FOCUSING ON CITIZENS:
A GUIDE TO APPROACHES
AND METHODS

COSLA
Rosebery House
9 Haymarket Terrace
EDINBURGH
EH12 5XZ

tel: 0131-474-9200
website: www.cosla.gov.uk

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a team comprising consumers, front-line staff, officers and elected members

Members of the sub-group –

Vilma McAdam, Policy Team, Chief Executive's Service (Lead Officer)
Steve Andrew, Community Development Unit, Education and Recreation Service
Jamie Bell, Information & Research, Planning & Economic Development Service
Ali Brown, Management Services, IT & Personnel Services
Marilyn Gardner, Strategy Section, Transportation, Roads and Property Service
Linda Robertson, Public Relations, Chief Executive's Service

With assistance from **Colin Simpson**, Policy Section, Planning and Economic Development Service

Graham Atherton adapted the Guide for publication by COSLA

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1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aims, organisation and use of the Guide

Aims

The purpose of this Guide is to encourage councils and other public bodies to look at new ways of involving the public, having regard to such key developments as best value, community planning and democratic renewal. The Guide draws on the many ways, including a number of innovative ones, for involving the public. It sets out the context and rationale for doing so, describes the nature, strengths, limitations and resource implications of various approaches and methods, gives practical examples of use and refers readers to sources of further information where appropriate. As indicated in the chart overleaf, the Guide is likely to be useful in helping to steer councils and other bodies towards the appropriate methods of involving the public in order to address certain sorts of issues or information needs.

Organisation of the Guide

The first section of the Guide describes the overall context and rationale for involving the public, together with a consideration of such issues as what to find out from the public, whom to involve and when the involve the public. Sections 2, 3, and 4 describe the various approaches and methods for involving the public, broadly comprising group work, surveys, panels and polls, public meetings and approaches using a combination of these. The last section is concerned with making best use of the results of this work, through the analysis and dissemination of findings and follow-up work and evaluation. A glossary of terms and some principles of good practice for involving the public are presented at the end, together with sources of further reading and a list of useful addresses.

Using the Guide

As many of the methods detailed in this Guide have not been used to a great extent, COSLA would very much welcome feedback on any parts of the Guide, with a view to publishing a more developed version in due course (for this reason, not all of the sections in the Guide are complete). COSLA would be particularly interested in receiving from users of the Guide written reports on any of the approaches or methods that they have put into practice, including indicative costs. These examples of actual practice would be featured in the next edition of the Guide to help users learn from each other.

APPROACHES AND METHODS: EXAMPLES OF USE

1. Explore Local or Community Issues

Interest/issue forums (5.4)
Planning for real (2.6)
Community needs assessment (6.1)
Public scrutiny (5.2)
Village/appraisal (6.1)
Community/parish mapping (6.4)
Networking (6.5)
Area/community forums (5.3)
Workshops for real (2.4)

2. Gauge Views or Opinions; Use as a Sounding Board

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Citizens' juries (4.3)
Consensus conferencing (4.5)
Special events (5.6)
Focus groups (2.1)
Referenda (4.7)
Standing citizens' panel (4.1)
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Consensus conferencing (4.5)
Focus groups (2.1)
In-depth interviews (3.6)
Standing citizens' panel (4.1)
State of the policy debates (5.5)
Interest/issue forums (5.4)

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Conflict resolution (2.7)
Community visioning (2.10)
Round tables (2.11)
Public scrutiny (5.2)
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Area/community forums (5.3)

5. Explore Controversial/Contentious Issues

Citizens' juries (4.3)
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Workshops for real (2.4)

6. Reach Consensus/Resolve conflict

Nominal group technique (2.2)
Referenda (4.7)
Conflict resolution (2.7)
Future search (2.9)
Round tables (2.11)

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Observation (3.8-3.9)
Research citizens' panel (4.2)

8. Market Research

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Focus groups (2.1)
Research citizens' panel (4.2)
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Future search (2.9)
Community visioning (2.10)
Networking (6.5)
Workshops for real (2.4)

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17. Early Stage Consultation

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18. Promote Council Services

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19. Standards setting

Nominal group technique (2.2)

20. Informing resource allocation

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Village appraisal/community auditing (6.2)
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21. Develop Performance Indicators

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22. Assess Performance/Performance Review

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23. Assess Value of Service

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24. Feedback Mechanisms

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Research citizens' panels (4.2)

1.2 Contexts

Public participation is regarded as one of the hallmarks of good government, and involvement of the public is now a standard feature of the work of many councils. In its white paper *Modern Government: in touch with the people* (1998) the Government has made participation one of the cornerstones of its drive to modernise local government. A number of key developments, summarised below, have or are expected to enhance public participation in this respect.

Best Value

Under the Best Value system, as set out in the *First* and *Second Reports of the Joint Task Force on Best Value* (The Scottish Office, July 1997 and July 1998) councils are required to show that they are developing effective means to involve people in shaping policies and services. Involvement may be at a customer/service user level, as a member of a community or interest group, or as a citizen or resident ("customer/citizen focus"). The "customer/citizen focus" is expected to extend to the private and voluntary sectors, where appropriate.

Related *Guidance on Service/Performance Reviews* (COSLA/Accounts Commission, 1998) points to the importance of focusing on the needs of the community and openness and accountability as part of the process of continuous improvement in service delivery. This includes giving attention to the involvement of groups often excluded from democratic processes. Involvement in service/performance review processes is expected to cover such aspects as:

- standards and measurements of performance
- current and comparative levels of performance
- reporting of performance
- possible future performance targets
- quality and cost issues
- service delivery options

The more that reviews are dealing with strategic issues, the wider the involvement is likely to be. The nature of the review will also affect the complexity, and so the cost, of the consultation process.

Democratic renewal

The *COSLA Response to the Commission on Local Government and the Scottish Parliament: consultation paper No. 1* (1998) points to the need to strengthen the democratic base of local government through the development of new forms of dialogue between councils and their communities, with reference to some of the innovative practices described in this Guide. COSLA argued that far from undermining representative democracy, these participative approaches would strengthen it.

Councils have also been required, under the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1994, to draw up their own schemes of decentralisation. COSLA's *Decentralisation: a* *guide to practice* (1996) sees decentralisation as a means by which communities can be more involved in council decision making and the development of services and as helping to make councils more accessible, responsive and accountable.

Community leadership and planning

In its *Report of the Community Planning Working Group* (1998) COSLA and the Scottish Office have acknowledged that councils, as democratically elected bodies, have a community leadership role and must find new ways to enable communities themselves to participate effectively in community planning processes. Under such processes, key providers of local services are brought together in partnership to develop a "community plan", setting out their shared vision of priorities facing an area and their relative contributions towards the attainment of that vision. One of the key elements of the community planning process is the identification of the needs and views of individuals and communities and how those needs can best be met and views be addressed.

Social inclusion

In its response to the Government's consultation paper on *Social Exclusion in Scotland* (1998), COSLA indicated that councils could play a lead role in promoting social inclusion through the community planning process referred to above. Part of this process, COSLA suggests, should include the development of "bottom up" approaches and mechanisms for involving people effectively in the shaping of policies, including a number described in this Guide. "A key measure of success will be empowering people who have been excluded and identifying and removing barriers to their participation in mainstream life so they have enhanced life opportunities and well-being."

Evidence-based policy

Increasing emphasis is being placed on the development of policies and good practice which are *evidence-based* and require councils and other public bodies to look to their communities for feedback about how well policies and services are working or could be improved upon. In its *Response to the Consultative Steering Group on the Scottish Parliament*, COSLA has, moreover, suggested that use should be made of some of the innovative approaches to involving the public in pre-legislative hearings that the Parliament could initiate at community level.

1.3 Involving the public

What is involvement?

Involvement is a process of *active* participation in the consideration of some issue. It is an educational process whereby the way of doing something is as important as what is done. It is about getting people involved in the formation of a development proposal, policy plan, performance review, etc and by doing so, giving them ownership of the issue. The involvement should be seen as a two-way process between the council and its public. It may be compared with *passive* participation (or formal “consultation”), under which the key decisions may already have been taken or a limited range of options put forward and the public is simply asked to react or respond to these.

Although involving the public through active participation is considerably harder work than passive participation, it arguably provides the council with better quality feedback from the public about the issue concerned.

Why involve the public?

Councils will want to involve the public in their work for various reasons:

Assessing needs. In planning for future provision, councils need to know whether services are reaching people in need of them, the factors affecting public take-up/non-use of services, and the nature and implications of peoples' changing circumstances.

Improving services. Councils are committed to providing better quality services and making them more cost effective. This can be greatly facilitated by involving the public in the planning and development of services, monitoring public use and satisfaction with services, and testing out ideas and policies with the public.

Allocating resources. Finding out what people think and value will help councils to target scarce resources to where they are most needed and demanded.

Empowering communities. Councils are helping communities to help themselves by giving them more say in the development and running of services.

Democratic accountability. By involving the public, councils are bringing about informed and accountable decision making.

Whom to involve?

Depending on the issue concerned, councils may wish to involve:

- people living in a particular neighbourhood or area
- users of a particular service or amenity
- particular sections of the population, such as young people, ethnic minorities, disability groups, etc
- particular sectors of the community, or “communities of interest” (eg voluntary and religious organisations, professional bodies, trade unions, industry and commerce, etc)

Key decisions will need to be made about the selection of people or organisations to involve. In some circumstances it may be appropriate to involve every individual concerned, in others a representative sample or cross section of individuals (see also section 3.2 on sampling). In the final analysis, it is important that whatever the basis of selection, the people affected by the issue are not left feeling excluded from the process or without an avenue to make their voice heard.

When to involve the public ?

Councils will need to give very careful thought about when to involve the public, which is likely to take a very sceptical view of a council which leaves people or their representatives feeling that they have not been given enough time to be consulted or that they have been "consulted" only after the key decisions have been taken. Community-based organisations, with very limited resources of their own, may need a lot more time than better resourced organisations to inform themselves of the issues concerned, organise a response to the issues or make whatever other arrangements are necessary to involve their members, supporters, etc.

What to find out

Services: accessibility, standards, performance, information, choice, etc.

Individuals: opinions, expectations, experiences, complaints, suggestions, knowledge, personal attributes/circumstances.

Issues: employment, environment, education, health, housing, personal social/care services, protective services (police, fire, consumer, etc), roads and transport, etc.

1.4 Taking a corporate approach

While much of the involvement of the public will be at a service level, this should be undertaken in the context of corporate guidance, with reference to:

- setting *standards* for involving the public which are of a consistency and quality that match overall corporate objectives
- *exchanging experiences and good practice* on approaches and methods between different parts of the organisation
- *sharing of the results of research and other exercises* involving the public which could be of benefit to other departments, agencies, etc.
- providing *common services* where it is cost effective to do so, for example, with reference to the collection and analysis of data, if not externalised.
- the *proper programming of work* involving the public so as to avoid "consultation overload."

Similar considerations apply to joint /inter-departmental working within the organisation and with other agencies, where it is important to achieve a co-ordinated approach to involving the public. Approaches to achieving co-ordination of effort include the setting up of co-ordination teams/working groups, provision of written guidelines on standards, etc, use of electronic bulletin boards, and optimal use of central support services (information gathering/dissemination, facilitation, technical advice, etc). Mechanisms for involving councillors also need to be firmly embedded at key stages in these processes.

1.5 Information gathering

Aims and objectives

It is essential to be absolutely clear what you want to achieve from involving the public before deciding on any particular approach or method. To inform policy? To assess satisfaction with a service? To plan for future needs? To allocate resources? And so on. It means thinking about the type of information that will be needed at each stage, how to obtain and analyse the information and how the information will contribute to the stated aims. An impulsive or unplanned survey or piece of research is more likely to answer the wrong question.

Some of the uses to which particular methods may be put are described in the appropriate section, along with their main strengths, limitations and resource implications. These aspects need to be considered very carefully before deciding on particular methods. There are also a number of other considerations, discussed below, which need to be taken into account. These are likely to form the basis of a briefing document and specification for carrying out the work.(see under 1.5 below).

Issues/questions to be addressed

The key questions for which answers are sought will need to be considered and probably discussed at length with the clients or customers for the work, both internal and external (elected representatives, relevant officers, local partner organisations, community and/or other local representatives, etc). The formulation of these questions will be a major consideration in deciding what and how the information sought can be best gathered. People with specialist knowledge or experience of research could be called on, if necessary, to advise on the formulation of questions, to help ensure that they are indeed answerable, and can be answered readily and reliably. For example, concepts such as "satisfaction" with or "access" to services are by no means as straightforward as they might seem, and considerable thought and discussion will be required to tease out just what sort of information is collectable.

Approaches (quantitative/qualitative, one-shot/longitudinal etc)

Broadly speaking, information can be classified according to whether it is *quantitative* or *qualitative.*

<u>Quantitative research</u> is useful to establish *how many?* or *what proportion?* It is about:

- asking the required questions
- selecting samples of a defined 'population'
- assuming that opinions, perceptions and behaviours of the sample are representative of the population as a whole
- quantifying sampling error.

In using quantitative methods you need to be clear about the *precise* questions you want to ask. Much time and effort could otherwise be wasted asking the wrong questions. Moreover, if the wrong questions are being asked, quantitative methods may actually alienate the public. People involved in a survey may resent giving up time and effort to complete a questionnaire when they do not see the relevance of the questions.

The main *advantage* of quantitative research is that the answers can be statistically analysed and tested in a way to select research findings which are *representative* of (and therefore generalisable to) the population they relate to. It may also be possible to compare findings over time or with other surveys using similar questions (although it is important to make sure, among other things, that concepts and definitions used are reasonably consistent with each other).

A drawback is that samples may have to be quite large, and therefore costly, before we can be sure that results are indeed reliable and representative enough of the population they refer to. Expect to pay around £10,000 for a random sample survey of 1,000 adults by most market research firms. It is important to make sure that the information you are looking for cannot be accessed from existing or alternative sources before embarking on expensive surveys (see under section 1.6).

A *limitation* of quantitative methods is that, generally, the questions are determined by the researcher and anything outside the framework of questions will be missed, so the output or results will reflect only what is asked. While open-ended questions can be used in surveys, answers may be difficult to quantify. The cost of the survey will also place limitations on interviewing time and the number and type of questions that can be asked.

<u>Qualitative research</u> is used when you are interested in *why?* or *how?* It is about:

- generally working with much smaller numbers of people to obtain information which is too detailed (and therefore costly) to capture in large-scale surveys
- listening to or observing people whose views/experiences are difficult to tap using standardised questions
- exploring in greater depth issues, concerns, motives, etc for which there is limited time and scope in a standard questionnaire survey

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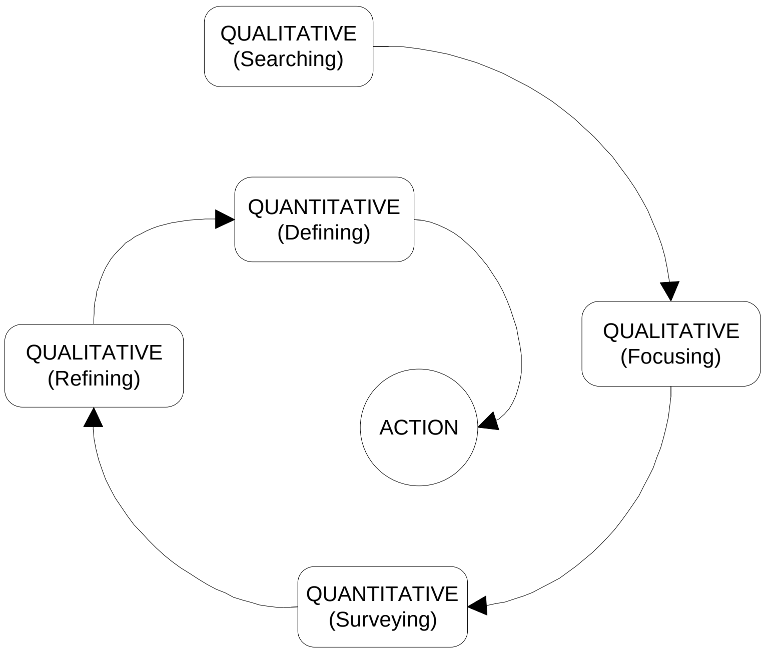
The *main strength* of qualitative research is that the open-ended nature of answers to questions is more likely than standard questions capture what is important to the people in the research. It also lends itself to a wide range of techniques which enhance people's active participation and researchers' understanding of the issues in question. Many of these techniques are described in this Guide, including a number of innovative ones being developed.

The main *limitation* of qualitative research is that results are not usually generalisable to the population they relate to. Those taking part in the research may not be representative of different population groups, although it may be possible to secure some sort of overall balance (eg by gender, age, socio-economic group, etc) in selecting participants. Qualitative data may be more time consuming to process and less straightforward to analyse.

Using a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research

It may often be appropriate to use a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Qualitative techniques can be used to identify or explore key issues, problems and concerns among specially selected groups of people before embarking on a survey to measure or quantify their extent and carry out other statistical analyses. Qualitative approaches can help inform the selection of topics and questions for the survey questionnaire. Equally, they can be used to shed more light on findings emerging from a questionnaire survey. This interaction between qualitative and quantitative research is depicted below.



At any one stage different research methods will be appropriate and results can be used to inform the next stage. The above model is a very generalised and not all steps may be necessary. Some issues will already be well understood and the only the final phase, that of defining or measuring, will be required.

Although qualitative and quantitative approaches tend to be associated with certain research methods, such as statistical surveys (quantitative) and in-depth interviews or group work (qualitative), it would be wrong to presuppose that any one method is exclusively quantitative or qualitative. Qualitative "open ended" questions can be built into questionnaires otherwise seeking standardised responses, and standard questionnaires can be slotted into in-depth interviews and group work.

Resource implications (time, money, expertise, technology)

For an exercise of any size, the need to marshal the necessary costs and ensure proper co-ordination must be planned thoroughly and well in advance. Decisions must be made about the skills needed to carry out the work, whether these are available internally and, if not, whether they need to be brought in from outside, or developed by training staff (see further below). The cost of the exercise, in employees' time, fees for external input, software, printing and so on, must be assessed and budgeted for. The clients of the work will also need to be consulted about the resource implications.

Each method described in this document has a section on resources. This has been completed for some methods described here, but as a number of them have hardly been used by councils before information on costs is scant. If employees use a method/approach for which little or no information on the resource implications exists, councils are encouraged to provide COSLA with an indication of how much it costs (money, employees' time etc).

Management and control

Arrangements will have to be put in place to ensure that any work, from conception to completion, is well managed. Different layers of management may be involved at different stages. Senior to middle management could be involved at the initial stages in considering how the work is supportive of/enhances corporate policy, how it fits in with service reviews and the allocation of resources for the work. A project manager and team will be put in charge of the development and day-to-day running of the work, possibly advised by a steering group of relevant officers, community representatives, external contacts, etc.

The project management team will be responsible for:

- drawing up a brief and/or specification for the work (see under 1.5 below)
- consulting/liaising with clients/customers (office bearers, service heads, community or other representatives, etc)
- commissioning work from contractors, if carried out externally (see under 1.5 below)
- deploying internal resources (money, staffing)
- monitoring/reviewing the progress of the work
- securing budgetary and quality checks and controls at all stages
- dealing with difficulties/problems along the way
- ensuring that work outputs (reports, statistics, etc) are put to optimal use

Timescale

Depending on what the information is wanted and the method chosen, you will need to think through the various tasks involved in carrying out the project, from initial conception and planning to completion and dissemination of the final report. This could vary from a few months to perhaps several years. Even the simplest of household surveys, involving the use of a professional survey firm, are likely to take at least two or three months to set up, with another month or so for the collection, processing, analysis and release of results. Larger and more detailed surveys and a number of the other methods described in this Guide are likely to take much longer, perhaps six months or more. Allowances may also have to be made for employee availability/absence, budgetary processes, seasonal factors, and unexpected technical complications.

The clients or customers of the work need to be made fully aware of the time required to complete it properly – the work will have been wasteful if important decisions are reached when it is still incomplete. They will need to be consulted as to when they want the information by and what resources they are prepared to make available to ensure the work is completed to required standard in time.

Employee development

Many of the approaches described in this Guide require knowledge and skills in:

- project management and control (see sub-section above)
- facilitating group discussions (section 2)
- collecting, analysing and presenting information (section 3)
- organising public meetings, polls and other events (sections 4 and 5)

All of these approaches are likely to involve a range of management, leadership, communication, technical, liaison, computing, and specialist skills. Facilitative approaches are also likely to involve various other skills and techniques, such as brainstorming, SWOT analysis, force field analysis, flowcharting, cause and effect analysis, process mapping, and so on (see glossary). Assessments will have to be made and decisions reached about the scope for drawing on internal or external resources for each of the tasks concerned within any given project, having regard to the knowledge and skills already available within the organisation and the additional training and/or external expertise required.

Where to find out more

Tim Blackman, "Research in Local government: an assessment of qualitative research", in *Local Government Studies*, vol 19, no 2, 1993. Newcastle-upon-Tyne City Council, 1991.

1.6 Preparatory work

Before any work involving the public can properly get started, it will usually be necessary to carry out a certain amount of preliminary and preparatory work, as outlined below, in order to get the focus right. As with home decorating, time spent in the preparatory work will pay dividends in helping to ensure that the final outcome is as intended!

Desk research

A necessary first step to any work is to find out as much as possible about any work already done in the area of interest, to avoid duplication of effort, enhance understanding of the issues involved and, where appropriate, build upon approaches and methods already used successfully. This could range from consulting relevant research and statistical databases, scanning relevant publications, speaking to acknowledged experts, commissioning a literature review, conducting an information trawl and searching the Internet. Expert advice should be sought about using the best search tools (databases, indexes, abstracts, etc) available – a lot of time can be wasted searching for the relevant material.

Key source materials are likely to include:

- official and other statistics (published and unpublished)
- research reports, registers, reviews, abstracts and summaries
- articles in academic, professional, trade and other journals
- working papers, technical notes, etc
- website and other electronic materials (much of it downloadable)

Points to be aware of when undertaking desk research include:

- validity and variability of concepts and definitions used in different but related research or statistics
- possible inaccuracies, inconsistencies or omissions in datasets
- appropriateness or representativeness of the samples used in the research
- statistical reliability of research findings
- comparability of statistics or research results over time, between different geographical areas, or by other breakdowns
- accessibility and cost of data for further analysis

On the basis of desk research carried out, it may be appropriate to draw up a scoping paper discussing possible research aims and approaches, the adequacy/inadequacy of existing information, the research and statistical work still needing to be done, with an indication of likely costs and other resource implications. Once the scope of the work has been defined, a research brief could then be prepared with a view to detailed specifications being drawn up (see next section).

Briefing and specification of work

It is usually necessary to draw up a written brief to say why the work should be done, with an indication of how it can be done, when and by whom. This helps to clarify and focus thinking. If work is to be commissioned externally, the brief is essential. Without going into too much detail at this stage, the brief should normally say:

- what key issues the work seeks to address
- background information/discussion of underlying issues, key developments, council's policies, etc
- the general aims and specific objectives of the work
- similar work already being carried out, where, when and by whom
- suggested or proposed approaches to carrying out the work and how this will enhance any work already done
- the main outputs from the work and how they will be put to use
- key tasks involved in carrying out the work
- resourcing and management of the work

The brief, generally not more than four or five pages long, forms the basis for more detailed consideration of what needs to be done, possibly with a view to commissioning the work externally. In drawing up the brief, it is important to consult all of the key stakeholders concerned. This should then be worked up into a detailed *specification*, saying exactly why the work is being done, who will do it, what will be done by when, how the work will be managed and what it will cost.

1.7 Commissioning of work

Few councils are likely to have the full range of expertise for many of the methods in this Guide and will want to consider commissioning the work externally, say, from companies, consultants, academics and other external contacts with the relevant expertise. For large scale surveys, employing teams of trained interviewers, using outside contractors is likely to be the only option. But even for group and other work described in this Guide, it may be necessary to approach professional facilitators and other specialists from outside the organisation.

External commissioning also gives the work a degree of objectivity, detachment and independence from the clients of the work. A possible drawback is that the external provider may lack the requisite local or in-house knowledge or understanding of the issues concerned, so it will be important to provide contractors or consultants with as much background information as possible before “fieldwork” proper begins.

Depending on the supply of external expertise, councils are likely to invite competitive tenders for most work, on the basis of the brief described above. Organisations such as the Market Research Society can supply free of charge a list of the names, addresses, services and specialisms of over 600 research survey firms and consultants. A scanning of professional and trade journals, informal networking and trawls among institutions (academic, professional, etc) may uncover other sources of expertise. Councils can obviously share information with each other about useful contacts.

In the brief, potential contractors should be asked to *specify*:

- the approach and technique to be used, and the basis for doing so (eg household survey, in-depth interviews, focus groups, etc)
- how members of the public will be selected/recruited for taking part in the work (through random sampling techniques or other means)
- the expertise they can bring to bear in carrying out the work
- the timetable for carrying out the work and the nature of the key tasks at each stage
- the cost of carrying out the work, with a detailed breakdown of costs by key inputs (staff, expenses, processing, overheads, etc)
- examples of previous work carried out for councils or other public bodies
- the names of persons who can comment on previous work they have done
- day-to-day management, reporting, liaison, payment and accounting arrangements, and administrative, clerical, IT and other support

Normally councils will want to invite three or four potential contractors to tender for work, although initially it might be appropriate to invite expressions of interest from a few more than that (EU directives also require councils to put out to competitive tender work above a certain sum). The council, will also want to consider whether or not to specify a maximum cost limit to tenderers (and the pros and cons of doing so).

Thereafter the council will need to:

- undertake an initial evaluation of the tenders submitted, with reference to price, quality and other criteria
- invite short-listed tenderers to interview/give presentations
- select the contractor, conduct any necessary post-tender negotiations, agree to finalised specification of work by the contractor, confirm award of contract and issue terms and conditions of contract

Again depending on the size and nature of the work, from initial preparation of the brief to award of contract, the commissioning process could extend over a period of ten or more weeks to as much as six months. Initial desk research and other work could take up another month or two.

Where to find out more

Guidelines for Commissioning Research, Local Government Management Board/Local Authorities Research and Intelligence Association, 1996.

Mike Asher, *Getting Good Value from Consultants*, Stanley Thornes (Publishers), Ellenborough House, CHELTENHAM, GL50 1YD, 1995.

2. GROUP WORK

2.1 Focus groups

Description

Focus groups bring together a small group of people, generally not more than six to ten people, to discuss in an informal setting some issue in depth for between one and two hours. Normally at least two or three such groups should be set up and discussion be moderated by one or professional facilitators working to a topic guide. Proceedings are recorded either in note form or by tape recorder (but preferably both) and the results are then processed for analysis. Results can also be fed back to members of the group. A good focus group session is characterised by frank and probing discussions which produce creative and spontaneous thoughts. A skilled facilitator is therefore needed to encourage participants to discuss their thoughts, feelings and reactions openly.

The more similar a group is in terms of age, sex and social class, etc the easier the communication is likely to be. It has been shown that if both men and women are included in a group the dynamics change and some people are inhibited. Members of the Group should not already know each other. It may be necessary to set up several focus groups to secure a good cross section of the community, for example in terms of age, gender, socio-economic status, etc. Various methods exist for selecting and recruiting participants (eg, randomised selection from administrative lists, at service point, etc) for which professional help should be sought.

Main uses

- to hear the views of sections of the community who may be under-represented in more formal consultations and communications
- to test out public reaction to policy initiatives and campaign messages
- to enhance more informal forms of communication between councils and their communities
- to explore issues or concerns that are not widely known or understood

Focus groups can also form an adjunct to other forms of public participation, for example at issues forum meetings (section 5.4) or in conjunction with a priority search (section 6.3). They should not necessarily be seen as a substitute for survey research, rather as complementary to it.

Strengths

- identify what people really think and what is of importance to them
- can help build a long term relationship with the community
- can be a productive source of ideas for later questionnaires
- likely to generate spontaneous and creative thinking as people spark off ideas from one another
- allow people who may feel more uncomfortable in a formal situation to speak more freely

Limitations

- because the views expressed (in the focus group) may tend towards the norm, it may have the effect of inhibiting other people's views
- some members of the group may dominate the issues brought up – the use of a skilled and trained facilitator is important to ensure everyone has an opportunity to have their say
- focus groups may not work well due to lack of experience, lack of skills and other problems in the group
- certain sections of the community may be excluded because of pre-selection processes or because the approach does not suit everyone
- as the membership of the focus groups is not, in a statistical sense, representative of the population due weightings cannot be given to the issues raised

Costs

- professional fees and expenses (recruitment of participants, facilitation, recording, processing and analysis of proceedings)
- purchase/rental of equipment (recorder, microphone, flip charts)
- room hire (eg hotel, community centre or, less formally, someone's home)
- catering (tea/coffee, biscuits)
- administration, postage, materials
- expenses of participants
- attendance/incentive fee for participants (optional - £10 is reasonable)
- preparation, printing and presentation of detailed report

Expect to pay £1,000-£1,500 per focus group.

Examples of use

In 1994, Shropshire Council asked MORI to arrange six focus group discussions with interest groups in three service areas - education, social work and environmental health, as part of a qualitative stage of study of views on council spending.

In 1996, Grampian education service arranged focus group discussions to find out the views of parents and pupils for ways of improving communication between home and school.

2.2 *Nominal group technique*

Description

The nominal group technique sets out a structured process to identify individual views and ideas to reach a group consensus. A group of 5 to 12 people is asked to consider a topic such as "What are the essential requirements of a good home help service?" or "What are the most important features of a quality reception service?"

What then happens is:

1. Each person records his/her ideas (there is no limit to the number) on a piece of paper.
2. The facilitator collects the ideas and writes them up on a blackboard/whiteboard/ flip chart.
3. Each idea is discussed by the group, ensuring everyone is clear about the meaning of each point.
4. Each participant then chooses the 5 to 10 (as identified by the facilitator) most important items from the list on the flip chart/whiteboard/blackboard and writes them onto a card.
5. They then rank them in order of priority, assigning a number (1 to 5, 1 to 10) to each one.
6. The facilitator collates individual scores and ranks them according to the highest score.

Main uses

The nominal group technique is useful for agenda setting and prioritising listings by customers/citizens. For example, it can be used to identify key requirements for a particular service delivery issue. *It cannot be used to explore an issue in-depth.* Because it is both flexible and robust, this technique is very useful in setting standards for purchaser-provider contracts[1].

Main strengths

- the method results in a short-list of ranked priorities (other methods may result in more information, but the most important issues are not identified)
- using the method results in consensus by the public
- the method favours those people who want to be involved, but do not like speaking out in such situations
- using paper and individual cards requires full participation of each person present
- it allows immediate feedback to the participants
- only the facilitator writes on the flip chart, so no one else is having to write and spell in front of people
- people usually enjoy taking part in the exercise

[1] *Towards Comprehensive Quality Assurance*, Report of a collaborative research project between Ayrshire & Arran Health Board and University of Glasgow

Limitations

- missing out on any stages of the process reduces the quality of the outcome
- the method does not allow you to find out about peoples' experiences or attitudes, and therefore is not appropriate for exploring issues in-depth
- the method does not let you know *why* the key issues identified are important to customers or what their past experiences have been

Costs

The main financial costs relate to paying participants' travel expenses, hiring the venue (if appropriate) and paying for a facilitator (if brought in). The human resource costs will depend on the number of groups set up. Clearly time will have to be allocated for administrative tasks, follow-up work and report writing.

Examples of use

Ayrshire and Arran Health Board, together with Glasgow University, used the nominal group technique to identify the key requirements in the quality of care for elderly people and the young mentally ill. Three groups were involved in the exercise – the patients, patients' relatives and nurses (acting as patient advocates).

Three lists of requirements were identified, one for each group. Top patient requirements included having attentive nurses, having visitors, having company and the chance to make friends, cleanliness of wards, church services and knowing what your medicines are for. Requirements that were seen as important by nurses (eg, food) was ranked eleventh by patients.

The patients' requirements were then incorporated into a questionnaire survey to determine patient satisfaction in long-stay wards.

Where to find out more

Consulting Consumers: a Guide to good practice for the NHS in Scotland, National Health Service in Scotland and the Scottish Consumer Council, 1993

A L Delbecq, A H Van de Ven and D H Gustafon, *Group Techniques for Program Planning: a guide to Nominal Group and Delphi Processes*, Scott Foresman and Company,1995

D Scott Sink, "Using the Nominal Group Technique Effectively" *in National Productivity Review,* pp 173-184, spring 1983

2.3 Study circles

Description

Study circles consist of five to twenty people, who are brought together on *several* (at least three) occasions to discuss specific issues. They are led by a neutral facilitator or group leader, whose role is to encourage all to participate and ensure no one person dominates the discussion. Guidelines lay down the way the discussion will be conducted and help to ensure that participants respect the views of others and listen attentively.

The *National Issues Forum Guidebook* (see also section 5.4) states that:

> "Study circles are an obvious format for the National Issues Forum programme, especially since we place some stress on encouraging participants to work through an issue. The study circle, with its five to twenty-five members, is ideally suited for this method".

Main uses

Study circles are used for setting goals or to set future scenarios. In the USA the approach is to enable local residents to set goals for the cities they live in. Sometimes study circles come together to discuss books/publications. The basis of study circles is that goals are set, based on a number of options, choices or scenarios.

They are often developed out of, and built around, existing organisations such as youth clubs, churches, trade unions, community centres, community councils and other neighbourhood groups.

Strengths

- well suited for participation
- easy to manage and schedule
- can fit in easily to other research programmes (or be part of a wider involvement process)
- are flexible because they take responsibility for their own programmes

Limitations

- some members of the group may dominate the discussions (but a good facilitator will minimise/obviate this)
- some study circles may not work well due to lack of skills or other problems in the group

Costs

Financial costs will relate to the rental of accommodation, provision of refreshments, training the facilitators and the analysis and reporting of results. A small stipend is often offered to the participants, or at least an offer to reimburse travel expenses.

Examples of use

Public Voice International used study circles in Bristol to engage the public in a city-wide discussion on how local people would like to see the development of the city into the next century. Discussion booklets outlining four possible scenarios were prepared. People were asked to consider the advantages and disadvantages of each scenario, with a view to identifying goals for the city. Contact: Public Voice International, 82 Colster Street, Bristol.

Where to find out more

Organising Your First Forum/Study Circle, National Issues Forum, 1995

2.4 Workshops for real

Description

Derived from public meetings, workshops and planning for real approaches, workshops for real are named as such, because (a) the consultees actually have to *work*; and (b) they are made to feel they *really* make a difference in a *real-live* issue - and that consultation is not simply a token gesture. They were developed by the former Gordon district council and further refined by Aberdeenshire Council. Normally they are attended by not more than two representatives from the council.

Groups of tables are arranged around a hall with some visual aid (eg, a map of the local area) on each table, together with a bundle of coloured *post-it* stickers. After an initial 5 minute introduction each group spends 30-45 minutes discussing and debating among themselves; the colour-coded stickers are used to identify those options on which there is consensus, those that are thrown out and those where the group has identified a new proposal for the council to consider.

Main uses

Workshops for real can be used to gauge views on almost any issue, such as local planning proposals. They are particularly useful in situations where the issue can be put across to participants in a very simple written and/or graphic form, such as plans or sketches (it is not appropriate for large, weighty documents).

Strengths

- as complicated issues are made simple, participants feel less intimidated and are more likely to comment openly
- participants made to feel they really can make a difference, thus helping to raise the profile of the council
- relatively inexpensive to set up and fairly easy to organise (can be delegated to a community group, therefore empowering the community and giving it a sense of ownership)
- displaying the output shows the participants what they have achieved, much useful feedback is achieved in a short space of time

Limitations

- materials are sometimes difficult/costly to prepare
- some participants do not like working in groups
- problems can arise if council officers feel possessive or precious about their own pet theories
- groups can have dominant/vocal people in them, leading to distortion of the feedback
- participants are not really informed of the 'fruits of their labour', unless the council makes a genuine effort to say how the output has been, or will be, used
- getting people to attend takes time and effort

Costs

- hire of the hall and catering
- materials required (this can be costly if artists' impressions, colour photographs, maps, displays are needed)
- stationery items, eg, pens, felt pens, flip charts, pads, selection of coloured post-it stickers
- employees' time – two to three employees are required to organise and set up each session

Examples of use

Workshops for Real have been used by Aberdeenshire Council with the people of Inverurie, as part of the planning process. Participants sit around tables in groups of between 4 and 8 people. The workshop-for-real leader gives a short five minute introduction outlining the purpose of the workshop, ie to ascertain the participants' views on a specific issue and how the council will use their views to take the issue forward. The workshops normally last two hours.

Groups spend around 45 minutes discussing the materials or 'food for thought' on their table (usually multiple copies of large, A3, sketches/plans with minimal wording, or artists' impressions, colour photographs and other displays). Participants say what they like and don't like and give any other views on the materials, by placing coloured 'post-it' stickers with their comments onto the materials/sketches/maps. A 15 minute break usually follows for refreshments.

Groups at each table nominate a spokesperson, who verbally summarises to the people in the hall, the group's observations. This is done by each spokesperson reading the 'post-it' labels which have been attached onto the materials/sketches/maps. Each summary is noted by the workshop-for-real leader on a flip chart, which is later pasted onto the wall for correcting or adding-to by the participants.

The workshop-for-real leader explains what will be done with the observations and comments, which are now visible around the room. *At no stage* during the session is there an 'open' question and answer session – this is important. Queries are either answered by the participants, or alternatively a participant can put up his/her hand and the workshop leader/council officer will give an answer (or assistance) on a one-to-one basis (not to the whole group). Contact: Colin Simpson, Planning and Economic Development, Aberdeenshire Council (tel: 01467-620881 x 6345).

2.5 Drama Workshops

Description

In a drama workshop, people – in the presence of a skilled facilitator - are encouraged to act out their interpretation of what they want, or what they do not want from a service. Groups and/or individuals can explore and debate options and solutions alongside professional staff.

The workshop can include small discussion groups and hands-on exercises (see sections 2.4 and 2.6). Participants explore and add various options to the topic(s) being developed and either reach a consensus or a series of options, which are then presented to the community. The workshop can be targeted at specific groups or individuals in a community or can be left open.

Main uses

Drama workshops encourage direct "hands on" participation and are a particularly useful means of tapping the views or concerns of disadvantaged people

Strengths

- likely to elicit more spontaneous feedback as a result of participants 'acting-out' roles
- can be an enjoyable experience, with creative outcomes, and make people feel participation has been worthwhile.
- better suited to participants who feel less comfortable with formalised methods (questionnaires, public meetings, etc)
- can be used for specific client groups, individuals or a community

Limitations

- some participants may feel inhibited in role-playing situations
- feedback may be difficult to analyse
- may be difficult to reach consensus

Costs

- facilitators' fees and expenses
- hire of venue and catering
- expenses of participants

Examples of use

Newcastle Health Authority ran a series of drama workshops with a user group for people with learning difficulties. The sessions were taken by a drama teacher and groups were asked to role-play what makes a good hospital and what makes a bad one.

Among the bad things highlighted were – rude staff, gloomy buildings, awful food, green paint and uncomfortable trolleys. Visiting at night was only one hour long, and wards were big and noisy with phones ringing all day and night.

2.6 *Planning for Real*

Description

Planning for real allows people to see the impact of changes and possibilities they had not thought about, usually by presenting them with a three-dimensional model of some proposed development. By moving around different components of the model (or option cards or flags, etc) – for example, pedestrian crossings, play areas, cycleways – participants can identify problems or work out solutions which might not otherwise reveal themselves.

Main uses

By working with three dimensional models, planning for real is a useful mechanism allowing people with similar concerns to view problems from different angles and formulate solutions to them. It has been used, with varying degrees of success, for involving the public in planning, housing, environmental, transport and other issues. It should be seen as only one part of a wider, longer term programme for involving people, however.

S*trengths*

- engages people in a very direct way in the problem or issue at hand
- facilitates feedback on plans already in the pipeline
- non-confrontational way of dealing with problems and putting forward new ideas in presence of professional staff
- promotes confidence building

Limitations

- takes a lot of time and effort to organise
- preparing material is difficult and often time-consuming
- people may find it difficult to think far enough ahead
- open to domination by unrepresentative individuals if not properly facilitated
- may be difficult to get socially excluded to attend or participate
- analysis and feedback to participants could be time consuming

Costs

- hall rental and catering
- time of employees in preparing for event
- production of materials (model making, etc)
- expenses of participants
- facilitator’s fees
- publicity

Examples of use

Interest in planning for real in Kyle and Kyleakin was partly fuelled by the Skye Bridge development. The exercise was led by members of the community with the aid of a 3-D model of the area. The model was used at a community consultation day, where people contributed by the use of flags placed on the model.

2.7 *Conflict resolution*

Description

People with *opposed* views on some issue are identified and brought together in a group work situation, with a view to informing and educating each other about their respective concerns and reaching agreement about issues or working out solutions which all sides can accept. While not all sides may feel equally enthusiastic about an agreed solution, this method should leave participants believe that they have reached the best possible solution available in the circumstances.

Resolution of the conflict involves the following eight steps:

1. Identifying the problem or conflict.
2. Gathering information to find out what is already known about the problem.
3. Analysing the data to establish what are the root causes of the conflict.
4. Generating solutions to identify what can be done.
5. Selecting the best solutions.
6. Planning for implementation and deciding how to go about ensuring that the agreed action actually takes place.
7. Once implemented, testing to see whether the problem/conflict has been resolved.
8. Continuing to improve on what has been achieved to date.

An independent facilitator or mediator is needed to assist in resolving the conflicts.

Main uses

Councils frequently find themselves having to resolve conflict between agencies/individuals/businesses facing conflicting demands, eg, conflicts between developers and environmentalists, or those who want to limit road-building and those who want a continuation of road-building. This method affords councils a variety of techniques for doing so, for example through (a) problem-solving; (b) arbitration; (c) mediation; (d) negotiation; and (e) consensus reaching/building techniques (see also section 2.8).

Strengths

- the stakeholders' problems are brought out into the open (although this could be a disadvantage too)
- helps to build up trust, two-way understanding and team working among participants with opposed/different viewpoints
- the structured approach helps to alleviate difficulties/tensions

Limitations

- conflicts and problems may turn out to be a great deal more complex than at first sight
- some participants may feel uncomfortable engaging those with opposed viewpoints

- not all participants will be happy with the proposed final solution

Costs

- hire of venue and catering
- collection and analysis of data
- facilitator’s fees
- report preparation and production

Where to find out more

Margaret Herman, *Resolving Conflict*, International City Management Association, 1994

Lawrence Susskind and Jeremy Cruickshank, *Breaking the Impasse*, Basic Books, 1987

2.8 Consensus building

Description

Using a structured approach and a skilled facilitator, consensus building brings together in a group work situation representatives of different, but not necessarily opposed, interests to arrive at an agreed position or decision on some issue or solution to a problem. It may be regarded as a corrective to the more adversarial approaches that may characterise, say, planning enquiries or political debate. It involves the following steps:

1. Listing ideas/suggestions. The purpose is to collect ideas (eg, solutions to the problem) from each person in the group, either by writing them down or through brainstorming.
2. Recording ideas/suggestions. The facilitator records ideas/suggestions on a flip chart. No judgements are made at this stage.
3. Checking understanding. Each idea is clarified and discussed with the group.
4. Voting on ideas/suggestions. Each idea is given a number. There are two ways of scoring: (a) if there are twenty ideas, then score twenty for the most valued point and one for the least important; and (b) each person can award a total of twenty points in all – thus twenty points could go to one idea and none at all to the rest! (The latter is known as 'weighted' and there is no need to vote on every idea.)
5. Reach a consensus. Each person's scores are recorded on the flip chart. This will indicate the majority views of the group and is a good starting point for discussion.

It is at this point that evaluation and judgements can be made. The discussion should be an open and honest one. As the whole purpose is to get the group to *agree* a position or decision, it is important that the different positions and priorities of each participant are well aired and understood. It then becomes possible to build upon these different standpoints to work towards a common approach to a problem or issue.

Main uses

- developing understanding and trust between different stakeholder groups on some issue or problem, with a view to formulating an agreed course of action acceptable to all concerned
- application to a wide range of issues, problems and decisions, in such areas as local planning, the environment, Local Agenda 21, etc

Strengths

- differences of viewpoint and disagreements are identified at the outset
- structured approach facilitates the reaching of a position/decision acceptable to all sides
- scoring system allows areas of concern/disagreement to be prioritised for discussion
- promotes two-way understanding, trust and team working

Limitations

As under *Conflict resolution* (section 2.7).

Cost

As under *Conflict resolution* (section 2.7).

Examples of use

Bristol has used consensus-building to seek agreement between different opposing groups on how the city centre could be improved. In Reading it has been used with the World-Wide Fund for Nature to develop action plans at community level in relation to Neighbourhood Agenda 21. In Hampshire, consensus-building was used to deal with a waste management crisis where the council wanted to replace four old incinerators (which did not meet EU standards). Local opposition forced the abandonment of the proposal.

2.9 *Future search*

Description

As its name suggests, future search is about bringing together stakeholders to share a *future vision* for a community or an organisations. It helps people to (a) think globally, but act locally; (b) focus on common ground and desired futures – rather than focus on conflict/problems; and (c) allow discussions to be self-managed and allow local people to take personal responsibility for implementation.

The method centres around a three-day conference (starting in the afternoon of day one and finishing in the afternoon of day three) at which ways of finding creative solutions for pressing problems are sought through using topic-based workshops. The conference involve anything from 35 to 70 people, and there must be representatives from every part of the community or organisation.

The conference works through five key tasks:

- reviewing the past
- exploring the present
- creating ideal future scenarios
- identifying common ground
- making action plans

Typical outcomes are –

- visions for the area's future
- agreed objectives
- agenda for action
- proposals for a particular site or programme
- achievable targets
- local coalitions and leadership

Events are normally facilitated by a team of people who have no direct involvement in the area or direct vested interest. This helps provide a neutral forum for debate and confidence in the outcome. Future search should be seen as the beginning of a process for involving the community and not an isolated one-off event.

Main uses

Future search is useful for bringing together stakeholders to share a future vision for a community or an organisation. Differences are set aside so that the conference can home in on agreed principles and aims, inventing future scenarios as a basis for planning actions by using common ground and exposing similarities rather than differences.

Strengths

- the community itself is the driving force for the event
- aims to help people with diverse interests to achieve consensus about their future goals
- an outside (expert) facilitator need not be used
- can be applied to a wide range of issues

Limitations

- may give rise to unrealisable expectations/unattainable targets if the event is not properly managed
- if independent facilitator not used, not all points of view are given a proper hearing

Costs

- hire of venue, equipment and catering
- fees of professional facilitators (if used)
- collection and analysis of feedback
- report preparation and production

It may be possible to offset these costs through local sponsorship.

Where to find out more

Marvin R Weisbord, *Productive Workplaces: organising and managing for dignity, meaning and community*, Jossey-Bass, 1987

Marvin R Weisbord and Sandra Janoff, *Future Search: an action guide to finding common ground in organisations and communities,* Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1995

2.10 Community visioning

Description

Community visioning brings together different stakeholders for visualising a shared future for a community, perhaps many years hence, with a view to arriving at a goal acceptable to all concerned. It is particularly helpful to organisations interested in developing strategic direction and involving/empowering communities in planning processes.

Through guided visualisation and other techniques, future scenarios can be presented in group work and other situations (eg, public hearings). Participants should be given a clear imaginative picture with which to play. They should be drawn from the local area and set goals, take decisions and produce a shared vision which relate to that area. It is not unusual to draw up two or three different scenarios for the same local area. This allows community plans to be prepared for different eventualities. Some preparatory desk research (section 1.5) could also be undertaken (eg, presentation of data on future economic and social trends).

Main uses

The method can be applied to a wide range of issues and situations, but it is particularly useful in promoting community empowerment, democratic renewal and related work. It is also a way of involving the public in the development of area improvement or regeneration strategies and such issues as community safety and Local Agenda 21.

Strengths

- facilitates a future vision for a community that provides an impetus for change
- assists the development of agreed goals and identifiable actions
- visualisations prompt imaginative approaches to problem solving
- gives communities a sense of ownership over approaches to local problems

Limitations

- unless the process is well worked out beforehand and facilitated at the event, visualisation may produce only limited outcomes
- in the scenario setting, some people may perceive only a bleak future

Costs

- preparatory research
- hire of venue, equipment, etc
- professional facilitation
- analysis and report preparation and production

Examples of use

Choices for Bristol is a project in which the people of Bristol were invited to think about and offer ideas and suggestions for the future of Bristol. According to Paul Burton: "Anecdotal evidence suggests a mixed response from within the City Council, although this appears to be changing for the better and there are signs that the health authority and local TEC are willing to use the ideas and visions where they can, in support of their own priorities."

The London Borough of Sutton has used community visioning as part of the Local Agenda 21 strategy. The council found it very valuable in identifying what is meant by a sustainable community, which has led to taking practical steps to help the council achieve the community's goals.

Where to find out more

Centre for Community Visions, New Economics Foundation (NEF), 1st Floor, Vine Court, 112-116 Whitechapel Road, London E1 1JE

Perry Walker, *Creating Community Visions*, Local Government Management Board, 1996

Paul Burton, *Community Visioning: an evaluation of the Choices for Bristol Project*, Policy Press, University of Bristol, in association with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1997

J Fishkin, *Democracy and Deliberation: New Directions for Democratic Reform,* Yale University Press, 1991

2.11 Round tables

Description

As the name suggests, round table discussions bring together 16 to 24 people from communities of interest at odds with each other (eg, commercial and environmentalist), in the presence of a facilitator, to forge common approaches and solutions to local problems. (They were developed in Canada to reflect the Bruntland Commission's analysis that our "existing institutions are one of the most serious obstacles to the transition to sustainable development and their fundamental restructuring are the most significant challenges.")

Main uses

The round table approach is most useful where there is a need to bring together adversarial groups on neutral territory.

Strengths

- help to overcome institutional "divides"
- bring together key stakeholders (in government, business, academic institutions, voluntary sector, etc)
- based on an inter-disciplinary and consensus approach to problem solving
- can be applied at national as well as local levels

Limitations

- biased or unrepresentative outcomes could emerge if not all key stakeholders represented
- a lot of behind the scenes work may need to be done to bring key stakeholders together (prior discussions, briefings, etc)

Costs

- professional facilitator
- purchase/rental of equipment (recorder/microphone, flip charts)
- hire of venue and catering
- expenses of participants
- analysis of data and report preparation

Where to find out more

John Gordon, *Canadian Roundtables and other Mechanisms for Sustainable Development in Canada*, Local Government Management Board, 1994

3. SURVEYS

3.1 What surveys do

Surveys constitute the main approach to the collection and analysis of information from the public. They range in size, scope and character – from surveys among the entire population on a wide range of topics, such as the Census, to ones involving very small samples on specialised topics. They mainly involve the use of questionnaires and interviews, with questions and responses to questions often standardised to ensure consistency in the collection and analysis of the information. They may also involve observations, collection and analysis of documents, and the recording of information in diaries, etc.

Surveys have many uses and it is possible to indicate only a few of these here:

- ascertaining public opinion on policy issues or proposed changes
- monitoring public use/experience of services
- identifying unmet needs for services
- understanding the household and other circumstances of people
- monitoring/forecasting social or economic trends
- estimating/planning for future demand for services

The main strength of surveys over the group work approaches described above is that they generally involve the collection and analysis of information in a very systematic and rigorous way, they usually allow quantitative assessments to be reached and they usually produce findings that are generalisable and comparable (over time and place).

Their main drawback is their cost. They require a lot of time and effort to plan and organise, a lot of staff to administer, and a lot of checks to be carried out (before, during and after the survey). Costs can be minimised by using smaller samples or shorter questionnaires/interviews but at the risk of compromising the reliability or generalisability of the results. Professional survey firms should be able to advise on these other aspects (considered below) before any survey work is commissioned.

Where to find out more

P Hatton, *Survey research for Managers: how to use surveys in management decision-making*, Macmillan, 1990

3.2 Sampling

It is usually possible to select only a proportion of the population you are interested in for the survey and still obtain reliable and representative results. It is seldom necessary to survey the entire population, which, in any case, is likely to be prohibitively expensive. There are a range of approaches and techniques for sampling the population and carrying out statistical tests, on which professional advice should be sought before proceeding with a survey. The type of sample will affect what analyses can be carried out and what statistical inferences can be drawn from the results. Typical approaches might include:

- selecting at random, say one in 20 parents of children in the first year of primary school in the council's area for a survey of children's pre-school experiences (random sampling simply means each and every person in the population, here defined as parents of primary one pupils, having an equal chance of being selected)

- sampling at random, say, 1,000 adults living in a housing estate for a survey of repair services (this is really the same as the approach above, except that a limit is placed on sample size for budgetary and other reasons)

- "stratifying" random samples of the population by, say, population density of peoples' area of residence for a survey of transport habits (this helps to ensure that the numbers in different population sub-groups are large enough for statistical analysis; "weightings" are then applied to the figures in the actual analysis by way of "correcting" for the known representation of different sub-groups in the population)

- selecting by quota one in every five users of recreational facilities over a number of sample weeks, days and times until the requisite numbers of people in different age, gender, economic or other groups had been interviewed

Even when the sample has been selected, it is important to ensure that provision is made for *maximising* the number of people actually responding to the survey, especially if self-completion postal questionnaires are used and *minimising* sources of bias in the response (or achieved) sample. This may include such provisions as:

- setting a target (eg 67 per cent) below which the response sample should not fall. Except in major surveys such as the Census of Population, it is exceptional to achieve a response sample of more than 75 per cent when factors such as absence of respondents, illness, refusals, etc are likely to limit the numbers actually taking part. For postal surveys, expect a much lower response rate (a response rate of 40 per cent or less is not unusual)

- proper training and briefing of interviewers (where used). As many surveys take place in peoples' homes, every effort has to be made to ensure that interviewers attract the trust and respect of interviewees. Interviewers should be expected to adhere to professional standards of conduct, questioning, recording or coding of answers, etc. They may also require detailed and sensitive guidance about, say, which household members to interview and what information about other household members can be collected “by proxy”

- issuing written information about the survey. This might take the form of a letter from the survey firm or sponsor, explaining to potential respondents why the survey is being carried out, reassuring them about the confidentiality of the information collected and the main uses to which it will be put, and giving the name of a contact person for further information, etc. Respondents might be further encouraged to take part if an undertaking is given to supply them with summarised results of the survey (or, at the very least from whom, where and when they can get published summaries)

- building in various other safeguards or checks, before, during and after the survey to eliminate/minimise possible interviewer or respondent bias, for example, in the selection of interviewees, presentation of questions, questionnaire completion, recording of answers, etc. It is well known, for example, that the personal position or circumstances of respondents affect readiness to take part in surveys or answer questions fully – with the worry that the concerns of the most needy groups may go under-reported or be under-estimated without due safeguards and checks.

You should expect all reputable research firms and organisations to work to the above standards as a matter of course. Most are also professionally bound by the Code of Practice of the Market Research Society (see also *Involving the Public: Principles of Good Practice* at the end of this Guide).

3.3 Questionnaires

The questionnaire is the key instrument for the collection of information in social surveys. Questionnaires may be administered by professional interviewers or completed by the respondents themselves – see next two sections for further discussion. Whether completed by interviewers or respondents, questionnaires require great care in preparation and may undergo several drafts and some piloting to ensure that instructions, questions and answer options are clear and unambiguous.

Key steps in questionnaire construction include:

- deciding what *topics to cover*. Judgements will have to be reached about the number of topics which can reasonably be covered in the time available (interview surveys) or the length of questionnaire that can reasonably be completed by respondents writing their answers down.

- working out for each topic a suitable *form and wording of questions*. Considerable skill is required in making sure that questions are relevant and well focused, readily understandable to even the most survey-shy respondent, and capable of eliciting a useable answer. Pitfalls to avoid include using questions with built-in value judgements, obscure, ambiguous or unfamiliar terminology, complicated sentences, etc. It may make sense to use questions which harmonise with those used successfully in other surveys, with which results can be then be compared (survey firms can usually draw on their own "question banks")

- depending on the aims of the research, attention also has to be given to the *types of questions* which should be asked, ranging from the basic "factual" (eg, place of birth, economic status) to ones eliciting attitudes, opinions, feelings, experiences, aspirations, expectations, etc. Key considerations include the extent to which factual questions can be answered with accuracy, with minimal "recall error", in sufficient detail, consistently, or with limited or no prior knowledge. With questions calling for subjective responses, such as "satisfaction with service X", it may be necessary to have a number of *prompts, probes* or *supplementary questions* (eg, "reasons for dissatisfaction") to get behind respondents' answers

- devising suitable structures for the *recording of answers*. Answers can be recorded using:

  - *pre-determined response categories* (eg, in full-time work, part time work, etc)
  - *rankings* (eg, list features in rank order, or rank from 1 to 10 in order of importance)
  - *scores* (eg, satisfaction scores of 1 to 10)
  - *multiple choice answers* (eg, select from list five likes and five dislikes)
  - *open ended answers* (here, the respondent volunteers own answer, which may be as long or short as respondent wishes)

Each approach has its strengths and limitations. For example, pre-determined categories are more likely to yield greater consistency and comparability of answers, but may miss out on important details. Rankings, scores and multiple-choice answers may provide a useful overall measure of value attached to something, but unless very well structured may conceal underlying reasons or dimensions affecting answers. Open-ended answers may be rich in detail but be less straightforward to code or interpret.

Organisation of the questionnaire. Decisions will have to be reached about the order in which questions are presented – for example, placing straightforward factual questions first, and leaving more complex or sensitive questions towards the end. If the questionnaire is being filled in by respondents, very careful attention will have to be paid to its appearance, layout and readability, with clear instructions about working through the questionnaire. Even when interviewers are used, the questionnaire still needs to cohere well if it is to be administered with ease. Other crucial aspects include:

- building into the questionnaire appropriate “filters” for questions which apply to certain respondents only (eg, respondents answering “yes” to previous question)
- use of probes or prompts to elicit more information
- supporting “show card”, “go to” and other instructions to interviewers
- pre-coding of response categories
- tape recording of responses (useful for in-depth interview surveys)
- software for input of coded responses from laptop in situ to central computer

Where to find out more.

A N Oppenheim, *Questionnaire Design, Interviewing and Attitude Measurement*, Pinter Publishers, 1993

3.4 Self-completion postal/questionnaires

Description

As their name implies, self-completion questionnaires involve respondents writing down their own answers to questionnaires, usually delivered to them by post but also quite often handed out to them at events, in public places, or possibly as part of a group work activity. They could also form a preliminary or sequel to an interview survey. They are frequently used by a wide range of organisations for obtaining user feedback about products and services. This section is mainly concerned with their use in postal surveys. Although usually a much less expensive alternative to interview surveys, postal surveys seldom attract a very high response rate – response rates of 30 per cent or less are not unusual. Great care also has to be taken in the layout and wording of questions and instructions to ensure questionnaires are properly understood and filled in.

Main uses

Largely as for interview surveys (see section 3.5). As suggested under *Strengths* below, there may be circumstances in which they are a preferable alternative to interview surveys.

S*trengths*

- a much less expensive alternative to employing interviewers (although the postal cost of poor or non-responses may still be considerable)
- the respondent has more time to think about answers
- people sometimes prefer to answer self-completion questions rather than be interviewed
- interviewer bias obviated (but still subject to other forms of respondent bias)
- greatly facilitates reaching respondents who live at geographically dispersed or remote addresses

Limitations

- low response rate, with those not replying likely to have significantly different views from those who do
- scope and length of questionnaire may be limited by perceived ability or readiness of respondents to fill it in
- the ‘correct’ person may not fill in the questionnaire
- no control over which questions are answered or answered properly
- questions may be misread or misinterpreted, if there is no-one on hand to explain or clarify questions
- replies likely to lack spontaneity
- questionnaire may be unanswerable or present difficulties for people with disabilities or impairments, with limited or no English or other difficulties in completing written documents

A number of things can be done to keep response rates as high as possible:

- use a reliable and up-to-date name and address list
- explain the purpose of survey in a clearly and carefully worded covering letter, reassuring respondents about the confidentiality of the information they give and that the information will not be used for any purpose other than the research. If necessary, explain to respondents how they have come to be selected for the survey
- indicate a date by which a reply would be greatly appreciated
- include a *Freepost* address/reply-paid envelope
- give the number of a helpline for advice or assistance in filling in the questionnaire
- send out a reminder letter within two or three weeks of the initial questionnaire
- consider offering prizes or other incentives for completed returns

Costs

As indicated, postal questionnaire surveys are much less expensive than interview surveys, but depending on the size of the sample, postal, stationery and data processing costs could still be considerable.

Financial costs to consider include:

- printing/publishing including photocopying, reminder letter, reply-paid envelope
- postage/packaging
- extra expenses associated with a pilot survey
- data processing and analysis
- report write-up and dissemination
- questionnaire analysis
- prizes/incentives

Human resource costs relate primarily to number of people required and estimated employees time centring on:

- planning time: questionnaire preparation and administration
- data input
- data interpretation/analysis/presentation.

Where to find out more

A N Oppenheim, *Questionnaire Design, Interviewing and Attitude Measurement,* Pinter Publishers, 1993

3.5 Interviews: household surveys

Description

Interviews constitute one of the main methods of collecting information in social surveys. Interviews can take place in peoples' homes, in the street, and at other locations. They may last from between a few minutes to a couple of hours or more. They may be based on fixed or variable sets of questions and involve the recording of pre-classified or open-ended answers (or combinations of these). This section is mainly concerned with the type of household interview carried out in large-scale surveys. Section 3.6 below considers interviews usually carried out "in-depth" among much smaller numbers of respondents.

For household surveys, the interviewer, working under the detailed instructions of the research organisation, will usually be expected to pay one or more visits to households at the sampling point selected for them. They may well need use of a car and possibly a telephone/mobile phone and portable computer (for keying in pre-coded answers), and should be able to read street and road maps. Interviewers will also need to be well trained and briefed so as to be able to engage the attention, interest, trust and report of the respondent more or less instantly. The interviewer should also be presentable, tactful, patient, resourceful and reliable. They should be sensitised to any difficulties or circumstances of respondents that affect participation in the survey and the answering of questions.

Main uses

- obtaining feedback from the users/non-users of services: take-up, experiences, opinions, expectations, preferences, etc
- assessing public opinion on policy and other issues at national, regional, local levels, etc
- collecting factual and other data required to inform planning processes, funding bids, management decisions, etc
- assisting the diagnosis or understanding of problems, difficulties or concerns affecting particular sectors of the population

Strengths

- non-response minimised (provided process well conducted)
- additional questions and follow-up questions can be asked
- questions can be asked of people not able to fill in questionnaires, eg very old/very young/infirm/less well-educated
- control over order of questions
- questions can be clarified/amplified if necessary

Limitations

- interviewer bias (personality/personal characteristics of the interviewer may affect response rates, interaction with respondents, quality of responses, accuracy or reliability in the recording of information, etc)
- very costly for large or widely dispersed samples
- limited length of interviewing time may mean that some questions glossed over

These limitations can be reduced by making sure that interviewers are well trained and briefed, recruiting interviewers living locally, and proper piloting.

Costs

- printing and publishing costs
- interviewer training and briefing sessions
- professional advice
- interviewer fees and expenses
- data processing, checking and analysis
- report writing

Where to find out more

A N Oppenheim, *Questionnaire Design, Interviewing and Attitude Measurement*, Pinter Publishers, 1993

B Sommer and R Sommer, *A Practical Guide to Behavioural Research*, Oxford University Press, 1991

3.6 In-depth interviews

Description

In-depth interviews use largely open-ended questions to record experiences or explore issues or problems in some depth and at some length with interviewees. As the interview may cover sensitive issues, considerable skill is required on the part of the interviewer in building up trust and confidence and encouraging communicativeness and openness by the interviewee. Although working from a schedule of questions, the interviewer may be given considerable discretion to formulate during the interview various supplementary questions, prompts or probes, or indeed engage in some form of dialogue with the interviewee to elicit responses to various issues, etc.

Because of the time needed to carry out the interview, which could last an hour or more, perhaps over one or more sessions, costs and other considerations will usually greatly limit the number of people who can be interviewed, compared with the types of survey described in 3.5 above. Care and sensitivity will also be needed in selecting people for interview (eg with regard to their personal circumstances, commitments, etc).

Main uses

This method is particularly appropriate for exploring complicated or sensitive issues which may be difficult to capture through short interviews using standardised questionnaires and response categories. It can be used as a preliminary or follow up to household and other surveys (3.5 above) or in tandem with various other methods (eg focus groups) described in this Guide.

Strengths

- allow detailed exploration of respondents views and experiences
- allow the giving of information on very personal and private thoughts which normally would be less readily captured in standardised questionnaires

Limitations

- very time consuming to collect and analyse and therefore costly
- only a small number of respondents likely to be involved (results may therefore not be representative)
- because of its open-endedness, the information will be less straightforward to analyse

Costs

Although in-depth interviews may involve much smaller numbers of respondents compared with household and other surveys, their costs should not be under-estimated. The costs of engaging interviewers with the appropriate skills for lengthy and possibly complex interviews are still likely to be considerable. The analysis of answers is also likely to be less straightforward, with cost implications.

Examples of use

Borders Health Board interviewed 41 elderly patients who were discharged from hospital, probing for information on the way the health service had worked for them and how things could be improved. This was used as the basis for a postal survey, carried out among a larger number of users, to gather quantitative data related to the interview work.

Where to find out more

A N Oppenheim, *Questionnaire Design, Interviewing and Attitude Measurement*, Pinter Publishers, 1993

3.7 *Telephone interviews*

Description

Skilled interviewers take respondents through a series of pre-determined questions on the telephone and record the answers on a record-sheet. Both structured (all questions in order and pre-set) or semi-structured (some questions are open) approaches can be used. Using appropriate computer software (eg, PinPoint), responses can be keyed into the computer and results processed more quickly. The Market Research Society's Code of Conduct states that "no calls in person, or by telephone, shall be made to a domestic household before 9.00am weekdays, 10.00am Sundays, or after 9.00pm any day, unless by appointment".

Main uses

Mainly as for postal and interview surveys, but this method is particularly useful if the information is needed within a short timescale

Strengths

Mainly as for face to face interviews, but also –

- convenient to administer; less advanced planning required
- collection of information within a shorter timescale
- lower refusal rate than postal surveys
- less expensive and time consuming than household surveys
- respondents may volunteer information they may not give in a face-to-face interview or by postal questionnaire (but the reverse may also apply)
- particularly suited to computer-assisted interviewing

Limitations

- biased against respondents without a telephone or who have difficulties using the phone, including some respondents with hearing or other difficulties
- higher refusal rate than face-to-face interview surveys
- less scope for establishing rapport with respondent than in a face-to-face interview
- costly if a large number of interviewers have to be engaged or interviews are lengthy

. Some of these limitations can be minimised if respondents are informed about the survey in advance, respondents are given reassurances about the use made of their replies, and interviewers are well trained and briefed about conducting interviews by telephone.

Costs

- interviewer(s) fees and expenses, particularly if using own telephone
- interviewer training and briefing
- telephone calls

- input and processing of information

Examples of use

Grampian Health Board used a telephone survey to establish the general health needs in small rural communities. A letter went out beforehand explaining the questions and people were told they could opt-out of the survey if they wished. The survey helped the Health Board to quantify the real extent of local concern and to assess local priorities.

Where to find out more

Quality Issues in Telephone Research, Research Resources Ltd (tel: 0171-656-5555)

3.8 Observation: mystery shopping

Description

Trained evaluators pose as customers/users of services and observe and report on such things as quality, promptness, reliability and friendliness of the service (it may be regarded as a special case of participant observation – see section 3.9 below). Observations are recorded afterwards on score sheets eg, time to answer enquiries, warmth of welcome, attentiveness and product or service knowledge. Although this method has been commonly used in the retail and personal finance sectors, it is being extended to other service industries and local government. It is a particularly useful tool for organisations culturally committed to improving their performance and the way they work. Mystery shopping is not confined to personal visits to organisations. It can also be applied to telephone and Internet research.

Mystery shopping practitioners are either specialists in the field or are divisions of wider-based research companies. The ‘shoppers’ should have been tested for such qualities as retentive memory and good visual and aural observation. They should not be obtrusive nor overly aggressive, nor should they be clipboard-carrying researchers. Mystery shoppers should match as closely as possible the typical customer.

Concerns over the ethics of mystery shopping have been resolved by the Market Research Society, which has issued a best practice guide. One of the most important points in the guidelines is that all employees should be advised in advance that their employer is planning to undertake mystery shopping, although not told when. They should be told the objectives of the programme and the organisation’s commitment. They should also be informed whether any employees will be identified, the elements to be evaluated, the reporting format and its implications, and the quality control measures to be taken in the project.

Main uses

- comparing what customers/service users want with what they get; identifying reasons for any gaps
- measuring and improving the effectiveness of employee training, motivation and communication
- detecting symptoms of poor or ineffective management
- monitoring new initiatives, policies, promotions, etc
- checking consistency of standards across the organisation, eg, courtesy, speed of response, whether claims/complaints being handled properly

Strengths

- relatively inexpensive compared with many other forms of market research. Although total cost will obviously depend on the number of shoppers engaged and the time spent on the activity, mystery shopping is likely to offer cost benefits to any organisation committed to a culture of self-improvement
- immediacy: reporting on exactly what happens, with minimal recall error (compared with interview and other surveys)

- can be applied in a variety of service situations: face-to-face, by telephone, by mail, on the Internet, etc
- may readily point to practical solutions to problems, ways of rectifying recurrent mistakes

Limitations

- possible trade union/employee resistance or suspicion where the appropriate organisational culture does not already exist – perhaps seen as a back-door management method of spying on employees!
- may have to be repeated many times, in a wide cross section of situations, to ensure representativeness of results
- potential "experimental" effect if employees are told mystery shopping is to take place, albeit at some unspecified time – perhaps resulting in upward shift in performance standards!

It may be possible to minimise these limitations by explaining to employees the aims and purposes of mystery shopping in full and dealing with any feelings of threat, insecurity or suspicion to which this may give rise.

Costs

- recruitment, payment, expenses, training and briefing of mystery shoppers
- demands on time of employees dealing with the mystery shopper
- processing and analysis of the results

Examples of use

Solihull Council used mystery shopping to market research their reception services. They looked at four issues: (1) to see how easy the signage was to direct people to the right services; (2) to assess 'first impressions' of reception areas in relation to their visual image; (3) to monitor quality of employees interaction with customers; and (4) to assess whether services (eg, repairs carried out, information sent to customer) were delivered, as promised.

3.9 *Participant observation*

Description

This research technique may be carried out through trained observers, cameras, or by closed circuit television. Classic sociological studies have used this technique to observe such things as classroom, gang and shop floor behaviour. In the context of this Guide, participant observation can be used to monitor services, both in the backstage areas and at the front line. As with mystery shopping, the Market Research Society’s Code of Practice requires participant observation to be carried out with the willing consent of the subjects of observation.

Main uses

As with Mystery Shopping, but also –

- monitoring services by “shadowing”, possibly over a sustained period, those involved in the delivery or receipt of services, whether internally within the organisation or outside it; this could include observation of management and planning processes as well as actual service delivery operations and situations
- monitoring services by trained observers actually taking on the role of service providers or users (participant observation in its classic sense)
- monitoring the effects of policy, organisational and other changes by observing “before and after” situations

Strengths

- the actions/experiences of service providers and users can be recorded on the basis of actual observation and not simply their recollection of them
- collection of information (about actions, behaviour, processes, etc) which cannot readily be captured by questionnaires

Limitations

As for Mystery Shopping but also –

- inter-observer bias (in what is observed, interpreted, recorded)
- what is observed may not correspond with what is perceived or experienced by those observed – observer and observed may each have differing definitions of the situation
- possible “experimental” effect as described under Mystery Shopping
- if observations and recordings are not very well structured, the data may be difficult to collate, process and analyse

It may be possible to minimise these effects by providing detailed observation guidelines and schedules to observers about what, how and when to observe and record, together with other background training and briefing. If non-professional “volunteers” (from the public, employees, etc) are used, training in basic observation techniques and recording will be essential, combined with careful selection/screening for volunteers for empathy, tactfulness, attentiveness, etc.

Costs

- recruitment, payment, expenses, training and briefing of observers
- collation, processing and analysis of data

Examples of use

Observation/shadowing was used to identify potential problems with signage and ease of access into Stirling Royal Infirmary. The local health council selected four people (some with special needs) to participate. They found that overgrown bushes obscured a sign and appointment times did not coincide with bus times.

4. PANELS AND POLLS

4.1 Standing citizens' panels

Description

A standing citizens panel comprises 100-200 citizens who meet on a regular basis, say once a month, to act as a sounding board for issues of concern or importance. The panel is meant to be representative of the electorate and is weighted for gender, age, ethnic group and other relevant background factors. The membership changes over time, say, by 10 per cent after every meeting. Panels can often be established through the electoral register or through advertisement in the local media.

Strengths

- useful as a sounding board for new ideas or plans
- useful way of establishing a two-way dialogue with customers/citizens
- statistically representative

Limitations

The results may not be reliable if the representative nature of the standing citizens' panel is not maintained.

Costs

- hire of venue
- collection and analysis of information
- monthly travel expenses for panel members
- professional fees of organisers (if applicable)

4.2 Research citizens' panels

Description

Research citizens' panels, unlike standing citizens' panels, need not meet so regularly and they work with survey methods (questionnaires, interviews, etc) to test public opinion on various issues. It should be made clear from the outset what the purposes of the survey are and how results will be used. As with standing citizens panels (section 4.1 above), the panel should be representative of the population.

If the panel meets more than once, it must be well maintained. People will always be dropping out, or leaving the area, so panels can get smaller and less representative. To make up for this, regular replacement of drop-outs will be needed, perhaps supplemented by face-to-face interviews to maintain representativeness. In commercial market research, incentives are often given to encourage participation, for example, a prize draw or a small gift for everyone.

Main uses

- monitoring public opinion on key issues
- comparisons between different population/client groups
- basis for focus and other group work

Strengths

- panel members representative of the population
- time and money saved by not having to draw a fresh sample for subsequent surveys
- continuity of membership more likely to foster public awareness/interest in the issues at hand

Limitations

- the database of names, addresses and other particulars requires constant updating
- by using survey methods the panel may not engage people actively in the issues at hand

Costs

There are considerable costs and work involved in running and maintaining the panels. Arun District Council maintains that operating their research citizens' panel costs about £5,000 a year. All research is done through telephone surveys and is considered to be very cost effective. If the research work is shared with local organisations/partners, the costs can be shared too.

Examples of use

Bradford Metropolitan Borough Council, together with Bradford Health and the Training & Enterprise Council, set up a panel of 2500 people to enable them "to identify how individual views, knowledge or behaviour are changing over time" and why people's views were or were not changing. The council produces an information pack which can be obtained from: Research Section, Strategic Management Unit, City Hall, Bradford, West Yorkshire BD1 1HY.

Where to find out more

Citizens' Panels: a new approach to community consultation, Local Government Information Unit, 1997

4.3 Citizens' juries

Description

A representative, but very small, sample of the population meet like a court jury to deliberate a particular issue over a number of days. The jurors hear evidence from expert and other witnesses and are able to challenge and question them. They then deliberate, discuss and debate amongst themselves, before putting forward recommendations and making their conclusions public. The jury usually comprises around 16 to 20 local residents.

Although there is no judge, there is a trained moderator whose responsibility is to facilitate the discussion and guide the timing of the process. Witnesses are generally selected to give an overview of the issue being discussed and present a range of views. Written evidence can also be submitted.

Main uses

Citizens' juries are used for consideration of policy issues, particularly in areas where the issues are known to be difficult/controversial. They work best when a council has already made considerable progress in consulting and involving the public. Their decisions are not binding.

Topics that have been explored using this approach include - alleviation of drug problems, local economic regeneration, alternatives for city centre development, community safety, provision of hospice facilities, problems with at-risk children and self-sufficiency in waste management facilities.

Strengths

- promote a culture of citizenship and public participation
- provide a range of informed views on a particular issue
- can help identify actual solutions to local problems
- reflect genuine commitment to community consultation

Limitations

- quite expensive and time consuming to set up
- rely on the ability of jurors to make critical and responsible use of the information provided
- jurors do not necessarily reach a unanimous view
- possible media distortion of jury proceedings
- possibility of biased recommendations if all-round evidence not presented

Costs

- selection, payment (in lieu of loss of earnings) and expenses of jurors
- fees and expenses of expert witnesses
- hire of venue and organising hearings

- facilitating, recording and transcribing proceedings
- analysis and report preparation
- associated publicity work

Citizen’s juries can cost between £15,000 to £25,000 or more to set up.

Examples of use

South Lanarkshire Council held a citizens’ jury in March 1997, in partnership with other public organisations and the citizens of Hillhouse. The jury was asked to address the subject of community safety with a particular focus on vandalism and graffiti. Three question were asked: (1) what is the cost of vandalism and graffiti, in terms of economic, social, environmental and emotional points of view? (2) who is responsible for the vandalism/graffiti? and (3) what can be done? (Contact: Kim Grant (tel: 01698-453826)

The creation of Fife Council held a citizens' jury to examine employment opportunities in Levenmouth. The question which the jury was asked to address was: "What can the public agencies and the local communities do to create more job opportunities for people in Levenmouth?" (Contact: Dawn Corbett, tel: 01592-413591)

Where to find out more

Anna Coote and Jo Lenaghan, *Citizens' Juries: theory into practice*, Institute for Public Policy Research, 1997

Citizens' Juries, COSLA, 1997 (includes details of Fife and South Lanarkshire council initiatives)

Declan Hall and John Stewart, *Citizens' Juries in Local Government: report for the LGMB on the pilot projects*, Local Government Management Board, 1996

“Citizens’ Juries,” in *LARIA News*, January 1997, Local Authorities Research and Intelligence Association

Lewisham Council has produced an information pack which gives details about setting up and running a citizens' jury, samples of the materials used and a video about the citizens' jury. (Contact: tel: 0181-695-6000 x 3113/3114)

4.4 Deliberative opinion polls

Main uses

Deliberative opinion polls allow the public to arrive at a modified view/opinion, after hearing the views of others. In effect, they are opinion polls undertaken after a public hearing, so that voters are more likely to make an informed choice. They involve the use of evidence, asking questions. having discussions and filling in questionnaires. The number of participants can range from 100 to 300 people selected at random. Depending on the issue being discussed, the event may take place over a single day/evening or over a series of days/evenings.

Participants in a typical deliberative opinion poll fill in a questionnaire on the issue at hand. They then listen to briefings and talks by a number of people putting forward a variety of opinions and arguments and are allowed to question the speakers. They are split into groups to debate, ponder and discuss the issue at hand in detail, taking into consideration the arguments put forward. Following this, the respondents complete the same questionnaire again to see if, or how, opinions have changed. This latter can be done a week or month later.

Main uses

- informing/influencing in an even-handed way public opinion about some issue
- comparing opinions over time

Strengths

- promote informed citizenship
- show how opinions can be developed, swayed or influenced by putting forward different arguments and opinions (but this could be a disadvantage as well)
- outcome is based on facts rather than perceptions

Limitations

- the output will be inconclusive if the briefings and talks are not well prepared and insufficient information is given to the participants

Costs

- recruitment of participants
- preparation of questionnaires and information materials
- speakers' fees and expenses
- participants' expenses (optional payment of participation fee)
- room hire and catering
- use of professional facilitators
- collection and analysis of data
- report preparation

Examples of use

This technique has not been used in Britain very much, but was used by Channel 4 TV and *The Independent* newspaper on issues of law and order. As far as it is known, no council in Britain has used the method.

Where to find out more

James Fishkin, *Democracy and Deliberation*, Yale University Press, 1991

J Abelson, J Lomas, J Eyles, S Birch and G Veenstra, *Does the Community Want Devolved Authority? Results from deliberative polling in Ontario*, Canadian Medical Association Journal, Vol 153, No 4, pp 403-412, 1995

4.5 Consensus conferencing

Description

A panel of about 10-20 lay people put questions about a topic of scientific, political or social interest to experts, listen to the experts' answers, and then reach a consensus about this subject before finally reporting on their conclusions at a press conference. The members of the panel are selected from open applications in response to local advertisements (and are not therefore necessarily representative of the population).

At nine weeks and four weeks before the conference, the panel members attend two preparatory weekends to: familiarise themselves with the topics of interest; identify the issues they want to examine; select the experts they want to question (working from or adding to a list); and agree on the questions they wish to put to the experts, who are then invited to submit written answers.

The consensus conference itself lasts three or four days. It is crucial that the conference is run by a professional facilitator. For the first two days, the panel members and the experts go over the written responses of the experts. Any outstanding questions are asked and answers are given during these two days.

The rest of the consensus conference is dedicated to writing the report, with the help of administrative and secretarial staff. The report summarises the evidence and sets out the panel members' assessments. The report represents the consensus reached. Any issues not agreed by the panel are not included in the report. The report is then presented to a press conference on the final day.

Main uses

This method, which has been developed in the scientific community, is particularly useful for public consideration of issues of ethical, scientific, technological or environmental concern involving the use of a lot of detailed evidence. It has been used for considering issues such as air pollution, food irradiation and electronic ID cards.

Strengths

- enhancement of public understanding of complex or controversial issues
- because of the press conference at the end, helps to give issues a high public profile
- importance attached to expert evidence

Limitations

- requires a lot of preparatory work
- very costly and time consuming to set up
- the panel of lay people is not necessarily representative of the local population
- relies on ability of lay people to sift through and evaluate expert (and possibly quite complex) evidence

Costs

- recruitment, payment (in lieu of loss of earnings) and expenses of panel members
- experts' fees and expenses
- payment of professional facilitator
- hire of venue and catering
- administrative and clerical support
- analysis and report preparation
- publicity

As a consensus conference can cost an estimated £25,000-£50,000, the conference would have to confer considerable benefits to be worthwhile.

Examples of use

The technique, which was developed in Denmark, has been applied by the Science Museum in London in relation to plant biotechnology but has not so far been used extensively elsewhere.

Where to find out more

Simon Joss and John Durant, *Consensus Conferences,* Science Museum, London (tel: 0171-938-8000)

4.6 User panels/groups

Description

User panels are a helpful way of keeping providers of services in regular contact with users of their services, who are thereby encouraged to become involved in the development of the service. The panel may consist of any number of people, depending on the service in question. Panels of 50 to over 750 people are not unusual. After receiving relevant information materials, groups of 10 to 30 people drawn from the panel meet through forums, focus groups or other methods to consider the topic at hand. They then complete a questionnaire and replies are fed into the service's decision-making process. Panels can be constituted as to be representative of specific user groups, eg, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, young people, etc.

Main uses

- feedback from users of their experiences and expectations of services
- input into service planning and review processes
- promoting public participation and better communication/understanding between service providers and users

Strengths

- a good way to establish a two-way dialogue between service providers and users
- a sounding board for new approaches or proposals relating to services
- early identification of emerging problems, difficulties and concerns

Limitations

- panel membership not necessarily representative of the population
- may not take into proper account relevant needs of *non-users* of services
- possibility of panel members becoming less critical by being made to feel over time they are part of the organisation
- service providers assuming that this is the only method for involving users

Costs

- recruitment of panel members
- maintaining and updating database of panel members
- questionnaire preparation and administration
- data analysis
- report preparation
- facilitation

Examples of use

In Reading a user panel was established to seek views on areas such as council tax and benefits, the council newspaper, electoral registration and refuse collection. In Lewisham all leisure facilities have user panels that meet on a regular basis. Argyll and Clyde Health Board set up a panel of 750 volunteers to function as a public sounding board. Dumfries and Galloway Health Council set up a panel of 120 people to gain an insight to public opinion on selected key health issues.

Where to find out more

Consulting Consumers: a guide to good practice for the NHS in Scotland, National Health Service in Scotland and Scottish Consumer Council, 1993

Consulting and Involving the Public: good practice in councils, Local Government Information Unit, 1995

4.7 Referenda

Description

Referenda are an important means of ascertaining public opinion on some major issue or concern of great public interest. A well-conducted referendum should also be preceded by public debates and the provision of information on the issues concerned, possibly over a period of several weeks or months. It is essential that the wording of the referendum question is neutral, unambiguous and free from bias.

Main uses

- promoting informed citizenship, public debate and participation
- allowing key decisions to be reached on major public issues

Strengths

- useful way of gauging public opinion on a controversial issue that is outside party politics
- may be conducted by post so people need not go to a polling station

Limitations

- can only be used for yes/no issues
- those taking part may not be representative of the population if turnout is low
- difficulties of interpreting votes, including "don't knows", if turnout is low
- not a substitute for representative democracy

Costs

- publicity and related materials
- postal administration (if postal ballot forms used)
- use and staffing of polling stations (if ballot box used)
- collation and analysis of votes

Examples of use

The former Strathclyde Regional Council conducted a postal referendum on Government proposals to reorganise the water and sewerage service. It attracted a turn-out of 71.5%; of those who voted, 97.2% were against the government's proposal.

A referendum was used by Ross & Cromarty District Council, in 1991, over the issue of opening new leisure centres in Ullapool and Gairloch, on a Sunday. Turnout was 68.8% and 57% respectively. In 1995 Stewartry District Council held a referendum over the use of the common good fund to contribute towards the cost of a local swimming pool. Turnout was 84%.

Western Isles Council held two referenda by post on a major quarry development proposal in the Isle of Harris. The first referendum showed support for the proposal. A second one was held in response to public demand because, as the public inquiry proceeded, there was much greater awareness of the issue. Turnout was 82.7%.

Where to find out more

Stanley Alderson, *Yea or Nay? Referenda in the United Kingdom*, Cassell, 1975

4.8 *Tele/electronic democracy*

Description

Advantage can be taken of developments in new technology, such as electronic networking, to sound out or test public opinion on various issues and make public information more readily available. Communication can be enhanced through the strategic location of interactive computer terminals in shopping and leisure centres, centres, libraries, etc. The growth of the internet, cable and satellite communications opens up even further possibilities. This form of participation may be particularly appealing to people who are already used to using new technology but have not had much involvement in democratic practice. It also has potential among people living a long distance away from centres of population, who are housebound or who have other difficulties participating in standard democratic processes.

Main uses

- informing/consulting people about policies, proposals, services, etc (eg through websites)
- allowing people to record their views on particular issues (eg through freephone messages, video booths, etc in strategic locations)
- providing interactive links with the council, councillors, information officers, etc (eg through computer/e-mail terminals)
- facilitating voting at election times, in referendums, etc

Strengths

- a way of engaging people with access to new technology but put off by other approaches to public involvement (meetings, surveys, etc)
- potential among people (eg housebound, living far way) who cannot attend meetings
- information can be very rapidly transmitted and readily updated (compared with printed media)
- instant feedback through interactive technology
- appealing to people already familiar with new technology

Limitations

- may be off-putting to people unfamiliar with/ slow to adapt to new technology
- accessible to only limited sections of the population (eg households with home computer, people with access to public terminals, etc)

Costs

- Development work (eg systems design)
- Information preparation and input
- Purchase of hardware and software
- Management and maintenance work

- Analysis of feedback/interactive information
- Report preparation

Examples of use

Amsterdam's Digital City was set up with a grant of £30,000 from Amsterdam City Council, with an additional subsidy from the Dutch government, to provide access to the city council, the Dutch parliament and universities via a modem and telephone lines through free terminals which are located in libraries, hospitals and museums.

Where to find out more

Martin Bartle, "Plug-in Politics" in *Demos Quarterly*, 4, 1994

Janie Percy-Smith, *Digital Democracy: information and communication technologies in local politics*, Commission for Local Democracy, 1995

5. PUBLIC MEETINGS

5.1 Public meetings in general

Description

Public meeting is a generic term for any gathering of people brought together by an issue of common interest or concern, and in this Guide it is seen as a possible preliminary to or outcome of the various other approaches to involving the public described elsewhere – on their own, they are often a poor approach to consultation. John Stewart (1995) has argued that councils should consider developing public meetings to turn protest towards discussion so that all stakeholders can understand the issues, see other points of views and collectively be involved in the outcome.

Public meetings are likely to engage people more and lead to better outcomes if they include provision for group work, preferably with the support of a skilled facilitator, and possibly some of the other approaches described in this Guide (eg, follow-up surveys, referenda). Plenary sessions, often involving a panel of speakers, can be used to set out the issues for consideration in group discussion and provide opportunity for reporting back on these discussions.

Thought should be given to the layout of the meeting room. Arranging chairs in theatre style and having a speakers table or platform at one end can often inhibit participation. It is usually better to arrange people in a circle, around a table (or tables) or in a semi-circle so as to reduce the social distance between participants.

Advance publicity (eg, in the local press or local radio and through public notices or leaflets) is critical to attracting a good attendance, as is a carefully thought-through programme and line-up of speakers (who should reflect a good balance or presentation of viewpoints or interests). It is also important to make sure beforehand that the meeting does not clash with other public events. The success of the meeting will also depend on it being well-chaired, preferably someone everyone concerned can relate to and who is seen as taking a neutral/even handed public stance on the issues involved. Some follow-up publicity or published report may also be desirable.

Main uses

- to raise public awareness or understanding of some important issue
- to provide the public with an opportunity to debate issues with key policy or decision makers
- to allow the public to raise concerns of their own, make their preferences known, or work out possible solutions to problems
- possible preliminary to or outcome of other approaches and methods for involving the public

Strengths

- often a good rough and ready way of gauging community concern about an issue
- potential capacity to bring diverse sections of the community together, possibly at short notice
- participative techniques can be built into proceedings
- potential media interest

Limitations

- poor attendance or domination of proceedings by unrepresentative sections of the community
- possible lack of clear focus or outcome if not properly planned for or conducted
- risk of meeting becoming polarised or collapsing altogether as a result of failure to reach common understanding or agreement on key issues

These limitations can be minimised or avoided altogether through well-thought through preparation, planning and publicity, appropriate choice of chair and speakers, and use of skilled facilitators. Selecting a convenient and comfortable venue and careful timing of the meeting are a great help too.

Costs

- publicity and information materials
- hall hire and catering
- speakers' expenses and fees
- facilitation (optional)
- report preparation and production (optional)

Where to find out more

James Creighton, "Designing and Conducting Public Meetings", in *Resolving Conflict*, by Margaret Herman (ed.), International City Management Association, 1994

5.2 *Public Scrutiny*

Description

Public scrutiny is a way of involving the public in performance reviews of services, often by being represented on or giving evidence to performance review panels, meetings, etc. As well as commenting on the performance of services, the public can also be involved in the development of performance indicators and related monitoring or research work. Public scrutiny could also extend to planning, environmental and other issues. Area or neighbourhood forums, where these exist, are likely to play a key role in this process.

Main uses

- informing performance reviews of services, planning and other issues
- contributing to the development of performance indicators
- assisting with the monitoring of performance
- identifying underlying problems or concerns and working out possible solutions

Strengths

- opportunity for public to influence running and development of services and make their needs and preferences known
- enhances communication and better understanding between service providers and users

Limitations

- participants not necessarily representative of all sections of the community

Costs

- preparation for and organisation of meetings
- selection/recruitment of participants
- analysis of feedback and other information
- possible use of facilitators

Examples of use

Haringey Council introduced public scrutiny under which the public were encouraged to attend meetings with a view to putting forward their views (including complaints) about the standards and quality of provision of various services. Output from the meeting(s) was fed back to the service for action and three months and twelve months later, meetings were called again to determine what improvement had been made and what action still needed to be taken.

In developing sustainability indicators, Lancashire County Council found that the indicators developed by the council were only partly accepted by the public, who did not wholly trust government or business to genuinely promote sustainability.   To ensure that sustainability indicators were seen to be acceptable by local people, the county emphasised "the importance of building work on performance indicators through participation, if they are to be meaningful for public concern and that has implications in other areas of council activities.”

Where to find out more

John Stewart, *Further Innovation in Democratic Practice*, Institute of Local Government Studies, University of Birmingham, 1996

5.3 *Area/community forums*

Description

Forums are a means of bringing together various sections of the community, often at a neighbourhood level, and involving them in a wide range of issues of community concern. They may take various forms, from public meetings open to everyone in the community, to small groups of selected representatives of different community interests. They figure in many of the decentralisation schemes developed by councils in recent years. They may also be set up on, say, a council-wide basis for particular communities of interest, for example, in housing (tenants, landlords, etc) and the environment (conservation groups, road users, etc).

Forums usually meet on a fairly regular basis and are likely to involve representatives from a broad range of interests, such as service providers and users, local businesses, voluntary bodies and community groups (community councils, tenants associations, parent-teacher associations, etc). Where the forums are large, a smaller group may meet to plan meetings. Forums may also issue their own newsletters.

Forums may be invested with various functions, from acting as a public sounding board on issues to, say, making policy recommendations. They may also assist with specific service planning issues and act as advisory bodies or for local planning, housing, transport and environment schemes and so on. They could have key links with the council and other bodies, through two-way representation. Forums can also make use of many of the other methods described in the Guide for involving the public and engaging with the council.

Main uses

- bringing together different sectors of the community (of interest, place)
- facilitating a co-ordinated and representative approach to local issues and concerns
- acting as a key link between the council and its communities

Strengths

- enhance community identity/empowerment, bottom-up approach to involving the public
- breadth of interests and concerns
- co-ordinating role
- basis for other forms of public participation
- potential for building up strong links between councils and their communities

Limitations

- require a lot of commitment at grassroots level to be sustained over time
- possibly open to manipulation by unrepresentative individuals or groups if not under firm and fair leadership
- may give rise to expectations which cannot be fulfilled
- credibility may be impaired if perceived as a talking shop that gets nothing done

- if not adequately funded or supported professionally, scope for action may be limited

Costs

- community development work
- printing and stationery costs
- possible publicity work
- venue hire and catering

Where to find out more

Decentralisation: a guide to practice, COSLA, 1996

D Burns, *Decentralisation: towards a new system of accountability in local government*, COSLA, 1997

Innovations in Public Participation, Local Government Management Board, 1996

Gerry Stoker, *Area Committees in Central Region: the experience of the first year*: Department of Government, University of Strathclyde, 1995

R Hambleton, P Hoggett, and K Razzaque, *Freedom within Boundaries: developing effective approaches to decentralisation*, Local Government Management Board, 1996

5.4 *Interest/issue forums*

Description

Interest and issues forums use public meetings and other means (eg, user or standing citizens' panels) to focus public interest on specific initiatives or areas of concern, such as community or pedestrian safety. They can assume many of the functions of community forums, but they are likely to consider issues at a much more specialised level, perhaps setting up smaller study circles, bringing in experts or initiating surveys to examine some issue in detail. They should be as representative as possible of the relevant interests concerned. Depending on the issue at hand, they may meet over a short to long period. Use of a facilitator may help to ensure proceedings run smoothly, balanced consideration is given to the issue, all views are aired and a way forward is worked out.

Main uses

Mainly as for community forums (section 5.3) but also -

- exploration of particular issue in depth among relevant communities of interest
- initiation of further investigation/research into the issues at hand

Strengths

Mainly as for community forums but also -

- specialist approach to issues and problem solving

Limitation

- danger that special interest focus may lose sight of broader community interests and concerns

Costs

Mostly as for community forums, but also –

- information gathering/preparation
- use of specialist expertise, consultant's fees
- collection and analysis of data from surveys (optional)
- preparation and printing of reports

Examples of use

As a follow up from the Foveran Community Survey, short term interest groups have been formed in each settlement to look at and develop the key findings. These groups have been co-ordinated by the Foveran Partnership, and the developments will be monitored and evaluated by a follow up public meeting.

In East Lothian a community safety forum has been initiated to address key issues identified in market research. The forum is multi-agency and includes representatives from community councils, the youth parliament and the local council for voluntary service. Meetings are open and reported through the media. The outcome of the meetings is used to help to inform council decisions.

Glasgow City Council has sought the views of young people by setting up and supporting a youth forum, hosting focus groups and distributing cards and posters designed by young people, with a telephone hotline number. The focus groups suggested many challenging ways to making services more relevant.

Where to find out more

Organising Your First Forum/Study Circle, National Issues Forum, 1995

5.5 *State of policy debates*

Description

This type of public meeting can follow the format of public meetings described above (section 5.1) but is expected to take a broader, longer-term perspective rather than focus on issues of more immediate concern. It can be used as a lead-in to or link-up with group work or forum meetings, through which people can directly engage with key policy and decision makers.

This approach may be particularly attractive in areas with a strong sense of community or place, but it could also be used to build up community identity. Use of a skilled facilitator will help to ensure smooth running of the debate and bringing it to clear conclusions.

Main uses

- involving the public in broader/longer-term issues and concerns
- bringing the public and key policy and decision makers together in open debate
- feeling the public pulse on issues of concern
- possible starting or focal point of wider programme of involving the public

Strengths

- helps the public to take stock of current situation and encourages forward thinking
- link-up potential with area or community forums

Limitations

- broad brush approach may mean that issues are dealt with superficially
- may end up in divisiveness/factionalism if debate is not properly facilitated

Costs

Mainly as for public meetings (section 5.1).

5.6 *Special events*

Description

Special events can be organised in order to promote public understanding or obtain public feedback about existing or proposed policies or services, projects, plans, etc. They can take a variety of forms, such as public meetings, open days, exhibitions and roadshows and can be as formal or informal as appropriate. They can take place over a series of days or weeks at one or more locations. They can involve speakers, displays, demonstrations, audio-visual media, printed materials, etc. Organisation of such events is critical in terms of timing, frequency, venue location and suitability and publicity in order to attract the right target audience. It may also be possible to relate or build into the event some of the group work and survey methods described in other parts of this Guide.

To generate interest in the event, well-targeted advance publicity is essential. Staff and relevant experts will need to be on hand to answer enquiries. Display panels and exhibition space may be required

Main uses

- seeking opinions or feedback from targeted audiences
- bringing stakeholders together for debate
- promoting public awareness and understanding
- acting as a sounding board for decision making

Strengths

- potential in attracting large/participative audiences
- flexibility of approach/methods
- positive publicity value, especially if well-targeted

Limitations

- potentially quite costly (see below) although it may be possible to offset some costs through sponsorship, attendance charges, sale of advertising/exhibition space, etc
- time consuming to organise
- possible lack of focus (publicity, choice of activities, exhibits, speakers, etc)
- short, medium, or long term benefits may be difficult to assess (use of feedback forms at the event may help, as may some form of post-event monitoring)

Costs

- publicity (advertising, leaflets, brochures, etc)
- hire of venue and (optional) catering
- speakers' expenses (if applicable)
- display production and audio-visual equipment (if applicable)
- preparation of delegate packs (if necessary)
- administrative and clerical support costs
- fees, time and expenses of professional support staff
- report preparation, analysis of feedback forms, etc

6. COMBINED APPROACHES

6.1 Community needs assessment

Description

Community needs assessment is a systematic approach to gathering information about an area and the needs of its communities, facilitating discussion, analysing each of these, and disseminating the results for group work activities.

- the initial stage is to gather information, statistics and published reports on the area (see section 1.6 on preparatory work) on the area
- the views of community representatives, front-line workers and other key players are sought and community surveys are carried out
- the third stage is to produce a summary of the findings, setting out the main issues identified, which is then circulated to the community
- the fourth stage involves the establishment of a number of focus groups (see section 2.1) to look at specific themes
- the focus groups draw up a list of priorities to consider for action

With the council acting as an enabler, this approach is very much community-led.

Strengths

- evidence based
- facilitates forward service planning
- helps inform allocation of area budgets
- bottom-up approach

Limitations

Unless the process is well-managed and facilitated, the need of some sectors of the community may be over-looked or under-represented.

Costs

- development and planning
- information gathering and analysis
- facilitation
- possible venue and equipment hire
- expenses of participants
- report preparation and production

Where to find out more

Janie Percy-Smith and Ian Sanderson, *Understanding Local Needs*, Institute for Public Policy Research, 1993

Murray Hawtin, Grant Hughes and Janie Percy-Smith, *Community Profiling: auditing social needs*, Open University Press, 1994

John Hammersley, "The Metrocentre: notes towards a social audit", in *Northern Economic Review*, 1993

Janie Percy-Smith, "Auditing social needs" in *Policy and Politics*, vol. 20, no. 1, 1992

National Database on Good Practice in Assessing Community Needs, Northern College of Education, Dundee Campus. Contact: Laurie Bidwell, Community Education (tel: 01382-464374; e-mail: l.bidwell@norcol.ac.uk)

6.2 *Village appraisal/community auditing*

Description

Village appraisal allows small rural communities to take stock of their needs and identify local issues. The appraisal starts with a public meeting, at which the council can also explain its enabling role in the community, for example, supporting partnership projects. A variant of this approach is community auditing, in which key local people are invited to take part in a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis of the community.

On the basis of the village appraisal meeting or community audit, a local survey is then carried out, with the community deciding on the issues/questions to be covered and the council assisting with the collection and analysis of the data. A community compact identifying what action needs to be taken both by the council and local people is drawn up between the council and the community. An appraisal committee of community, community council and other representatives is set up to develop and plan this work and monitor progress.

Main uses

- identifying issues, concerns and unmet needs at a local community level
- helping to inform action to be taken by the council and/or other local partners in addressing these issues, concerns or needs

Strengths

- the community identifies the issues of importance
- makes use of surveys which are community driven
- promotes community initiative, involvement and empowerment

Limitations

- special efforts may be required to involve and represent the interests of more disadvantaged sections of the community, such as very elderly people

Costs

Costs will vary, depending on how the council sees itself performing its enabling role and to what extent activity is community driven, but they are likely to include:

- initial development and planning
- publicity
- venue hire and catering
- use of facilitator (eg for SWOT analysis)
- collection and analysis of data
- report preparation and production

Examples of use

In South Somerset six villages undertook a village appraisal.   The outcome was that even relatively well informed local people were surprised how uninformed they were about what was happening in their own community.   People were unaware of events taking place in their village and even fewer people were aware of the ways in which the council could help.

Where to find out more

Peter Beresford and Suzy Croft, *Citizen Involvement: a practical guide for change*, Macmillan, 1993

David Smith and Charles Freeman, “Be appraised!” in *Municipal Journal*, 12-18 May 1995, no. 19

6.3 Priority Search

Description

Priority search makes use of focus groups and surveys, supported by specially developed software, to rank priority needs of an area. Representatives from a broad cross-section of the community are first invited to focus groups (section 2.1), at which they are asked to consider a key question, such as, "What would make this a safer place to live in?" or "What would improve the quality of life in our community?" (The group facilitator helps to make sure that there is a free flow of ideas, the group is focused on the future, no-one dominates the discussion and possible solutions to problems are identified.) Telephone or face-to-face interviews could be conducted with people unable to take part.

The priority search software is then used to generate a questionnaire from the ideas and statements emerging from the focus groups discussions (and interviews, if used). Statements are paired with each other in such a way as to allow the person completing the questionnaire to have opportunities to show how strongly, or otherwise, they feel about each statement. The rank-ordered priorities from questionnaire returns are then fed into the council's decision-making processes or used to inform further needs assessment or standards setting work.

Main uses

- identifying and prioritising community needs
- informing needs assessment, standard setting and other related work
- helping to inform targeting of resources

Strengths

- allows assessments to be reached about relative importance attached to various issues/concerns by various sections of the community

Limitations

- the "big issues" and top priority concerns will overshadow lesser but nonetheless important issues

Costs

- setting up and facilitating focus groups
- priority search software licence
- collection and analysis of questionnaire data

Where to find out more

Priority Search Ltd, Sheffield Science Park, Arundel Street, Sheffield S1 2NS
(tel: 0114-270-1006)

6.4 Community/parish mapping

Description

Community (or parish) mapping is an approach to answer the questions *what do you value about the place where you live?* It has been developed by Common Ground, a charitable organisation that "offers ideas, information and inspiration to help people to learn about, enjoy and take more responsibility for their own locality".

A public meeting is called at which people are asked to mark on a map what it is they value about their area and the things they are worried about. Information can then be fed into a Geographical Information System (GIS). A good starting point is to establish what the local community is particularly interested in. For example, it could be natural history, geography, food, customs, stories, local history, archaeology, landscape, literature or architecture.

People can be split up into working groups to gather information and views on specific topics and then come together to decide what to include and what to discard. Identifying the skills of local people and using them is important in keeping the project intact. Working groups should, if necessary, make contact with local organisations such as photography clubs, tenants' groups, schools, allotments or civic societies for their ideas and possible collaboration. Additional information could by collected through local surveys.

Community maps need not be cartographically correct and should be expressive and unconstrained by conventional mapping scales, sizes etc. They represent the community's subjective responses to a place which cannot be measured, counted or even seen (such as the stories, dialect or fragments of history). Maps can be sewn, woven, knitted, printed, drawn, painted, filmed, animated, performed and written. Other forms they can take include photographic journals, tapestries or video recording of the area..

The map should be hung in a public place, such as a village hall, library, museum, community centre, church or pub. In this way, interest is maintained and people are encouraged to contribute more. A co-ordinating group (which can be a partnership between the council and community councils and organisations) should try to draw in as many people as possible. The greater the discussion, the more views will be reflected and the richer the map will be. It is useful to establish a regular meeting time and place, where people can drop in to find out what progress is being made.

Main uses

Raising public awareness about local planning, transport, sustainability, cultural, recreational and other issues.

Strengths

- helps to promote public participation and community identity in a novel and imaginative way
- facilitates exchange of ideas and information about an area in a very direct way

Limitations

- could give rise to unrealistic suggestions/expectations
- participants might not be representative of broad cross-section of the community
- requires considerable commitment from co-ordinating group to be sustainable

Costs

- technical support (eg map preparation, video production)
- data analysis (eg input into GIS)

Examples of use

Since Common Ground launched the project in 1987, hundreds of maps have been made by a variety of groups, including environment, parish, women's, old people's, school, play, community, wildlife, arts and crafts groups. Trees, hedgerows and ponds have been saved from destruction, buildings renovated, orchards taken into community use and old festivals revived.

In Aveton Gifford, Devon, local people created a parish map to help them re-discover their place after the by-pass had been built. Many working groups were formed which walked, talked and shared their findings. The map was printed, paid for by South Hams District Council, and has sold well. Two 'walks leaflets' have been produced since then.

Mendip District Council have a project underway in which local people mark on a map what they value about the area they live in. The information is put onto a GIS. The project was combined with involving local people to identify sustainability indicators. Getting people to identify things of value, informed the council about a wide variety of things it was unaware of.

Where to find out more

Common Ground (Seven Dials Warehouse, 44 Earlham Street, London WC2H 9LA tel: 0171-379-3109) has produced the following leaflets: *Parish Maps*, *From place to PLACE*, *Celebrating Local Distinctiveness* ,and *Common Ground for Rural Action*; *Local Distinctiveness*

6.5 Networking

Description

Networks are groups of people, individuals, organisations, businesses etc, who are bound by a common commitment, interest or goal. They can have a range of functions, from sharing of information to initiating a course of action.

Getting a network established requires consideration of:

- what the aims and objects of the network are, such as the sharing of information on specific topics, promoting greater awareness of an issue or influencing other bodies/future action
- criteria for membership and how members will be recruited and involved, for example, through public meetings, conferences, informal contacts, publicity work, etc
- how the network will be managed and administered, for example, through a steering group, project officer, administrator, etc
- how the network will communicate with its members, through meetings, mailings, e-mail, website, etc
- how decisions will be reached, where appropriate, for example, on the basis of survey results, group work and other approaches described in this Guide

It may be possible to combine networks into a federation, or network of networks, bringing key representatives together. Many networks may develop spontaneously in response to some interest, issue or concern, but there may also be scope for bodies such as councils to provide support or assistance of their own, for example, through community development work, start-up grants, free use of premises, administrative assistance, etc.

Main uses

- sharing information, experience, and good practice
- facilitating communication between councils and their communities (of interest, place)
- enhancing public participation
- influencing policies, decision making, practices

Strengths

- may serve as a bridgehead for supporting other participatory initiatives
- capitalises upon existing knowledge, skills and experience

Limitations

- may require professional support (eg community development) to get started properly
- considerable vision and commitment of leading members required to maintain momentum
- networks may not be representative of all relevant interests in the community

Costs

Depending on the nature and size of the networks sets up, costs could include:

- room hire
- stationery, printing and publicity
- secretarial and/or clerical support
- publicity
- collection and analysis of information (optional)
- report/newsletter preparation and production

Where to find out more

Alana Albee and Graham Boyd, *Doing it Differently: networks of community development agents*, Scottish Community Education Council, 1997

7. REPORT BACK AND EVALUATION

7.1 Recording and processing of information

In any exercise involving the public, whether through group work, surveys or other methods described in this Guide, the information, ideas, opinions, preferences, etc thus generated will almost certainly need to be recorded, collated, analysed and summarised in some way, so that any decisions needing to be made are based on the best possible information. Many textbooks on the collection, processing and analysis of information already exist, so this Guide gives no more than a very short outline. Professional survey firms and research consultants will, in any event, take all of this under their wing, and will also usually offer an interpretation of the results. It is nonetheless important to have a general awareness of some the key considerations in the analysis, interpretation and presentation of results before these are made more widely available.

Various approaches to recording information currently exist, each with its own strengths and limitations, mainly to do with maximising efficiency and minimising error in the recording and processing of information:

Paper and pencil methods (questionnaire entries by respondent or interviewer). Recording of fixed responses, often by means of ticks, crosses or code numbers in boxes, is generally more straightforward than for open ended questions, when answers take longer to record and code, with a greater likelihood that things are missed out or misheard or writing is difficult to decipher. Recordings are then copied onto disk for computer analysis.

Tape recording. For longer, in-depth interviews, it may be more appropriate to tape record answers. Not all interviewees feel comfortable in the presence of a recorder, however, and due consent and other protocols need to be observed to reassure people about the confidentiality and use to which the information will be put, as indeed in all other survey work. Tape recordings may require considerable editing/transcribing before the information is ready for processing and analysis.

Computer-assisted recording. Interviewers employed by professional survey firms may be supplied with laptop computers for recording answers directly onto a computer, cutting out the need to transfer recordings into a separate coding sheet for input onto disc. Computer-readable responses can also be entered with special markers and paper on self-completion questionnaires. This can greatly minimise the amount of recording error, provided that the computer has been properly programmed.

Video recording. With camcorder and video equipment now available at greatly reduced prices, this form of recording is now much more accessible, although skilled camerawork and editing will be involved. The strictures applying to tape recording apply more so to video recording, in which masking and other techniques may need to be used to preserve the anonymity of respondents.

Data checks/controls

Before the information is ready for analysis, it is important to carry out various checks or controls for:

- errors in the recording, coding, transcription or keying in of information
- inconsistencies in the recording and coding of answers by interviewers and those processing the data
- missing information (failure to record the relevant information, as distinct from the respondent answering a question, for which a separate coding is required)
- software “bugs”, “viruses,” etc
- suppression of data/data cells which could result in the possible identification of an individual or household (eg, data capturing the only household in the population with six children living in a small island community)
- double-counting, making sure figures add up properly

Accuracy and representativeness

It may be possible to check the information collected against other independent sources of information (eg, official records/statistics) to gauge the accuracy of information supplied or recorded, and, in some circumstances, it may be appropriate for the respondent to check through a transcript to make sure that it is a faithful record.

Sometimes the sample drawn at random may turn out not to be as representative as required, say, as a result of certain types of household/individual not being contactable for interview. “Weights” can often be assigned to the data in question so that overall results give a more representative picture.

7.2 Analysis of information

The choice of analysis will be influenced by the type of information collected and the purpose of the research. Analysis is an integral part of research and should be considered early in the design of a programme. Broadly speaking, analysis can or quantitative/statistical (how many? what proportion?) or qualitative (why? how?), as discussed in section 1.5.

A wide range of statistical and other techniques exist for analysing quantitative data and can be found in most standard textbooks. Software, such as the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), takes away much of the hard slog of computing the statistics, such as percentages, medians, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients, etc – see glossary). Tests can also be carried out to determine whether findings are "statistically significant" or not.

<u>Quantitative analysis</u> can be carried out at various levels, for example, at the level of the individual, household, neighbourhood, etc. Depending on the size of the sample, it may be possible to carry out two-way, three-way or more cross tabulations, comparing, say, opinions on a particular issue by age, gender, social class or a combination of these. Other approaches include comparisons over time, before and after some event, or at different stages in the life cycle (cohort studies). More

sophisticated techniques, involving correlations and other measures, allow assessments to be reached about to what extent certain factors, such as age or gender, are *associated with* particular attitudes, etc compared with others, such as economic status or length of residence in an area.

Qualitative analyses can be applied to recordings/transcriptions of in-depth interviews, discussions/debates, documents or diaries, video recordings, and first-hand observations. In this case, the objective is to extrapolate in a structured way "meaning" from the data, perhaps with reference to a checklist of issues, concepts ideas, processes, assertions, conflicts, explanations, problems solutions, proposals, etc. Qualitative analyses can be extremely time consuming and are not appropriate for large samples. Although well developed in academic research, qualitative analyses have not been used to their full potential in other forms of research. Software is now available to help with the analysis of qualitative data, for example to search for, count and index specific terms, making the coding of data much easier.

As indicated in section 1.5, quantitative and qualitative techniques should be regarded as complementary to each other, shedding further light on their respective results.

7.3 Report writing and dissemination

Once results have been assembled and analysed, great care still needs to be taken to make sure that results are not misinterpreted. Common examples of misinterpretation include:

- *over-generalisation* of results, which are presented as a if they stand for all time and to all people in all circumstances – reality is seldom as simple as this. For example, certain findings (eg, concern about public safety) may apply to a sub-sample only (eg, single women living in cities), but not to the sample as a whole. A repeat survey some time later may generate a different results

- *imputation of causality* to factors which have a statistical *association* with each other only, for example, assuming that because girls tend to make better progress in reading at an early age than boys do that being a girl is the *cause* of or "reason for" their progress (all sorts of other factors may enter the equation, such as the level of parental support, number of books in the home, teaching methods and other "hidden" or "intervening variables" associated with gender differences)

- *not comparing like with like,* where, for example, council A is deemed to be outperforming council B in the time taken to complete repairs to their housing stock without regard to differences in the age of their stock and complexity of repairs carried out

Reputable survey firms and researchers will hedge the results of their work with all sorts of cautions and qualifications, which the uninitiated may ignore at their peril!

Report writing

The analysis of results and writing up of the research report may proceed in tandem, and each of these may undergo considerable refinement or revision before results are ready for publication. The report, whether written-up by professional researchers or not, will usually include:

- an executive summary (or separate summary report)
- acknowledgements
- table of contents
- an introduction to the issues, problems, concerns, etc which the research is seeking to address, and if appropriate relating the work to broader policy contexts or developments (eg, best value, community planning, social inclusion, sustainability)
- a note (or appendix) about how the research was carried out
- a description of the main findings (simplified tables, diagrams, explanatory text, illustrative "quotes", examples of good practice, etc)
- a concluding discussion (implications of findings for policy, practice, future action, etc)
- optional appendices describing in more detail the research methods used, presenting tables too complicated to include in the main text, and containing references to information sources

The type(s) of audience the report is intended for (professional officers, general public, local politicians, etc) will have a bearing on how the report is written, how much detail the report goes into and such aspects as the cover, graphics and layout. Whatever the audience, however, optimal use should be made of plain language, with technical terms kept to a minimum (or explained in a glossary). Longer reports may require an index. Having a summary at the start or end of each section helps people who only have time to skim through the report. The report could also be accompanied with a press release.

It is also essential to make doubly sure that nothing in the report will result in the identification of individuals taking part in the research being identified, or if they are identified that this is only done so with their express permission.

Arrangements for making the report available will also have to be carefully thought through – copies may need to be sent to those participating in the work, councillors, officers, libraries, community groups, voluntary organisations etc, with a reserve stock for other potentially interested individuals or organisations.

7.4 Feedback and follow-up

It will often be highly desirable to share the results of the research among those participating in it, by sending them a summary of the report or, better still, arranging for the results to be discussed with them if practicable. Participants should have already been made aware of what use will be made of the results at the outset (eg, explanatory letter with the questionnaire), but a report on subsequent action will help to renew their sense of involvement. They could be told who within the council is considering the report, when key decisions are to be taken, what is likely to happen as a result and who to contact for further information. In this way, involving the public becomes a continuing dialogue between the council and its communities.

7.5 Evaluation

The evaluation of any exercises for involving the public is a complex process involving a wide range of considerations, including:

- the actual impact involvement of the public has had on policies, services, attitudes, ways of working, etc
- the history, interests, values and expectations of councils and their communities, which are likely to vary considerably
- the appropriateness of the methods used for involving the public, for example, with reference to desired levels of participation and the quality of information generated
- the management of the process itself, with reference, for example, to meeting timescales/timetables, social inclusiveness, budgetary control, etc
- the effectiveness of support systems: building involvement of the public into organisational culture, staff development, role of front-line staff, decentralisation, use of plain language in written communications, etc
- degree of co-ordination secured, for example, with reference to consistency of standards, timetabling of consultations and sharing of information across services
- use made of information in decision making, policy development, planning, employee development and other processes
- cost-benefits, for example, the “return” on the costs of involving the public (staff time, professional fees, expenses, production costs, etc) with reference to more effective or efficient delivery of services, better ways of working, partnership working with other local agencies, etc
- questions of equity: for example, has involvement of the public benefited some sections of the community more than others?
- overall and specific impacts on relationships between councils and their communities, with reference, for example, to accessibility/approachability of staff, quality of information about services, enquiry/complaints handling, provision of redress, etc

Addressing each of these considerations is a *professional* task involving considerable expertise in the development and application of the concepts, definitions and measurements needed in any impact, input-output or other analyses underlying the evaluation of an initiative. In practice, it is likely to be difficult or impossible to disentangle or weigh up the various influences bringing about change; involvement of the public may interact with a range of other factors (political, professional, managerial, budgetary, organisational, etc). It may also be difficult to evaluate approaches and methods of involving the public, in terms of the above criteria, until a considerable period of time has elapsed, possibly in terms of several years rather than weeks and months.

For further consideration of these and other issues, see *Evaluating Consultation* (1998), prepared for the Best Value Working Group on Consultation and Political Leadership by the Local Government Association and the Local Government Management Board. The paper presents a framework for evaluating consultation and a checklist of evaluation criteria (from which many of the above considerations have been derived).

Where to find out more

Henry Dunlop, "Evaluation research: an illustrative case study", in *Public Policy and Administration,* vol. 8, no.3, winter1993

Nicholas Maddock, "Has project monitoring and evaluation worked?" 1993 in *Project Appraisal*, vol 8, no 3, Book Tree Publishing, September 1993

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Brainstorming is a technique which encourages creative thinking and generates ideas.

Cause and effect analysis is a technique for identifying the possible causes affecting a project or problem. A cause and effect diagram is a visually effective way of recording the possible causes as they are suggested.

Correlation coefficient is a measure of association between two variables, such as height and weight. A high correlation, of up to 1.0 denotes a strong association, a low correlation, down to zero denotes a weak or no association. A plus sign in front of the coefficient means that the association is positive (eg, taller people tend to be heavier), a negative sign shows an *inverse* association (eg, the higher the altitude and the lower the oxygen level).

Facilitator is a person who helps teams of groups of people to work together effectively to achieve their objectives.

Flowcharting shows the flow or sequence of a process and is useful to help understand or improve the work process, to create a common understanding of how the work should be done. Flowcharts are used to portray a logical series of events and allow complex sequences to be broken down into manageable parts.

Force field analysis is a technique for identifying the forces that help or obstruct a change that needs to be made. The forces can be environmental, organisational, interpersonal or intrapersonal.

Mean is the arithmetic average as commonly understood. It is the sum of numbers divided by the number of values. The *mean* of 1,1,1,1,2,3,4,5,6 is 2.67.

Mode is the most commonly occurring value/measurement. The *mode* of 1,1,1,1,2,3,4,5,6 is 1.

Median is the middle of the range of values or measurements. The *median* of 1,1,1,1,2,3,4,5,6 is 2.

Negative brainstorming is done by brainstorming all possible obstacles to success and developing lists of ways to prevent the obstacles occurring.

Population is the actual range of values that exist. For example it could be the heights of adults. Usually it is impractical to analyse an entire population so a *sample* is used.

Problem solving is a logical sequence for solving problems and improving the quality of decision. It is also a guide to identifying which tools and techniques to apply. It can be used to tackle an opportunity as well as a problem.

Sample is the set of values being worked with. The statistical analysis of a *sample* is used to infer things about the *population*.

Significance,* or *confidence levels is a measure of how reliably results from a *sample* can be said to be true of a *population*. Examples are: "it is 95% certain that adults are between 5'3" and 6'2"" and "it is 67% certain that adults are between 5'6" and 5'11'".

Standard deviation is a measure of how dispersed values are. The more spread out a sample the higher the *standard deviation* in comparison to the *mean*.

SWOT analysis is the identification of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in relation to some issue of situation.

INVOLVING THE PUBLIC: PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

The following principles are largely derived from the Code of Conduct of the Market Research Society, which is binding on its members.   A copy of the Code of Conduct is obtainable from the Society (tel: 0171-251-0731).

Purpose of Research or Public Involvement and Participation

The purpose of the research or other exercise for involving the public should be clearly explained at the outset, including a statement of what the work is meant to achieve and likely demands on the time of those taking part.

Approach

- interviewers should always show proof of identity to informants, giving the name and other contact details of the agency carrying out the research or exercise
- the approach should be as non-intrusive as possible and every effort should be made to develop a good rapport with informants
- those undertaking the work should aim to work in a way that is sensitised to the concerns and circumstances informants
- consideration should be given to the ethical issues arising from involvement of the public and due protocols drawn up and observed

Consent and participation

- the public's *voluntary* participation in any exercises for involving them should be emphasised.   People should be told that they are free to opt out at any stage and are not obliged to answer any questions put to them.   In some situations it may be necessary to get consent from a third party, such as a carer
- it is important to explain to informants why they and not others have been selected for the research or other exercise where appropriate

Confidentiality

- it should be made clear to informants that any personal information collected from them will be held in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1984 and shall remain confidential to the agency conducting the work and the client commissioning the work
- reports and other documents will be presented in a way that would not lead to the possible identification of any individuals taking part, except with their express consent

Dissemination

- arrangements should be made to ensure that informants are advised of the outcomes (reports, decisions, follow-up action, etc) of any work in which they have been involved and given the name of a contact person for further information

FURTHER READING

(see also various sections of the Guide for further reading relating to specific methods; for copies of COSLA publications, contact: David Kennedy, tel: 0131-474-9205)

Adamson C, “How to waste money measuring consumer satisfaction,” in *Managing Service Quality,* vol 4, no 5, 1994

Atherton G, *Decentralisation: a guide to practice,* COSLA, 1996

Beresford P and Croft S, *Citizen Involvement: a practical guide for change,* Macmillan, 1993

Birks D, “Initiating effective consumer research to support strategic decision making in local authorities,” in *International Journal of Public Senior Management,* vol 7, no 5, 1994

Blackman T, “Improving quality through research,” in *Management of Quality in Local Government,* by I Sanderson (ed.), Longman, 1992

Burns D, *Decentralisation: towards a new system of accountability in local government*, COSLA, 1997

Burton P, *Community Profiling: a guide to identifying local needs,* School for Advanced Urban Studies, University of Bristol, 1993

Cram L and Richardson J, *Citizenship and Local Democracy: a European perspective,* LGMB, 1992

Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, *Modern Local Government: guidance on enhancing public participation,* October 1998 (for copies, tel: 01709-891318) - free *Summary* also available

Fishkin J, *Democracy and Deliberation: new directions for democratic reform,* Yale University Press, 1991

Geddes M, *Extending Democratic Practice in Local Government,* Commission for Local Democracy, 1996

Hawtin M, Hughes G and Percy-Smith J, *Community Profiling: auditing social needs*, Open University Press, 1994

Local Government Information Unit, *Consulting and Involving the Public,* LGIU, 1995

Local Government Management Board, *Creating Involvement*, LGMB, 1994

Local Government Management Board, *Involving the Public*, LGMB, 1998

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National Consumer Council, *Consulting Your Customers: a handbook for public service managers,* HMSO, 1994

Percy-Smith J and Sanderson I, *Understanding Local Needs*, Institute for Public Policy Research, 1992

Rallings C, Temple M and Thrasher M, *Community Identity and Participation in Local Democracy*, Commission for Local Democracy, 1994

Rallings C, Thrasher M and Downe J, *Enhancing Local Electoral Turnout: a guide to current practice and future reform,* Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1996

Scottish Consumer Council/NHS in Scotland, *Consulting Consumers: a guide to good practice in Scotland,* SCC/NHS in Scotland

Severijnen P, "Local authorities and market research" in *Local Government Studies,* vol 20, no 1, spring 1994

Stewart J and Stoker G, *From Local Administration to Community Government*, Fabian Society, 1988

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Stewart J, *Further Innovation in Democratic Practice,* Institute of Local Government Studies, 1996

Stewart M and Taylor M, *Local Government Community Leadership: the strategic role of the local authority,* LGMB, 1993

Tizard J and Holman K, *Communities, Governance and Local Democracy: roles and relationships,* Local Government Policy Making, vol 21, no 5, May 1995, pp 3-8, 1995

Wahlberg M , Taylor K and Geddes M , *Enhancing Local Democracy*, LGMB, 1995

Wilcox D, *Community Participation and Empowerment: putting theory into practice*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1994

Wilcox D, *The Guide to Effective Participation*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation/Partnership Books, 1994

USEFUL ADDRESSES

Accounts Commission, 18 George Street, EDINBURGH, EH8 9LD (tel: 0131-228-8484)

Chartered Institute of Marketing, Moor Hall, Cookham, MAIDENHEAD, SL6 9QH (tel: 01628-427500; website: www.cim.co.uk)

Citizen's Charter Unit, Horse Guards Road, LONDON, SW1P 3AL (tel: 0171-240-4449; e-mail: charter@gtnet.gov.uk; website: www.open.gov.uk/charter/ccuhome.htm)

Commission for Local Democracy (publications), CLD Ltd, University of Greenwich, Churchill House, Wellington Street, LONDON, SE18 6PF (tel: 0181-331-8019)

Community Development Foundation, 60 Highbury Grove, LONDON, N5 2AG (tel: 0171-226-5375; e-mail: admin@edf.org.uk)

Data Protection Registrar, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, WILMSLOW, SK9 5AF (tel: 01625-535777; e-mail: data@wycliffe.demon.co.uk; website: www.open.gov.uk/dpr/dprhome.htm)

Demos, Panton House, 25 Haymarket, LONDON, SW1Y 4EM (tel: 0171-321-2200)

Electoral Reform Society, 6 Chancel Street, Blackfriars, LONDON, SE1 OUU (tel: 0171-928-1622; website: www.gn.apc.org/ers)

Institute of Local Government Studies, School of Public Policy, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, BIRMINGHAM, B15 2TT (tel: 0121-414-5008)

Institute for Public Policy Research, 30-32 Southampton Street, LONDON, WC2E 7RA (tel: 0171-470-6100; e-mail: ippr@easynet.co.uk; website: www.ippr.organisation.uk)

Institute of Public Relations, 15 Northburgh Street, LONDON, EC1V OPR (tel: 0171-253-5151)

Joseph Rowntree Trust (publications), York Publishing Services, 64 Hallfield Road, Layerthorpe, YORK, YO13 7XQ (tel: 01904-430033)

Local Authorities Research & Intelligence Association, Administrator: Sue Gee, 2 Turnstone Close, Winnersh, WOKINGHAM, RG41 5LQ (tel: 0118-783776; e-mail keyplan@luna.co.uk)

Local Government Association, 26 Chapter Street, LONDON, SW1P 4ND (tel: 0171-834-2222; e-mail: info@lga.lgorgs.gov.uk; website: www.lga.gov.uk)

Local Government Information Unit, 1-5 Bath Street, LONDON, EC1V 9QQ (tel: 0171-608-1051; e-mail: lgiu@geo2.poptel.org.uk; website: www.lgiu.gov.uk)

Local Government Management Board, Layden House, 76-86 Turnmill Street, LONDON, EC1M 5QU (tel: 0171-296-6600; e-mail: adrian.barker@lgmb.gov.uk; website: www.lgmb.gov.uk). Information service – for access to the SIGN database of management initiatives (free to local authorities) - tel: 0171-296-6768; e-mail: info.lgmb@gtnet.gov.uk

Market Research Society, 15 Northburgh Street, LONDON, EC1V OAH (tel: 0171-251-0731; e-mail: marketresearch@enterprise.net; website: www.marketresearch.org.uk)

National Consumer Council, 20 Grosvenor Gardens, LONDON, SW1W ODH (tel: 0171-730-3469; e-mail: d.whitworth@ncc.org.uk)

Plain English Campaign, PO Box 3, New Mills, High Peak, SK22 4QP (tel: 01663-744409; e-mail: info@plainenglish.co.uk; website: www.plainenglish.co.uk)

Policy Performance & Review Network, Sally Blewett, Network Administrator, 17 Port Street, CLACKMANNAN, FK10 4JH (tel: 01259-725353; fax: 01259-725143)

Policy Research Institute, Leeds Metropolitan University, 16 Queen Square, LEEDS, LS2 8AJ (tel: 0133-283-3223)

Scottish Centre for Public Policy, 20 Forth Street, EDINBURGH, EH1 3LH (tel: 0131-477-8219)

Scottish Community Development Centre, Suite 327, Baltic Chambers, 50 Wellington Street, GLASGOW, G2 6HJ (tel: 0141-248-1924)

Scottish Community Education Council, Rosebery House, 9 Haymarket Terrace, EDINBURGH, EH12 5EZ (tel: 0131-313-2488)

Scottish Consumer Council, Royal Exchange House, 100 Queen Street, GLASGOW, G1 3DN (tel: 0141-226-5261)

The Scottish Office, Local Government Division, Victoria Quay, EDINBURGH, EH6 6QQ (tel: 0131-244-7055)