

## Information sheet

# Methods of Stakeholder Consultation

**This information sheet describes methods of consulting with key stakeholders that have an active interest or investment in a recycling system or in the block of flats.**

## Focus groups / workshops

A focus group or workshop is usually based on a relatively small number of people who have been selected to discuss a single topic. Facilitators assist the discussions using a topic guide and may record the session to ensure that information on all opinions expressed is captured. This method of consultation is useful at the start of the process to help develop and test ideas or to obtain feedback on the performance of a service at key points throughout its delivery.

As with any stakeholder consultation method, effort should be made to consult a diverse range of stakeholders who are representative of the cross section who will be involved in the recycling and food waste service. It is beneficial to invite stakeholders who are pro and anti the subject matter to get the best representation from the event. An incentive payment may be made when engaging residents to encourage a range of people to come to the session (e.g. not just those that are interested in recycling). The session is best held in neutral territory such as a community hall to ensure that the surroundings do not influence the outcomes of the session e.g. if a session was held in a recycling education room the information within the room may affect how people respond to questions.

### Pros

- Good quality qualitative information can be captured
- Allows in depth discussion of issues and resolution of problems
- Face to face contact ensures attendees understand issues and detailed information can be elicited about opinions they express

### Cons

- Can be costly as there may be a need to hire a venue, pay incentives and travel expenses, hire independent facilitators and translators or child minders and send out teams in advance to recruit people face to face to attend the session.
- Consultation with a relatively small number of people means that information gathered will not be quantitative
- Groups may not represent the majority opinion
- Can be difficult to recruit for – both time wise and getting a suitable mix of residents

## Meeting with established groups

The council officer attends a meeting of an established group as an invited guest. The meeting will be held in the usual meeting place for the group with recycling forming part of the agenda. An example may be attending the meeting of a residents association or forum for private managing agents.

### Pros

- Cheap and relatively easy to organise
- Makes use of existing networks and allows specific groups to be targeted
- Face to face contact ensures attendees understand issues and information can be elicited about opinions they express

### Cons

- Since recycling forms part of a larger agenda the time allocated for discussion may be limited and attendees may not have much interest in the topic. This might lead to recycling being dropped from the agenda if other topics take priority

- Unknown issues and previous relationships between the members of the group may drive responses
- Opinions might not be representative of the wider community

## Surveys and opinion polls

Surveys and opinion polls can be postal, face to face, web-based or conducted via telephone. They usually use a standard form or letter so that all those contacted are asked the same questions in order to make evaluating the responses most effective.

Sometimes an incentive is offered to encourage responses. Where there are complex issues general feedback gained from surveys can then be used to develop themes for discussion in focus groups.

In some instances stakeholders may be informed of a planned change and invited to comment within a set time frame. For example a letter may be sent to residents to inform them that a new recycling bin site will be located outside the entrance of their block. Residents may then be given two or three weeks to respond to the letter with any objections.

### Pros

- Wide group of people consulted which means that quantitative information is obtained
- Can be relatively cheap
- Responses are more likely to be based on individual opinion rather than guided by the group

### Cons

- Can have low response rates
- Information gathered can be superficial and the reasons behind an opinion may not always be clear
- Data may be skewed by closed questions which may not allow expression of the exact reasons behind a response

## Events / roadshows

Events and roadshows are usually larger than focus groups or workshops and there may be some selection of invitees but usually all those interested can attend. There is potential to combine events with other methods of stakeholder consultation such as smaller breakout focus groups or opinion polls. Events and roadshows can also be used as an opportunity to raise the profile of the project.

### Pros

- Allows large numbers of people to be consulted at the same time and for large numbers of new contacts to be obtained
- Potential to collect quantitative and qualitative information at the same time
- Potential to invite a mix of stakeholders representing different opinions

### Cons

- Can be costly and time consuming to arrange
- Need for large venue and supporting staff
- Opportunities for in depth discussions may be limited
- More suited to communicate the service rather than consult

## Individual interviews and meetings

One to one meetings with stakeholders can be a useful way of consulting with stakeholders on detailed or specific issues e.g. to discuss fire risk with the fire brigade or discuss how a recycling collection scheme might work in a block with the managing agent.

### Pros

- Individual contact means that the location of the meeting is flexible e.g. it could be held on site
- Allows in depth discussion and understanding of issues
- Usually low cost and easy to arrange

### Cons

- Likely to be very focused on individual issues
- Time consuming
- Little quantitative information gathered and not majority opinion

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