

# Public Consultations: What can you expect?

## Introduction

**Whenever a new public service is being designed or an existing service changed, the public need to be consulted and involved in making decisions about that service.**

The public tell Healthwatch Kent that they are not always confident about the consultation process. That could be because people don't fully understand how they should, and could, be involved in the process but we also hear that people feel it can be a tick box exercise and they are not truly listened to.

Healthwatch Kent is keen to ensure the public are always truly involved in decisions about their health & social care services, so we have created this guide to help people understand what you can expect from public consultations.

At the same time, we have created a guide for the organisations who are undertaking consultations so they can clearly understand what they should and shouldn't be doing.

### What is the process?

All organisations must adhere to some legal guidance which is known as the Gunning Principles. If there is any legal challenge to any consultation, these Principles are always reviewed.

1. Consultation with the public must take place when proposals are at an early stage, before ANY decisions have been made
2. The organisation must clearly state the reasons for any change so the public can fully understand and consider the proposals
3. Adequate time must be given for the public to consider and respond
4. The organisation must be able to evidence that they have listened and considered the feedback they receive from the public

In addition, health organisations funded by the Department of Health have to meet four further requirements called the Lansley Tests.

1. Clinical evidence about the need to change a service must be clear
2. They must have the support of the GP commissioners and the Clinical Commissioning Groups
3. There must be a genuine choice for patients. They cannot present one option
4. They must be able to show that they have involved and listened to the public, their patients and the local authority

All consultations must be transparent, honest and visible.



**There are four clear stages to a good public consultation and there are clear guidelines about how these stages should be organised**

### 1. Establish the need for change

- Patients and public have to be involved in this stage
- This stage identifies the issues and looks at the current situation and establishing the need for any change to a service
- The public must be able to clearly understand why a service might need to change and the challenges and restrictions that are present so they can help develop the best options for the future

### 2. Pre-consultation

- By working together with the public, this stage will develop a range of options for the future of a service
- The organisation must have completed what is called an Impact Assessment to identify which communities will be affected by any change. These communities must then be involved in any discussions
- Enough time needs to be given for people to get involved at this stage

### 3. Consultation

- At this stage, the options for a new or changed service are presented to the public for discussion
- Clear information should be presented to ensure everyone can get involved and participate should they wish.
- Translation services must be available if required
- Traditional public meetings are not always the best way to talk with the public, other methods to reach people can also be used

### 4. Post consultation

- The final decision is communicated to the public. It must include clear information about how the feedback from the public has influenced the final decision
- The findings of the consultation must be easily accessible to the public

To share any questions or concerns about any consultations contact us for free on **0808 801 0102** or email **info@healthwatchkent.co.uk**.

Alternatively text us on **07525 861 639**. You can also request a British Sign Language Interpreter through our text service.

