

Consultation Strategy 2018 - 2021



Introduction

This document sets out the Council's Consultation Strategy for the next three years. It is an important corporate document and is relevant to all officers and members of the Council.

Consultation is a key priority for the Council, and as such is outlined in our Business Plan. This document details our 'refreshed' approach to our consultation strategy and will support us to appropriately engage and consult with residents about Council services and proposals. Elected members will use consultation results to help inform policy and decision making. Therefore, it is important that consultation is properly constructed and follows a consistent process to give clear results that can help inform future decisions.

Consultations will also enable the Council to respond to customer feedback in order to improve service delivery.

This consultation strategy also supports all of the Council's corporate objectives outlined in our business plan, which are:

- **Communities** – supporting our ageing population, young people and vulnerable members of our community. Promoting health and wellbeing for all
- **Environment** – delivering a high performing refuse, recycling and street cleansing service. Working with partners and the community on projects that improve the street scene and reduce crime
- **Economy** – attracting new businesses, jobs and opportunities whilst supporting existing businesses. Promoting tourism and growth in Fenland, as well as lobbying for infrastructure improvements
- **Quality Organisation** – ensuring we are running an effective organisation with good customer service and an empowered workforce. Pursuing transformation and commercial opportunities

Our Business Plan is available to view in full at www.fenland.gov.uk

Consultation plays a vital role in enabling our whole community to give their views. Gaining this knowledge is vital to informing effective decision making. Our website lists the current available consultations at www.fenland.gov.uk/consultations

This strategy provides a consistent and clear framework to underpin the wide range of public consultation undertaken by the Council. It also provides guidance as to how we can improve the way we engage with our communities.

Consultation in Fenland

The Council is committed to ensuring that strategic priorities reflect local public opinion. Effective consultation plays an important role in achieving this.

We are Customer Service Excellence (CSE) accredited, a national standard for delivering excellent customer service. A key element of this award is making the consultation of customers integral to continually improving our services and also advising customers of the results and action taken.

Consultation can mean a range of different things, including:

- Asking people about their priorities
- Seeking their advice on matters that affect them
- Telling people what you propose to do

The Council undertakes frequent consultation upon a range of statutory and non-statutory issues (statutory duties will include consulting on planning applications and the Local Plan). Government legislation can also require us to engage with individuals who have a disability, for example, the polling district review. This document establishes the principles and best practice that should underpin all our consultation and engagement activity.

Although consultation is not new to the Council, we continually look for innovative methods to develop and improve our approach to consultation and community engagement.

Fenland District Council is part of the Cambridgeshire Compact, which is a partnership agreement between statutory bodies and the voluntary and community sector in Cambridgeshire. The agreement sets out a framework for effective

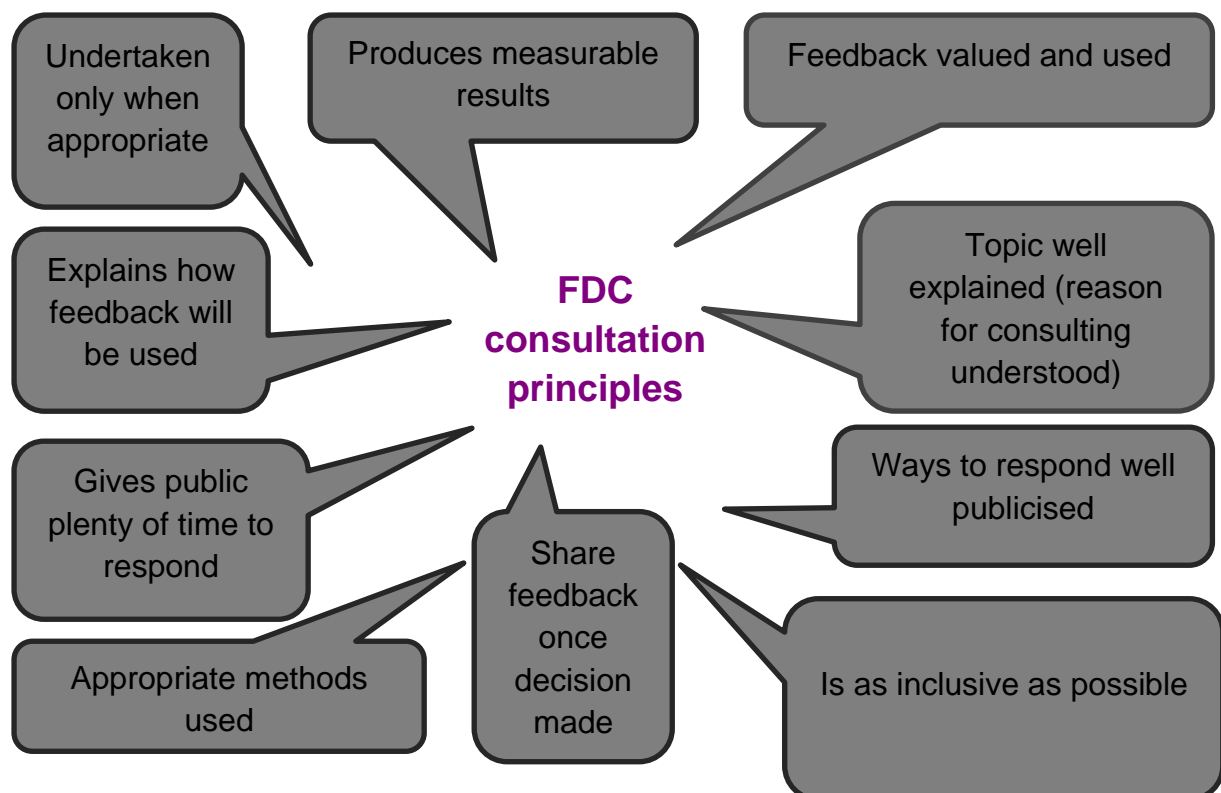
consultation, representation and partnership working to achieve common goals and outcomes for the benefit of the local community.

Our Approach

The Communications Team offers advice in ensuring that any consultation meets corporate standards. It is important that all consultation is well planned and prepared. A consistent process will allow the consultation to give clear results and therefore inform future decisions. Before undertaking consultation, it is recommended the following five points are considered:

1. **Design.** Why are you consulting and what are your objectives? Your consultation will be set around your aims.
2. **Target.** Who is your audience? You will need to adapt your approach accordingly.
3. **Methods.** Be willing to be flexible; you may need to use multiple methods to engage different target audiences.
4. **Feedback.** How will you let people know how their input is used and how it has affected decisions?
5. **Decision-making.** Only consult if you are willing to make changes based on responses – do not consult to decisions already made.

Fenland District Council's approach to consultation is summarised in the diagram below:



These key points are explained in more depth below.

- **Consultation will be as required**

Before any new corporate consultation begins, a thorough search will be made to understand whether relevant questions have already been asked of the public. This avoids unnecessary replication and duplication.

- **Consultation will enable informed opinion**

The introduction of each consultation must explain why it is being carried out and how the results will be used. This will show residents how their feedback can add value and will increase your response rate as residents will understand their responses will be properly considered. Questions will be framed in a way that gathers measurable feedback and be evaluated objectively.

- **Consultation will be well planned and timely**

Consultees will be given adequate time to prepare their response. This will vary depending on the time of year and the detail of response that is being sought. Sufficient time will be allowed so the consultation results can be properly analysed and fed directly into the decision making process.

- **Consultation will be inclusive**

Fenland District Council seeks to gain a representative cross-section of views from our community. However, some sections of the community are harder to engage through more 'traditional' consultation methods than others. Appropriate action will be taken to ensure that views are actively sought from 'harder to reach' audiences (for example older people, younger people and the migrant community) and depends on the type of consultation.

Examples of past successful engagement with minority groups include:

- Running engagement sessions with the Fenland Community Youth Council
- Visiting Golden Age Fairs and other events which attract a particular audience
- Sending a postal survey to every household in Fenland
- Providing translated copies of surveys in key community locations e.g. the Oasis and Rosmini Centre. (The Council also states that its documents can be translated into different languages or put into Braille/Large Print etc)
- Engaging a translator at a community centre (e.g. Rosmini Centre) who can explain the consultation and capture feedback in a different language.

The Council's Traveller and Diversity Manager can also offer advice on how to engage with hard to reach groups. Each service area also has 'Equality Champions' who are responsible for ensuring that their team delivers its services inclusively.

To help you assess whether the consultation you are planning is fully inclusive a Customer Impact Assessment (EqIA) can be used to help you assess whether the consultation you are planning is fully inclusive. It can help you to:

- Eliminate discrimination
- Tackle inequality
- Develop a better understanding of the community you serve
- Target resources efficiently
- Comply with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010

- **Consultation will be well managed and undertaken using appropriate methods**

The Council will use appropriate public consultation methods to ensure that feedback is captured. Available methods, including their advantages and disadvantages, are explained in greater detail in Appendix A.

A majority of consultations the council completes will include a survey or questionnaire. These are an effective low-cost way to gather information from a wide variety of sources. A guide to developing questionnaires is explained in Appendix B.

- **Consultation results will be acknowledged and fully considered**

The full range of views gathered during consultation will be properly considered. The analysis will draw attention to areas of agreement and disagreement, as well as other general areas of suggestion. The results of public consultation will be used carefully together with other evidence and considerations.

Consultation Methods

The type of consultation method will vary depending on the aims, objectives and consultation audience. It will often be necessary to use a selection of consultation methods to capture a representative audience. By taking a varied approach and using a range of different methods, we maximise the opportunities that people have to give us their views. These include;

- Consultation papers
- Online surveys
- Postal surveys
- Telephone surveys
- Face to Face surveys
- Focus groups
- Signposting to consultations using social media and emails
- 3c's system
- Customer feedback forms
- Social Media

Technology and digital media continues to develop and the Council makes full use of all the tools available to allow us to engage with all our stakeholders. We encourage the use of online responses as part of our Corporate Channel Shift project, but will always have alternative methods available for anyone who is unable to access consultation electronically.

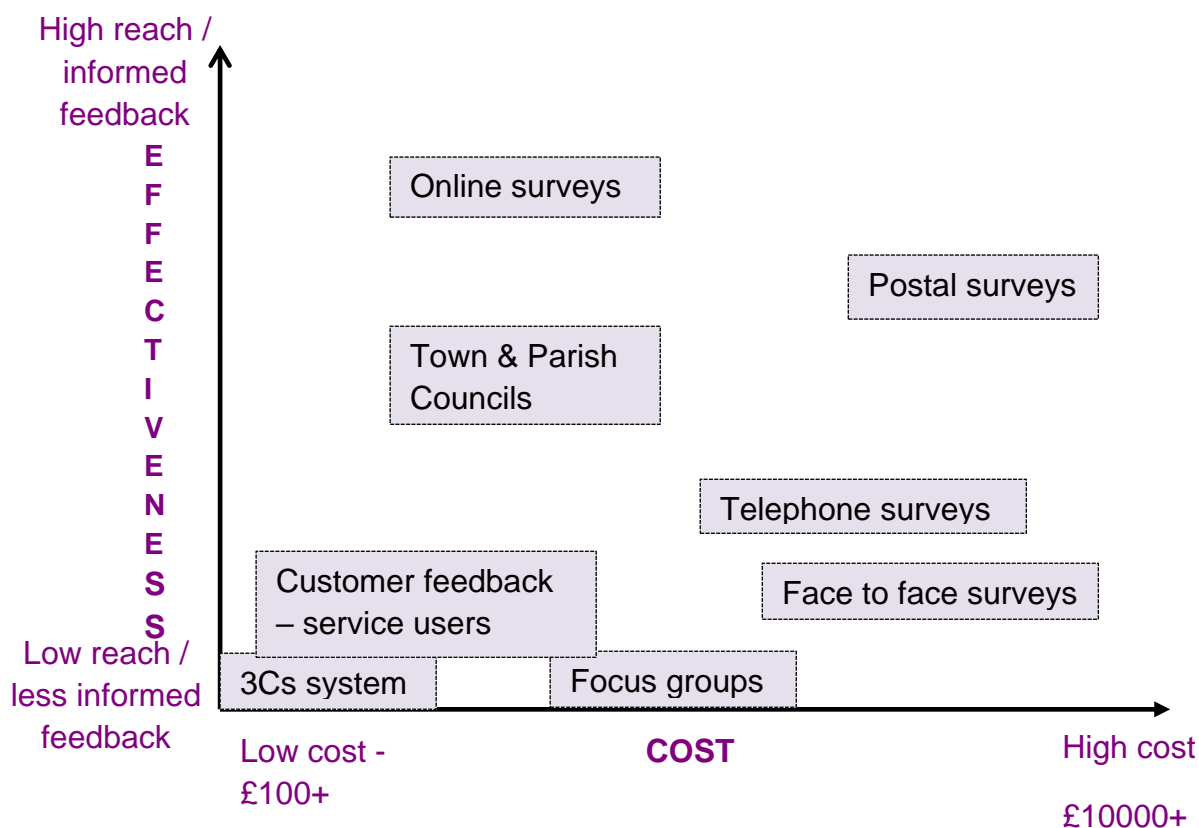
We will ensure that any consultation includes enough information to allow someone to consider the proposal and make an informed contribution to the consultation.

Generally, the more expensive methods of consultation can provide either:

- a greater number of responses
- in-depth feedback from a more engaged audience

The Council aims to use the most effective methods possible within its budget.

Appendix A provides a full explanation of the consultation methods that can be used by the Council. However, their general effectiveness and cost* are summarised on the graph below:



*effectiveness and cost depend on a number of factors including on number of participants that need to be reached, equipment required, whether an external provider is responsible for delivery etc

Further to our service related consultations, we publicise all Council minutes and decisions, and the Council’s forward plan which sets out decisions that the Council, Cabinet or an individual member of the Cabinet intends to take. All key decisions are transparent and publicised online at; www.fenland.gov.uk/councillors

In addition, members of the public also have the opportunity to submit a petition, which dependent on the number of signatures can initiate a debate at Full Council. Full details of petitions can be found online at; www.fenland.gov.uk/petitions

Analysis / Next Steps

We will ensure that our consultation is co-ordinated and the community is provided with sufficient time and information to make an informed opinion.

We will make sure that all consultation documents, and where appropriate, an analysis of consultations will be published on our website at www.fenland.gov.uk/consultation.

We will regularly review the strategy to ensure that it reflects current good consultation practice and considers local community needs.

Appendix A: Consultation Methods

There are a variety of methods that can be used to consult and engage with the community. The consultation purpose and its target audience will influence the suitability of each method. A summary of the most common and effective methods can be found below.

Once you have decided on the focus of your consultation it is strongly recommended that you contact the Communications Team who can assist you in developing and publicising your survey.

Method	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages	Cost
3Cs system	The Council's 3Cs (Comments, Complaints and Compliments) system makes it easy for customers to give feedback. Customers can complete a paper form, online form or directly email their feedback to 3Cs@fenland.gov.uk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Easy to do ✓ Promotes satisfaction ✓ Ongoing method to gather customer feedback that can positively shape services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × Only gathers views of minority × Can be mostly negative × Cannot ask the customer specific questions (unless in a follow-up survey) 	Low
Customer feedback forms	A system for customers to give feedback about a specific service they have received. Our Leisure Services currently use a system called NetPromoter. This gathers customer feedback on a scale of 1-10, with a customer receiving a call back if they are dissatisfied.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Easy to develop ✓ Helps to monitor service ✓ Promotes satisfaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × Response rate can vary significantly × Can be resource intensive to respond to a high volume of feedback 	Low – Medium* * - dependent on software used
Online surveys	The Council uses SurveyMonkey to create its online surveys. The system generates a link to the survey that	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Simple to develop ✓ Responses can be monitored in real time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × May miss certain groups × Requires access to a PC 	Low

Method	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages	Cost
	can be promoted online and also directly emailed to respondents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Produces clear, useful feedback ✓ Allows in depth analysis of the feedback of certain participant groups ✓ Can be accessed in Council locations across the district (doesn't exclude audience that is not digitally connected) ✓ Gathers accurate data as the same person cannot fill it in more than once 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × Cost may rise if provider changes 	
Social Media	<p>The Council uses Facebook and Twitter to publicise and promote all consultations.</p> <p>We also signpost to our online survey from our social media pages.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Easy to post ✓ Ability to reach large numbers of people ✓ Good channel for younger members of the community ✓ Option to pay to promote posts ✓ Use of functionality incl. polls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × May miss certain groups × Requires access to a mobile phone or PC × Difficult to respond individually to high numbers of responders 	Low
Postal Surveys	<p>Printed questionnaires can be sent to Fenland households. Its effectiveness and cost depends on factors including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where the questionnaires are printed (the Council usually prints them in-house as it is the most 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Reaches harder to reach groups (e.g. who do not use computers or the internet) ✓ Large numbers of people can be contacted ✓ People more likely to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × Labour intensive to input responses × Contacting an audience who may be willing to complete online × Duplication – impacts accuracy as there is no 	High

Method	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages	Cost
	<p>cost economic option)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing a return envelope (cost of stamp for delivery) • Whether letters are sent by ordinary mail (1st/2nd class stamp) • Whether letters are sent by Royal Mail's marketing scheme 	<p>complete it as requires little effort to locate it</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Very inclusive if sent to every Fenland household 	<p>way of preventing residents completing a postal and online survey</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> × When using cheaper mailing methods (i.e. Royal Mail - door to door), postal surveys may get mixed up with 'junk mail' × Respondents may not pay for the paper copy to be returned (but providing a self-addressed envelope increases the cost) × One householder tends to fill it in at the exclusion of others in the house. 	
Face-to-face surveys	<p>One-to-one interviews taking place across towns and villages.</p> <p>Respondents can be invited to participate on an 'ad-hoc' basis (e.g. at a community event or at a Council location) or formally invited to participate at a set time and location</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Reason for consultation and context can be explained to the respondent to aid their understanding better quality of feedback ✓ Clarification and follow up questions can be asked 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × Time consuming – even a very short survey will last upwards of 15 minutes × Labour intensive collating results × Only reaches a small audience × Potential difficulty in finding participants 	High
Telephone surveys	<p>A set of questions will be asked to a customer over the phone. This can either be when the customer makes contact with the Council, or when the Council selects the phone numbers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Reason for consultation and context can be explained to the respondent to aid their understanding better quality of feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × Specific skills needed × Ex-directory houses excluded × Potential language barrier 	High

Method	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages	Cost
	can make contact with them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Clarification and follow up questions can be asked 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × Time consuming – even a very short survey will last upwards of 15 minutes × High participation refusal rate 	
Town and Parish Councils	<p>Surveys can be sent to Town and Parish Council Clerks to distribute to members / community</p> <p>The surveys can also be included in parish newsletters and added to community noticeboards and websites</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Reaches harder to reach groups ✓ Members are aware of all consultations taking place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × Need to be mindful of meeting cycles and ensure consultation deadlines are long enough to ensure Councils can make a timely response × Newsletters may only be distributed quarterly, so print deadlines need to be planned well in advance. 	Low

Appendix B: A guide to developing questionnaires

Questionnaires are an effective low-cost way to gather information from a wide variety of sources. This guide has been written to equip teams with the basic knowledge to ensure their surveys are easy to understand and produce useful results. If you need any further information, please contact the Communications Team who can assist you in developing your survey.

The basics of questionnaire design

Consider the following:

- The purpose of the questionnaire should be clear
- The wording should be simple and jargon free. Avoid specialist language unless your consultees are specialists in the relevant area
- Avoid unclear, loaded and biased questions
- Decide the type of information you are looking for – facts / views / ideas etc. This will influence whether your questions are open ended or closed
- Only ask questions that are necessary – think about the information you want to get out of the question and how you will use it. (Questionnaires should be as short as possible in order to maintain consultee interest)
- Limit the amount of additional information you include. Respondents don't want to have to search through paragraphs and pages of text to find the questions they need to answer

Survey Layout

To get the best out of the questionnaire the respondent needs to find it an interesting, enjoyable and stress free experience. The following is recommended:

- Questionnaires should be presented into a professional, attractive and uncluttered format. Leave space between questions.
- Start with a brief introduction describing the survey's purpose, the topics being covered and how results will be used. (This should be in a covering letter if the questionnaire is postal.) Ensure the instructions for completing the survey are easy to understand.
- Number each question clearly.
- If your questionnaire has multiple pages, make sure the pages are stapled (or bound) so they do not get mixed up. Number each page.
- Consider the design. Fonts should be large enough to read and the checkboxes must be easy to see. If you are asking respondents to circle numbers, space them far enough apart so two are not circled in error.
- The questionnaire should end with a thank you message, including how and when the results will be used and publicised. If the questionnaire is postal it will need the deadline and return address (a prepaid envelope will increase the response rate).

Question layout

Questions should follow a logical sequence and be grouped in easily identifiable sections. Each section should be given a title and number. Where required, you should write a sentence to introduce it to the respondent.

Avoid too many open ended questions, and questions that respondents may feel has a “right” answer. Lengthy and wordy questions are also not recommended.

Important questions should not be left to the last. This is because respondents do not always complete whole questionnaires, especially if they are lengthy.

Demographic questions should be put at the end of the questionnaire. This is because it is better to keep respondents’ minds on the survey whilst you have their attention at the beginning.

Question ordering

Be aware of position bias. This is where items on a list are treated differently depending on where they are positioned.

This is easily overcome when creating online surveys as our provider has the option to randomise the order options appear on a list.

Rating scales

Rating scales are commonly used to give respondents an equal number of positive and negative options to tick. For example:

“How would you rate our refuse and cleansing service?”
Very good Good Neither good nor poor Poor Very Poor Don’t know

OR

1 2 3 4 5

Many researchers omit the ‘don’t know’ field to force respondents to make a choice.

If a numerical rating is used, it is important that you make clear which number is poor or excellent.

Providing too many options (e.g. a scale of 1-10) may reduce the quality of your feedback as respondents may give more neutral answers.

Accessibility

The questionnaire should be clearly laid out so that respondents can easily read and follow it.

Alternative formats (such as in braille) and language should also be offered. Placing translated copies of the questionnaire in community locations will enable valuable feedback from “hard to reach” groups that cannot find a translator.

How to publicise your consultation effectively

Publicising your consultation effectively will ensure you have the best chance of getting results. The Council have a number of community locations that we are able to use as distribution outlets;

- Fenland @ your service shops in March & Wisbech
- Community Hubs in Chatteris & Whittlesey
- New Vision Fitness Centres in March, Wisbech, Chatteris & Whittlesey
- FDC Business Premises in Chatteris & Wisbech

- Business Reception in March
- Rosmini Centre in Wisbech
- Oasis Centre in Wisbech
- Community House in Wisbech
- ACCESS (formerly KLARS - Kings Lynn Area Resettlement Support)

In addition to the community locations we also have the Council's digital communication channels; FDC website, Facebook, Twitter and a bank of approximately 6,000 email addresses that we can use for all consultations. Our social media pages benefit from 'likes' and 'retweets' from partner organisations.

We have an active media presence with local newspapers, and are able to send press releases for publication in both newspapers and on their websites.

For smaller consultations we are able to take a more targeted approach to ensure that key markets are included. For example, the council has a business database so any business or economic consultations we can ensure all businesses on the database they receive all business consultations.

FDC Councillors are important community advocates and collectors of views from the community on important issues therefore ensure consultations are brought to the attention of Members via Member Services. FDC Members can also publicise consultations to the public. Ward Councillors should be informed of particular consultations affecting service delivery within their wards.

Town and Parish Councils are key consultees who are also supportive of publicising FDC consultations through community noticeboards. If consulting with Town and Parish Councils you need to be mindful of their meeting cycles and ensure wherever possible consultation deadlines are long enough to ensure Councils can make a timely response. Member Services can help send consultations to clerks for circulation to Councillors.

Consultation calendar

The communications team keep a Corporate Consultation Calendar to ensure all consultations are joined up and to avoid duplication. Before any new consultation is undertaken a thorough search is made to ensure relevant questions have not already been asked.

Reference documents;

<http://www.customerserviceexcellence.uk.com/>

<http://www.lqcomms.org.uk/>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications>

<http://www.cambridgecvs.org.uk/group-support/compact>