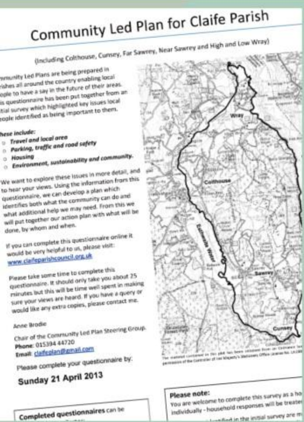
Questionnaire Design Guide

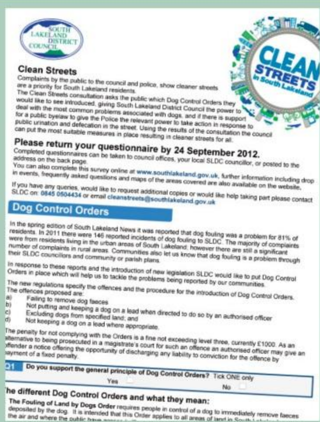
Produced in partnership by South Lakeland District Council and ACTion with Communities in Cumbria (ACT)


Community Led Plan for Claife Parish

(Including Colthouse, Cunsey, Far Sawrey, Near Sawrey and High and Low Wray)

Please complete your questionnaire by:

Sunday 21 April 2013

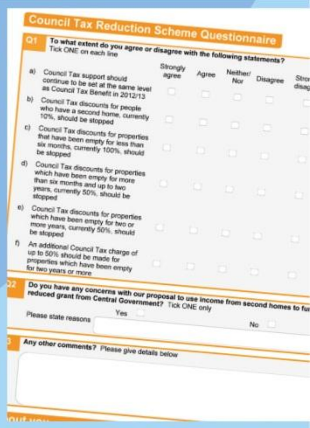

Clean Streets

Please return your questionnaire by 24 September 2012.

Dog Control Orders

Q1 Do you support the general principle of Dog Control Orders? Tick ONE only

The different Dog Control Orders and what they mean:


Council Tax Reduction Scheme Questionnaire

Q1 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Tick ONE on each line

Any other comments? Please give details below

SOUTH LAKELAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

ACTion with communities in cumbria

This guide was produced in partnership by South Lakeland District Council (SLDC) and ACTion with communities in Cumbria (ACT). *This guide is based on one produced by Cheshire Community Action and we acknowledge their work.*

South Lakeland District Council Policy and Partnerships team has produced this guide following requests for support by our staff and community organisations, including Community Led Plan groups across South Lakeland. Further support for Community Engagement including a Consultation Strategy and Toolkit are available on the SLDC website.

Policy and Partnerships, South Lakeland District Council, South Lakeland House, Lowther Street, Kendal, Cumbria, LA9 4DQ
Tel: 0845 050 4434
Email: Info@southlakeland.gov.uk
Web: www.southlakeland.gov.uk

To contact Emma Nichols - Community Engagement Officer (Parish Liaison Officer):
Tel: 01539 793268
Email: e.nichols@southlakeland.gov.uk

ACTion with Communities in Cumbria (ACT) is the community development organisation and Rural Community Council for Cumbria. The organisation champions community and rural issues, with a wide-range of resources available for voluntary and community organisations. This includes written and video case studies of community projects and guidance on community engagement, community planning, governance, business planning, funding and running community buildings. For more information please use the contact details below.

ACT champions community and rural issues

ACTion with Communities in Cumbria, Offices O-Q Skirsgill Business Park, Penrith, Cumbria CA11 0FA
T: 01228 817224 | www.cumbriaaction.org.uk | info@cumbriaaction.org.uk | Follow us @ACTCumbria
Registered in England as Voluntary Action Cumbria | Charity Registration Number 1080875 | Company Number 3957858

ACT's work on this guide was funded by SLDC and the BIG lottery through the BASIS project which supports youth and rural organisations in Cumbria.

LOTTERY FUNDED

Version 1 - July 2013

©ACT and SLDC 2013. This publication may be reproduced free of charge in any format or medium provided that it is reproduced accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as ACTion with Communities in Cumbria and South Lakeland District Council copyright and the title of the publication specified.

DT046 11.07.13

Contents

Front cover photo credits:

- Left photo - Claife Community Led Plan meeting by Julia Wilson
- Right photo - Barton Community Led Plan Consultation by Cyril Wilson

1. Why develop a questionnaire?

People use questionnaires for a variety of reasons, it may be to:

- Understand the community
- Look at the views of different groups of people
- Track changes over time
- Promote a policy.
-

People also need a reason to respond, they may take part:

- To get an incentive
- To make a complaint or offer praise
- To make a difference and improve things
- To engage in a process
- Because they have to.

Before you start drafting your questionnaire give some thought to **your** motives:

- Why are you doing this?
- What do you want from it?
- Why will people in your community respond?

Ask yourself if there is another way to get the information you need. You may find that statistical and other information about your community already exists with the Parish Council, the Local Authority and other bodies and agencies such as a Health Authority or ACTion with Communities in Cumbria. It always pays to do some research first to find out what information already exists in the way of census data, needs surveys, prior consultations, published literature about the history and origins, the built and natural environment etc. Cumbria Intelligence Observatory holds a wealth of information which is freely available at www.cumbriaobservatory.org.uk. You should ensure that any necessary permission is obtained for the use of such data where relevant, although abstracting information from published sources will often not require such permission and merely acknowledging the source will be sufficient.

Communities take many shapes and forms. They can include an area, interest or culture. What does the community you want to engage with 'look like'?

Top tip: Just as there are no perfect communities, there are no perfect questionnaires so don't be afraid of making mistakes and don't put it off any longer, read this guide, give it a go and ask for comments once you have produced your first draft.

Remember questionnaires generally form part of a wider consultation process. South Lakeland District Council have produced a Consultation Toolkit available at: www.southlakeland.gov.uk and ACTion with Communities in Cumbria has provided a number of Community Led Planning resources available at: www.cumbriaaction.org.uk/resources

2. The questionnaire design group

If your consultation group is functioning through a steering group, a number of topic-based working groups or the questionnaire has been drafted in sections by different working groups, you will need to agree who exercises editorial control.

The questionnaire needs to be a coherent and cohesive document that hangs together as a whole. Initially an agreed editor could provide a set of basic guidelines that all working groups should adhere to in devising their part of the questionnaire. In addition, an editor can take an overview of the complete questionnaire and ensure that it works as a whole.

3. Introduction to questionnaire development

This guide is intended to help you through the process of developing a questionnaire. It highlights issues you need to keep in mind as you work through the process together with details of how to ask meaningful questions. So let's start with an overview:

The key to success

The way in which you construct your questionnaire will have a direct impact on the success of your consultation. It can potentially affect how many people respond, how fully they respond and how useful and intelligible the responses are. Remember that you may only get 'one bite at the cherry' and as a result you need to get it right, as questionnaire fatigue can very quickly set in. Try to find a balance one longer survey asking relevant questions is better than several short ones.

Every consultation is unique

It may be useful to look at other questionnaires and consultations for ideas on content, layout and format, however, your consultation purpose and community are unique and your questionnaire needs to reflect this. The questionnaire should deal with issues already identified. This could be as a result of changes in services, previous discussions of needs within the community, changes in funding or through other consultation.

Please don't be tempted to simply copy another questionnaire or take one 'off the shelf'. You may think that this is saving work and time but the questions may have no relevance to your community. This will be apparent to your respondents, who may treat the exercise with the same lack of thought and care that has gone into its development. This guide will take you through the process of setting questions and provide some examples.

Publicity

Explaining the aims of the consultation before the questionnaire is sent out and reminding people a few weeks before the questionnaire is due back will help to increase interest and return rates. This can be done through press releases, posters, notices, flyers, newsletters and announcements at meetings. Use existing groups and networks so you can reach as many people as possible. This is covered in more detail later in this guide.

Identifying and writing for your target audience

Before you start you need to be clear about who your questionnaire is targeted at, so you can take their needs into account at the drafting stage in terms of content, language and layout.

You may be consulting every household in the vicinity or you may be targeting the under 18s or over 60s. Your questionnaire should reflect the needs of your intended recipient group, e.g. larger print, clearer font and different versions for young people. The questions also need to be targeted and relevant to the recipient group e.g. there is no point asking the over 60s if they want to join a youth club, unless you want them to volunteer.

Sample size

It may not be possible to hand a questionnaire to every person who could give you useful information. In such cases you need to select a sample of all the members of the group you are interested in. This sample should be representative of the group, so ask yourself does it cover the relevant ages, socio-economic groups, genders etc. Consider what response rate you would be happy with and set yourselves a target.

Confidence in data
When respondents to surveys are part of a sample, depending on the scale of the consultation, it can be important to quantify any uncertainty in the results values as a Confidence Interval (CI). This is especially important in surveys where the data likely to be studied closely. It is usually reported as 95% Confidence Interval, which is the range of values within which we can be 95% sure that the true value for the whole population lies.

For example, where satisfaction is recorded at 50% with a 95% CI of +/-2%, we would have 95% confidence that the true satisfaction value is between 48% or 52% if we surveyed the total population.

For more information on sample sizes and confidence in data, the Scottish government has a frequently asked questions article:
www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Health/scottish-health-survey/ConfidenceIntervals#a11

Keep it short and simple
This should be your byword. When you begin constructing the questionnaire and deciding upon the individual questions you need to consider:

- simplicity of language and style - simple means easily understood
- clarity - plain English, simple sentence structure (see below)
- conciseness - short questionnaire, short questions, short words
- easy to read - complete layout and format, not too cluttered
- simple and straightforward instructions
- easy to complete - layout and design.

It is important that people can respond with the minimum of time and effort if you want to achieve a fairly high return rate, suitable formatting can help. The easier you make it for respondents to answer your questionnaire then the more likely they will be to respond. Further advice on formatting is included later in this guide.

> *"The respondent is the most important, yet the least involved, concerned or interested party in the survey exercise so the questionnaire must be simple and relevant."* Dr Sandy Ochojna

Things to avoid
Be mindful that it is very easy to put people off. Very often people who design questionnaires fall into the trap of confusing their audience so it's worth avoiding the following right from the start:

Jargon, techno speak, acronyms, initials and abbreviations

Use everyday words and avoid those that need a dictionary to understand. Always opt for a shorter, simpler word or phrase where one is available, provided the sense is the same. Choose language that the reader can relate to, acronyms, initials and abbreviations are annoying if you have to keep checking the glossary to find out what they stand for or if they are not explained at all. It is also sensible to avoid words that might be misheard e.g. 'sects' and 'sex' in case you need to read your questions out to a respondent. Otherwise this may result in some unexpected answers. More information is available from the Plain English Campaign website www.plainenglish.co.uk

Double negatives

Negatives in questions, especially double negatives can be very confusing — e.g.:

- Are you against a ban on dogs being allowed in the children's play area?

It takes a little time to work out that if you are against a ban then you are in favour of allowing something. A respondent may not complete this question because it is unclear, or misinterpret it and give an unreliable answer or start becoming irritated with the survey. Why risk any of these responses when a simple positively phrased question can be asked in its place? A better question for this example would be:

- Do you think dogs should be allowed in the children's play area?

Personal questions

This information will help you understand your community, you can identify who is and isn't taking part in the survey and take steps, if needed, to make sure everyone's views are equally represented e.g. work with the local school or youth group if you aren't getting responses from younger people .

Top tip - If you want to know information about the individual filling in the questionnaire so that you can understand your community e.g. age, gender or ethnicity you need to be sensitive and make the response optional. Personal questions should be kept to a minimum and are often best left to the end of the questionnaire so that they can be kept separate from the rest of the answers.

There are characteristics which are 'protected' under the Equality Act 2010 that you should consider when you are developing your questions, these are:

- Age
- Disability
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Religion or belief
- Sexual orientation

The Equality Act involves removing disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics, taking steps to meet their needs, where these are different from the needs of other people and encouraging them to participate in public life or in activities where their participation is disproportionately low. You may also wish to consider Rurality – e.g. isolated area in the countryside

Questions about wealth and income should be avoided as they are sensitive and some respondents find them intrusive and unwelcome. If such questions need to be asked then an explanation of why they are being asked may be helpful.

Leading questions

These are questions that suggest the answer that is required in the question and should always be avoided. For example:

- How should the parking problems in the village be resolved? or
- How bad do you consider the parking problems in the village to be?

This clearly assumes that there are parking problems rather than asking directly whether the respondent believes there is a parking problem in the village. For example:

- Are there any issues around parking within the village? Yes / No
- If so, please indicate what problems you have encountered and where?

Multiple questions or multiple ideas within a question

Multiple questions or questions that include multiple ideas will cause confusion. If you ask more than one question in a single sentence and receive only one answer, you will find it difficult to know which question is being answered or whether the answer to all of the questions is the same. For example:

- Do you regularly use the Village Hall and the Church Hall?

If the answer is 'Yes', does this mean that the respondent uses just the village hall, just the church hall or both? For the data to be meaningful and usable, this needs to be broken down into two separate questions, or one question 'Do you regularly use…? with two different answer rows 'the Village Hall', 'the Church Hall'.

Hypothetical questions

These types of question are difficult to devise and the data is hard to analyse accurately, because people are being asked questions about things that may or may not happen at some point in the future when their own personal circumstances and views may or may not be the same. For example:

- If a farmers market took place once each month, would you use it?

Whilst it may be useful and necessary to ask such questions, you will need to be aware that they can only provide an initial indication of future action and further detailed consultation will be necessary. The extent to which the responses from such questions can be relied upon needs to be tempered with a degree of realism. Such responses are not measurable in the same way as factual responses and should be used as early indicators only.

Avoiding bias

Be careful not to bias questions by suggesting a negative or positive response within the question. For example:

- Are you dissatisfied with....?
- How unhappy are you with....?
- How satisfied are you with ...?

Instead consider using a more equally weighted question such as:

- How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with..?

Irrelevant questions

When writing each question you should begin by asking yourself some searching questions:

- Why do we want to know this?
- What will the answer to this question tell us?
- Will the answers to this question be useful when writing the report?
- How will the response inform our thinking and planning?
- What will we do with the information when we have collected it?
- Will it tell us something new or is it just nice to know?

Top tip - If you can't be sure that the response will be useful and informative then there is no point in asking the question.

4. Starting your questionnaire

You have to begin somewhere. People are more likely to engage with you if they understand what's happening.

Explain who you are, what you are doing and why

The first page should give a brief description of the purpose of the questionnaire. You need to explain in a friendly and straightforward introduction the aims of the project, why you are doing it and who you are. Use a map if your questionnaire covers a specific area. You are trying to capture the reader's interest and trust. You should also explain what you will do with the information and that the responses will remain confidential. Give an indication of how long it will take to complete the form; you can test this with a pilot group. You should aim for no more than 15 to 20 minutes.

Consider who is eligible to reply. Are you asking for responses from individuals or from the household? If you are happy to receive a response from more than one member of a household consider saying so:

> *Please note you are welcome to complete this survey as a household or individually – household responses will be treated as one. For additional questionnaires please contact (provide contact details).*

You may want to make it clear that respondents should pass over any question/s they feel they do not want to answer. You can also make it clear that you would rather have a partially completed questionnaire rather than none at all.

Another consideration is making it clear you would like the respondent to answer on their own behalf:

- How often do **you** use the following?

Rather than on behalf of the community in general:

- How often is the swimming pool used?

As actually this is very difficult for a person to guess accurately without having specific usage numbers available – e.g. by the staff of the swimming pool themselves. See the section on perception questions on page 13 for further examples.

Appreciation, value and thanks

Make it clear that you value the respondent's input and that their answers, comments and ideas are an important part of the consultation. Always remember to thank them for taking the time to complete and return the form. A simple statement like:

> *Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.*

is all that is necessary. You may decide to include this in your introduction and reserve it for the end of the questionnaire or you can do both.

Return details and further information

Information about how and who to return the form to and any deadlines for return should be clearly stated. You should also consider providing a contact name and number for help in completing the questionnaire and how to get hold of a large print version should this be required. You might want to consider whether to include an incentive prize draw for completing and returning the questionnaire as this can improve your return rate and add an element of fun.

5. Logical sequencing of questions

Try to follow a simple thought process so that questions flow as well as they can.

Use of section headings

Questions should follow a logical sequence and be grouped together under identifiable headings or sections. For example all the transport questions should be asked under an umbrella heading like 'Transport'. This allows for ease of navigation round the questionnaire and enables people to deal with one overall issue at a time. Section headings create a natural pause before moving onto the next topic. This will also help those compiling and editing the questionnaire, (which may be drafted by a number of topic-based working groups) and those analysing the data.

Section introductions

Each new section may need a brief sentence of introduction followed by instructions about how to complete the questions. You may want to consider inserting introductions and instructions in a different type or size of font, emboldened, underlined or in italics, in order to make them stand out from the questions. Further advice on formatting is included later in this guide.

Build towards complexity

As each section develops it is useful to begin with the easy questions and build up towards the more difficult, complex and/or personal questions. You may also need to consider adding an introduction to a complex question or issue.

6. Types of question

There are a number of types of question you can use. They generally fall into two categories: open and closed.

Open questions

Open or free text questions draw out qualitative data; the responses encourage thought and freedom of expression.

Qx **What do you particularly like about living in this area?** **Please give details below**

They can help to add insight by expanding on short answers. However, they take longer for people to answer and can be difficult to analyse. They can also be misinterpreted.

You should therefore consider using mainly multiple choice and option questions whilst offering opportunities for people to write their own comments at intervals. You can do this by having an ‘Other’ response box on specific questions or a ‘Please state...’option. This allows people to provide alternative answers.

Qx	**If you rarely or never use public transport, is there a reason for this?** Tick ALL that apply		
Easier to walk or cycle	☐	Journey times are too long	☐
No bus/train services locally	☐	No buses/trains where I need to go	☐
Buses/trains not at times needed e.g. to commute to work	☐	Cheaper to use the car	☐
Transport connections are not synchronised	☐	Easier to use the car	☐
Expensive public transport fares	☐	Was not aware of Community Transport Schemes mentioned at Qx	☐
Other reasons - please write in			

At the end of the questionnaire consider asking if the respondent has 'Any other comments' on relevant issues that have not been addressed, this allows people to expand on issues that are important to them. Sometimes, where it may be useful or perhaps for a complex issue, this could also be included at the end of a section.

Closed questions

Closed questions provide quantitative data, the responses can be counted and quantified so they are easy to analyse. They are quick to answer and people find it easy to respond, however, this can lead to people ticking boxes without really thinking.

Multiple choice and option questions

Many questionnaires use a predominance of multiple choice questions, including perception questions. These are more likely to be answered than open questions as they structure the available answers within the question format. Whilst the fact that they are more likely to be answered is useful, they may be regarded by some as leading. As mentioned above, they do make the job of analysis much easier. There clearly is a place for them but they need to be interspersed with open questions and consider using open options as per the following examples.

There are various different types of multiple choice /option questions.

<u>Simple Yes/ No answers</u>

Qx	**Do you run a local business?** Tick ONE only	
	Yes ☐	No ☐

<u>Questions that allow you to make a single response</u>

Qx	**How long have you lived in the area?** Tick ONE only					
	Under 2 years	**2-5 years**	**6-10 years**	**11-20 years**	**21-30 years**	**30+ years**
	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Using response bands like these can desensitise personal questions about age, income etc. If you adopt this approach then you need to ensure that the bands are sequential and do not overlap. When using 'How often...?' questions, it is advisable to phrase them in relation to things that have already occurred in the past rather than referring to the future, which is much more difficult to measure accurately. For example:

- How often have you used the mobile library in the past 12 months?

This will result in a more concrete and realistic response than:

- How often are you likely to use the mobile library in the next 12 months?

It is also advisable to offer a specific number of occasions or timescales in the multiple choice answers rather than more general responses. For example:

Qx **How often do you use these forms of public transport?** Tick ONE for each

	Every day	2-3 times a week	Around once a week	Once or twice a month	Less often	Never
Local buses	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Trains	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Rural Wheels	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Voluntary Car Scheme	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Answers that are much more general, like ‘Frequently’, ‘Often’, ‘Rarely’, are open to wide interpretation by both respondents and analysts and can result in inconsistency of approach and inaccurate conclusions being drawn.

However if a group already knows how often something does happen you could ask:

Qx **Would you like events to be held in the local area…?** Tick ONE only

More often	About the same	Less often	Don’t know / can’t say
☐	☐	☐	☐

Satisfaction ratings and different ways to ask

Satisfaction ratings can be asked as a **multiple choice** – single line response about one issue, or item, or as **a matrix choice** - where there are multiple choice answers about a number of issues in one question

If you decide to use satisfaction ratings in relation to specific services or issues then you will need to provide guidance at the beginning of the section and possibly reinforce it throughout the questionnaire. You can use a variety of approaches:

- Very good, Good, Neither good nor poor, Poor, Very poor – about a service, or solution in place
- Very satisfied, Satisfied, Neither/nor, Dissatisfied, Very dissatisfied – about a service, or solution already in place
- Very important, Important, Neither/nor, Not Important, Not at all important, etc. – about a service or issue
- Strongly agree, Agree, Neither/nor, Don’t agree, Strongly don’t agree – about a statement made.

A numerical system asking respondents to rate something on a scale of 1 to 5 implies less connotations than using words like poor and very poor. Respondents may find it easier and be more prepared to be honest and critical using a numerical system, but these can be harder to analyse and not always easy to set up on online surveys.

Perception questions
These are questions based on someone's own experience or take on something should be preceded with 'In your opinion', 'to what extent' or 'in your view' as these helps the respondent to understand it is their view we are interested in rather than their view on behalf of the wider community. See the examples below.

It is often very useful to follow up a satisfaction rating question with a free text question that allows people to explain their satisfaction rating. For example:

- Please state your reason for this satisfaction rating?
- Please give a comment about your answer?
- How could this matter be improved? as below.

If you decide to use satisfaction rating questions then you should consider whether you wish to provide a 'Don't know' option.

This example shows a number of these satisfaction options being used in one question as a matrix:

Qx **To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?** Tick ONE for each statement

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither/ Nor	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Enough is being done to ensure that alterations/repairs to buildings in the area are in keeping with the village tradition	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Older or more historic properties in the area are well looked after	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

How could this matter be improved?

Don't know's

There can be a tendency for respondents to take the easy way out and plump for the 'Don't know' option rather than make a conscious choice. Many questionnaire setters decide to leave out the 'don't know' option for this reason. Consider though, if someone genuinely doesn't know, maybe the action from this result is to help the respondent to know more about the issue either generally, or in the survey itself.

An introduction to the subject may help respondents to have enough information to set the scene. Rather than outlaw the 'don't know' option, it is better to consider whether a 'don't know' option would be appropriate for each question.

An alternative to think about is whether a 'doesn't apply'/'not applicable' option would be better, in the example below an easy to understand option is 'Don't have broadband', which may also indicate the respondent has no interest or opinion on the subject

Qx **How important is Broadband access to you?** Tick ONE only

Very important	Fairly important	Neither/Nor	Not very important	Not at all important	Don't have broadband
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐ go to **Qx**

If you wish to force someone to make a decision rather than sit on the fence, you may decide to remove the 'Neither/Nor' option, however consider this carefully, sometimes someone selecting 'Neither/Nor', is simply saying 'I have no opinion', 'I'm not bothered'. This can be as important in an issue as a 'Very important' response.

Questions that allow you to make multiple responses

These are questions which allow people to tick more than one response that applies, and can also add a further option if an option relevant to them hasn't been included. This can help save on trying to list every possible eventuality and stick to the most common, without loosing valuable information.

Qx How do you currently heat your home? Tick ALL that apply

LPG	☐	Electricity	☐	Heat exchange	☐
Oil	☐	Wood	☐	Ground source heat pump	☐
Coal	☐	Biomass boiler	☐		

Other, please write in ______________________

Questions that allow ranking of answers in order of priority

Questions in this format help to identify how best to allocate resources. However it can be difficult if only three out of a possible 5 options have been numbered, or if as in the example below there are multiple lines but you can only choose a few, in this case rank the top 3 in order or importance. If people have been used to ticking answers throughout the form they may misread the question or not like having to choose and simply tick all the ones that matter to them as most important. Ranking is best avoided where possible, consider do you need to rank or is asking if something is important will naturally lead to a ranking anyway.

Q x What is important to you in a Car Park?
Please select a maximum of THREE options/rows. Then rank these in order with **3** being the MOST important and **1** the LEAST important.

	3 (Most important)	**2**	**1** (Least important)
Level access	☐	☐	☐
Lighting	☐	☐	☐
Size of space	☐	☐	☐
Proximity of payment machine	☐	☐	☐
Cost of parking	☐	☐	☐
Choice of different payment options	☐	☐	☐
Security	☐	☐	☐
Motor home / large vehicle parking	☐	☐	☐

Please note – ranking isn't currently possible using the 'Have Your Say' online survey website, which is covered later in this guide.

7. Formatting your questionnaire

First impressions matter, a well presented questionnaire can help lead the respondent through the process. Always include an introduction and begin with simple questions. Difficult questions and questions that might bring out strong feelings for the respondent should be left until the end of the questionnaire. Asking them too early can affect the responses given to unrelated questions.

Defining difficult, technical, complex or unclear terms
Make sure that you define the meaning of difficult, complex, technical or unclear terms or better still avoid them altogether. Your questions should not routinely need explanation and amplification, otherwise they are too complex. Remember you may have given information in the introduction to the section or question. However, when you can't avoid this make the meaning clear as in the example below.

Qx **Have you taken part in a bulk buying scheme for your fuel?** Tick ONE only
E.g. oil buying collectives **www.boilerjuice.com**, **www.oil-club.co.uk** (nearest is Newby Bridge) or electricity switching scheme **www.powerupyourcommunity.co.uk**

Yes ☐ No ☐ Not aware of any schemes ☐

Or alternately sometimes an introduction is required to a question to set the scene:

The vicar and church council of x church, are keen that the church serves the community as best it can. They would like to know if they can do any more.

Qx **How can the church give further support to the community?** Please give details below

Or to reassure as in this example regarding contact details and data protection:

Your contact details will only be used by the Community Plan group and will not be passed on to any other organisation.

Qx **If yes in Qx, please give contact details below**

Name

Phone number

Email address

Skills I can offer - please give details

Numbering
Choose a simple, sequential numbering system that avoids roman numerals and letters. This can be useful for respondents if they ring up needing help with particular questions and for those analysing and recording the data. Remember that you will probably want to include your questions within your final report and a clear numbering system will help you to organise the material and findings. Make the question number stand out to help respondents move between questions.

Routing
Be careful if you use routing of responses as this can result in people getting confused or lost and giving up. It can become very complex and is best avoided wherever possible. If used, make sure the pilot group looks at this particular aspect in detail and see how well it works. For example:

Qx	Do you run a local business? Tick ONE only		
	Yes ☐	No ☐	➔ Qx

Please note – automatic routing isn't currently possible using the 'Have Your Say' online survey website, which is covered later in this guide.

Workload impact
A simple format and a lower number of questions will also make your own task of printing and data handling easier if you are producing your own questionnaires. You will not have to collate and staple numerous sheets of paper for example. If using postage, there will be lower cost implications of a slimmed down questionnaire. The data analysis will involve so much more work if you ask 150 open questions than if you confine yourself to a maximum number of questions, largely in closed/option choice form, with limited open questions in each section.

Streamlined and professional appearance
To encourage a response your questionnaire should look uncluttered and organised. Giving clear instructions at the outset, presenting questions in a logical order and making it easy to move from section to section, will persuade people to continue through to the end. Even if your questionnaire is not being produced at a printers your questionnaire still needs to look professional, but this can be achieved easily e.g. putting borders around questions, grey shading to make tick boxes stand out, and using bold fonts for questions and normal font for answers, as per the examples given in this guide.

Clearly mark sections and check for grammatical and spelling mistakes. The print needs to be clear, and the font legible and of a reasonable size. A minimum of 11 point font, Arial or Calibri are recommended. A pastel coloured background paper can result in more completed returns and is easier for householders to find amongst junk mail.

Size matters
Having decided on the content and question types, it is important to consider the layout and appearance of the questionnaire as this will influence how user friendly respondents will find it. Thick booklet-sized questionnaires and pages crammed with blocks of solid, small print will make hearts sink and put respondents off filling it in.

Top tip - If you can limit your questionnaire to one A3 sheet of paper, folded to make four A4 sides, you are more likely to have success with completed returns, but then consider if you have asked all you need to ask, as it would be worse for the community to receive two surveys from your group because you didn't ask all the questions needed the first time.

If you need more pages, the usual approach is to make a booklet from folded sheets of A3 paper, either 4 x A4 sides, 8 x A4 sides, or 12 xA4 sides being the norm and looks professional. It is also better to space the survey well rather than try to squash the questions on to a space too small and reduce text size, both make a survey harder to read. Clever spacing between questions and column widths can work wonders when only a few centimetres need to be saved.

Commercial printers can provide alternatives if you can't make your survey fit well, e.g. 6 sides of A4 in one long piece with the sides folded in on themselves (similar to a leaflet) back down to A4 size and other methods. Unusual ways of presenting the survey can also help attract respondents to complete it.

8. Children and young people

Where you are targeting children and young people with your questionnaire, particular care needs to be taken as you have a responsibility not to compromise or jeopardise their safety in any way or put them at risk of being abused or put in any danger. You should avoid requesting any personal information about children or young people (i.e. the under 18s) that might potentially put them at risk. This would include contact or personal details such as name, address, telephone or mobile number, email address, post code, school, gender, age etc.

In the case of children under 16, the consent of a parent or guardian is needed for the child to participate in a survey. Guidance from the Market Research Society is that when it is known, or ought reasonably to be known, that all or a majority of respondents are likely to be under 16, then questionnaires should be addressed to the parent or guardian. All such questionnaires should carry a note or notice explaining that consent is required for all children to participate. There should also be a space on the questionnaire for the parent or responsible adult to sign that they have given their consent for the child to complete the questionnaire.

The overriding principle is that researchers must take all reasonable precautions to ensure that respondents are not harmed or adversely affected as a result of participating in a survey and that would include the risks of collecting contact or personal details.

If you are carrying out a survey that is designed and intended for children and young persons, we would strongly recommend that you take advice on your proposed questionnaire from your local child protection specialists within the Council, Police Service, School and/or Social Services. Often working with the teacher and ensuring they stay in the room is sufficient.

9. Disability etiquette

If you are asking questions in your questionnaire about disabled people or facilities in your local area, made sure you use appropriate language so people won't be offended.

It is **acceptable** to use words and phrases like :

Disabled people	Non-disabled people	Blind
Partially sighted	Deaf	Hearing impaired
Partially deaf	Deaf people who use sign language	Mental health difficulties
Wheelchair users	Specific learning difficulties	

It is **not acceptable** to use words and phrases like :

Handicapped people	A victim of...	Invalid
Wheelchair bound	Suffering from	The special needs child/person
The disabled	No 'ic' word e.g. 'the epileptic'	

If in doubt or need help or assistance with wording your disability questions and with other equality issues, go to www.equalitycumbria.org

10. Testing your questionnaire through a 'dummy run'

It’s very difficult to get everything right first time so test your questionnaire with a small group of volunteers (around 6 to 10) who have not been involved in creating the questionnaire and preferably are not part of the consultation group.

The sample group should be asked to complete the questionnaire 'blind' i.e. without any help or instructions other than those that appear in the questionnaire. They should as nearly as possible complete the questionnaire under the same conditions as the final survey. This will hopefully throw up any particular difficulties of language, terminology and phrasing of questions and let you know if the questionnaire works.

Feedback on readability and timing

Informal feedback can also be obtained on readability, layout, ease of navigation and how easy the form was to complete. Ask the volunteers how long it took them to work through and for suggestions on how the questionnaire could be improved and/or simplified. Once you have obtained feedback you can take a detailed, critical look and incorporate any appropriate suggestions.

Questionnaire testing form

A sample questionnaire testing form is provided in **Appendix 1**. Use the results to amend your questionnaire.

Testing checklist

During the test you are looking for the following:

- Comprehension
- Language or phrasing problems
- Ease of answering
- Co-operation from the respondent
- Navigation from start to finish and topic to topic
- Clarity of instructions
- Practicality
- Time taken to complete.

Feedback through analysis of data

Analyse the questions they have answered to see if any difficulties arise. Look at how they have answered and check it makes sense to you. Consider how this information could be used within you final report. Will the results provide what you need to meet your aims? Comments raised by several respondents may indicate missing questions.

11. Questionnaire checklist

When you have completed your questionnaire check it! Remember KISS - 'Keep It Short and Simple' – check you have:

- Included an introduction stating: who you are; why you are asking the questions; what you will do with the results
- Used a suitable print style and a professional layout
- Used a clear font no smaller than Arial 11 for clarity and ease of reading
- Avoided UPPER CASE where possible as it is more difficult to read
- Used bold or underline to emphasise words or phrases
- Used clear headings and introduce each section briefly with a short explanation of why the questions are being asked
- Offered to send a larger font questionnaire on request (this instruction itself must be in a larger font, at least Arial 14 bold)
- Say where completed forms should be sent and include a deadline
- Provide contact details in case the respondent has any queries or needs help completing the form
- Used a mix of mainly closed questions with occasional open, free text questions
- Avoided technical and complex language and terms and explained them if their use cannot be avoided
- Avoided routing if at all possible
- Tested the questionnaire on a small sample group and finalised the questionnaire using the results
- Remembered to say ‘Thank you’ somewhere in the questionnaire, either in the introduction, at the end or both.

Remember to get final approval from the group, committee or your manager, as relevant, before you send the questionnaire out.

12. Delivery and collection methods

Consider how you will distribute and collect questionnaires and remember to raise awareness through publicity. There are a number of methods detailed below, chose methods which are appropriate for your community.

House to house delivery and collection
If you are consulting with a relatively small community and have plenty of volunteers who will deliver and collect for you consider personal delivery. Hand delivering and collecting questionnaires will dramatically improve your response rate, especially if a quick chat to explain the reason for the survey is possible. It may also be useful to collect responses if you have many elderly respondents who might need help in completing the questionnaire.

However, this is time consuming and may not be suitable for larger communities or consultations.

Piggy back on other mailings
Linking the delivery of your questionnaire with other mailings/newsletters can be very effective and cut down on volunteer time and postage costs.

However, it can result in your questionnaire being `eclipsed' or `overlooked' by the accompanying material unless it stands out in some way.

Strategic community collection points
Having a range of collection points to hand in completed questionnaires around the community can be useful in increasing return rate. These should be in buildings that residents regularly use, such as a village shop, village hall, post office, church, pub, school, doctor's surgery, bank or garage, where available. Provide another option though for people that don't regularly use these buildings and who may find them difficult to access because of the hours they work etc.

Drop in events
Holding workshops at advertised times in community buildings, where questionnaires can be picked up, and questions asked easily as well as, the usual delivery and collection of questionnaires, will result in a high return rate and quality responses from those who attend, although not everyone will attend.

If you are helping people complete forms or conducting interviews, always use a script so that you don't inadvertently lead someone into giving you the answer you want to hear. You may be happy to complete questionnaires over the phone, again use a carefully worded script.

Another approach is to take questionnaires to places that you know peoples regularly meet at i.e. school gates (let the school know), lunch club, youth club, toddler group and ask people to fill them in there and then.

Postage and reply paid envelopes
For larger communities postage may be the only real option and this can be both costly and less effective in ensuring good return rates. You may be able to use the electoral register and information from postal services to calculate the number of questionnaires needed and the likely costs for your budget. A postage paid return envelope will be more likely to ensure return and reassure people that the response is confidential, as does providing online surveys, see below.

Online
Consider publishing your survey online. This may encourage people who are used to using the internet in their daily lives. There is no risk that they will forget to return the form and the data is already added reducing the time it takes you to input the response into a spread sheet. However, not everyone has internet access and some people will be put off if they have to respond this way, so always make sure that paper copies are distributed as well.

There are a number of online survey tools available:

- **Have Your Say** is a free online survey tool available for local authorities, voluntary and community groups and town and parish councils. This also have a sophisticated but simple to use analysis section and a basic report is automatically generated with all statistical results included. This is available via your county or district council. To see some current consultations visit www.haveyoursay.org.uk
- **Survey Monkey** provides a free service for a limited number of questions and responses. If you are asking a number of questions and/or expecting a high response rate there is a fee. Simple analysis, by highlighting the most chosen answer is included, main analysis is done via a download of the full results onto an excel spread sheet. www.surveymonkey.com

Most online survey tools will be set up to let you add the respondents' answers from a paper questionnaire manually, bringing all your results together for easy analysis. You will be able to see which were completed online by the respondent – which will show how successful you were in getting the online responses, and which were input by steering group members, also allowing you to check accuracy.

13. Follow up

Using a 'Follow Up Reminder Card' in A6 format sent out 10 days before the closing deadline for returning questionnaires can prompt another surge of responses after the initial surge.

The card should simply say that the group is still hoping that people will return the questionnaire that had been delivered.

Consider including a series of bullet points:

- Maybe you have already sent it to us (in this case we are sorry to have delivered this card)
- Maybe you need some help or have some questions (just call us on ....)
- Maybe you need some help or have some questions (just call us on ....)
- Maybe you have misplaced the questionnaire (just call us on ....)
- Maybe you forgot or have been away (please hurry so your views will count)
- Maybe you don't want to answer the questionnaire (that's OK too.).

Finally remind the reader to return the questionnaire by the cut off date.

Top tip - For large consultations consider sending out a press release or put an article in a local newsletter.

14. Analysis of data

A mixture of question formats is often the most effective way of gathering information. Consider how you will analyse the results and what you intend to use the information for. Be realistic, because there is no point in collecting masses of quality data if you never get around to analysing it.

If you have made your survey available online some questionnaire replies will have been entered already, information from any paper questionnaires will also nee to be inputted. Standard reports can be run automatically but you still need to interpret the open questions and put the facts and figures into context.

Quantitative data
Multiple choice type questions and option type questions will be the easiest to analyse as they provide figures. You can use a spread sheet to sort, quantify and present your findings. Entering data can be time consuming but it does mean that you become familiar with the data. Once you have the raw data you can begin to interpret your findings by looking at how the responses to the questions relate. This is also an option on the Have Your Say website.

Qualitative data
Facts and figures can be built upon by using qualitative data, which relates to the feelings and ideas drawn out from open questions. These can be harder to analyse but you can often spot themes or ideas.

Open questions often prompt people to set out their visions, needs and wishes in their own words. These types of responses cannot easily be represented in percentages, graphs, tables and pie charts but it is still important that they find their way into the final report.

15. Writing your report

Always write a report, it will make you check the data, look at its strengths and weaknesses so you can be confident in your findings. Did you questionnaire provide the data you need to achieve your aims?

Remember the data you gather must be used in context, simply presenting a series of unrelated findings will mean nothing. Your report provides an opportunity to present your data to state what has happened and to explore some of the reasons behind this.

Reporting on the survey

It is important that anyone reading you report has confidence in your findings. Consider how you will defend you findings if someone disagrees with them. Be open and transparent, acknowledge any flaws or bias.

Explain how representative your data is. For example:

- How many people/households did you ask?
- How many responded?
- Is this a representative sample?
- Do your responses reflect the demographics of the area? You could compare them to Census data.
- What methods did you use to gather information?
- Did you have to take any steps to ensure it was a representative sample?
- Could the results be influenced by the method e.g. questionnaires completed over the phone?
- What did you do to minimise bias e.g. using a script over the phone so that everyone was asked the same question in the same way?
- Could the results be influenced by the timing of the survey e.g. just before/after an election or a major news item?

Reporting your findings

Consider how you will combine the pieces of data to form a narrative. Think about your original aims and identify the major issues. Begin with the facts and develop your theory. Present all the information that explains why you have drawn these conclusions. Highlight any unusual findings, but only when they are relevant.

To make you report easy to read keep it simple and use sub-headings. Tables and Charts will break up text and can be used to present information in a clear and concise way but don’t be tempted to show everything in this way. All should state the question, the sample size and its composition. Use exact quotes or captions in the main text to express qualitative information. These along with photographs, drawings, maps and an image of the questionnaire help to give a sense of community and place and jog peoples memory of the consultation.

If you undertook the questionnaire to change, something your report may need to include an Action Plan i.e. the actions that need to be fulfilled for change to happen. Be as specific and realistic as you can and include a lead person/organisation and timescale.

16. Summary of resources

- **Cumbria Intelligence Observatory** – data, including census data, can be found on communities www.cumbriaobservatory.org.uk
- **Consultation Toolkit -** a consultation toolkit is being developed for communities and will hopefully be available later in the year, the SLDC version is available at www.southlakeland.gov.uk
- **ACTion with Communities in Cumbria (ACT)** - provide information and a range of resources including guidance sheets are available at www.cumbriaaction.org.uk
- **Scottish Government** – further information on sample size and confidence in data www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Health/scottish-health-survey/ConfidenceIntervals#a11
- **Plain English Campaign** – information on how to write clearly and avoiding jargon www.plainenglish.co.uk
- **Equality Cumbria Resource Centre** – for assistance with equality issues and questions, contact www.equalitycumbria.org
- **Have Your Say** – free online survey database for organisations in Cumbria, includes detailed analysis options and has details of the consultations carried out in Cumbria (where registered). www.haveyoursay.org.uk
- **Survey Monkey** – online survey service free for limited functionality, fee for more questions and responses, limited analysis options. www.surveymonkey.com

Other resources

- **Sample questionnaire testing form** – appendix 1
- **Have Your Say training guide** – separately available document, contact Emma Nichols at SLDC for the most recent version.

Appendix 1 – Sample questionnaire testing form

[Name of plan area] Community Plan - Survey testing

Community Plans are being developed in parishes all round the country so local people can have a real say in the future of their area.

The survey has been put together by the Community Plan Group, which includes members from the Parish Council and wider community. It is the outcome of more than a year's work gathering a range of views about living in this area.

Using this information the survey has been developed to cover a range of topics affecting the lives of people in [name of plan area]. Topics covered include attractiveness of villages, housing, local countryside, visitors, business and employment. – amend these as necessary

In order to test the effectiveness of the questionnaire it would be very helpful if you could complete the draft version and answer the questions below on your experience of completing it.

Question	Response
Q1 How long did it take you to complete the survey?	
Q2 Were any of the questions: a. Difficult to understand?	a.
b. Difficult to answer?	b.
Q3 Did you find the overall format easy to understand?	
Q4 Did the response options let you answer the questions in the way you wanted to? - If not please state question number(s) and the response you would have given	
Q5 When completing the survey are you likely to complete it online?	
Q6 What would make it easier/more likely for you to complete it online? (e.g. easy web address)	
Q7 If there is more than one member in your household, would you be likely to submit more than one questionnaire?	
Q8 Would you suggest modifying the survey for younger people in your household (under 16's)?	
Q9 Any other comments	