questions.

What questions should I ask?

See the recommended question wording at the back of this guidance. It is recommended that you ask for information about

- Gender Identity / Sex
- Age
- Ethnicity
- Disability
- Carer status
- Sexual orientation
- Religion and belief
- Post code

If appropriate, it may also be useful to ask for information about nationality, residency, tenure, household size, the number of people living in the household, car ownership, benefits, type of disability, gender reassignment status and household income.

What about confidentiality and Data Protection?

State clearly on any forms/questionnaires or in person/over the phone why you would like to collect personal information and what it will be used for. Under the [Data Protection Act](#), the council should only be asking for personal information where there is a clear reason for doing so. The reason the council asks for this information relates to equality legislation and to ensure that services are delivered in a fair way to everybody in the local community and that all employees are treated fairly. There are steps you can take to protect privacy: keep all responses confidential, store all personal information securely, and never pass on information to a third party without prior consent.

For help and advice about research and consultation and customer monitoring please speak to the CRAC team (tel: (860) 1759). For help and advice about employee monitoring please speak to Tim Waldron (Tel: (860) 5029), the council's Principal Equality and Diversity Officer.



Introduction

This guidance explains how to collect information about different members of the community through employee and customer monitoring, research and consultation. 'About you' questions - sometimes known as 'classification' questions or 'demographic' questions - provide factual information about the people that have

- Used a council service or been in touch with the council
- Taken part in research and consultation
- Applied for a job with the council, work for the council, get promoted, take up training, get dismissed from their job or are involved in a grievance process

This guidance note gives an explanation of

- **Why** 'about you' questions should be included as part of customer and employee monitoring, research and consultation
- **How** and **when** 'about you' questions should be asked
- Some **important factors** to consider when asking 'about you' questions, such as **confidentiality and Data Protection**
- **What** questions and question wording to use. This guidance lists **recommended questions, useful questions** and **discretionary questions**.

This guidance does not relate to monitoring of complaints.

Why should I ask 'about you' questions?

- The council has a commitment to understanding the views, needs and wants of different members of the community in Kirklees. This information helps the council to deliver better services, make decisions based on evidence about the local population and meet its duties under equalities legislation. The council also has legal duties to treat all employees fairly, and to understand which members of the community are more or less likely to apply for jobs, work for the council and progress in their careers with the council.
- 'About you' questions help to understand who uses services and makes contact with the council, and which groups of people are more or less likely to do so. 'About you' questions also help you to analyse which groups of people have taken part in research and consultation, and how views vary between different groups.
- When carrying out a research or consultation project, your sample should as far as possible be a representative cross-section of your sample population. This is particularly the case when carrying out quantitative research such as surveys involving large numbers of people. For large consultation and research projects, it is advisable to set quotas on the number of respondents from different demographics. This will ensure the data you collect is representative of the sample population.
- For qualitative research such as focus groups, you should aim to recruit people that broadly represent the diversity of your sample population. If the aim of your project is to target a particular group (e.g. disabled people), you should think about diversity within this groups (e.g. different types of disability).

Some examples of how ‘about you’ questions can be used:

The membership profile of a **sports centre** could be compared to the demographic profile of the local population. Including ‘about you’ questions on membership registration forms would give information about which members of the community are more or less likely to use the sports centre.

Data from a **survey about health** could be broken down by different groups of people such as White and Asian, male and female. Including ‘about you’ questions on the survey means you could compare the responses of different groups.

Including ‘about you’ questions on the council’s **job application form** means that the council can understand which members of the community are more or less likely to apply for jobs with the council and in particular professions.

At a set of drop in sessions held in each locality about the future of land use and development in Kirklees, a short **equality monitoring form** was made available for members of the public. This meant the council could find out which people had and had not come along to give their views.

Including ‘About you’ questions as part of customer and employee monitoring, research and consultation would enable you to

- Find out who is **using a service**
- Find out if there are groups of people in Kirklees who **do not appear to be using a service**
- Gather information on **customer satisfaction** with standards of service
- Find out differences in **perceptions** of the council and its services among customers and employees
- Find out differences in **lifestyle, behaviour and socio-economic status**
- Find out which members of the community are more likely to **apply for a job with the council, work for the council, get promoted, take up training, get dismissed from their job** or are involved in a grievance process

Data on all of the above can inform Equality Impact Assessments and Service Performance Plans and give a better understanding of the council’s customers and employees.

- The people who use council services should reflect the diversity of the local community, though some groups will use some services more than others (e.g. young people will use youth centres). It is often possible to find out the demographic profile of your sample population or potential customers using census information (e.g. the population of Kirklees or the population of a locality).
- Including ‘about you’ questions in research, consultation and customer and employee monitoring enables you to analyse how representative your sample or customer/employee profile is compared to your sample population.
- If the profile of people who responded to your consultation is not representative of your target group it is possible to apply a statistical ‘weighting’ to your data which removes imbalances. Weighting is a complicated process, and can make data analysis more difficult. Use a representative sample in the first place where possible.
- Remember to enter information about any consultation projects on to [Involve](#). You should check Involve’s calendar when planning your consultation to see what data already exists about the topic you are interested in.

For more information about sampling, please see the ‘sampling’ guidelines.

How and when should ‘about you’ questions be used?

- Local people can be asked ‘about you’ questions at different times, such as when first calling the council, when registering to use a service, when attending an event or when completing a questionnaire. ‘About you’ information is best collected through paper or online forms, as this helps to ensure confidentiality. However, sometimes it may be appropriate to ask ‘about you’ questions either on the phone or in person.
- Include ‘about you’ questions at the end of questionnaires or forms, including when carrying out a face-to-face questionnaire. Factor this in when thinking about questionnaire length and print runs.
- For a public event such as a conference or a focus group, monitor the profile of attendees. This can be done via a short form either when respondents are recruited or register to attend the event or when signing-in on the day.
- If you want to compare your results to another data set that asks ‘about you’ questions.

Remember:

- Do not collect demographic information just for the sake of it. ‘About you’ questions should be included only if they are appropriate and the data will be used.
- When designing forms and questionnaires, the number of ‘about you’ questions should be proportionate to the number of ‘core’ questions.
- There is also no point in asking ‘about you’ questions where the number of respondents is so small that you can not break your data down by different demographics. As a rule of thumb, 100 or more respondents will give you data that is statistically robust enough to come to conclusions.
- It is bad practice to report on groups of fewer than 10 individuals, and be careful that your data does not unknowingly identify individuals.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

- Under the [Data Protection Act](#), the council should only be asking for personal information where there is a clear reason for doing so. The reason for collecting ‘about you’ information is that the council had legal duties to deliver services in a fair and equal manner to all members of the community and to treat all employees fairly.
- State clearly on any forms/questionnaires or in person/over the phone why you would like to collect personal information and what it will be used for. Include some brief text/explanation prior to ‘about you’ questions explaining all of the above. See the template introductory text below.
- Try not to include name and address information on the same form or questionnaire as the ‘about you’ questions, or include them on a tear-off section. This will ensure that responses are anonymous. Sometimes it is unavoidable to include name and address information (e.g. during statutory planning consultations). Make clear on any forms or questionnaires that data will not be traced back to individuals.
- The council has to make sure personal information is stored and transferred securely and never passed on to a third party without prior consent from respondents. This means that all personal information you collect should be stored in a password protected file, and should only be stored for the length of time that you need to use the data. It should be securely destroyed after this.

During the council’s **2010 Employee Survey**, data was not broken down to service area level or for groups of people with less than ten respondents. This ensured that no individual responses could be traced. All responses to the survey were anonymous and confidential.

Standard Introductory Text

Include some brief explanatory text on any forms/questionnaires or explain in person/over the phone why the council asks for personal information and how this information will be used. Also make assurances about confidentiality and explain that answering ‘about you’ questions is optional:

We would like to ask some questions about you. This information will help the council to improve its services and be fair to everyone who lives in Kirklees. The information you provide will be kept entirely confidential and will never be traced back to you as an individual. The information you provide will be used for statistical and research purposes only and will be stored securely. If there are any questions you do not wish to answer, move on to the next question.

What questions should I ask and what question wording should I use?

‘About you’ questions can be grouped under three headings:

Recommended questions

Where possible, questions about the following should be included as part of customer and employee monitoring, research and consultation:

Gender

- The Council has a responsibility to ensure that all respondents have the opportunity to describe and categorise themselves as they wish. Therefore, we recommend that surveys don’t just ask respondents if they are Male or Female, at the very least there should be the option of ‘other’ and give space for respondents to self-define.

Are you:

Male Female Other _____

Gender Re-assignment Status

- The council has legal duties to treat transsexual people equally with regards to employment and training.
- It is not a legal duty to monitor trans people, and there are certain pitfalls that need to be avoided.
- Monitoring should not be carried out on small populations as, even when the results are anonymised, a single positive in a small group may lead to inadvertent disclosure. This would break the law. Even for research or consultation involving a large sample, extreme care needs to be taken to protect confidentiality.
- Asking for information about somebodies sex they were assigned at birth is very different from gathering data on their gender identity. The Gender Recognition Act 2004: provides a mechanism for someone to be legally recognised in their adopted gender. Identification of the trans history of a person who does not wish to be identified as having a trans history could lead to prosecution.

Asking ‘about you’ questions

a ‘how to...’ guide

- If it is felt that monitoring of gender re-assignment status is appropriate, the questions to use are below. An extra category such as ‘transgender’ added to a question about gender is inappropriate, as trans people are not a ‘third gender’ and would take offence at this. It is also not appropriate to add an extra category to a question about sexual orientation, as transgender is not a form of sexual identity.

Is your gender identity the same as the gender you were assigned at birth?

(Tick ✓ one box only) Yes No Prefer to say

Do you live and work full-time in a different gender to that assigned at birth?

(Tick ✓ one box only) Yes No Prefer to say

Age

- The council delivers services to people of different ages within the community, and for services such as Adult Services, delivers age appropriate services. The council also has a legal duty to treat employees of different ages fairly.
- There are a number of ways of asking about age. You can ask respondents to select an age band. The most commonly used age bands for consultation with adults are 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64 and 65 and over. However, it is your choice about which age bands you use, depending on who your sample population is and how you want to analyse your data. For example, if your consultation was targeted at a population of older people, it may be appropriate to use age bands of 50-54, 55-59, 60-64, 65-69 and 70 and over to reflect the different needs of older people.

How old are you? (Tick ✓ one box only)

Under 18 18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65 and over

- You can also ask for the age of respondents on their last birthday. It is then possible to group the answers to this question into relevant age bands, though this is more time consuming at analysis stage.

What was your age on your last birthday? (Please write below)

Ethnicity

- The council has a legal duty to deliver services in a fair and equal way to people of different ethnic groups. It is a legal requirement for the council to monitor the ethnicity of its customers. The council also has legal duties to treat employees from different ethnic groups fairly.
- The first question below is a shortened version of the ethnic categories that were used in the 2001 census. Please note that the ethnic categories changed slightly for the 2011 census.

Asking 'about you' questions

a 'how to...' guide

How would you describe your ethnic origin? (Tick ✓ one box only)

- | | | | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| Asian or Asian
British | Black or Black
British | Mixed | White | Other ethnic
group
(including
Chinese) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

- The question below is the full set of ethnic categories taken from the 2011 census. The amount of space you have available on your questionnaire will influence which question you choose to use. The important thing is that your data is comparable to the census.

How would you describe your ethnic origin?

(Tick ✓ one box only)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>White</p> <p>English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Irish <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Gypsy or Irish Traveller <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Any other White background (Please write in) <input type="checkbox"/></p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px; width: 150px; margin-left: 20px;"></div> <p>Mixed/multiple ethnic groups</p> <p>White and Black Caribbean <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>White and Black African <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>White and Asian <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Any other Mixed background (Please write in) <input type="checkbox"/></p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px; width: 150px; margin-left: 20px;"></div> | <p>Asian or Asian British</p> <p>Indian <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Pakistani <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Bangladeshi <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Chinese <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Black/African/Caribbean Black British</p> <p>Caribbean <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>African <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Any other Black background (Please write in) <input type="checkbox"/></p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px; width: 150px; margin-left: 20px;"></div> <p>Other ethnic group</p> <p>Arab <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Any other ethnic background (Please write in) <input type="checkbox"/></p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px; width: 150px; margin-left: 20px;"></div> |
|---|--|

- If you wish to collect data about groups (e.g. Polish people or Kashmiri people) that are not included in the census categories, there are extra topics you can ask about such as nationality (see the 'Useful Questions' section). A question about nationality should always come before a question about ethnicity. The questions about Residency (see the 'Useful Questions' section) will enable you to monitor the responses of non-UK citizens such as EU nationals, refugees and asylum seekers.
- If you wish to collect data about Kashmiri people, direct people who answered 'Indian' or 'Pakistani' to an extra question asking them whether they identify as 'Kashmiri'. As with any 'about you' questions, only include it if it is relevant to the topic and you intend to use the data.

Do you consider yourself to be Kashmiri?

(Tick ✓ one box only)

Yes

No



Disability

- The council has a legal duty to deliver services in a fair and equal manner to disabled people, and to take disabled people’s views into account when planning and delivering services. The council also has a legal duty to treat disabled employees fairly, and make reasonable adjustments to support disabled employees in their job.
- There are a couple of ways of asking about disability status. The first question below is the 2001 census question that complies with the legal definition of disability in the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2005.

Do you have any long-standing illness, disability or infirmity? (Long-standing means anything that has troubled you over a period of time or that is likely to affect you over a period of time)?
 (Tick ✓ one box only) Yes No

- The second question below was used in the 2008 and 2010 Kirklees Employee Survey. The major difference is that the census question is based upon a medical definition of disability, where disability is considered as a long-term medical condition that has an effect on the individual in them carrying out their day-to-day activities.
- The question below is based on the ‘social model’ of disability, where an individual might consider themselves to be disabled by virtue of society disabling them as opposed to their medical condition causing them to be disabled. Where possible, it is recommended that this question is used, as Kirklees Council follows the social model of disability and supports people to self-declare their disability status.

Do you consider yourself to be a disabled person?
 (Tick ✓ one box only) Yes No

Carer Status

- A question about carer status was included in the council’s Employee Survey for the first time in 2008.
- As well as finding out about carer status, it may also be useful to add extra questions about how many people are cared for, what conditions cause them to need help and the age of those who are cared for.

This question is about people who provide unpaid care for family, partners or friends in need of help because they are ill, frail or have a disability. This includes a person who looks after someone who misuses alcohol or substances.

Are you responsible for caring for an adult relative/partner, disabled child, or friend/neighbour?
 (Tick ✓ one box only) Yes No

Sexual Orientation

- The council must not discriminate on the grounds of sexual orientation in the exercise of public functions. The council also has a legal duty to treat employees of different sexual orientations fairly.
- The wording for the question below about sexual orientation was developed following consultation with the Kirklees Council LGBT Employee Network. It is recommended that lesbians and gay men are kept as separate tick boxes, as often their needs are very different based on their gender and respondents themselves may not feel comfortable with identifying with a catch all option of ‘gay/lesbian’. However, because the number of LGB respondents to

Asking ‘about you’ questions

a ‘how to...’ guide

your project may be small, at analysis stage it may be worth combining LGB respondents so that the data by sexuality is more robust and can be compared to heterosexual respondents.

- Include the option ‘I am not prepared to say’, as some respondents will not want to answer this question. For face-to-face consultation exercises, make assurances about confidentiality.

How would you describe your sexual orientation? (Tick ✓ one box only)

Heterosexual	Bisexual	Lesbian/ Gay woman	Gay man	I am not prepared to say	None of these
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Religion and Belief

- Equalities legislation means that the council must not discriminate on the grounds of religion or belief in the exercise of public functions. The council also has a legal duty to treat employees with different religious beliefs fairly.
- The wording of the question below is taken from the 2001 census and was used in the 2011 census. You do not have to list the religions in a particular order, alphabetical order is fine.

What is your religion, even if you are not currently practising?

(Tick ✓ all that apply. Tick ‘none of these’ if none apply)

Buddhist	<input type="checkbox"/>	Muslim	<input type="checkbox"/>
Christian (including C of E, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sikh	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hindu	<input type="checkbox"/>	No Religion	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jewish	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other religion (please write in the space below)	<input type="checkbox"/>

Post Code

- Collecting post code information means you can analyse your data by key geographical areas such as localities or wards.
- Asking about post codes is better than asking where respondents live by listing geographical areas. Local people are unlikely to have much knowledge about geographical areas such as localities or wards.
- Give assurances about the confidentiality of providing a post code. Bear in mind data protection when collecting post code information. When mapping responses to consultation exercises by post code using software such as Geographical Information Systems, analysis should only take place at a geographical level that does not allow individual responses to be

Asking ‘about you’ questions

a ‘how to...’ guide

traced to individual streets or addresses. Responses in a particular post code area should be grouped together by a geographical unit such as wards or localities.

What is your post code? (Please write in below)

Useful questions

There are questions that could be useful when analysing your employee or customer profile or consultation data. For example, there would be a clear reason for asking questions about the number of people living in respondents’ household for a consultation project relating to housing.

Nationality

- The question below is taken from the 2011 census questionnaire
- If you include a question about nationality, it should come before any question about ethnicity.
- A question was asked about nationality in the 2008 Current Living in Kirklees Survey. 4% of respondents selected ‘Other’. Common written responses to the ‘Other’ question included Irish, Pakistani, Polish and Indian. You can add extra nationality answer options if you will find this data useful or are looking to monitor a particular national group such as Polish people.

How would you describe your national identity? (Tick ✓ one box only)

English

Welsh

Scottish

Northern
Irish

British

Other (Please
write in below)

Residency

- Including a question about residency would help you to collect information about migrant workers, asylum seekers and refugees.

Are you a British/United Kingdom citizen?

(Tick ✓ one box only)

Yes

No

If you are a national of another country, are you? (Tick ✓ one box only)

A EU
national

A Refugee

An Asylum Seeker

A Student

Other (e.g. on a
working holiday visa)

Length of Residence in Kirklees and the United Kingdom

- You may want to ask respondents to identify how long they have lived in Kirklees or in the United Kingdom. At analysis stage, it is possible to group your responses by time bands such as under one year, 2-5 years, 6-10 years etc.

Asking 'about you' questions

a 'how to...' guide

How long have you lived in Kirklees? (Please write in number of years)

How long have you lived in the United Kingdom? (Please write in number of years)

Tenure

- A question about tenure would only be appropriate for adult respondents. It is ok to include the name of the main Registered Social Landlords or Arms Length Management Organisation.

Is your present home:
(Tick ✓ one box only)

Owner occupied / owned outright

Rented from a Housing Association

Owner occupied / buying with a mortgage

Rented from a private landlord

Rented from Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing
(Kirklees Council's properties)

Accommodation comes with the job

Another type of tenure

Household Size

- The standard way of asking about household size is to ask about the number of rooms in the household excluding bathrooms, toilets, halls or landings.

How many rooms do you have for use by your household only? (Write in number of rooms in box below. Do not count bathrooms, toilets, halls or landings)

Number of people living in household

- When asking about the number of people living in respondents' household, also ask about the age of household members.

How many people are there in your household including yourself?
(Please write in)

Children
4 years and under

Children
5 to 16

Adults
17-64

Adults
Over 65

Car Ownership

- The standard way to ask about car ownership is to ask about the number of cars or vans that are available for members of respondents’ household to use.

How many cars or vans are available for your household to use? (Please write in below)

Benefits

- You can either ask respondents if they personally receive any benefits, or ask if they or anyone in their household is receiving any type of benefits.

Do you or any other member of your household receive any of the following?

(Tick ✓ all that apply. Tick ‘none of these’ if none apply)

- | | |
|--|---|
| Housing Benefit <input type="checkbox"/> | Free School Meals <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Income Support <input type="checkbox"/> | Pension Credit / State Pension <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Jobseeker’s Allowance <input type="checkbox"/> | Carers Allowance <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Working Tax Credit <input type="checkbox"/> | Disability Living Allowance <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Incapacity Benefit <input type="checkbox"/> | None of these <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Attendance allowance <input type="checkbox"/> | Other (<i>Please tell us what</i>) <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Council Tax Benefit <input type="checkbox"/> | |

Discretionary questions

There are questions that may provide you with useful information, but can be sensitive topics to respondents. You should think carefully about the pros and cons of including these questions.

Nature of Disability and Effect of Disability

- A question about disability status is a recommended question to be used in customer monitoring, research and consultation exercises. See the notes under the recommended questions heading above.
- In addition to asking about disability status, it may also be useful to know which disability respondents have. It may also be useful to know if respondents’ disability affects their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

What is the nature of your disability?

(Tick ✓ all that apply)

- Deafness or severe hearing impairment
- Blindness or severe visual impairment
- A condition that substantially limits physical activity such as walking, climbing stairs, lifting or carrying
- A learning difficulty
- A long-standing psychological or mental health condition
- Other (including any long-standing illness such as cancer or HIV)

Does this illness or disability limit your activities in any way?

(Tick ✓ one box only)

Yes

No

Household Income

- Some respondents will deliberately not answer this question as they may feel this information is private.

Please tell us the total annual income of your household (before tax and deductions, but including benefits/allowances)? (Tick ✓ one box only)

Below
£10,000

£10,001 -
£20,000

£20,001 - £30,000

£30,001 -
£40,000

Above £40,000

Some common concerns:

Will people take offence at being asked particular questions? Sometimes, yes. But this can be countered by explaining very clearly why it is important for the council to collect this information and how the aim of collecting it is to ensure that everybody is treated fairly. State clearly that answering these questions is always optional and responses are treated confidentially.

Which questions do people get most offended by? A question about household income tends to be the one that respondents are most likely to not answer. People are not as offended as you might think about being asked about their sexual orientation. LGB people often appreciate official recognition of their needs.

Further information

- For more information about the general pros and cons of using questionnaires, please see the 'questionnaires' guidelines.
- For more information about other types of questions to use in survey work, please see the 'writing questions' guidelines.



Asking 'about you' questions

a 'how to...' guide

- For more information about consulting with specific groups such as BME people or LGBT people, please see the guidance on working with specific target groups.

What next?

If you would like to know more about this topic or any other aspect of research or consultation, please contact any member of the team:

The Council's Research and Intelligence Team		01481 221000 consultation@kirklees.gov.uk
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