

H.M. Government Code of Practice on Consultation – Seven Consultation Criteria.

In July 2008, John Hutton – who later became Lord Hutton - produced for the Government the third version of a Code of Practice on Consultation.

This is still regarded as best practice.

He said: “Put simply, effective consultation allows the Government to make informed decisions on matters of policy, to improve the delivery of public services, and to improve the accountability of public bodies.”

He outlined seven consultation criteria which should be followed:-

Criterion One - When to consult

Formal consultation should take place at a stage when there is scope to influence the policy outcome.

Criterion Two - Duration of consultation exercises

Consultations should normally last for at least 12 weeks with consideration given to longer timescales where feasible and sensible.

Criterion Three - Clarity of scope and impact

Consultation documents should be clear about the consultation process, what is being proposed, the scope to influence and the expected costs and benefits of the proposals.

Criterion Four - Accessibility of consultation exercises

Consultation exercises should be designed to be accessible to, and clearly targeted at, those people the exercise is intended to reach.

Criterion Five -The burden of consultation

Keeping the burden of consultation to a minimum is essential if consultations are to be effective and if consultees' buy-in to the process is to be obtained.

Criterion Six - Responsiveness of consultation exercises

Consultation responses should be analysed carefully and clear feedback should be provided to participants following the consultation.

Criterion Seven - Capacity to consult

Officials running consultations should seek guidance in how to run an effective consultation exercise and share what they have learned from the experience.

He also recommended that to increase transparency, these criteria should be reproduced in consultation documents where possible.