

## Public Meetings

### **What are...Public Meetings**

The purpose of this type of meeting is to bring people together to share information, exchange ideas, introduce new services & ways of working, to develop relationships and contacts. Attendance is open to any interested member of the public or a particular community.

Public meetings should not be confused with an open meeting when members of the public are invited to observe a meeting e.g. a Council committee.

### **Why use this technique?**

It allows for a two-way information flow. Their very nature means they are open to all and everyone is entitled to express an opinion.

Creates a focal point of activity where people can share perspectives and concerns, hear other points of view, identify tensions and agree resolutions for action.

### **When should you use it?**

This technique should be used when:

- Looking for qualitative feedback on proposals
- Engaging the local community
- Generating new ideas
- Looking for a highly visible form of consultation
- Taking ideas and options out to a community
- Attempting to devolve the decision-making process
- Looking to gain commitment
- Identifying consensus
- Validating work conducted with smaller groups



## **What type of information does it produce?**

It is predominantly qualitative although, if votes are taken, quantitative data would be generated.


## **What are the advantages?**

- It is useful for obtaining wide-ranging views
- It is an opportunity for both sides to put their views forward
- It can be a good public relations exercise
- It can involve a multi-agency approach
- It is an opportunity for the public to challenge the Council
- It makes officers and members more accountable
- It is a good networking opportunity

## **What are the disadvantages?**

- Small numbers may undermine or question validity of the information
- People who attend are unlikely to be representative of the local population
- It can prove shambolic if badly handled
- It can attract the same vocal community activists
- There is a danger of being one-sided with the platform disseminating information to the audience
- It may be seen as tokenistic
- It may be difficult and time-consuming to organise
- Attendees' ability to contribute to a discussion about service-wide strategic priorities can be limited by a lack of knowledge and possible lack of interest

## **What are the costs?**

- Costs will vary dependent on venue costs, PA requirements, refreshments and the publicity needed to generate sufficient interest
  - You should be possible to keep expenditure to a reasonable level
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## What are the practicalities?

- Be clear what the objective of the meeting is and what is expected from it. This is about the following:
  - informing
  - seeking views and opinions
  - seeking consensus
  - developing shared vision
  - gaining commitment to objectives or action
- It needs to be well publicised and well organised.
- You will need to think about how to manage any media interest, e.g. press release, attendance on the day, interviews (Councillors or senior officers), etc
- You should consult with others about who should be invited
- ensure a record is kept of proceedings - with more detail than just minutes
- Make sure there is adequate time that can be allocated for presentations, comments and questions.
- You must think about how the event is to be chaired - may be worth having an independent chair, or a Councillor or community leader
- Consider timing – evenings are popular with people working but elderly often reluctant to attend at night
- Do you need and can you provide crèche facilities?
- Have you prepared for people with disabilities? E.g. access, signers, Braille documents
- Will you need interpreters?
- How are the discussions and outcomes to be fed back to the audience and wider community?
- Consider setting the room up in a less confrontational way with speakers on the floor and not the platform and the seating placed around table rather than in adversarial rows
- Consider contacting local community groups or leaders for assistance, using community newsletters and community groups' mailing lists in order to reach particular people.
- Consider inviting or informing the local ward Councillors.