

When should consultation be carried out?

Issues for consideration

1. The consultation stage of the audit and strategy process
2. When should consultation be delivered
3. Timescales and timelines

This section locates and describes the consultation stage within the audit and strategy process, offers insight into devising timescales for carrying out the consultation exercise and identifies various questions for consideration. This section must be read alongside **Who should be consulted? What needs to be in place?** and **How should consultation be delivered and used?**

1. The consultation stage of the audit and strategy process

Newburn and Jones (2002) identify four stages of consultation. The four stages are detailed below:

- **Pre audit stage.** This stage of consultation describes the process of collating pre-existing data on crime and disorder (and drugs) problems, and initial discussions with partner agencies to highlight issues and problems
- **Crime audit stage.** This stage of consultation is carried out as part of the audit stage in order to inform the audit and subsequent production of the consultation document
- **Post audit stage.** This stage of consultation is carried out in between the collation of the findings of the audit and the preparation of the strategy document with a number of prescribed stakeholder groups including partner agencies and organisations, members of the general public and hard to reach groups as laid down in the CDA 1998 guidance as amended by the PRA 2002. This stage is to help verify and validate the audit findings and determine and establish strategic priorities and targets
- **Implementation and monitoring stage.** This stage of consultation is used to provide feedback on how successfully the partnership is implementing its plans, and to feedback about problems and difficulties.

A further important stage of consultation is the **Post consultation review stage** (see for example the Audit Commission 2003; MORI 2003). This stage allows for a review of consultation to ensure that consultation is used effectively.

Signpost: For a more detailed discussion of the Post consultation review stage consult the MORI (2003) report Feeling the Pulse II. It provides a detailed and exhaustive discussion of reviewing consultation and its findings.

A number of CDRPs may well acknowledge from the bullet points above that they have already carried out consultation before and/or as part of the audit. Where this is the case, CDRPs can be classified as having carried out either consultation at **pre-audit** or **crime audit** stage or both. Both stages are important and can provide valuable information which will inform the production of the audit and strategy.

This guidance, however does not concern itself with carrying out consultation at either of these two stages. Rather, this guidance is principally concerned with consultation as it relates to the audit and strategy process as laid down in the CDA 1998 as amended by the PRA 2002 – the stage identified by Newburn and Jones (2002) as the **post audit stage** and described as focussing:

Primarily on validating and/or amending the local objectives as identified in the audit and developing specific local interventions to address these (Newburn and Jones 2002: 62)

Post audit consultation is defined in Box 6 below.

Box 6 Post audit consultation

Post audit consultation is the stage between the publication of the audit document setting out the CDRPs assessment of problems and outlining provisional solutions and the formulation of strategic priorities and target setting. As the original audit and strategy guidance (Hough and Tilley 1998) states, post audit consultation is an essential stage of the process as it ensures 'that strategies are grounded in the experience of local people'.

In accepting the importance of the post audit stage of consultation, it is also worth noting that, as the Audit Commission (2003) detail in its report Connecting with Citizens and Users, a statutory requirement to consult is not always sufficient to ensure the effective delivery of consultation and its findings. Rather, the Audit Commission suggests that effective consultation must be a process that is at the heart of organisational culture and one that represents a real commitment to promote community engagement.

Note 4 Being committed to doing consultation

This guidance should not therefore be considered in isolation. Rather it should be read as addressing the requirement to consult at a particular point in time as laid down by statutory guidance, promoting a broader culture of consultation and acknowledging the wider opportunities of doing consultation (as described in **What is consultation and why is it important?**).

2. When should consultation be delivered?

Having described the post audit consultation stage as the one between the publication of the audit document setting out the CDRPs assessment of

problems and outlining provisional solutions and the formulation of strategic priorities and target setting of the audit and strategy process, this section describes in detail when consultation should be delivered.

The post audit consultation stage connects the following processes:

- Preparation of a consultation document which brings together the preliminary key findings of the audit and the emerging priorities and strategic objectives in a clear and concise way
- Dissemination of the consultation document amongst persons and bodies specified by the Home secretary, local relevant organisations, the general public and hard to reach groups
- Delivery of consultation on that document that seeks verification of the preliminary findings of the audit and the emerging priorities and strategic objectives and provides opportunity for the experiences of persons and bodies whose views are not reflected in it to engage in the process prior to the formulation of the final strategy document
- Data processing, analysis, presentation and dissemination of the findings of the consultation in a manner that ensures the subsequent development of a strategy that is both reflective and responsive to the needs, experiences and concerns of all those consulted and that allows for effective feedback to be given to key stakeholder groups and communities

Note 5 Flexibility and post audit consultation

Post audit consultation should be delivered at a stage when CDRPs are able to ensure that they are in a position to consult effectively with key stakeholders on findings of the audit and emergent strategic priorities. This means that the stage of consultation must be flexible enough to accommodate slippage in audit delivery and completion as well as in consultation planning and preparation. It also means that consultation delivery times may differ across CDRPs.

Post audit consultation cannot be carried out by CDRPs until at least the following stages/processes have been completed:

- Collection, collation, analysis and presentation of audit data, and the identification of emergent priorities and strategic actions.
- Identification of the persons and bodies to be consulted, taking account of the need to consult widely across persons and bodies specified by the Home secretary, local relevant organisations, the general public and hard to reach groups
- Consultation planning and preparation informed by a strategy for action which connects the consultation approach and the various methods proposed with the target groups detailed above in a way that is responsive to their needs and accessibility

- Preparation of a consultation document for publication and dissemination which is clear, accessible, accurate, impartial and informative

Strategic planning of the audit and strategy process should already have identified a draft timescale that includes the consultation exercise. This should be used to:

- assess progress in delivering the audit
- amend timescales in relation to consultation delivery (where appropriate, for example if audit delivery is over running)
- inform the identification of the actual period of consultation planning and preparation
- finalise the period of strategic development.

There are a number of issues to consider when determining the point at which consultation should begin and end. For example:

- Some approaches to consultation may take more time to deliver than others. For example, the Cabinet Office (2004) guidance suggests that written public authorities should allow 12 weeks for completion.
- Some methods of consultation may take longer to design and implement than others. For example, planning a representative questionnaire survey of local residents will require more time than planning a focus group with local residents associations.
- For some target groups it will take more time for their identification and subsequent involvement in the process.
- Aspects of the consultation may be delivered through mechanisms already in place. Indeed, local and statutory authorities are required to consult on a range of policy and strategy processes and it may be preferable to work together to avoid consultation 'overload'.
- The Local Government Association (2000) suggests that consultation should take place at appropriate times when people are most likely to be able to take part. For example:
 - School holidays will prevent some parents from participating at particular times during the summer months
 - Farmers and farm workers will be busy at harvest time
 - Faith groups celebrate religious festivals at particular times of the year
 - Major national cultural and sporting events will distract attention away from local consultation events and activities, or can be used as part of the consultation if they fall within the boundary of the CDRP

- Some events in the local calendar, notably local festivals and country shows may offer positive opportunities to broaden the scope of your consultation process especially when trying to interest and engage people from different communities

3. Timescales and timelines

The final subsection details the importance of timescales and timelines in deciding when consultation should be delivered, and introduces a number of important stages of the consultation process.

Setting out a timetable and identifying relevant timescales and timelines is an efficient means of identifying the elements necessary for a successful consultation exercise. Table 1 below provides an example of a consultation timetable and builds upon a timetable set out in the Audit and Strategy Guidance.

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Table 1 Example of a consultation timetable

	2004	2005
Consultation task	Apr	
	May	
	Jun	
	Jul	
	Aug	
	Sept	
	Oct.	
	Nov	
	Dec	
	Jan	
	Feb	
	Mar	
Planning		
Preparation		

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Delivery

Data processing and analysis

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Feedback

Review

The consultation timetable detailed in Table 1 splits the post audit consultation process down into a number of identifiable and manageable stages. In the paragraphs that follow, these stages are expanded upon to identify a number of core tasks associated with each.

- **Planning.** This stage involves a number of important administrative tasks; some that require completion before moving on to the next stage (**preparation**) and others that will continue to remain open until the end of the consultation process. Box 7 offers a few useful tips and ideas in relation to initial planning of your consultation exercise.

Box 7 Tips and ideas

- Take note of consultation and research exercises that are happening in your area around the time you will carry out consultation.
- Avoid competition and exploit opportunities for co-operation with partners and other partnerships working in your area.
- It is better to work with partners especially where 'a safer community' is central to the local strategic partnership objectives.
- Consider setting up a register of contemporary consultation/research that is happening in your area if you have not already done so.
- Think about the local and national calendar of events. For example sporting and religious festivals may overshadow your consultation but country shows, festivals and fairs may draw families and communities together in one place.

Planning tasks include:

- Inauguration of a consultation steering group whose remit is the organisation, management and oversight of the consultation process. The consultation steering group may be the audit and strategy group; it may also take the form of a sub-committee to that group. It will have the responsibility of drafting a consultation plan that will identify the means through which the consultation will be planned, prepared and delivered.

It plan will:

- Detail the terms of reference for the consultation exercise, including its proposed aims and proposed outcomes for the various participants involved
- Lay down the mechanisms of accountability and responsibility associated with the tasking of persons or bodies as part of the planning, preparation and delivery of the consultation
- Confirm the timescale associated with the completion of the audit process and the identification of emerging priorities and strategic objectives.

- Detail a timetable and timescales associated with the planning, preparation, delivery, data processing and analysis, and review stages of the consultation exercise
- Carry out an audit of consultation activity within the CDRP and its partners in order to identify ongoing / potential mechanisms for consultation, and gaps where new mechanisms of consultation need to be developed.
- Distil the approach to consultation that will be taken by the CDRP. This will involve identification of the specific methods that will be used to consult (in some cases this will involve identifying ongoing mechanisms for piggybacking consultation upon, such as other household survey's being delivered; Citizens Panels, and the articulation of new mechanisms for the specific purpose of this consultation (such as the delivery of participatory appraisal with hard to reach groups of young people))

Signposting: See How should consultation be delivered and used?

- List those persons or bodies responsible for the preparation and delivery of different aspects of the consultation process (including the contracting of departments to deliver aspects of the consultation process as well as outside bodies, such as consultants)

Signposting: See Who should be consulted?

- Highlight the means through which the proposed persons and bodies prescribed by the Home Secretary for consultation will be identified (this may include the electoral roll; through relevant local organisations etc) and the persons or bodies task to carry out this function

Signposting: See Who should be consulted?

- Acknowledge the means through which the findings of the consultation exercise will be fed into the audit and strategy process

Signposting: See How should consultation be delivered and used?

Checklist 1 highlights a range of questions you should be thinking about when planning your consultation.

Checklist 1 Is your consultation timely?

- Have you ensured sufficient time to prepare the consultation documentation, including drafting, proofing and printing stages?

- Have you ensured sufficient time that has been allocated to devising the consultation methodology including identifying the specific consultation methods to be used?
- Have you secured the appropriate information regarding accessing relevant stakeholders including community groups and organizations?
- Does your timetable ensure that your consultation exercise begins after completing the audit and finish before finalising your strategy?
- Have you allowed sufficient time to share your audit findings with everyone and all the agencies and organization that need to be consulted?
- Have you allowed sufficient time to allow everyone time to consider how your strategy might affect them?
- Do your plans and timetables allow sufficient time achieve a written response from everyone you want to consult with?
- Have you allowed sufficient time to publicize consultation events?
- Have you allowed sufficient time for organizations to talk with everyone they need to talk to before responding?
- Have you allowed sufficient time to make sense of all the contributions people and organizations make to your consultation?

- **Preparation.** Preparation is an important stage of consultation. It is a stage that in some cases comes after the planning stage whilst at the same time it is a stage that overlaps to varying degrees with the planning process. It ensures that all relevant materials, documents, persons and organisations are prepared (or rather more crudely ready and able) to deliver the consultation according to plan. Preparing for consultation can take a number of different forms, and this guidance can only begin to provide illustration of the type of preparation required.

Signposting: See What needs to be in place?

Preparation includes ensuring:

- that all relevant materials are prepared for distribution and use; for example the consultation document, survey questionnaires, interview schedules, etc.
- that all relevant databases, contact details and mailing lists are contemporary, relevant, accurate and ready to be used
- that all those involved in the delivery and data processing and analysis stages are fully briefed and trained
- that all relevant meetings and committees are aware of their role in the consultation and that all relevant venues are booked including refreshments etc.
- that all necessary hardware and software is available and capable of providing the relevant support to the delivery and data processing and analysis stages

- **Delivery.** The consultation itself will involve the use of a variety of methods delivered in multiple ways to different stakeholders over many time frames. An effective and dynamic timetable should be able to chart the timing of the delivery of different aspects of the consultation exercise, together with the related timescales for data processing and analysis

Signposting: See How should consultation be delivered and used?

- **Data processing and analysis.** Data processing and analysis is often a neglected aspect of the consultation process. It is very important. It may require specialist training and software in order to handle different types of response achieved from different types of respondents.

Signposting: See How should consultation be delivered and used?

- **Review.** Feedback is not just about disseminating the findings and outcomes of consultation to partners and decision makers it is also about keeping respondents informed and reassuring the public that their views have been accounted for. Process of review should be addressed in the planning stages of the consultation process.

Signposting: See How should consultation be delivered and used?

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