

Consultation Methods

This list of approaches is designed to be as comprehensive as possible. However, a number of techniques overlap, and sometimes a range of titles is used. Similar techniques have been grouped together here, although alternative titles have been given in addition where possible in the following index. The principle has been used that each approach described should have something distinctive about it. Some other guides discuss each named approach individually.

Index

Area forums or committees	Art (to express ideas)	Cable television
Choice at point of service delivery	Citizens juries	Citizens' Panel (large scale research panel)
Citizens' Workshops (deliberative panels)	Citizens' Polls	Comments and complaints
Complaints	Computer records (using existing information)	Consensus Panels (deliberative)
Consensus techniques	Conflict resolution	Consulting employees
Co-option	Deliberative Opinion Polls	Deliberative panels
Desk research	Devolving power to users	Diaries
Direct user involvement	Documentary information (desk research)	Documents seeking comments
Drama	Electronic communications	Employee involvement
Exhibitions roadshows open days	Existing interest groups	Facilitated workshops (ways of involving participants)
Focus groups	Front line staff	Future Search
Health panels	Hearings	In-depth interviews
Informal contacts	Internet	Interest forum (established by Council)
Interest groups (existing)	Interviews	Invitations for comments
Involvement in Council committees	Leaflets inviting comments	Mass media
Members' contacts and outside bodies	Metaphor	Mystery Customers
Neighbourhood committees or forums	Newspapers	Nominal Group Technique
Observation	Open Days	Open Space
Other deliberative panels	Other interest forum (established by Council)	Parish Councils
Participant led sessions	Participation	Petitions
Pictures metaphors drama	Piloting service changes	Planning for real
Plays	Professional bodies	Profiles (desk research)
Public involvement in hearings or scrutiny	Public meetings	Question time (Council or committees)
Questionnaires and surveys	Radio	Reading circles
Referendums	Request for written comments	Road Shows
Role Play	Round Tables	Samoan Circles
Scrutiny – public involvement in	Semi-structured interviews	Service user groups
Specialist bodies	Standing Research Panels	Suggestions schemes
Surveys	Tapping peoples experience	Television
Use of front line staff	User choice and involvement in services	User groups
User Management of Services	Video box	Video (as part of observation)
Village Appraisal	Visioning exercise	Whole systems events
Written comments		

	Good For	Problems / Beware of	Cost
<p>Questionnaire and surveys Postal, telephone, in person, service specific or corporate. In home, in street, at point of service use. This group of techniques includes a vast variety depending on numbers reached, nature of the questions, whether conducted by interviewers or self-completion, where people are contacted, etc.</p>	<p>Larger numbers, so able to obtain representative view. Because specific and quantifiable, able in principle to compare over time and with results elsewhere. Also able to use as targets and for performance measure.</p> <p>Useful where questions and issues understood (e.g. about people's personal experience) but need to be tested quantifiably.</p> <p>Telephone polling can be carried out very quickly. Cheaper than household surveys. Lower refusal rate than self-completion postal surveys. Personal contact without the intimacy of face-to-face which may mean more, or less, information volunteered.</p> <p>Self-completion questionnaires cheaper but less reliable. Respondent has more time to consider answers. Less scope for interviewer bias, but may misinterpret questions.</p>	<p>Doesn't allow for two way dialogue; no chance for discussion or deliberation so not useful in areas where respondents are likely to be not well informed.</p> <p>May not get accurate picture of groups making up a small proportion of the community (e.g. ethnic minorities in some areas, or users of services which affect small numbers, such as pest control)</p> <p>Questions have to be meaningful, understandable and useful.</p> <p>Need statistically robust selection.</p> <p>Telephone polling excludes those without a phone who may be the more disadvantaged.</p> <p>Self-completion questionnaires may be unrepresentative depending who decides to complete them. May disadvantage those who have difficulty</p>	<p>£20k-£30k for 1,000 interviews in people's homes. £3k-£10k for 500-750 person postal survey. If done in-house do not underestimate skills required (badly phrased or uninformative questions can nullify any benefits, so in effect prove very costly). Analysis can be extremely time consuming.</p>

	<p>May be easier to reach people geographically dispersed. If sending to larger numbers of people is more inclusive and seen to be consulting people.</p>	<p>with the reading or the language used. Also less control over who completes them and how.</p>	
<p>Citizens' Panels / Standing Research Panels</p> <p>Ongoing panels of around 1,000-2,000 representative of the local community, surveyed several times a year, usually by post or phone. Panels can also be used in other ways, in the whole or sub-groups for deliberative workshops, focus groups etc. Once some or all become more knowledgeable, they become less representative.</p>	<p>Being taken up by many authorities, since using the same panel a number of times reduces recruitment costs.</p> <p>Since people agree to be on the panel, should increase response rates.</p> <p>May allow for some measurement of changes over time, though there are disagreements over the statistical validity of this.</p>	<p>Risk could become simply a 'fashion'. People on the panel become more knowledgeable than the general public over time, and therefore less representative, so need turnover of the panel (about a third per year) which may reduce validity of tracking over time.</p> <p>Volunteering to respond to several surveys may mean they are more 'willing' than the population at large.</p>	<p>Should be cheaper than the equivalent one-off survey. Costs depend on size of panel, means of recruiting, method of polling, whether costs shared with other agencies. Reported costs, in one case £5k p.a. for telephone survey. In another, £25k set up, £8k p.a. + £5k staff costs.</p>
<p>Deliberative Opinion Polls</p> <p>Representative samples are used (representative demographically but also representative of attitudes based on an initial, broader, baseline survey) but participants have the opportunity to learn about and discuss the issue, questioning experts, so they can make informed and thought through judgements. 250 to 600 people might meet over 2-4 days</p>	<p>The best of all worlds - informed but representative views.</p>	<p>Expensive. (Have often been done in conjunction with media organisations, which could help share costs).</p> <p>As with any provision of information there is always the risk of bias.</p>	<p>Approx £250k for local poll to several millions for national one.</p>

<p>with polls taken at the beginning and end of the event.</p>			
<p>Referendums Asking a question of the whole population. May be carried out using normal election machinery, by post etc. If not binding, more likely to be called 'Citizens' Poll.</p>	<p>Useful on issues where everyone is felt to have a right to have a say and which are felt to be important locally and the results will be acted on.</p> <p>Provides a clear mandate for action.</p>	<p>Not appropriate for many issues, e.g. when respondents do not have the knowledge or skills to make a judgement, or for complex issues not subject to 'yes-no' answers. It should also be on an issue which can be considered on its own, not dependent on other questions.</p> <p>If turnout is low may not be representative.</p> <p>A majority view may not be the 'community view' - need to consider interests of minorities.</p>	<p>In addition to the normal costs associated with a large scale survey, there may be additional costs ensuring that only those qualified to do so vote.</p> <p>Costs may depend whether ballot is in person, postal, electronic or a combination.</p> <p>There will information and publicity costs to ensure decisions are as informed as possible.</p>
<p>Comments and Complaints Schemes Comments cards or suggestions boxes, in reception or at point of service delivery; systems for ensuring any comments or complaints are dealt with systematically and recorded so lessons can be learnt.</p>	<p>Being aware what's going wrong - a free source of detailed information about how services are working.</p> <p>Complainants properly dealt with are likely to be more satisfied evenly than if nothing had gone wrong in the first place!</p> <p>Another possible source of new ideas.</p>	<p>May not be representative.</p> <p>Ideally (i.e. if not anonymous) results of suggestions should be fed back to those making them.</p> <p>A good and well publicised complaints scheme should encourage complaints, so the number of complaints received shouldn't be used as an indicator of success.</p> <p>Needs to be a culture and attitude which welcomes and encourages comments and complaints and ensures something is</p>	<p>Most authorities have systems already, however a little time and effort may be needed to ensure they are comprehensive and effective.</p>

		done about them.	
<p>Invitations for written inputs</p> <p>General request for comments, from the public at large or from service users. Often distributed through Council newspaper or leaflets, either limited coverage or to all households. This may be just one or two open or closed questions. A rather different alternative is publication of consultation documents on which the public and interested bodies are invited to comment.</p>	<p>Gives anyone the chance to have their say. Inclusive. Lets people know you are listening.</p> <p>Responses take into account information given in leaflet, so more informed.</p> <p>May be qualitative or quantitative (tick box) information.</p>	<p>May not be representative. Frequently get low response rates (e.g. a few hundred responses, from 30 – 50,000 distributed) unless it's of importance to people (e.g. community safety).</p> <p>Impossible for the information given in the leaflet or newspaper to be totally objective and neutral so may skew responses.</p> <p>Where open ended questions are given (rather than 'tick boxes') it may be hard to analyse responses, if do get larger response or, say, several thousand.</p>	<p>Printing costs.</p> <p>Distribution (Council newspaper, with local free paper, hand delivery, discounted bulk mail). May be possible to keep costs down by doing in conjunction with some other distribution.</p> <p>Analysis (some Councils have been unprepared for large responses and have been swamped).</p>
<p>Public meetings</p> <p>One-off rather than ongoing forums. Needn't be the traditional evening spent in a cold hall being harangued from the platform. Can allow opportunities for small group discussions and feedback through oral reports, sticky notes stuck on walls, electronic voting etc. There may be opportunities for those present to set or influence the agenda, for instance in small</p>	<p>Gives a large number of people, with open invitation, the chance to have their say.</p> <p>An opportunity to explain and give information.</p> <p>If organised effectively, the potential for informed discussion and hearing the views of a large number of people.</p> <p>Demonstrates that the Council is listening, and may be reported more widely (in local media) to reach those who do not</p>	<p>Beware traditional format with platform making the presentation, audience little chance to contribute, encourages conflict.</p> <p>Need to give careful thought to timing, location and venue, publicity, facilities etc.</p> <p>Could lead to bad media publicity, especially if confrontational.</p> <p>Unlikely to be representative - not</p>	<p>Hire of hall. Advertising and publicity.</p> <p>Handouts or subsequent reports.</p> <p>Officer time.</p> <p>Break out rooms ideally required to help small group working (probably have to have more than one group in each room).</p> <p>Need plentiful supply of flip</p>

<p>groups or through the questions asked.</p>	<p>attend.</p> <p>May be more effective in smaller communities than across the whole town or city.</p> <p>Meetings may be regular, covering a range of issues, rather than one-offs. Such assemblies need careful organising and management to be effective.</p>	<p>everyone has the time, ability or inclination to attend.</p> <p>Attendances often low unless people feel personally and deeply concerned and/or affected.</p> <p>Many people likely to be inhibited from speaking in large group.</p>	<p>chart paper, blue tack, Post-it notes etc.</p>
<p>Area/neighbourhood Forums and Panels Meetings involving citizens in a particular geographically-defined area (rather than Councillor only area committees). May be on particular service or more general. Having officer and/or Member involvement. Membership may be set (e.g. local groups) or open to the public. A budget may be devolved to the forum (usually formally to a Council committee or to officers). Agenda may be set in advance or formulated at the time according to participant concerns.</p>	<p>Good for reaching people in their own areas and addressing specific local concerns. Can relate to natural communities.</p> <p>If all relevant agencies are there (police, health etc.), all complaints can be dealt with, which increases credibility with the public.</p> <p>A relatively small budget can be quite significant for a small area (considering this is a 'top up' on regular council services).</p>	<p>Needs commitment to keep it going. Be prepared for people just complaining early on.</p> <p>Involve ward councillors.</p> <p>Need to avoid domination by small cliques.</p> <p>Danger of them becoming rule bound and bureaucratic.</p> <p>Danger of confusion or conflict over the respective roles of Councillors and other local representatives.</p>	<p>Cost of officer time in arranging and attending. Hire of rooms. Publicity.</p>
<p>Service User Groups Regular meetings of users of a service, either with fixed or open membership. May be self-organised and/or selected, or selected by the Council. The nature of the group.</p>	<p>A chance to discuss the issues with the people who know.</p> <p>Can help generate new ideas and provide early warning of problems.</p> <p>Because ongoing allows follow up discussions,</p>	<p>May not be representative – might have to check out significant findings on statistically representative sample.</p> <p>Unlikely to represent non-users.</p>	<p>Cost and time of recruiting members, and the administrative costs of running meetings, including hire of venue, advertising and payment of travel expenses.</p>

<p>and especially how representative it is will vary accordingly. They will also vary in any rights to make recommendations to Council committees or share decision making.</p>	<p>and building up rapport and trust over a period of time (though may need turnover of membership so do not become too close to the organisation).</p>	<p>Some services don't have 'users' – or the people dealt with are not the ones for whom the service is provided.</p> <p>As with all such groups, the members need to be clear on what basis they have been selected, their role and how much power they have.</p>	<p>Costs of analysing outcomes.</p> <p>There are also costs (e.g. giving up free time) for volunteers on the groups.</p>
<p>Other Interest Forums and Panels Ongoing groups, established by the Council for consultation, focusing on a particular issue or citizen group, e.g. youth assemblies. May have a fixed or open membership.</p>	<p>Council can design the group to meet its needs (so e.g. not relying on 'self-selected leaders').</p>	<p>May be harder to recruit people to a Council panel than allow people to organise themselves.</p>	<p>Depends whether specialist company used for recruitment.</p>
<p>Public involvement in hearings and scrutiny committees Ad hoc or ongoing gatherings involving users, members of the public and other interested bodies usually alongside Councillors, reviewing performance or investigating some general or cross cutting issue.</p>	<p>Likely to be tied directly into the policy making process.</p> <p>Allows direct, systematic dialogue between Councillors and community interests.</p> <p>This model could be used for Best Value reviews.</p>	<p>Formality of the process may put some people off. Will not necessarily get a representative view.</p>	<p>The usual meeting costs, including meeting expenses of members of the public.</p>
<p>Involvement in Council Committees and business Public question time at Council and committees; petitions; co-option onto committees (though usually now without</p>	<p>Cheap and gives the public the chance to get involved, have their say or raise questions should they want to.</p> <p>In theory open to everyone so inclusive.</p>	<p>Involves a limited number of people. Many people will be unaware or unwilling to get involved. Unlikely to be representative. Risks being conflictual.</p>	<p>Publicity for the scheme. Expenses for co-optees.</p>

the right to vote).	Could be a valuable long stop.		
<p>Existing interest or specialist groups Regular consultation with existing bodies including parish Councils, other public sector bodies, private sector organisations, specialist groups, professional bodies, interest groups, ethnic minority groups, voluntary and advice giving bodies, civic societies, sports and leisure societies and reading circles, and other stakeholders.</p>	<p>Relatively cheap, because these bodies already exist.</p> <p>Should have an in depth knowledge of their particular community, perhaps including groups the Council finds it hard to reach.</p> <p>Often have specialist expertise in their area of concern.</p> <p>Perhaps best used as a starting point, to raise questions, rather than believing they provide the answers.</p> <p>Able to build a relationship of trust and co-operation over a period of time.</p> <p>The groups can develop specialist knowledge and so give informed views.</p>	<p>May not truly represent their constituency.</p> <p>They may be operating with limited time and money and could become easily overburdened.</p> <p>Many services regularly approaching the same groups can lead to ‘consultation fatigue’.</p> <p>Need to be sensitive to the particular circumstances of the body and treat it as a partnership, developing a relationship over time not an automatic right and duty to hear their views.</p>	<p>The direct costs of communication.</p> <p>Maintaining records of the various groups (voluntary officers of a society may well change each year).</p>
<p>Focus groups An established market research technique where an issue is explored in depth for 1 or 2 hours through structured but open ended discussion by a group of around 8-10 people, representative of a particular sector, led by a trained facilitator. Keeping similar types of people together helps reduce inhibition and promote discussion.</p>	<p>Good for issues where need in-depth qualitative view.</p> <p>Useful to generate questions for quantitative analysis or analyse and explain <i>after</i> quantitative survey.</p> <p>Can be used to assess reaction to proposed changes.</p> <p>Avoids just hearing the ‘loudest voices’.</p> <p>May be used to focus on sections of the community commonly</p>	<p>Because of small numbers, can’t be guaranteed to be statistically representative of the community as a whole.</p> <p>May need a number of groups to cover all relevant groups.</p> <p>Worth doing using specialists, probably outside company.</p>	<p>About £1,000 - £1,500 per group if commissioned externally (unlikely that the true costs would be any less if done in-house).</p>

	<p>excluded.</p> <p>Group discussion allows ideas to be built on, and directions taken not initially thought of, rather than follow single individual's view or preset questions.</p>		
<p>Citizens' juries Group of 12-16 citizens, representative of the local community, who take evidence and deliberate over 4/5 days and recommend to the Local Authority, which still takes the final decision. This produces an informed and collective view, resulting from deliberation.</p>	<p>Good for involving citizens in significant decisions.</p> <p>A valuable model for harnessing citizen commitment and obtaining informed opinions.</p>	<p>Costly, so pick the issue carefully.</p> <p>Because of small numbers, not necessarily representative of the community as a whole. To the extent that outcomes are representative, they will be representative of what the community would think if exposed to all this information, i.e. their informed rather than 'naïve' view.</p> <p>The sponsoring body (i.e. the Council) has to be prepared to accept the results or else the process rapidly loses credibility.</p>	<p>£17,000 - £23,000 if outside professionals are used for selecting the jury, moderation etc. This does not include the considerable amount of staff time involved both in preparation and running the jury.</p>
<p>Other deliberative panels / 'Citizens' Workshop' e.g. where a representative group of citizens are brought together to learn about, discuss and give their views on an issue. Typically 12-20 people might be brought together for a day, or might meet for a couple of hours on several</p>	<p>Many of the advantages of Citizens' Juries without the costs.</p> <p>Allows participants to develop stronger relationships than in a focus group.</p> <p>Depending on the model it can allow knowledge to be built up over a period of time with ample opportunity for reflection (and discussion</p>	<p>You get what you pay for. The less time you spend, the less well informed the consultees are.</p> <p>Because of the small numbers, you cannot be sure the results will be representative of the community as a whole.</p>	<p>Depends whether expert help is bought in, whether any expense payments are made etc. Can take considerable officer time.</p>

<p>occasions. Some Health authorities have Health Panels, each of 12 members representative of various demographic characteristics, meeting 3 times a year, with parallel panels discussing the same topics. 'Consensus conferencing' has been used in Denmark and by the Science Museum where 10-20 lay people question scientists or other specialists before reporting consensus conclusions.</p>	<p>with others).</p>		
<p>Pictures, Metaphors and Drama People are invited to express their thoughts and feelings in other ways, such as through drawings, art or plays. Could include a role play of how would ideally like to experience the service. Used for groups with common experiences and/or identity.</p>	<p>Can be a good way of defining the agenda, unconstrained by limitations of words or prior assumptions. Can allow feelings and emotions to be expressed which difficult to put into words or which unconscious or repressed.</p> <p>May be helpful for those who have difficulty with language. Not just for use with 'disadvantaged' groups, can also provide insights into the thinking of 'high flying executives'.</p> <p>Can be enjoyable and creative.</p>	<p>May require a leap of faith by participants so some skill and experience by facilitators. Some people may feel self-conscious, particularly with drama.</p> <p>May be difficult to analyse what is really meant or to summarise it all accurately.</p>	<p>This is something likely to be used as part of other activities. The main costs will be of skilled facilitators (including possibly assistants), materials and the time of those involved. May also be costs of transport child care and other expenses of participants.</p>
<p>Visioning Exercise Helping a community establish a vision of the sort of future they would like for their</p>	<p>Useful for community Planning and the corporate aspects of Best Value. Broad and exploratory.</p>	<p>New area for most people - requires particular skills, e.g. in facilitation and broad, blue-sky thinking.</p>	<p>Time taken to organise. Possibly cost of specialist facilitator.</p>

<p>area (e.g. Local Agenda 21). May involve picturing alternative futures. 'Future Search' is one specific approach described in a book of the same name by M.R. Weisbord and S. Janoff, 1995, where stakeholders are brought together for a three day conference. Aims to produce consensus.</p>	<p>Can start to deal with conflicting interests.</p> <p>'Consensus' may be not just a point between the extremes and something less than each party wants, but creative, with new ways of thinking about the issue.</p>	<p>There may be conflicts of interest which cannot be resolved, or not simply.</p>	<p>Cost likely to be £5,000-£10,000.</p>
<p>Samoan Circles A way of managing participation in a large group. Inner circle of 5 to 6 chairs, rest in outer circle. To speak most move to inner circle. Stand behind inner circle chair to wait for a chair, then return to original seat afterwards.</p>	<p>Produces some of the benefits of small group dynamics.</p> <p>The formal management of participation draws attention to and helps manage domination of proceedings by individuals.</p>	<p>A lot of people are still not able to speak most of the time and may not feel able to push themselves forward.</p>	
<p>Participant led sessions / facilitated workshops / ways of helping participants set the agenda Range of techniques available, often borrowed from training and management development. Examples include whole systems events and open space. Participants set the agenda on the day, e.g. by writing concerns on post-it notes, sticking them on the walls and arranging them into</p>	<p>These are ways of improving other sorts of event as much as techniques in themselves.</p> <p>Very valuable in letting participants set the agenda without domination by the Council or particularly vociferous elements. Doesn't substitute for discussion, but helps moderate it, ensuring all voices can be heard.</p>	<p>Need training and familiarity with the approaches before trying them out. They may put some people off, to begin with, as being strange and trendy (but most people see the benefits in use).</p> <p>Any individual technique may not give the whole answer, e.g. may just identify problems or issues, get suggestions. May still be a need for full discussion, expert input, consensus</p>	<p>Few additional costs beyond that for the meeting (but possibly including cost of facilitator). Flip charts, post-it notes, pens.</p>

<p>themes. Workshops are held, then written up and distributed to participants. Nominal group technique involves listing views or ideas, individuals select most important and rank them, this then collated into overall ranking.</p>		<p>building etc.</p>	
<p>Open Space Very flexible approach where those present determine the issues discussed. Starts with individuals identifying issues in which they are interested and prepared to take responsibility for leading a workshop. Participants sign up for the workshops which are recorded for feedback at the close of the event or shortly after. Principles emphasise flexibility, informality and responsibility to go to where you can learn or contribute.</p>	<p>Good for addressing difficult issues, involving a large number of people, particularly where there are conflicting views.</p>	<p>A good idea to get some experience of the approach before trying it out. It may seem new and different to some people, but reactions to it generally seem to be very positive.</p>	<p>Cost of a facilitator for the day, a large venue and stationery (flip chart paper, something to stick it to the wall, marker pens, post-it notes, etc.).</p>
<p>Consensus Techniques and Conflict Resolution Ways of bringing people together to try and find common ground and new ways of more fully meeting the needs of each side. May be on a specific issue, e.g. a development, or more generally concerning</p>	<p>Allows more positive outcomes than traditional approaches. Rather than merely finding a compromise which does not exactly meet anyone's needs, may produce totally new ideas.</p>	<p>Requires specialist facilitation. Real conflicts may require specialist mediation, or may be completely intractable. Participants need to be willing to participate. Depending on numbers and who attends, may not be representative of the</p>	<p>Takes time. Requires trained facilitators.</p>

<p>the future of an area or community. Variations in how far solutions are proposed by outside facilitator. 'Round tables' bring together key stakeholders.</p>		<p>community as a whole.</p>	
<p>Exhibitions, Roadshows and Open Days Where the opportunity is taken to listen as well as to give information out. Information can be collected through self-completion questionnaires, comments cards, questions asked by interviewers or members or staff, through informal discussions (with main points noted), through post-it notes (which can then be grouped by theme) etc. Information can be given through display boards, models, written material, video, tape-slide etc. May be an opportunity to visit Council facilities, see locations, machines, equipment etc. directly.</p>	<p>Getting out to people. Both give and receive information. Information can be given in a range of ways (words, pictures/graphs/diagrams, models, etc. and can provide for first hand experience).</p> <p>Drop-in facility means it can be convenient for more people.</p>	<p>Need to have something people will want to see.</p> <p>Can't be guaranteed to be representative - self-selection in who attends and who completes questionnaires (collecting demographic information will help determine how representative the views are).</p> <p>Normally only a limited range of options is given, but opportunities can be given to generate new ideas e.g. by writing on a map, or through Planning for Real exercises.</p>	<p>The principles will be familiar to most people.</p> <p>Cost of putting together materials, hire of venues and time of staff attending.</p> <p>Advertising costs.</p> <p>Cost of any give-away items (such as pens, carrier bags).</p>
<p>Planning for Real Pioneered by the Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation in the 1970s. Models are used interactively to allow the public to influence planning, development and</p>	<p>Allows communication in a medium most people can work with, not requiring high literacy. People can see the results of different options. People involved in the decision making, making use of local knowledge.</p>	<p>The right tool at the right time and place. NIF suggest full benefits may not be achieved without proper training.</p> <p>People need to attend to be involved so may</p>	<p>Training in the technique (provided by NIF). Can take a lot of time and effort to organise. Cost of the model - though may be produced as part of broader</p>

<p>other environmental issues. People can move around parts of the model to identify problems or solutions, or stick post-it notes on, with their comments.</p>	<p>helping generate options, not just consulted on them. Allows people to raise problems in a non-confrontational way. Particularly appropriate for physical / geographical issues.</p>	<p>exclude some and not be totally representative.</p>	<p>project. Cost of employing external consultants for all aspects (plan and prepare for the day, building models and analysing results) could be £4-8,000.</p>
<p>In-depth interviews One to one interviews, usually lasting between ½ and 2 hours. There may be variations in how fixed the questions are, but will commonly be ‘semi-structured’, i.e. fixed areas to cover but allowing follow up of issues in more depth or not originally thought of.</p>	<p>Allows you to probe issues in depth, and gives the individual the chance to give their full views without influence from the rest of a group. Useful for the right kind of issue (e.g. significant and difficult, where individual’s views can be enlightening, and for sensitive issues).</p>	<p>A lot of effort in getting a few views. Unlikely to be representative necessarily, unless a lot of time/money spent on it (to interview enough people). Interviewees may feel vulnerable on their own. Need for skilled interviewers.</p>	<p>Cost of specialist interviewers. Writing up time is not inconsiderable. (Allow 1-2 hours per interview, 2-3 hours to write up, 1 hour to read + travel time and overhead for preparing questions, administration etc). Taping ensures accuracy but adds considerably to time and may be offputting for interviewees. Lot of time required to read results, or else depend on expert analysis.</p>
<p>Tapping People’s Experience Mystery customers (an outside person uses the service and takes detailed notes. May be in person, by phone, post or internet. Can be done on a reciprocal basis with another local organisation. Ask</p>	<p>Makes use of real experiences at point of use rather than later or general impressions. Precise and detailed information about services. Useful for checking certain sorts of things, e.g. how easy to find</p>	<p>May not be representative, particularly if you only have one example. Usually need a real case to be meaningful (e.g. details of repairs for a housing case.)[May be safest not to volunteer to</p>	<p>Should be able to arrange on reciprocal basis with another organisation, so main costs officer time in organising, implementing and evaluating. Could become quite expensive to</p>

<p>people to keep diaries of use of a service; etc. See also Observation below.</p>	<p>facilities, how dealt with.</p>	<p>reciprocate with a hospital's accident and emergency department]</p> <p>Mystery shoppers should be as typical as possible of real customers and should not (normally) be too knowledgeable.</p> <p>Care needed in presenting the idea to staff so not seen as underhand. Market Research Society has best practice guide which says employees should be told in advance but not when it is going to happen. This may lead to untypically higher performance during this period.</p> <p>Important to highlight good as well as bad practice.</p>	<p>obtain enough examples to be statistically representative.</p>
<p>Electronic communications The use of the internet or other IT network such as cable t.v. allowing interaction between the public and the authority.</p>	<p>Relatively cheap.</p> <p>Convenient - can be used from own home.</p> <p>Allows provision of information and discussion as well as collection of views.</p> <p>Extensive documentation can be made available on the Web without large printing costs, and allowing selective access.</p> <p>Impersonal.</p>	<p>Limited number of people have access, e.g. to Internet.</p> <p>Different personal preferences in use of technology.</p> <p>Impersonal.</p> <p>For survey may be hard to verify accuracy of respondent details (so may get some multiple replies, replies from outside the area etc.)</p>	<p>Running costs generally low. Initial infrastructure costs. 'Human costs' such as training may be higher.</p> <p>Specialist help usually required in designing web pages, discussion forums and possibly analysing responses.</p>
<p>Video box, video links Opportunities for the</p>	<p>Ability to have direct contact with staff from a remote office. Useful in</p>	<p>Costs of setting up the infrastructure. Some people prefer the</p>	<p>At least one authority felt their video box was not</p>

<p>public to leave messages or make direct contact with Council staff by recording a video message or through video conferencing. Opinions can also be recorded on audio or video using conventional recorders.</p>	<p>remote areas or where transport difficult (though early pioneer is Lewisham, London).</p> <p>Recording comments allows users to use their own words without high facility in written language.</p>	<p>human link.</p> <p>Never likely to have large number of video boxes.</p>	<p>value for money. [Examples of other experiences welcome]</p> <p>Relatively expensive way of collecting views.</p> <p>Watching/listening to recorded comments is time consuming, or expensive in obtaining transcriptions.</p>
<p>Consulting employees Any consultation of employees (which may use other techniques listed here). Other activities such as Quality Circles may also contribute to employee involvement.</p>	<p>May produce good ideas about how services are provided, often based on close contact with customers. Employees have a personal, and valid interest in how services are provided.</p>	<p>Needs to be more than just tokenism or it will soon fall into disrepute. Criticisms need to be welcomed with no risk of blame or reprisal.</p> <p>May be a need for independent facilitation and guarantees of anonymity for people to really open up.</p>	<p>Costs depend on approach used, but any costs of mailing or sample recruitment should be lower given that a database of employees already exists.</p>
<p>Use of front line staff Systematic collection of information from those who have direct contact with the public. This may be through discussion groups, workshops or surveys, regular meetings, informal discussion, upward briefing, ad hoc memos or e-mail, through records such as a day book, statistics of numbers seen, etc.</p>	<p>Makes use of existing information (LAs have contact with more than 50% of their public each year).</p> <p>Involves the staff and may be useful part of 'empowering' and delegating.</p>	<p>Front line staff are ambassadors for the Council. Need good support and training. Mechanisms needed for systematic feedback.</p> <p>Staff may become cynical and disillusioned if nothing seen to be done with results.</p>	<p>Cost in setting up systems. Time spent recording, communicating and analysing results. If want to discuss with staff in depth may mean taking them from their positions and paying for replacement cover.</p>
<p>Informal contacts</p>	<p>Cheap, understandable</p>	<p>Effort required to</p>	<p>A little extra time</p>

<p>Making use of any conversations by officers or Members with the public; feedback from Members of their involvement in outside bodies.</p>	<p>by the public. Demonstrates genuine listening. A good way to introduce and explore ideas which can then be followed up and tested more systematically.</p>	<p>record results systematically. Strong risk of bias in who is listened to and which messages are accepted, remembered and recorded.</p>	<p>for conversations but generally part of what would be doing anyway. The main additional time in setting up systems, recording and analysing.</p>
<p>Observation e.g. how people use reception desk, counting numbers using leisure facilities. May also be used to see how services are provided (directly to public or in back office). Can be done through direct observers, shadowing, cameras or closed circuit television.</p>	<p>An accurate record of people's behaviour as opposed to what they say they will do. Could be used in conjunction with piloting changes.</p>	<p>Can be time consuming. The only information is what can be observed, not how people feel and think about the service. There may be some (probably unconscious) observer bias. People may not act naturally if they know they are being observed. Need to think through the ethics, particularly when observing people's work behaviour. Should have their willing consent.</p>	<p>Cost of time ensuring procedures are robust, and time taken in observation. Time and cost involved in recruitment, payment, training and briefing of observers. Time to analyse data. If video is used, analysis likely to take considerable time.</p>
<p>Desk research / other documentary sources of information For instance, information from national surveys relevant to the area; bringing together and analysing information collected for other purposes, e.g. returns to government departments, computer records of</p>	<p>Cheap. It may be the only feasible alternative in difficult or specialist areas (e.g. what are the long term social costs of drug abuse)</p>	<p>Can be time consuming. You have to accept what exists rather than what you need, and it may not be exactly the right information or in the right format. If based on research nationally or elsewhere may not exactly match local position.</p>	<p>The main cost is for someone to do the research. There may be some additional costs purchasing reports, accessing databases etc.</p>

<p>numbers using facilities; building up profile of an area; village appraisals.</p>		<p>Skills required to find, analyse, interpret and report on the information.</p>	
<p>Mass Media (local, regional or national newspaper, radio or t.v.)</p> <p>Information out - editorial coverage, news items on t.v. and radio, features and ‘magazine’ items.</p> <p>Letters pages, interviews with members of the public, phone-ins, surveys commissioned by the media organisation.</p> <p>The specialist press can be used to target particular groups, such as certain parts of the business community, or those hard to reach through other means, including some ethnic minorities, gay and lesbians, etc.</p>	<p>Allows two way communication with large numbers of people, albeit indirect and mediated by the media organisation.</p> <p>High profile (especially with Members). May get to people not reached in other ways, but does not reach everyone.</p>	<p>May be a slant by the media organisation in selection of material (including the public’s letters and Council’s press releases) and how presented.</p>	<p>Cheap. Ideally requires person with relevant skills, knowledge and experience to deal with the media. Time required to monitor output, respond, generate material, do interviews etc.</p>
<p>Piloting service changes</p> <p>Make changes to the service or parts of the service and survey users on their reaction.</p>	<p>You find out how people will really react, rather than what they say they will do.</p>	<p>Not necessarily practical or cost effective for major changes.</p> <p>Area of change needs to be as representative as possible of the whole service.</p> <p>Some changes may require long time to take effect or only work on a large scale.</p>	<p>Depends on the type of change, but since it is on a smaller scale than changing the whole service may be proportionately more expensive (because doesn’t exploit economies of scale).</p>

		so pilot is not infallible guide.	
Direct User Involvement User management of services (e.g. community-run nurseries or youth clubs; increased choice in service; involvement at point of service delivery; citizen street monitors reporting on litter, street lights out etc.	Letting people choose directly removes possible distortion by Council decision makers.	You may also need the input of professionals and those who can consider the bigger picture.	

(Acknowledgements - specific references are not given here for reasons of space, but this section has relied heavily on other publications and information from officers in authorities for which we are very grateful. This includes internal guides produced by Islington, York and Birmingham, as well as the following publications:

Stewart, John, *Innovation in Democratic Practice*, Birmingham, Institute of Local Government Studies, 1995

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

Stewart, Prof. John, *More Innovation in Democratic Practice*, Birmingham, School of Public Policy, University of Birmingham, 1997

Walker, Perry and Lewis, Julie (eds), *Participation Works! 21 techniques of community participation for the 21st century*, London, New Economics Foundation (no date)