

Tell us what you think



Research and Consultation
Guidance and Standards

INTRODUCTION

In Hull we believe in asking people what they think about the issues and services that affect their lives. The Council regularly undertakes research and consultation with residents and other stakeholders to seek their views on proposed changes to council services, plans, policies and other important issues.

Research is a systematic investigation to establish facts, solve problems, prove ideas or develop new theories. It can measure attitudes and behaviours and whether different people view things differently. It must be undertaken with an open mind, and with a representative sample of people. Customer Feedback is included in research.

Consultation is the dynamic process of creating a dialogue on an issue leading to a decision based upon a genuine exchange of views. It requires forward planning and time. This requires open and honest communication and scope to influence the outcome and should be undertaken when plans are at a formative stage. There are principles and actions which must be followed in consultation. Councils must act on the results of consultation. **It's the law!**

This guidance document has been developed to assist service areas to make the right judgments about when, with whom and how to undertake research and consultation. It is designed to be an easy to understand, step by step process.



Hull City Council does however have minimum Research and Consultation Standards, which you should commit to meet. **Look for this symbol in this guidance.**

Note: Because consultation in particular, comes with its own legal duties all council consultation must reach the minimum Research and Consultation Standards. **If you have no intention of committing to these standards then it can't be called consultation.**

Why research and consultation needs to be done properly

- Hull City Council is committed to involving local people in the decisions that affect them. When done properly research and consultation enables people to make informed decisions and shape the services that affect them.
- Hull City Council is committed to evidence-led decision making. Research and consultation should produce evidence which is reliable, trustworthy and valuable, and which can stand up to scrutiny.
- Legal challenges to public consultations and decision-making have increased markedly since 2011, with courts being willing to intervene where all the requirements of lawful public consultation are not met e.g. robust evidence collection, equality analyses and fair, open and meaningful consultation.

THE COUNCIL'S RESEARCH AND CONSULTATION PRINCIPLES

The Council's Research and Consultation Principles are:

- All research and consultation should be fair
- It must be clear what the research / consultation is about
- Information must be concise and relevant, in plain clear English and should present proposals in concrete terms
- Those directly affected should be contacted and made aware of the proposals and of the consultation and enabled to feed back in the manner most appropriate for them
- The most appropriate method(s) for the intended audience should be used – this includes the use of alternative formats and languages, and digital and postal methods
- Raise awareness, making it as easy as possible to take part
- Ensure people have enough time and information to give their views
- Research / consult at a formative stage so people's views can be considered before making decisions and use them in the decision making
- Carefully analyse responses so that results are accurate, reliable and without bias
- Publish results and provide feedback on decisions taken, and next steps
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of research / consultation so that we can continue to improve
- Work in a co-ordinated way within the council and with partners to reduce waste, unnecessary cost and avoid duplication
- Understand what information is already available and use it
- Share results and learning, and be open to scrutiny

These principles are built upon

- The Gunning Principles 2001/14
- Cabinet Office Principles
- Case law
- Hull City Town Clerk's advice
- Market Research Society Code of Conduct



Where these principles are not followed; there is clear evidence that decisions can, and have, been overturned through judicial review. Not only does this waste money, time and resources, it also damages the reputation of the council and its partners.



To meet the Council's Research and Consultation Standard, any research or consultation must demonstrate an understanding and commitment to the Council's Research and Consultation Principles.

The Gunning Principles

The Gunning Principles are a set of rules for public consultation that are designed to make consultation fair:

1. **Proposals are still at a formative stage** - A decision has not yet been made, nor is it predetermined, by the decision makers
2. **There is sufficient information to give 'intelligent consideration'** - The information provided must relate to the consultation, must detail any issues or changes in concrete terms, and must be available, accessible, and easily interpretable for consultees to provide an informed response
3. **There is adequate time for consideration and response** - There must be sufficient opportunity for consultees to participate in the consultation. There is no set timeframe for consultation, despite the widely accepted twelve-week consultation period, as the length of time given for consultee to respond can vary depending on the subject and extent of impact of the consultation – corporate standards require a minimum of 6 weeks open period for responses for informal consultations and a minimum 12 week open period for a formal consultation. This does not include the planning or reporting stages
4. **'Conscientious consideration' must be given to the consultation responses before a decision is made** - Decision-makers should be able to provide evidence that they took consultation responses into account and demonstrate how and why they were or were not used

THE RESEARCH AND CONSULTATION PROCESS

1. Decide if you need to undertake research or consultation or neither

Do research / consult:

- To evidence / understand a need
- Inform a plan or policy
- To evidence your case
- To involve the community
- To make best use of resources

Do not research / consult:

- To communicate / market to people
- To ask leading questions
- To tick a box
- To get the answer you want
- To raise expectations and not deliver

You need to think about what has been decided already and what is open to change or influence. Remember that research and consultation will often raise public expectations, so you need to be clear how you plan to use the results.

Be prepared to act on the views expressed; otherwise, don't ask for them.

Consultation:

Decide if the project is research or is consultation.

Only consult people if they can have influence over the outcome.

If there is a reasonable expectation of consultation, then it should be done and done properly and it should follow the organisation's process and standards.

If there is a statutory requirement to consult, then it must be done and done properly. Statutory consultation will include direction about what must be included in the consultation process as a *minimum*, but rarely precludes good practice or existing process (i.e., this guidance).

3. Previous research / consultation and other data sources

You should ensure the information you need does not already exist. Avoiding repetition and duplication not only saves time and ensures value for money but also helps to avoid research / consultation fatigue and reputational damage. Look for opportunities for joint working which may avoid duplication and ensure value for money.

The Hull Data Observatory ([HERE](#)) holds both socio demographic information on Hull and its residents and the results of previous research and consultation. The Insight Team can advise on previous research and consultation.

4. Define a clear objective

Once you have decided there is a need to undertake research or consultation it is important to clearly define your main aims and objectives which should include a clear understanding of what you need to find out. This will help you when designing your research / consultation questions later in the process.

You should have a clear idea of:

- Q. What are you trying to achieve / what decision needs to be made
- Q. What data you need to achieve that / make that decision
- Q. What questions you are going to ask to get the data you need

5. Decide who you need to research / consult with / stakeholder mapping

You need to identify the people or groups who are likely to be affected, or have an interest in, the focus of the research or consultation.

- Those directly affected by the decision
- Those indirectly affected by the decision
- Those who might be affected by the decision in the future
- Those whose help is needed to make the decision work
- Those with specialist knowledge or expertise on the subject

You can't involve everyone with everything. Involvement should be proportionate to the significance of the issue and the benefits to be gained. However, those directly affected must be proactively reached. The sample you get should be representative of the population of interest demographically, geographically and numerically (sample size).



You may have to make special arrangements and extra efforts to get some people's views. To meet the Research and Consultation Standard you must demonstrate that consideration has been given to these groups.



Note: Groups who are 'hard to reach' could, for example, include young people, carers, or people with a disability or impairment. All interested groups must be given an *equal and fair* opportunity to participate, using appropriate methods. Any barriers should be identified and mitigated.

Remember: The results of your research or consultation, must be both **valid** and **representative** of your population of interest. You need a large enough number of responses to be confident in the result and respondents should "look" broadly like the wider population of interest. Different people may have different needs and it is important that we understand these when reviewing / developing services. If you are reviewing, removing or developing a strategy, policy, function or service, an Equalities Impact Assessment should be undertaken; contact corporate.equalities@hullcc.gov.uk

6. Decide when and how long you need to research / consult for

As much time as is possible should be given to every research / consultation project. There are a number of things to take into account:

Are there any statutory requirements? When to consult and the *minimum* time to consult for may be pre-determined.

If your research / consultation is not statutory then the length of time you research / consult should be determined by the nature and complexity of the research / consultation as well as the method used, the impact on individuals, how many people will be affected, who they are and how easy or hard they are to reach.

To meet the Research and Consultation Standard:



The **minimum** time for non-formal research and consultation (excluding planning and reporting time) is **6 weeks**.

The **minimum** time for formal research and consultation (excluding planning and reporting time) is **12 weeks**.

If you have more time to research / consult then you should use it.

If full information is not available at the outset, then research / consultation timescales should be extended. Consultation is an iterative process and may change through the course of the consultation period.

Research and consultation fatigue – if particular individuals / groups have been consulted on a similar (or separate) issue recently, you may want to consider delaying your research / consultation.

The deadlines you need to meet should be used to inform your planning and timings.

7. Decide what research / consultation method(s) to use

The methodology you choose will depend on:

- What the research / consultation is about
- The types of questions you want answered
- The type of people you are undertaking research / consultation with
- The amount of time and budget you have

The Insight Team can help you to design your research / consultation based on what you are researching / consulting on, with whom and for how long. The most popular ways of conducting research and consultation include:

1. Paper Survey

Paper surveys are an accessible way to research / consult with the majority of residents. However, a paper survey always involves a lot of additional cost / resource. If they are mailed out, then the surveys need to be printed, placed into envelopes, posted and a mechanism (freepost envelope) should always be provided for respondents to reply free of charge. Paper surveys also need to be data entered once they are returned / completed which has a further impact on timescales and costs. They are also not suitable for all audiences. Consideration must be given to the provision of alternative formats / languages.

2. Online Survey

An online survey can be emailed directly to people or can be shared online through social media and the Council's dedicated consultations and surveys webpage. Whilst using an online survey will minimise costs and timescales, an online survey can typically only be completed by someone with access to the internet. Depending on whom you need to research / consult with you may need to provide alternative methodologies or additional support. You will also need to consider other ways you will get people to complete your survey. Consideration should be given to accessibility and to other language requirements.

3. The People's Panel

The People's Panel is a community of over 3,000 local residents who are surveyed online four times a year on a variety of subjects. They are a highly engaged, representative group who provide the Council with high quality local intelligence. To use the People's Panel to research / consult with Hull residents the Insight Team need to be involved at least 12 weeks in advance and content must meet the Council Research and Consultation Standard. You will also be expected to provide a prize for the survey and to demonstrate that you are promoting completion of the Panel through your own marketing / communication channels.

Note: There is a high level of demand for content in the People's Panel and therefore inclusion cannot be guaranteed. Priority will be given to 'planned' content (i.e. those who have come to the Insight Team early), content which appeals to / impacts on the general resident (rather than a small subset) and content which meets the Research and Consultation Standard.

The Insight Team does not help run focus groups. They can however, provide you with the details of agencies that offer this service and help with the tendering of agency services.

To meet the Council Research and Consultation Standard:



You must use the research / consultation method(s) which will get the best response from those you have decided to research / consult. You may need to use a variety of research / consultation methods.

8. Check you have the time / resource to research / consult properly

Now you have a clear idea of what information you need, from whom, and how and when you are going to collect it, then you can decide if you have the available time and resource to research / consult **properly**.

Don't forget, you need to think about the time and resource needed to:

- Plan the research / consultation
- Allow people to respond
- Collate and analyse the results
- Allow the results to inform any action or decision to be made

You will need budget / staff resource depending on the methodology you use.

9. Gain Appropriate Approval

All research and consultation should be approved at the appropriate level.

To meet the Council Research and Consultation Standard:



Your research / consultation will need to be approved by an Assistant Director or Director who commits to the Council's Research and Consultation Standard Principles and agrees to adhere to the guidance provided. You may also need to seek approval from the Portfolio holder, a relevant group, board or council meeting. This will depend on the significance / importance of the research / consultation to the council and residents, whether it is a statutory consultation and the likely outcome of your research / consultation and the impact this will have.

10. Inform the Insight Team



The Insight Team has developed the Council Research and Consultation Standards. The Insight Team will help and assist research / consultation projects which commit to the Council's Research and Consultation Principles to reach to the Council Research and Consultation Standard.

Once you have Assistant Director / Director approval, you should contact the Insight Team on insight@hullcc.gov.uk as early as possible.

11. Develop a detailed research / consultation and communications plan

Now that you know the 'what, when, who and how' of your research / consultation you should prepare a detailed research / consultation and communications plan.

This should outline the process from beginning to end. This will ensure the process runs smoothly and that everyone is clear and committed to achieving it.



You should complete a Research and Consultation Plan. (Appendix A). The Insight Team can help you to do this in detail.

Support from colleagues within the council and partners should be sought to increase awareness of the research / consultation. Publication on the Council website is not enough; to ensure a successful response then research / consultations must be promoted more broadly and you must have a plan for proactively getting responses, including the use of direct mailers.

Remember: You are responsible for the number of responses your research / consultation receives; including ensuring that the results of your research / consultation are both valid and representative.

12. Design and start your research / consultation



You now need to design the materials you will use both when researching / consulting and communicating the research / consultation.

To meet the Council Research and Consultation Standard:

When designing your research / consultation materials you must make sure that the 'language' and the terminology you use is clear, informative, and will not confuse those taking part and it must be suitable for the audience.

You may need to produce accessible formats, including easy read, audio, large print and alternative languages. Relevant and appropriate information must be included and the effects of any change being proposed should expressed in 'concrete terms'.

The Insight Team can help but you should ensure that people know:

- Who is being researched / consulted and why
- What decisions / processes will be informed / influenced
- Who will take the final decision and when
- How the results of the research / consultation will be fed back to them
- That anonymity and confidentiality will be respected (if applicable)
- What will be done with any personal data and how it will be used
- Who they can contact if they have any questions or complaints



To meet the Council Research and Consultation Standard:

All research / consultation materials should collect demographic information on respondents and details of respondents who wish to join the People's Panel / Enterprise Panel.

Collecting demographic information on respondents allows you to evaluate how well the responses you receive represent your population of interest and whether different 'types' of respondent have differing views or opinions. It helps you to formulate your Equality analyses, and to meet your duties under the Equalities Act as well as to help make sure your consultation and decision-making are lawful.

The Council has a standard method of collecting this information which should be used across all research / consultation (see Appendix B).

Throughout the research / consultation, you should keep track of the number and representativeness of responses you receive so action can be taken to improve response rates if necessary (including within specific groups of the population). You should also check the responses being submitted to get an indication of the issues arising.

You should include a privacy notice with your consultation / research materials and must only collect information that you need. You must not collect information you cannot use.

13. Analyse, interpret and report results

A comprehensive analysis of the results considers the story the data is telling and what this means in terms of the questions asked. It should seek to identify any patterns, trends or themes, to help identify key issues including whether different 'types' of respondents think or feel differently. Analysis should always be open and honest about the number of people that replied and the actual results of the research / consultation

If the research / consultation is planned in advance, the Insight Team may be able to help with your analysis. However, the Insight Team typically do not analyse open text responses and you should bear this in mind when designing your questions. The Insight Team can advise on how you can analyse your own open text responses.

You will have to decide what you are going to do as a result of your research / consultation and why. Remember, you should always be able to explain how consultee's contributions have informed the decision making process.

14. Provide feedback

Feedback is an important part of research / consultation and demonstrates to people that you have listened to their views and that you have used them to inform decisions. Sharing the results with colleagues and other interested parties prevents research / consultation fatigue (by ensuring residents don't get asked the same questions again and again), and improves data sharing and best practice.



To meet the Council Research and Consultation Standard:

The results of your research / consultation should be shared with the Insight Team, the public and other interested parties, including via the Hull Data Observatory.

15. Evaluate the consultation

You need to consider how successful your research / consultation has been. Success includes more than just receiving responses. It includes whether the responses received are helpful to you in achieving your aims and objectives, whether the best methods of research / consultation were used, if the research / consultation came in on budget, and so on.

If the Insight Team supported your project they will tell you if it met the Council Research and Consultation Standard.

THE RESEARCH AND CONSULTATION CHECKLIST

Before you research / consult

- I need to do research / consultation
- I have checked previous research / consultation and other data sources
- I have a clear objective and understand what I need to know
- I know who I need to research / consult with
- I know when and how long I need to research / consult for
- I know what research / consultation method(s) I am need to use
- I have the time and resource to research / consult properly
- I have the appropriate approval to research / consult
- I have told the Insight Team about my research / consultation
- I have a detailed research / consultation and communications plan
- I have appropriate research / consultation and communication materials

After you research / consult

- I have analysed the results of my research / consultation
- I have reported the results of my research / consultation; demonstrating how consultee's contributions have informed the decision-making process
- I have provided feedback and shared the results (including with the public and the Insight Team)
- I have evaluated the success of the research / consultation

THE COUNCIL'S STANDARD

As a Council we are committed to:

- Ensuring that we meet any statutory obligations when consulting with people
- Adhering to our research and consultation principles
- Providing officers with the necessary guidance and tools to undertake research and consultation effectively and efficiently
- Ensuring that research and consultation is of a high standard and that decisions are made based on high quality, reliable data
- Having a consistent, co-ordinated and joined-up approach to research consultation across the council and with our partners

In order to achieve this, the Insight Team produces a quarterly report to senior management which includes a list of all known upcoming and recently completed research and consultation. This provides an organisational overview of what is being asked, to whom, and by whom.

To provide decision makers and the public with confidence in the results of this research and consultation, this report also includes details of whether research and consultation meets / met the Council's Research and Consultation Standard.

To meet the Council's Research and Consultation Standard:



- It should be approved by an Assistant Director / Director
- Advice should be sought from the Insight Team at the appropriate stage
- It should demonstrate an understanding and commitment to the Council's Research and Consultation Principles

This includes meeting minimum standards of:

- Questionnaire / Data collection design
 - Methodology
 - Timescales
 - Analysis and reporting
- Results of the consultation should be valid and representative of the population of interest
 - Results should be shared externally and internally and published on the Hull Data Observatory

Appendix A: Research and Consultation Planning

Consultation Name:	
Director / A.D:	
Named Officer:	
Contact Number:	
Service Area:	
Objectives:	
<i>Why are you carrying out this activity? What needs to be decided? What information do you need? What questions will you ask?</i>	
Is this a statutory requirement?	Y/N
Have you checked what other data is available?	Y/N
Audience	
<i>Who will be affected? Who needs to be consulted? Do any hard to reach groups or groups with specialist requirements need to be consulted?</i>	
Methodology	
<i>What are your audiences' preferred communications channels? Is there more than one way for people to have their say? How will you capture the results, so nothing is missed?</i>	
Do you intend to use the People's Panel?	Y/N
Promotion	
<i>How will you encourage people to complete? How will you market it?</i>	
Timing and Milestones	
<i>When does a decision need to be made? Does a report have to be produced by a certain date?</i>	
Do you have the budget / resource to do this properly?	Y/N
Analysis	
<i>Who is going to analyse responses? What level of analysis is required?</i>	
Results and Feedback	
<i>How will the results be used? How will they be fed back to those who took part in the research / consultation? How will they be shared more widely?</i>	
Evaluation	
<i>How will you evaluate if the research / consultation process was successful and achieved its objectives?</i>	

Appendix B: Standard Demographic Questions

The following questions help us to make sure that we have received the views of a representative sample of people and also help us to understand if different groups have different views and experiences. This helps us to make sure that we deliver our services fairly.

At the end of this section there is space for you to tell us anything else about yourself that we have not asked.

This information will remain confidential and will not be shared with anyone else. This information will not be reported at an individual level and will not be tied back to you.

Leave any questions you do not want to answer blank

Q1. What is your full postcode at home?

Q2. What year were you born? (YYYY)

Q3. In which of the following age ranges are you? Please tick one box

11 – 16 17 – 24 25 – 34 35 – 44 45 – 54 55 -64 65+

Q4. Which of the following best describes you? **Please tick one box**

Male / Man..... FTM..... Non-binary / other
(please state)
Female / Woman MTF.....

If you prefer to use your own term, or there is anything else about your gender or gender identity you would like to say, please use the space below

Q5. Which of the following best describes your ethnic background? **Please tick one box**

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> White British | <input type="checkbox"/> Mixed / Multiple ethnicities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other White (please state) | <input type="checkbox"/> Arab |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black / Black British | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please state) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asian / Asian British | |

Q6. Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or an impairment which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months? (Please include conditions such as mental health issues or those related to ageing). **Please tick one box**

Yes, a little Yes, a lot No

Q7. If there is anything else you'd like to tell us about yourself, please use the space below. Examples of things other people have told us are the different languages they speak, that they are transgender, more information about their impairment or the voluntary work that they do.

The Armed Forces Covenant

The Armed Forces Covenant is a promise by the nation ensuring that those who serve or who have served in the armed forces, and their families, are treated fairly and get the help they need and are entitled to. These questions will help us to deliver on that promise.

Q8. Have you ever served in the armed forces? **Please tick one box**

Yes

No

If yes, Please tell us which service

Sign up for the People's Panel

Have you signed up to get the People's Panel yet? Have your say on the way public services are delivered, and on the future of the city and take part in local and national research projects that are both interesting and important.

People's Panel members influence many local decisions that affect them and their families. It couldn't be easier. You don't have to come to any meetings; we will send a survey straight to you by email. Every time you complete a survey, you will be entered into a prize draw to win a fabulous prize.

Name

Email

Mobile phone

NB: the Insight Team have alternative questions which should be used if you are conducting research / consultation with local businesses. The Insight Team also have supplementary demographic questions, such as sexual orientation, impairment type etc. These should be used rarely and under advisement of the Insight Team