

Consultation

Best Value

Have your say! [The Local Government Act 1999](#) will provide greater opportunities for local people to have a say about Council services. The terminology used to encompass the Act is "Best Value". This is part of the Government's drive to make local government more modern and in touch with local people.

The duty of Best Value requires local authorities to make arrangements aimed at securing continuous improvement in the way that services are delivered, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. Consultation with local residents, taxpayers, private, voluntary and other public sector organisations are key elements in the drive to secure first class services and drive up standards for local people.

Best Value is all about - providing the services local people actually want. This is reflected in Redditch Borough Council's [Vision Statement](#) for Redditch 2002 and beyond, that state "Our services need to be relevant and responsive to local people, at the quality they want, delivered in the most effective way, when and where people want them."

Under Best Value councils will be judged by what they do, their delivery of real improvements in the services provided to local people and businesses. Consultation is key to providing services shaped not for the convenience of the organisation delivering them, but for the people receiving them.

Redditch Borough Council is well placed to gather peoples' views on its services. This can be demonstrated by the various consultation mechanisms that it uses.

- **Citizens Jury**
- **Community Capacity Building**
- **Community Safety Strategy**
- **Complaints system**
- **Disability Access group**
- **Equalities forums**
- **Healthy Borough survey**
- **Heineken Survey**
- **Local Plan**
- **Neighbourhood groups**
- **Planning for Real**
- **Public meetings**
- **Redditch Reports**
- **Student Council**

- **Talk of the Town**
- **Tenant Panels**
- **User surveys**
- **Visioning conference**

Redditch Reports Redditch Reports was established in October 1991 with the aim of improving, in a systematic manner, the quality of customer feedback obtained by the Council. The project has involved the establishment of a standing group of 'observers' (Redditch Reporters) to monitor the performance of the Council through regular completion, of a detailed standard questionnaire.

Last year the survey questionnaires were sent to 1500 Redditch residents, 40% of whom had completed questionnaires previously (Redditch Reporters) and the remaining 60% went to a random sample of addresses from the Electoral Register. 957 questionnaires were completed and returned, making the overall response rate for 62% (74% from Redditch Reporters and 54% from the random sample.) This is a good response rate for a postal survey, and enables us to have some confidence in the reliability of the survey.

Healthy Borough survey This is a lifestyle postal survey which is carried out by the Council every two-three years. The number of respondents have been in excess of 800 people. This consultation exercise is an example of partnership working with other agencies. The information is used to develop the Healthy Borough Strategy to shape some of its programmes and priorities of not only the Council but also Worcestershire Health Authority.

User surveys/focus groups A number of departmental surveys/focus groups have been carried out in recent years. These have focused on levels of satisfaction and service specific issues aimed at both internal and external audiences

Tenant Panels The Tenants Panel was created 4 years ago. The panel consists of twenty-five tenants with numbers increasing as local tenant groups grow. It operates on the basis that the panel meet once a month to discuss various housing issues, and has elected representation on the Housing Committee. Tenant representatives have no voting power within this Committee, however they can express the opinions of the Tenants Panel and feedback decisions back to fellow tenants.

Local tenant groups provide 3 elected representatives annually for the Tenants Panel, and its meetings are held locally within their specific areas. This is co ordinated by the Council's Tenant Participation Officer who provides training and support for all participants.

Neighbourhood groups The Borough Council has 14 Neighbourhood Groups (and 1 Parish Council.) These were established in 1996 with the purpose of taking the Council to the community. Each group is allocated an annual budget of £1,000 for local projects which can be spent virtually any way the local community chooses.

The groups are open to all, meeting three times a year and chaired by a Councillor with support from a member of the Council's management team and third tier officers. [\(Meeting details\)](#). Agendas are set by the local community and the Council adds items of interest. Issues discussed are varied and action is taken by a majority vote. A report and a publication is available upon request.

Councillor Representatives

Public meetings The Council has arranged a number of very high profile public meetings on matters of particular concern either to the Council or to local people. A prime example being a series of meetings concerning the possible closure of the Alexandra Hospital. Over 1000 people attended these events, and proved to be a pivotal point in generating local support behind the Councils' campaign to save local health services.

Complaints system The Council has in place a well established complaints system. This has been structured around good practice guidelines issued by the Local Government Ombudsmen.

Student Council Redditch Student Council was one of the first of its kind in the Country, and is currently celebrating its fifth year. The initiative was set up by Redditch Borough Council in conjunction with local schools, whereby representatives are annually elected.

There are 25 elected student representatives, with 5 deputies for those who can't make any of the meetings. These students are trained by youth workers to meet as a committee to comment and discuss on Council issues and their own items of interest. Councillors get a copy of the agenda, and can attend any of the meetings.

The Student Council meets twice every term and has its own budget thanks to the £500 sponsorship from local firms and contributions from the SRB programme in terms of officer time and joint work initiatives

Disability Access Group The group meets once every month to discuss a variety of issues that affect their daily lives. The meetings provide a format for Council Officers to discuss planning proposals and gain input from citizens with disabilities about the design of future developments within the Town. It also provides a platform for citizens to voice concerns over forthcoming legislation and future policies affecting services within the Borough.

Talk of the Town Last year as part of the Council's commitment to one its three priority areas - the town centre, £90,000 was allocated to improve it. The Council co-ordinated a public relations exercise which acted as a consultation tool through the local press. People were asked to submit suggestions on what they wanted the money to be spent on. As part of gathering comments/ideas the Council offered a prize for the best suggestion.

This was complemented by officers who interviewed local youths at another consultation exercise (Planning for Real) to get their views/suggestions. The campaign attracted a lot of media interest, both good and bad. This proved very beneficial in raising the profile of the Council's priority area, and generated some interesting comments.

Community Safety Audit The Redditch Community Safety Partnership was formed to meet the challenge of Section 6 (1) of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to create, publish and subsequently deliver, a three year crime and disorder strategy. This multi-agency approach devised a strategy and carried out an audit of the area which was published earlier this year.

Widespread consultation followed the audit. This involved a postal questionnaire to every household within the Borough to assess current trends and concerns. The results from this exercise shaped the crime and disorder strategy by prioritising key issues. These include: Young People, Domestic Violence, Harassment & Intimidation, Road Safety, Town Centre and Involving the Community. Consultation with local communities have clearly given agencies a remit in tackling effectively crime and disorder by prioritising resources to match local concerns.

Equality forums The forums are aimed at reaching out to minority groups to provide an opportunity to voice issues of concern with elected members and council officers in a supportive setting.

Community Capacity Building (Healthy Borough Alliances) Redditch Borough Council Healthy Borough Partnership was established in 1989. The strategy included the development of community health initiatives using a multi-agency approach in areas of greatest need. The strategy based on Health for All principals and Health of the Nation (Our Healthier Nation) has its core aim to reduce health inequalities

The project is jointly funded by the Council and Worcestershire Health Authority to provide neighbourhood development workers in four key areas of Redditch working directly with the community. The project aims to support residents organising events, improving the neighbourhood, building up skills and encouraging local people to get involved in community work.

Planning for Real Planning for Real is a community development tool that was used to gauge young peoples' views of Redditch town centre, and four ward areas: Batchley, Smallwood, Winyates and Woodrow.

The exercise lasted six months, and involved thousands of youths aged between 13-25 to comment on their communities using scaled 3D models of each area. This gave participants an opportunity through inter-active exercises to show how each area can be improved, or point out specific concerns, by placing pictorial "option cards" on the appropriate model

The Planning for Real exercise was broken down into three stages. The first was to identify concerns about the town centre. This involved day long events in four high schools within the Borough, and three day events within the Kingfisher shopping centre (town centre.)

The second stage involved looking at the four ward areas. Seven events were held in local high schools and youth clubs. Over 900 young people took part.

Information from all of these events were collated and presented to young people who wished to take part to examine the issues, and democratically select those that they considered should be prioritised. This meant that options were narrowed so that a clear picture emerged of young peoples' concerns.

Citizen's Jury - Redditch Borough Council was the first local authority in the County to hold a citizens' jury.

So far we have held two citizens' juries on landscaping and the town centre. This involved recruiting twelve members of the public for each Jury to examine and discuss issues relating to a specific topic.

The jurors were able to call any witness from inside and outside the Council and visit various sites across the town. After informed deliberation reports were compiled and presented to relevant Committees and Partnership forums.

The Heineken Project The project targeted the parts that other surveys do not reach in terms of socio-economic status, geographical area and family status.

Groups/areas were chosen on the basis of previous research where response rates have been low. These include younger people, families with children and residents of specific neighbourhoods.

A survey (random sample of 1,250 households) and a series of 3 focus groups on the theme of landscaping and the environment were carried out.

Questions were asked about the town centre and local neighbourhood areas. In addition, participants were asked to provide suggestions and ideas to maintain and improve the areas where they live and work in, and for the town as a whole.

The results from the exercise provided data for a needs assessment, and tested service delivery within these areas.

Visioning Conference Redditch held its first weekend 'Visioning conference' last year. The conference was based on an adapted version of "future search", a technique pioneered by Marvin and Sandra Welsbord in the USA. It involved eight representatives from each stakeholder group (residents, community and religious groups, public agencies, educationalists, businesses, voluntary sector, local government officers and local politicians) to draw up a vision for the future through workshops and inter-active exercises.

This vision for Redditch - the kind of town we want it to be and the kind of town we know it can be - was produced by 62 people, Redditch's stakeholders, each representing a different aspect of life in the town.

The group's concentrated effort and sense of purpose culminated in a series of action plans, themes and pledges aimed at making the town a better place to live and work. The results of the weekends' activities have formed the basis for the Council's Community Plan and Local Performance Plan.