

## **SECTION 10**

### **CONTINUING TO CONSULT**

For a number of years Guildford Borough Council has encouraged local people to play an active role in consultation and to have their say on the future provision of services of the borough.

In 1998 this programme was expanded to fulfil the requirements of Best Value and to provide the framework for a planned, co-ordinated approach across the authority, at both a strategic and individual service level.

#### **Residents' Survey**

The Council has an established programme of consultation in place. Since 1993 a Residents' Survey has been carried out every two years to evaluate levels of awareness, usage, and satisfaction with the Council and its services. This ongoing programme of research has enabled us to monitor any change in attitude over time.

#### **Citizens' Panel**

In order to supplement the findings of the Residents' Survey and to ensure that we are obtaining informed and considered feedback on the Council's Core Values and Strategic Priorities and on individual services, the Consultation Strategy recommended the recruitment of a Citizens' Panel of 1,000 households. This Panel is now in its second year, with an option to consult up to three times per annum about the Strategic Priorities of the Council and levels of service provision.

The Borough's Forums and Youth Council are also identified as key to the Consultation Strategy, as are publications such as the Council newspaper "About Guildford" and "Time for Business" newsletter. The Council's Web Site is also identified as an important vehicle for consultation purposes.

#### **Valid research into services**

The two main elements of the Strategy - The Residents' Survey and Citizens' Panel are carried out in accordance with the Code of Conduct of the Market Research Society. The existence of both methods of consultation ensures statistically valid feedback is obtained. Overall, the Council's Strategy for consultation seeks to be comprehensive, appropriate and flexible, centrally co-ordinated and evolving according to changing needs and requirements.

In recent years this has included focus group research; research into individual services through face-to-face, telephone and postal surveys and the on-going monitoring of customer feedback/complaint forms.

## **Effective consultation**

Consultation is only effective if the feedback is utilised and the outcome communicated. To this end, the Citizens' Panel consultation is timed to feed into the Council's Strategic Planning Process. The feedback obtained from the Panel is used to inform the decision making process. As a result of last year's consultation, funding was allocated to a selection of strategic issues that had received high levels of support from the Panel. Additionally, at individual service level, a number of operational changes were implemented as a result of findings.

The findings of the consultation, together with any resulting action are fed back to the Panel through a newsletter to Panel members and through the local press and the Council newspaper.