



Improving Oxford Together Consultation Strategy 2004-2007

Forward

Oxford City Council has a strong record in using many different ways of gathering people's views and involving them in decisions that affect their lives. As early as 1993, MORI conducted a residents survey on behalf of Oxford City Council, while 'Talkback' – Oxford City Council's Citizens' Panel - was first established in 1997.

Oxford City Council recognises the importance of consultation as a tool for improving service delivery. In adopting this Consultation Strategy the Council has committed itself to using consultation as a driving force in achieving our Vision for Oxford. This consultation strategy therefore sets out what we are aiming to do, how we intend to do it, who will be responsible and when it should be completed. It draws on the Scrutiny Review of Consultation (March 2004) and builds on the 2001 Consultation Strategy. It sets out an action plan for the next three years, but is also a working document, which will be reviewed annually.

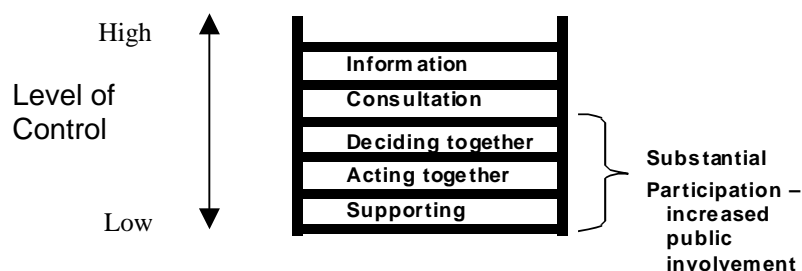
Context

"Consultation is a process of dialogue that leads to a decision" (Audit Commission – 'Listen Up: Effective Community Consultation', 1999).

A further definition is provided in The Guide to Effective Participation developed by David Wilcox in 1994. The Wilcox model's definitions are based on the following assumptions:

- **Information:** the least you can do is tell people what is planned
- **Consultation:** you offer a number of options and listen to the feedback you get
- **Deciding together:** you encourage others to provide some additional ideas and options, and join in deciding the best way forward
- **Acting together:** not only do different interests decide together what is best, but they form a partnership to carry it out
- **Supporting independent community initiatives:** you help others do what they want - perhaps within a framework of grants, advice and support provided by the resource holder

The Guide to Effective Participation



This Consultation Strategy covers only the ‘consultation’ aspect of Wilcox’s model. It is thus aimed at robust and systematic forms of consultation (such as quantitative surveys and qualitative focus group discussions or workshops) aimed at answering specific research questions. The strategy does not include other aspects of participation included in the Wilcox model (such as Council Committees and other forums or sounding boards; information and communications; putting documents out for comment; and dialogue with individuals over specific issues, such as planning applications), although links are made where relevant. The strategy also does not prescribe exact techniques or methodologies to be used, as each Business Unit has its own research questions and audiences of interest (including residents, service users, staff, members, stakeholders and partners). The consultation techniques/methods selected will depend on the nature of the audience and the research question. Other related plans and strategies under development at the time of writing include:

- Communications Strategy – which deals with communications within the City Council and externally
- Customer Care Strategy – which seeks to improve service standards
- Human Resources Strategy – which deals with staff related issues within the City Council
- Area Plans – which seeks to establish priorities for action for the six Area Committee Areas

Consultation Aims

This Consultation Strategy aims to make consultation more effective by:

1. Ensuring a clear understanding of and commitment to effective consultation;
2. Adopting a co-ordinated, strategic approach to consultation which avoids duplication;
3. Ensuring that consultation is both inclusive and representative;
4. Improving standards in consultation practice;
5. Considering the circumstances of consultees;
6. Working in partnership;
7. Ensuring that consultation is used in decision making and translates into action;
8. Feeding back the consultation findings to consultees and disseminating the results more widely;
9. Using resources effectively;
10. Monitoring and Review.

What the Council will do

Oxford City Council sets out to achieve these ten aims in the following ways:

1. Ensuring a clear understanding of and commitment to effective consultation

- I. Communicating our commitment to consultation within the organisation and to the wider community, while making clear what impact consultees can have.
- II. Ensuring consultation is part of the Business Planning process for every business unit.

2. Adopting a co-ordinated, strategic approach to consultation, which avoids duplication

- I. Establishing clear terms of reference for the new Consultation and Communication Officers' Group.
- II. Co-ordinating consultation exercises.
- III. Establishing shared template and procedural arrangements throughout the Council.
- IV. Running corporate consultation exercises, such as the Talkback Panel.

3. Ensuring that consultation is both inclusive & representative

- I. Using a variety of techniques appropriate for the audience. This includes being flexible, and considering new and innovative forms of consultation (such as participatory videos, web and text surveys, area surveys, in-school surveys with young people etc.).
- II. Respecting diversity and ensuring consultations are representative of the City's population.
- III. Providing advice and guidance on consulting different communities and ensuring it is covered in the training programme.

4. Improving standards in consultation practice

- I. Applying set quality standards to all consultation exercises.
- II. Providing training and guidelines to the Consultation and Communication Officers' Group and others.
- III. Establishing a system to collect information about consultation exercises and to ensure a proper sign off procedure.

5. Considering the circumstances of consultees

- I. Providing a named contact and return address for every consultation exercise and responding to enquiries.
- II. Respecting the confidentiality of consultees.
- III. Using the most appropriate methods for the audience.
- IV. Giving consultees sufficient time to respond to consultation exercises.

6. Working in partnership

- I. Maintaining the positive Talkback Steering Group partnership with Oxford City Primary Care Trust and Thames Valley Police.
- II. Building on the success of the Countywide Consultation Officers Forum comprising Consultation Officers from the County Council and all the District Councils in Oxfordshire.
- III. Keeping abreast of developments in local government generally.

7. Ensuring that consultation is used in decision making and translates into action

- I. Disseminating the findings of consultation to aid decision making.
- II. Seeking to provide evidence that demonstrates where and how consultation has influenced service delivery and future plans.

8. Feeding back the consultation findings to consultees and disseminating the results more widely

- I. Ensuring the findings from consultation exercises and the resulting actions/decisions are fed back to those involved - telling them what the Council plans to do as a result of the consultation and why.
- II. Using the most appropriate methods for the audience when communicating the findings of consultation - such as the Intranet, Internet, newsletters, letters, 'Your Oxford', through the media, presentations, events, reports, articles, video, and committee meetings (e.g. Area Committees, Oxford Tenants Panel etc.).

9. Using resources effectively

- I. Combining consultation exercises.
- II. Ensuring the provision of adequate resources for consultation activities and development.

10. Monitoring and Review

- I. Learning from previous consultation exercises and consultation evaluations.
- II. Annual review of consultation – including reviewing progress against the Consultation Strategy Action Plan, and reviewing all aspects of the consultation process (from initial project set-up to acting upon the findings) for different consultation exercises conducted throughout the previous year.

Resources and responsibilities

Oxford City Council recognises that resources for consultation will always be limited and it is necessary to maximize the use of those resources by planning and co-ordinating consultation within the Council and with partners and by sharing results. The Strategy and Review team will be provided with resources to undertake corporate consultation, while other, service based, consultation will be financed by the service concerned.

The Consultation Officer (based within the Strategy and Review team) will be responsible for:

- Being the main contact in Oxford City Council for consultation matters;
- Working with the Performance Management Team to ensure that the Consultation Strategy is implemented and to monitor progress;
- Co-ordinating consultation, including developing the Annual Consultation Plan and co-ordinating the Consultation and Communication Officers' Group;
- Working with the Learning and Development Team to ensure consultation training is provided where required;
- Working with the Performance Management Team to monitor the quality and effectiveness of consultation;
- Managing corporate consultation exercises, such as the Talkback Panel and the BVPI General Survey;
- Providing advice and support to the Business Units;
- Feeding back and disseminating the results from corporate consultation exercises, including writing an Annual Consultation Report;
- Disseminating relevant consultation reports produced by other organisations;
- Ensuring the consultation pages of the website are kept updated;
- Maintaining the positive contact with partner organisations.

The Consultation and Communication Officers' Group (CCOG) will be responsible for:

- Helping to implement the Consultation Strategy and to monitor progress;
- Attending consultation training;
- Championing effective consultation in their business unit and providing practical support and advice where skilled to do so;
- Providing detailed Annual Consultation Plans for their business unit;
- Ensuring that the Project Approval and Post Project Appraisal forms are completed where appropriate and returned to the Consultation Officer and the Performance Management Team for consultation projects in their departments (and in the longer term, ensuring that it is inputted into tracker);
- Attending and reporting back to the Consultation and Communication Officers' Group meetings to share knowledge and best practice;
- Assisting in peer evaluations of consultation to monitor consultation standards;

Draft 4 (29/10/04) – Amended draft for final sign off

- Disseminating the findings of consultation exercises to their business units;
- Sharing with the Consultation and Communication Officers' Group relevant reports on consultations carried out by other organisations;
- Seeking news stories in their business units and forwarding to the Communications Team;
- Ensuring the communication function of the group adheres to the Communications Strategy.

The Performance Management Team will be responsible for:

- Working with the Consultation Officer to ensure that the findings of consultation are acted upon and to monitor the quality and effectiveness of consultation;
- Working with the Consultation Officer to ensure that the delivery of the Consultation Strategy is monitored;
- Using the findings of consultation when developing the City Council's Corporate Plan.

The Director Champion will be responsible for:

- Championing consultation by assisting the Consultation Officer in providing strategic direction to consultation and by raising the profile of consultation.

The Portfolio Holder Champion will be responsible for:

- Championing consultation by assisting the Consultation Officer in overcoming barriers to effective consultation within the Council and by raising the profile of consultation.

Members will be responsible for:

- Attending consultation training;
- Keeping up to date with current Oxford City Council consultation activity (e.g. through the Annual Consultation Plan, Tracker, Business Plans and by attending briefings and meetings);
- Using the information and analysis from consultation to inform decision making (e.g. through full Council, Executive Board, Scrutiny, Area Committees etc.).

Business Unit Managers will be responsible for:

- Identifying and implementing appropriate consultation within their service area (in partnership with Members);
- Ensuring planned consultation is properly covered in their business plans, with sufficient resources (staff and budgets) set aside to ensure it happens;

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- Reporting back the findings of consultation to appropriate committees and ensuring that all reports include details of any consultation undertaken (e.g. through full Council, Executive Board, Scrutiny, Area Committees etc.);
- Acting upon the findings of consultation in relation to the decisions made by Members.

Project leaders will be responsible for:

- Carrying out the consultation, managing the project within the timescales and resources identified, evaluating the project and its outcomes, and working in accordance with the strategy. They will report on the results and actions to the appropriate parties through the appropriate mechanisms (e.g. full Council, Executive Board, Scrutiny, Area Committees etc.).

Consultation Strategy Action Plan 2004-2007

Consultation Aim	Consultation Objective	Tasks	When	Who
1. Ensuring a clear understanding of and commitment to effective consultation	I. Communicating our commitment to consultation	Place this strategy on the website	March 05	Consultation Officer
		Develop a consultation toolkit	June 05	Consultation Officer
		Develop training for Officers and Members	Dec 05	Consultation Officer, Learning & Dev.
		Ensure Business Plans identify approach	March 05	Business Managers
		Draft a document distinguishing consultation & communication & disseminate via CCOG	April 05	Consultation Officer, CCOG
	II. Ensure consultation is part of Business Planning	Improve consultation element of business plans by providing prompts for consideration & by learning from previous consultation	Feb 05	Business Managers, Consultation Officer
	Ensure a clear understanding of the consultation objectives & consulting at a point at which action can be taken	Continuous	Project Managers & Business Managers	

Consultation Aim	Consultation Objective	Tasks	When	Who
2. Adopting a co-ordinated, strategic approach to consultation which avoids duplication	I. Clear terms of reference for CCOG	Approve terms of reference	June 05	Consultation Officer & CCOG
	II. Co-ordinate consultation	Embed tracker via CCOG	Dec 06	Consultation Officer & CCOG
		Identify Director & Portfolio Holder champions	Dec 04	SMB/EB
		Annual Consultation Plan	March 05/06/07	Consultation Officer & CCOG
III. Shared template and procedural arrangements	Design a questionnaire template SNAP training for CCOG	Dec 04	Consultation Officer	
		Dec 04	Consultation Officer & CCOG	
IV. Corporate consultation exercises	Staff survey At least 2 Panel surveys per year Develop an annual budget consultation programme	April 05	Consultation Officer & HR	
		Annually	Talkback Steering Group	
		Annually	Consultation Officer, Finance mgt	

Consultation Aim	Consultation Objective	Tasks	When	Who
3. Ensuring that consultation is both inclusive & representative	I. Considering new and innovative forms of consultation	Undertake a schools-based survey of young people Ensure robust methods are used for representative surveys which allow for trending & benchmarking data where appropriate (i.e. $\pm 3\%$ at the 95% confidence interval)	Dec 04 Continuous	Consultation Officer & Countywide Forum Consultation Officer & Project Managers
	II. Respecting diversity	Adhere to the Equalities Standards for Local Government & the Council's Equalities Policy	Continuous	Project Managers
	III. Advice and guidance on consulting different communities	Training programme for CCOG & others Provide materials in other languages/formats & use Language Line where necessary	Annually Continuous	Consultation Officer, CCOG, Learn & Dev Project Managers
4. Improving standards in consultation practice	I. Applying professional standards to all consultation exercises	Consultation Officer to provide advice service	Continuous	Consultation Officer
		Adhere to the standards of the Market Research Society (MRS)	Continuous	Project Managers & Consultation Officer
		Set quality standards for OCC	Sept 06	Consultation Officer
		Develop approved supplier list & commissioning criteria	Dec 04	Consultation Officer

Consultation Aim	Consultation Objective	Tasks	When	Who
	II. Training	Training programme for CCOG & others (including Members)	Annually	Consultation Officer, CCOG, Learning & Dev
	III. Establish a system to collect information about consultation exercises & to ensure a sign off	Via the 'Project Approval' & 'Post Project Appraisal' forms	March 05	Consultation Officer & Project Managers
		Obtaining Tracker	Feb 06	Consultation Officer
5. Considering the circumstances of consultees	I. Providing a named contact & return address	Standardise procedures for postal surveys & for prize draws/incentives	Dec 05	Consultation Officer, CCOG
		Ensure performance is in line with the Customer Contact Strategy	Continuous	Project Managers
	II. Respecting the confidentiality of consultees	Adhere to Data Protection Act & Freedom of Information Act	Continuous	Project Managers
		Ensure databases are regularly updated & managed inline with the Data Protection Act	Continuous	Project Managers
III. Using the most appropriate methods	Ensure consultation is relevant to the consultee, presented in a clear way without the use of jargon & uses other formats/languages where necessary	Continuous	Project Managers	
IV. Giving consultees sufficient time to respond	A minimum of 3 weeks to respond to the Talkback postal surveys	Annually	Talkback Steering Group partnership	

Consultation Aim	Consultation Objective	Tasks	When	Who
6. Working in partnership	I. Maintain Talkback Steering Group partnership (TSGP)	TSGP to continue to meet regularly & to also attend/read the minutes or updates of some partner organisation consultation meetings	Continuous	Consultation Officer, TSGP
		Share consultation findings	Continuous	Consultation Officer, TSGP
		Investigate possibility of a countywide panel	07	Consultation Officer, TSGP, CCOF
	II. Building on Countywide Consultation Officers Forum (CCOF)	Continue to attend CCOF meetings & to share knowledge across Oxfordshire	Continuous	Consultation Officer, TSGP, CCOF
		Provide joint training	Annually	Consultation Officer, CCOF
		Undertake a county-wide survey of young people	Dec 04	Consultation Officer, CCOF
		Consider another joint commission of the BVPI General Survey	07	Consultation Officer, CCOF

Consultation Aim	Consultation Objective	Tasks	When	Who
	III. Keeping abreast of developments in local government generally	<p>Review relevant websites, newsletters & journals</p> <p>Disseminate relevant consultation reports produced by other organisations</p> <p>Attend relevant external training, seminars & conferences</p> <p>Publicise examples of OCC consultation good practice (e.g. through writing articles etc.)</p>	<p>Continuous</p> <p>Continuous</p> <p>Continuous</p> <p>Continuous</p>	<p>Consultation Officer, CCOG</p> <p>Consultation Officer, CCOG</p> <p>Consultation Officer, CCOG</p> <p>Consultation Officer, CCOG, Media team</p>
7. Ensuring that consultation is used in decision making and translates into action	I. Disseminate consultation findings to aid decision making	<p>Develop a consultation library</p> <p>Set up an electronic filing system</p> <p>All reports to EB & Area Committees to include details of any consultation undertaken & to highlight any disparate views or issues arising from the consultation</p> <p>Use appropriate mechanisms to disseminate consultation findings to decision makers (e.g. committee meetings, reports, Councillor briefings etc.)</p>	<p>Oct 05</p> <p>Oct 05</p> <p>Continuous</p> <p>Continuous</p>	<p>Consultation Officer</p> <p>Consultation Officer</p> <p>Project Managers, Business Managers</p> <p>Project Managers, Business Managers</p>

Consultation Aim	Consultation Objective	Tasks	When	Who
	II. Provide evidence that demonstrates consultation has influenced service delivery	Post Project Appraisal form completed & sent to Consultation Officer & Performance Management Action Plans for every consultation exercise Annual Report of Consultation Findings and resulting actions Findings of consultation included in the Corporate Plan Business Plans to use previous consultation to develop appropriate actions	Continuous June 05 June 05/06/07 Dec 05 Feb 05/06/07	Project Managers Project Managers Consultation Officer CCOG Performance management Business Managers
8. Feeding back the consultation findings to consultees and disseminating the results more widely	I. Feeding back the findings & actions to consultees	At least two newsletters to Talkback Panel members per year Quality standards to include automatic feedback to consultees Report not just on the consultation findings, but also on the resulting actions Use the most appropriate method of feed back for the audience Keep the consultation pages on the Intranet & Internet regularly updated	Annually July 06 Continuous Continuous Continuous	Consultation Officer Consultation Officer Project Managers Project Managers Consultation Officer

Consultation Aim	Consultation Objective	Tasks	When	Who
	II. Using the most appropriate methods for communicating	Keep the consultation web pages regularly updated	Continuous	Consultation Officer
		Use a range of communication mechanisms - those most appropriate for the audiences	Continuous	Project Managers, Media Team
		Have a regular slot in 'Your Oxford'	Annually	Consultation Officer, Media Team
		Ensure communication is in line with the Communications Strategy	Continuous	Project Managers
		Incorporate communications into the Annual Consultation Plan	March 05	Consultation Officer, CCOG, Media Team
		Forward news stories to the Media team	Continuous	Consultation Officer, CCOG, Media Team
9. Using resources effectively	I. Combining consultation exercises where appropriate	Consider during Business Planning	Feb 05	Business Managers
		Investigate further joint commissioning with our partners	Continuous	Consultation Officer
		Consider during Annual Consultation Planning	March 05/06/07	Consultation Officer, CCOG

Consultation Aim	Consultation Objective	Tasks	When	Who
	II. Ensuring the provision of adequate resources for consultation activities	Maintain a corporate consultation budget Business units to ensure resources for service consultation (incl. Reps on CCOG) Seek value for money when commissioning external organisations to conduct consultation	April 05 April 05 Continuous	Exec Board Business Managers Project Managers
10. Monitoring and Review	I. Learning from previous consultation exercises and evaluations	Learn from evaluations, such as the Scrutiny Review of consultation, Talkback evaluation etc Ensure shared learning from previous consultation exercises Ensure learning is applied when developing the next year's Business Plan Disseminate best practice examples of consultation from other organisations Consultation participants systematically asked their views	Continuous Continuous Feb 05/06/07 Continuous Continuous	Consultation Officer, CCOG Consultation Officer, CCOG Business Managers Consultation Officer, CCOG Project Managers

Consultation Aim	Consultation Objective	Tasks	When	Who
	II. Annual Review of consultation	Peer evaluation of 10% of consultation exercises Strategic review of consultation Review progress against the Consultation Strategy Action Plan	Annually August 05/06/07 August 05/06/07	Consultation Officer, CCOG Consultation Officer, Director Champion Consultation Officer, Performance mgt

Acronyms

BVPI – Best Value Performance Indicator

CCOF – Countywide Consultation Officers Forum

CCOG – Consultation and Communication Officers Group

EB – Executive Board

MRS – Market Research Society

SMB – Strategic Management Board

SNAP – Survey software package for questionnaire design and analysis

Tracker – A work flow and document management system that is web enabled

TSGP – Talkback Steering Group Partnership