Best Value and Audit Commission Performance Indicators for 2000/2001
Volume I - User Satisfaction Performance Indicators:

Guidance on Methods of Data Collection

Prepared by the DETR,
the Housing Corporation and
National Housing Federation
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1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter covers the following topics:

- **Background**
- **The guidance manual and questionnaires**

1.1 Background

Services provided by best value authorities have a direct effect on the quality of life of local residents. It is important, therefore, that the best value performance indicators address levels of satisfaction with these services. Thus, a number of "quality" BVPIs have been specified by the Government to explicitly reflect users' experience of services. As the services for which user satisfaction performance indicators are needed are very varied, the Government proposed several surveys.

The responses to the September 1999 consultation paper were generally supportive of the proposed user satisfaction performance indicators. The majority saw a need for the Government to prescribe survey details in order to ensure comparability of data across authorities. However, most authorities were in favour of allowing for some flexibility on the method of data collection and on the questionnaire, with the possibility of adding questions to the core set to suit local circumstances.

The responses also highlighted that many local authorities already monitor their residents' experiences and satisfaction with the services they provide. In view of this, it is important to point out that the user satisfaction performance indicators are not meant to replace local consultation.

Having given careful consideration to the consultation responses on user satisfaction performance indicators, the Government has decided to prescribe in detail what it believes to be the minimum amount of survey detail consistent with obtaining comparable data across authorities. **The minimum requirements are specified in the DETR and Audit Commission (1999a) 2000/2001 Performance Indicators Guidance – Chapter 14. A copy of Chapter 14 is available in Appendix 7 and subsequent amendments to the guidance in Appendix 8.**

This report aims to provide an overview of the different methods that can be followed and how these can be applied by best value authorities to meet the requirements specified in the Guidance (see Appendices 7 and 8).

This document <u>does not</u> provide specific guidance on a survey of library visitors, a survey of council housing tenants, social services surveys or police surveys.

A survey of library visitors is covered by PLUS (Public Library User Survey by IPF) manual and guidance available from**:**

Institute of Public Finance Ltd
7th Floor
NLA Tower
12-16 Addiscombe Rd
Croydon CR0 0XT
0181 667 1144

A survey of council housing tenants is covered by STATUS (Standard Tenant Satisfaction Survey) which will be published by the National Housing Federation in April. For further details, contact:
Publications Department
NHF
175 Grays Inn Rd
W1CX 8UP
Tel. 020 7278 2311
Fax. 020 7843 2214
e-mail: publications@housing.org.uk

A survey of social services users is covered by the PAF (Performance Assessment Framework) guidance will published by the Department of Health in the Summer. For further information see www.doh.gov.uk/scg/pssperform/index.htm it is envisaged that the guidance will be published in the above DoH address.

Surveys for the police user satisfaction performance are covered in www.homeoffice.gov.uk/ppd/pru/guidance.htm

As surveys are based on a sample of the population, they produce estimates of the real figure in the population. These will always be surrounded by a margin of error (± x%) thus it is unlikely that any changes would be picked up by carrying out the research every year, unless there is some major change or new initiative in the authority or service area which would affect the residents significantly. Therefore, although authorities may wish to carry out the surveys more frequently, data for all of the user satisfaction performance indicators needs to be collected in year one (2000-01) and then every 3 years (2003-04).

Much of the this manual (particularly Section I) builds on guidance scheduled to be published in April 2000 on 'The Standardised Tenant Satisfaction Survey' (STATUS) which can be used to collect information on the Housing user satisfaction BVPI's. The development of STATUS has been funded by the Housing Corporation and carried out by the National Housing Federation.

It is intended that the Government will commission a series of reviews by external organisations (or by DETR) of the way in which the surveys work in the first year of best value. The aim will be to evaluate the robustness of the data collection method and the appropriateness of the questions and guidance. These studies will inform future improvements in the surveys.

1.2 The guidance manual and questionnaires

This manual provides detailed guidance on how to undertake a general resident satisfaction survey covering a range of services. It also provides two chapters on how to carry out the 'planning applicants survey' and the 'housing and council tax benefit claimants survey'. In addition to technical and practical details, it provides a chapter on contracting out research.

The methods guidance is divided into seven main sections:

- **Section I**: This section takes the reader through each of the stages in the survey process and it is recommended that all authorities read it. Most of the principles covered in this section apply generally to any method of data collection (postal, face to face or telephone surveys). Equally, the principles apply to a 'general survey' or a more 'service specific survey'.

  The section uses the example of a postal survey which would collect data for those indicators that be covered by a general survey of the authority's population as a whole:

Figure 1-1 General survey indicators

BVPI no.	Service	Indicator
BVPI 3	Corporate Health	The percentage of citizens satisfied with the overall service provided by their authority.
BVPI4		The percentage of those making complaints satisfied with the handling of those complaints.
BVPI89	Litter	Percentage of people satisfied with cleanliness standards.
BVPI90	Waste	Percentage of survey respondents expressing satisfaction with Recycling Facilities, Household Waste Collection and Civic Amenity Sites.
BVPI103	Transport	Percentage of users satisfied with local provision of public transport information.
BVPI104		Percentage of users satisfied with local bus service.
BVPI119	Culture	The percentage of residents by targeted group satisfied with the local authorities cultural and recreational activities.

- **Section II:** Telephone surveys

- **Section III**: Face to face surveys

- **Section IV**: Citizens' panels
- **Section V**: Detailed chapter on a survey of Housing and Council tax benefits claimants
- **Section VI:** Detailed chapter on a survey of Planning applicants
- **Section VII:** Detailed chapter on contracting out research

1.2.1 Questionnaires

The guidance includes three questionnaires, copies of which are enclosed inside the back cover of this document. A word version is available in http://www.local-regions.detr.gov.uk/bestvalue/indicators/indicatorsindex.htm which authorities can download, amend/modify and use for the collection of the BVPIs. The three questionnaires cover the following areas:

a. General survey questionnaire: for those indicators where questions can be asked of a sample of the local authority population as a whole.
b. Planning applicants questionnaire
c. Housing and Council tax benefits claimants questionnaire

The general survey questionnaire can be copied onto twelve sides of three A3 pages or alternatively onto twelve sides of six A4 pages and stapled. The questions are arranged into the eleven main sections and cover the minimum requirement for the collection of data on seven of the Best Value user satisfaction indicators.

It is intended that the questionnaires will be reviewed in the future. Improvements, additions or deletions of questions may be made to allow for changes in any of the service delivery areas and cross cutting areas to improve the effectiveness of the survey.

1.2.2 Using the guidance manual

The guidance manual offers practical advice and assistance to authorities on carrying out surveys. It is hoped that local authorities will benefit from using this guidance regardless of the level of knowledge and experience they may have in conducting such surveys. In particular the manual:

- provides the inexperienced with the necessary skills and information to use carry out the survey and advice on where to seek further help.
- sets out the different stages in conducting a survey

- gives advice on sampling, administering the survey, data-processing, analysis and interpretation

The guidance manual aims to equip authorities to carry out the surveys in-house if that is what authorities wish to do. Many, however, may consider they do not have sufficient resources or time to do this, and may want to contract out all or part of the project. This and other options are discussed in more detail in Section VII. There are a variety of experienced commercial firms with certification by the International Standards Organisation (ISO 9001), MRQSA (Market Research Quality Standard Accreditation), and/or operating under the Market Research Society Code of Conduct, others with their own in-house quality control and code of conduct - who will tender for such work.

Authorities may also consider getting expert advice in survey research methods if they do not have the expertise in-house. There are some publications which offer listings of consultancies, universities, research institutes and individuals specialised on quantitative social research, although these are not exhaustive. Nevertheless, they illustrate the kind of published information on organisations and individuals that is available:

- Bulmer M, Sykes W and Moorhouse J (1998) Directory of Social Research Organisations in the United Kingdom Second Edition, Mansell London and New York. Tel. 020 8693 1222 Fax. 020 8693 0866

- The Research Buyers' Guide, 15 Northburgh Street, London EC1V OAH. Tel. 0171 490 4911 Fax. 0171 490 0608

- British Market Research Association (BMRA) 'Select line' 0800 801785 see www.bmra.org.uk

SECTION I – THE SURVEY PROCESS

Although much of Section I has been written with a 'general postal survey' in mind***, it is strongly recommended that all authorities read this section***. Most of the principles covered in each of the chapters (planning to undertake the survey, probability sampling, response rates, confidence intervals, data processing, analysis and so on) apply generally to any method of data collection (postal, face to face or telephone surveys). Equally, the principles apply to a 'general survey' or a more 'service specific survey'.

2 POSTAL SURVEYS: PLANNING, MANAGING AND RESOURCING THE GENERAL SURVEY

This chapter covers the following topics:

- **Survey strengths**
- **Summary of advantages and disadvantages of different kinds of surveys and citizens' panels**
- **planning to undertake the survey**
- **managing the survey**
- **options for contracting-out or running the survey in-house**
- **assessing the resources required**

2.1 Survey strengths

Whether face to face, telephone or postal, the following strengths that are common to all:

- **Standardisation/comparability -** the survey gives unrivalled ability for comparing satisfaction levels and attitudes between local authorities and across different areas of service delivery. The Local and Regional Government Research Unit within the DETR will develop a database that will enable you to compare and monitor your authority's performance over time, with other authorities and with national level results.
- **Resident profile information -** you can use the socio-economic and demographic breakdowns in the survey to check if particular groups feel they are receiving a better or worse service than other groups. You can use this information to then run (for example) focus groups to identify why this is the case.
- **Service satisfaction information** - the results of the survey allow information to be obtained on various different services and forms of contact provided by your organisation.
- **Baseline information** - you can repeat the survey and use the results to measure changes in resident attitudes over time
- **Can opener** - the survey results can be used as a "can opener" to identify areas of concern or success where you can seek more detailed opinions or information through, for example, focus groups.

2.2 Summary of advantages and disadvantages of different kinds of surveys and citizens' panels

2.2.1 Telephone surveys in context

For the collection of data on some of the indicators an authority may consider the use of a telephone survey. At the outset you will need to weigh up the strengths and weaknesses of telephone surveys. For most of the indicators, carrying out a telephone survey would not be viable, for example, for the general survey it would not be advisable to carry out a telephone survey, since it would be near impossible to assess if everyone in the authority had an equal chance of selection. However, for some of the specific surveys, for example, planning, the authority may have a contact number for each of the applicants, this would constitute a very good sampling frame. For further details on telephone surveys see Chapter 9.

2.2.2 The advantages of a telephone survey

- **Cost –** telephone surveys tend to be more expensive than postal surveys but cheaper than face to face surveys. Some argue that beyond a certain sample size telephone surveys become just as cost effective as postal surveys.
- **Response rates –** they can produce higher response rates than postal surveys
- **Complexity –** the questionnaires can be relatively complex if interviewers are trained appropriately.
- **Relatively quick field work –** the telephone survey fieldwork can be done in a relatively short time, however, this is not always the case. In many occasions the telephone interviewer has to call the respondent up to 10 times until contact is made.
- **Supervision** – telephone interviewers are easier to supervise than face to face interviewers given that they are normally in a telephone unit.
- **Identity of the respondent** – when the sample has been pre-selected from a data file there is more guarantee, than with postal questionnaires that this individual will be the one that answered the questions.
- **Can reach isolated areas at no extra cost**
- **Can use CATI** (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) whereby the telephone interviewer will key in the answers straight into a computer.
- **Use of proxy respondents –** in occasions where the selected respondent is elderly or their disability does not allow them to respond other people may respond on their behalf. However, if proxy respondents are used this should be annotated in the questionnaire and in the resulting database of responses.

2.2.3 Weaknesses of telephone surveys

- **limited number of questions** – it is not recommended that telephone surveys should last for more than 15 minutes.
- **Coverage problem** – many people still do not have a telephone, particularly among socially excluded groups.
- **Specialised interviewers** – telephone interviews are very difficult to manage, specially if using CATI. Therefore authorities will either need to train a group of their staff to do interviews solidly for the fieldwork period or will have to contract out the work to specialised interviewing companies.
- **Can't use visual aids**
- **Complex explanations –** telephone questionnaires are not recommended where complex explanations need to be recited to the respondent on the telephone. A way around this is to send background information in the post and allow the respondent a few days to read it before interviewing him/her.
- **excluding groups** - because of the nature of surveys some groups or individuals may be excluded or under-represented. In some cases the interviewers can be briefed so that when they come across a non-English speaker a translator can be brought in to carry out the interview.

2.2.4 Face to face surveys in context

For the collection of data on some of the indicators authorities may consider the use of a face to face survey. Once again, at the outset you will need to weigh up the strengths and weaknesses of face to face surveys. For further details on face to face surveys see Chapter 10.

2.2.5 The advantages of a face to face survey

- **Length** – it is advisable for postal and telephone questionnaires to be kept relatively short, failing this, it is very difficult to get appropriate response rates. On the other hand face to face questionnaires can last slightly longer and still produce good response rates.
- **Response rate** - face to face based surveys normally have a higher response rate than postal surveys and telephone surveys. However, it is worth noting that the response rate is totally dependent on the quality of the administration of the survey.
- **Complexity** - the questionnaire can have complex definitions, instructions and visual aids.
- **Clarification –** the interviewer can make sure that the respondent understands the questions correctly. In the interviewer brief, the questions should be read and discussed, the brief is there to ensure that all interviewers understand the question in

the same way. The brief allows them look at those questions which may need further clarification and a standard explanation is to be developed to be used by all interviewers. In some occasions a booklet can be produced to which interviewers can refer to when the respondent does not quite understand the question.

- **Probability sampling** – if the sample has not been pre-selected from a data file, the interviewer can carry out random sampling within the household, ensuring total confidence in probability sampling.
- **Can use CAPI** (Computer Assisted Personal Interview) - whereby the interviewer will key in the answers straight into a computer.

2.2.6 Weaknesses of face to face surveys

- **Cost -** face to face surveys are much more expensive than postal surveys and telephone surveys
- **Specialised interviewers** – face to face interviews are very difficult to manage, specially if they have to carry out random sampling in the households or if using CAPI. Therefore authorities will normally have to contract out the work to specialised interviewing companies.
- **Long explanations –** where respondents have to read extensive explanations about the service provided by the authority, much valuable interviewer time will be used for this purpose. It would be advisable to send background information in the post and allow the respondent a few days to read it before interviewing him/her.
- **Excluding groups** - because of the nature of surveys some groups or individuals may be excluded or under-represented. In some cases the interviewers can be briefed so that when they come across a non-English speaker a translator can be brought in to carry out the interview.
- **Interviewer effect** - the interviewer can influence the answers by the mere fact of being there, respondents may pick the answers that they think are more socially acceptable. For example, respondents may say that they go to the local museums every 6 months, when in fact they do not. Differences between interviewers has also been found as a cause of variance. For example, a very trendy interviewer may get very liberal answers from their respondents, an interviewer dressed in a suit may get more conservative views. It is, therefore, recommended to get professional interviewers to do the fieldwork.
- **Effect of people in the room** - other people may be present during the interview influencing the respondents answers, again, making their answers more socially acceptable or in accordance with the answers that the observers would give or they may simply affect the respondents' concentration on the interview questions (i.e. children). For this reason, whenever possible the interviewer should ask the respondent to be on his/her own at the time of the interview.

2.2.7 Postal surveys in context

Although most of the consultation responses indicated that this should be the recommended method, for many authorities it may not be the most appropriate option. For example, some authorities may already know from previous postal surveys that their residents are not very good at filling in postal questionnaires, even in cases where the postal survey was carefully administered. Other authorities may want to ask many more questions in their survey for which a face to face questionnaire would be more appropriate (the strengths and weaknesses of telephone and face to face questionnaires are covered in chapter 9 and 10 respectively)

2.2.8 Advantages of postal surveys

- **Cost effective** - postal questionnaires are one of the most cost effective methods for gaining feedback representative of the resident population as a whole. It can also allow for larger sample sizes without much increase in the cost.
- **'Easier to conduct in-house**
- **Can reach isolated areas at no extra cost**
- **Difficult to reach groups** – a postal questionnaire may get through to those members of the population whom interviewers find difficult to catch at home or are traditionally difficult to reach e.g. Socially excluded groups.
- **Time to reflect** - allows respondents time to reflect on the questions (and possibly to look up records) so they can give more considered and more precise answers – however, this advantage may be more theoretical than real' (Adapted from Prescott-Clarke et al 1993: 29)

2.2.9 Weaknesses of postal surveys

- **limited number of questions** - the questionnaire proposed for the BVPIs covers only a limited number of standardised questions. This is due to the need for postal surveys to be short to maximise response. The standardised nature of the questions also allows direct comparison between authorities, so long as no alterations are made to the existing questions, and only minimal additional questions are added.

- **risk of low response rates** - response rates for postal questionnaires can be lower than for some other forms of data collection method, such as face to face interviews. This can lead to a serious bias in the results. However, a well-planned and well-managed postal survey can usually ensure an acceptable response rate (see Chapter 6).

- **risk of differential response rates** - although the questionnaire will be sent to a random selection of residents, those who decide to respond select themselves. This means that sometimes some groups are under- or over-represented. Typically, you may find that a higher proportion of elderly residents or a lower proportion of residents in employment tend to respond. It also may be that individuals with

particular concerns are more likely to respond than those with less strong feelings. The solutions are, firstly, to maximise the response rate, and secondly, to carry out a 'weighting' exercise. These are discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.

- **excluding groups** - because of the nature of postal surveys some groups or individuals may be excluded or under-represented. In some authorities the questionnaire and guidance should be adapted to accommodate respondents with high care and support needs, people with difficulties reading, and people whose English is not their first language. The test is whether your residents are able to understand the questions and answer them adequately; and whether the questions are relevant to the particular group's circumstances. Use your discretion to decide who should be included always trying to maximise the representativeness of the sample. Be aware that those that are vulnerable and require some support may be less likely to respond.

  Based on your knowledge of your client groups, you may want to reprint the questionnaire in large print for the visually impaired, and in languages other than English. If you want to seek feedback from residents who you feel cannot be properly reached by this survey, you can apply some of the good practice contained here and develop a modified questionnaire or use alternative methods for seeking views.

- **Long field-work period:** Respondents need to be given enough time to fill in the questionnaire. Reminders need to be sent to those who have not responded. Field work may take up several months.

- **Who is the respondent:** there is no guarantee, even if the questionnaire is addressed to a specific individual, that this individual will be the one that filled in the questionnaire.

2.2.10 Citizens' panels in context

Many authorities are already considering using their citizens' panel for the collection of data for the general survey indicators (those that need to be asked to a sample of the whole population of the authority). Others are thinking of setting up a panel for this purpose as well as for other consultation exercises. This section aims to help authorities to make an informed decision on whether to use the panel or use a fresh sample of respondents for the BVPIs. For further details on citizens' panels see Chapter 11.

2.2.11 The advantages of a panel

- **Method of data collection** – once the panel has been set up, any method of data collection can be used, face-to-face, telephone (providing that all of the members of

the panel have a telephone), or postal.

- **Response rate** - panels normally produce good response rates, just for the panel members (see below for representativeness of the population).
- **Conditioning** - members of the panel will necessarily be conditioned by the mere fact that they have agreed to collaborate with the authority to monitor and improve its services. With time, this will make the people in the panel different to the population as a whole because they will take much more interest in local Government issues. This conditioning will, in many occasions, make the respondents more knowledgeable about local Government issues than the rest of the population, providing more informed answers to the questions.
- **Changes in views over time** - the panel can track changes on the views of the same group of people over time.
- **Subgroups** - the authority will be able to select people by subgroup and consult with them in issues that are particular to that group
- **Special needs** - some panel members will have special needs, these will be known about in advance and the researchers can prepare for this.
- **Quick results** - once the panel has been set up, it can produce quicker results as sampling has already been done.
- **Long term cost** - arguably, in the long term citizens' panels are cost efficient. However, this is dependent on attrition levels and whether the authority will need to refresh the sample (see Chapter 11).

2.2.12 Weaknesses of citizens' panels

- **Method of data collection** – authorities will still have to approach the panel either face-to-face, by telephone or post. Therefore, all of the weaknesses of each of these methods of data collection will still be present when using the panel.
- **Response rate and representativeness of the panel** - it is said that panels normally produce good response rates.

However, this is dependent on how saturated the panel is. Response rates tend to go down if the panel members have been inundated with requests to collaborate in research, if the authority demands too much time from them, or if they are disillusioned, for example, if they have been in the panel for a couple of years and they have not seen any changes (improvements) emerging from the findings of the research.

The response rate is also totally dependent on the quality of the administration of the survey whether is face-to-face, postal or telephone.

Finally, the panel it self may not be representative of the population as a whole, therefore, even if the panel produces good response rates the information will be loaded with biases (see Chapter 11 for further details).

- **Conditioning** - as explained above, members of the panel will be conditioned, they will naturally be more interested and, probably knowledgeable about local Government. Therefore, for the purpose of collecting data for the BVPIs this will challenge the need to collect data that is representative of the population as a whole.
- **Attrition** - many panel members will decide not to take part after a while and will drop out from the panel. Therefore, the panel needs to be reasonably big to start with. After one year you can expect that 10% to 20% of the panel will drop out. It is important to evaluate the representativeness of the panel regularly and replace the membership where needed. In the long term this could become a **costly exercise**.
- **Subgroups** - attrition tends to be most common in young people, the very old and minority groups.
- **Strong element of self selection** - it is not the same to ask a person to take part on a one off survey than to ask a person to be part of a panel. Therefore, the element of self selection is stronger in panels and it is likely that those who agree to participate are already more interested in local Government issues than those that refuse to participate.

2.3 Planning to undertake the survey

2.3.1 Note about the structure of the report

Much of the content of the remaining chapters in 'Section I' have been written with a 'general postal survey' in mind**.** However, this has been done purely for illustrative purposes as most of the principles covered in each of the chapters (planning to undertake the survey, probability sampling, response rates, confidence intervals, data processing, analysis and so on) apply generally to any method of data collection (postal, face to face or telephone surveys). Equally, the principles apply to a 'general survey' or a more 'service specific survey'.

2.3.2 Basis of the project

From the outset you need to be prepared to address the following questions:

- Why are we carrying out ***the survey*** ? What are the critical pieces of information we want?
- What are the main outputs that we want ?
- How and when will the outputs be communicated ?
- Who are the prime parties that need the results ?
- What resources are required to undertake the project ? Can we make these resources available ? If not, do we reduce the scale of the project, or seek extra funding ?

2.3.3 Involving and informing staff, elected members and residents

At the outset and at key stages of the survey process, you should inform, involve and consult those with an interest in the survey.

Involving staff and elected members will:

- enable them to answer residents' queries about the survey
- make them feel part of the process
- help them 'own' the findings
- increase their enthusiasm to improve services identified as less satisfactory by the respondents.

By the same token, informing, involving and consulting with the population will:

- make them more likely to participate in the survey,
- lead them to encourage others to take part, and
- give them confidence that their views will genuinely be taken on board.

Staff and residents' newsletters, and staff and residents' conferences can be used to promote the survey before it is undertaken, and to keep people updated on progress.

2.4 Managing the project

Decisions will need to be made on who will be managing the project, which staff are to be involved and how much time will be needed to complete the survey. One person - normally a middle manager in your organisation - should be given overall project management responsibility throughout the survey, and act as the main point of contact for resolving problems. The project manager will want to assess other in-house resources required (see section 2.6)

It is often sensible for the project manager to set up a steering group or advisory panel to provide specialist input from the perspective of different stakeholders in the research, act as a sounding board, help the project manager problem-solve and (sometimes) to recruit contractors. The steering group may have a representative from the Best Value implementation team, a consultation officer, a social researcher, an elected member, a public relations officer, service delivery area representatives and resident representatives. Ideally it should be small - no larger than six or seven people.

2.4.1 Stages of the project

When planning to run the survey the project manager should be aware of the tasks that will have to be undertaken at various stages of the project, and how long they are likely to take. Figure 2-1 illustrates the main stages of the project, the respective tasks which need to be undertaken at each stage, and the chapter in this guide where they are explained.

The main stages and the tasks involved in carrying out the postal survey are as follows:

SURVEY STAGES	TASKS	CHAPTER

1. Planning	Deciding whether to contract out or not, creating a steering group, identifying the processes involved, raising awareness, determining resources	2
2. Sampling	Deciding on a sampling method and a sample size, and drawing the sample	3
3. Sending out the questionnaire:	Ordering stationery supplies, printing the questionnaire, labels and covering letter and mailing them out to residentss, monitoring returns, sending out the reminder(s)	4, 5
4. Data inputting	Inputting the completed questionnaires into a computer file	6
5. Data analysis and interpretation	Manipulating the data into tables, cross tabs etc., and interpreting the results	7
6. Comparative data analysis	Comparing the results of the survey with other authorities	8
7. Communicating the results	Writing up the report and/or summary report, distributing the findings, follow through of action plan	8

Figure 2-1 The main stages and the tasks involved in carrying out the postal survey

The figure overleaf shows how these various tasks may overlap and flow throughout the life of the project. It assumes that you will decide whether or not to contract out all or part of the work; clearly who carries out later tasks will depend on whether contractors or your own organisation are doing the work.

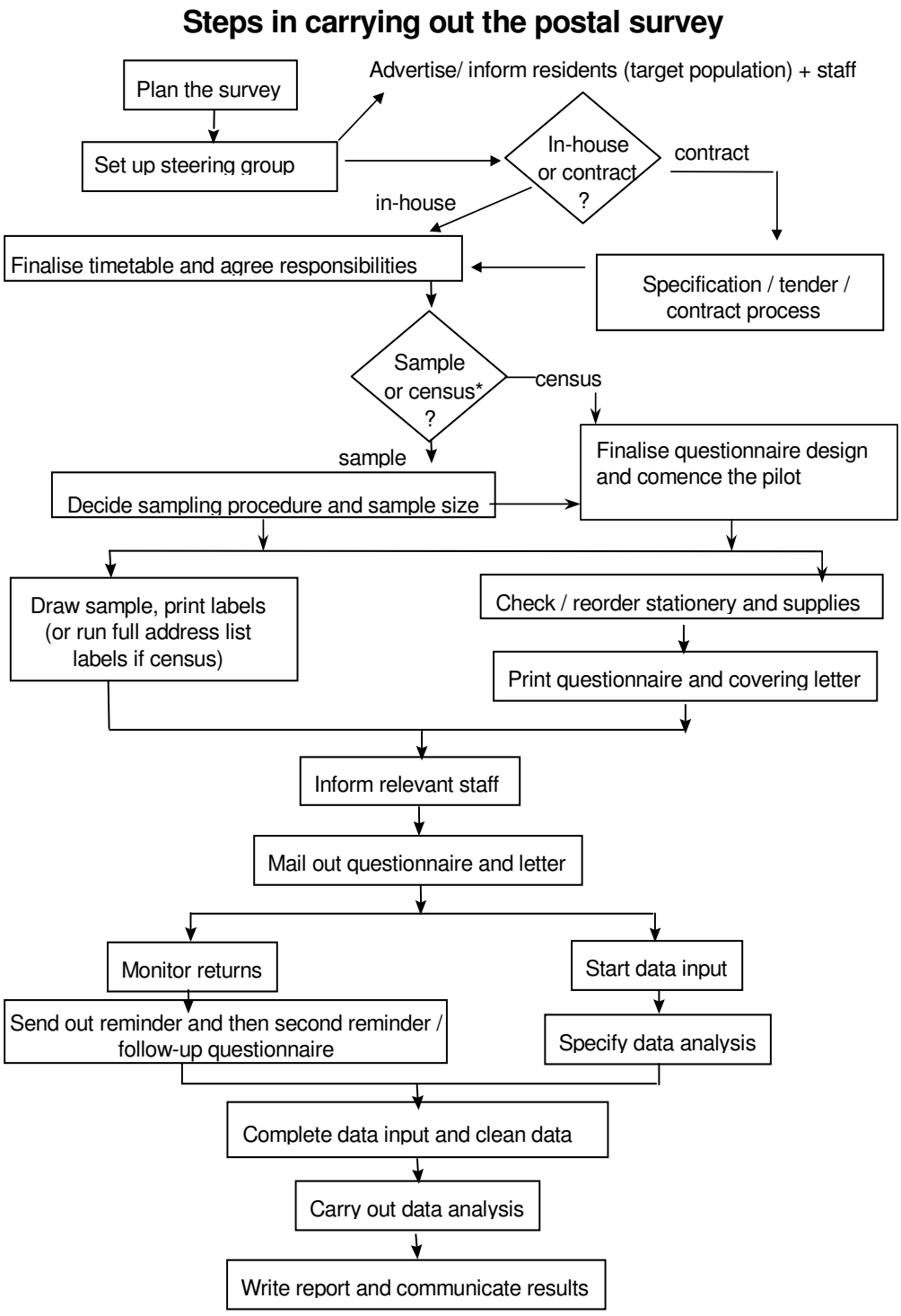


Figure 2-2 Steps in carrying out the postal survey

*Census: means 100% sample of the target population

2.4.2 Estimating the time required

It is important to be as accurate and as realistic as possible in estimating the amount of time the survey process is likely to take. Delays at any stage in the process can mean crucial dates for the results of the survey being missed. An element of flexibility should be built into the planning process to allow for such setbacks.

The requirements for the collection of data on each of the user satisfaction performance indicators indicate the **time of the year for fieldwork**. This is the time of the year during which authorities must carry out the survey fieldwork i.e. the period during which questionnaires are given (or sent) and received back from the sample selected.

Therefore, authorities need to keep these periods in mind and work out a timetable that suits the specific requirement for each indicator.

Figure 2-3: Example of time-table for the general survey

March	Plan survey Set up steering group Advertise/inform residents (target population) – on-going process Decide whether to do the survey in-house or contract out
April	Write specification Tender
May	Contract out Agree responsibilities
June	Decide sampling procedure Start sampling process Finalise questionnaire design and commence the pilot
July	
August	Sample Print questionnaire and check stationery supply (pre-paid envelopes…) Inform relevant staff
September	Mail out questionnaire and letter (give respondents two weeks to reply)
October	Monitor returns Start data input Specify data analysis
Second week in October	Send out reminder (wait for around 2 weeks before sending third reminder)
Fourth week in October	Send out reminder with questionnaire (give respondents 'as soon as possible' deadline)
End of November	End field work Complete data input and clean data
December	Carry out data analysis Write top line report and communicate results
January	Write detailed report

2.5 Options for contracting-out or running the survey in-house

This guide aims to provide your organisation with sufficient guidance to undertake ***a postal survey*** yourself and in subsequent sections to adapt it for a face to face survey. However, some authorities may feel that they lack the time, resources, or expertise to carry out the entire survey themselves. As an alternative, various tasks and stages of the survey can be carried out by external agencies.

Using external market research professionals to complete all or part of the survey can bring greater legitimacy and independence to the survey results, expertise and research experience, less disruption to other in-house services, and greater resources. By the same token, contracting-out brings with it a loss of control over those tasks and the risk that any problems in carrying-out the project may need to be picked up later by the authority. Contracting-out requires careful and regular management of the contractors to ensure they carry out the project on time and to the specifications requested. Further guidance on contracting all or some of the work is available in Section VII.

Contracting-out will affect the planning and timetable for the survey. You will need to build into your plans time to finalise a commercial specification (see appendix 5 for a example), receiving tenders and interviewing or choosing a successful contractor. This process will usually take up to 4 months to complete. Contracting-out will also require working within the contractors timetable and when they are available to begin work.

2.5.1 Improving in-house skills and resources

As an alternative to contracting out you can also choose to equip your own staff with the necessary skills and resources to carry out the survey in-house This will have two main elements:

Training : this may take the form of a basic course in survey techniques, sampling and research survey methods, or how to use a specific data analysis software package. Sources for training include many consultancies, research institutes and local academic institutions. The following list, although it is not exhaustive, provides a few useful addresses and it illustrates the kind of training that is available:

http://www.grapevine.bris.ac.uk/cgi-bin/dbase?view=grape/public/listpublictr…/training.tp
http://www.natcen.ac.uk/docs/research_units/qru/training.htm
http://www.natcen.ac.uk/docs/research_units/smc/courses.htm
http://www.soc.surrey.ac.uk/daycourses/dcindex.html
http://www.asc.org.uk/events/apr00/index.htm
http://www.alsiss.org.uk/conference.html

http://www.stats.gla.ac.uk/cti/links_stats/diary.html
http://www.city.ac.uk/human/asrm/mscasrm.htm
http://www.mrs.org.uk/training/tcalendar.htm
http://www.the-sra.org.uk/online1.htm
http://www.esrc.ac.uk/ptd/inter/info.htm

'Education and Training Guide' by Ann Atkinson (Newcastle City Council), Bryan Hall (Cheshire County Council), Knud Moller (Stoke-on-Trent City Council) and Debbie Wilson (Kirklwees MBC) available from LARIA (Local Authorities Research and Intelligence Association. You can contact Sue Gee the administrator for further details: laria@winnersh.org.uk

Information technology: Some degree of reliance on IT is required to make the most of the data. There are many types of computer software which may be appropriate. The following list, although it is not exhaustive, illustrates the kind of software that is available: Excel, Lotus 123 or Quattro Pro are quite basic. An alternative to these is a database package, such as Access or Paradox. Some prefer specialist statistics packages, such as SPSS, STATA or SNAP which will allow for easy creation of tables and statistical operations such as weighting (see chapter 6). This list does not claim to be definitive; you need to discuss what you already have, and what you can afford. Computer training companies and software companies themselves will provide information on specific software courses.

2.6 Assessing the resources required

Postal surveys are a cost-effective means for gaining feedback but still require considerable resources of staff and time. The level and variety of these resources will depend on the extent to which you contract-out the survey. The amount of resources needed will also vary with the size of the survey being undertaken.

A clear planning process should be able to identify the resources needed for the various stages in advance, helping to avoid problems, such as overload for busy staff, insufficient supplies or over-running budgets. The list below gives an outline of the possible resources that will be needed, assuming the activities are carried out in-house.

2.6.1 Resources

- **The budget:** You will need to allocate funds for the survey well in advance of it's execution (sometimes up to a financial year in advance) using an estimate of all the likely costs involved.
- **Staff time:** Do not underestimate the amount of staff time required at all stages of the project. Calculate staff time fully when deciding between undertaking the survey in-house or contracting out. When estimating these costs for in-house work, cost the project manager's time for the planning, sampling, drafting of the letters to the selected sample, and analysis of the data. Assume that sending out the questionnaires

and reminders, routine monitoring of returns, organising stationery, questionnaire checking, 'booking-in', data cleaning and data-inputting can be completed by more junior staff (if they are properly trained).

- **Stationery:** This includes printing or purchasing copies of the questionnaire, the covering letter to the selected sample (and a reminder letter), envelopes, 'envelope-stuffing' postage and facilities for printing and distributing the final report.
- **Software for data inputting and interpretation:** As noted above, if the sampling, data inputting, analysis, production of tables and final report are being carried out in-house, appropriate software and staff trained in its use are needed.
- **Launching and publicising the results:** You may wish to launch the results and action plan at a special event. Hire of venues, costs of preparing a presentation, refreshments and publicity material should be costed**.** Much of the data gathered will be published in the performance plans, however, the authority may want to prepare a summary of the key findings to disseminate to all residents or to the local press.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS:

- **ensure your organisation has total understanding of the requirements set by the Government for the collection of data on the Best Value PIs.**
- **involve stakeholders from the start and throughout the project**
- **plan the survey process carefully: be aware of the tasks to be performed, and at what stages they are to be carried out**
- **build flexibility into the planning process to allow room for unexpected delays**
- **if you contract out, ensure you are a 'strong client': brief and manage any outside contractors clearly on agreed objectives, outputs, timescales and costs (see Section VII)**
- **carefully estimate the staff time and other resources needed in your organisation, whether or not you contract-out.**

3 ACHIEVING THE OUTPUTS REQUIRED FROM BEST VALUE AUTHORITIES - SAMPLING

This chapter covers the following topics:

- **The target population and sampling frame**
- **Probability sampling**
- **Output: Sample size and confidence intervals around the estimates**
- **Maximising the response rate**
- **Piloting**

3.1 Introduction

Once the planning and preparation for the running of the survey has been finalised the next stages involve setting up the sample and sending out the questionnaire. A decision on the sampling procedure should be reached at least two months before sending out the questionnaire (fieldwork).

The sampling stage is technical in nature. Although this guidance should be sufficient for your organisation to carry out its own sampling in-house, if there are any doubts you should consider further reading, seeking outside help or contracting out this area of work.

Some of the technical language used in the sampling section of this chapter is described in more detail in the glossary of terms in appendix 6. This chapter assumes (in the main) that the sampling and the administration of the survey are completed in-house. It also assumes you have access to some form of computer software specifically for research, but it pitches itself to minimum requirements.

3.2 The target population and sampling frame

The target population is the group of people from which a sample will need to be drawn. In the case of the general survey the target population is all of the local authority residents (over 18 years old). For other indicators the target population is 'planning applicants' ' library users' and so on.

It is unlikely for a perfect (totally comprehensive) list of all of the target population to be available. Therefore, generally there are different **sampling frames** that can be selected. For most of the indicators the sampling frame specified is a list of people (or households) which should include all (or most) of the target population. This list should be as comprehensive as possible. For other indicators the sampling frame specified

consists of all of the users of a service within a defined time period.

For the purpose of the general survey, the sampling frame specified by the Government is either the Postcode Address File (PAF) or the Electoral Register which are generally recognised as the most comprehensive lists of the population. Of the two, the PAF is the most comprehensive list because it includes all of the addresses of the local authority and it is therefore the recommended list for authorities to use. The PAF will ensure that all of the addresses have an equal chance of selection and will, therefore, pick up residents who are not registered to vote, particularly, socially excluded members of society. This sampling frame is especially effective if face-to-face interviewing is carried out and the interviewers are using Kish (see chapter 10) or a similar sampling method to randomly select households and individuals within the households. For postal questionnaires, however, covering letters to questionnaires would have to be addressed to any of the residents i.e. 'Dear resident'. The disadvantage of using PAF in a postal survey this method is that you will have no control over who within the household completes the questionnaire.

The PAF is available from the Royal Mail:
0131 550 8999
http://www.royalmail.co.uk/paf/

The 'Royal Mail UK addresses' CD rom contains the Ward code for each post-code.

The Electoral Register is particularly good for postal questionnaires because the authority has access to the actual name of the person, thus, allowing the probability sample to identify each individual for the sample from the outset, and a much more personalised touch. However, even if the questionnaire is addressed to a particular individual the authority will have no guarantee that this person is the one who actually filled in the questionnaire. It is estimated that an average of 95% of the population are in the Electoral Registers. Some authorities are more proactive than others at having their register up to date. Authorities should evaluate the comprehensiveness of their Electoral Register before making a decision to use it for sampling purposes.

3.3 Probability sampling

Probability sampling is often considered to be the most reliable way to ensure a sample is statistically representative of the target population under study. A probability sample is one in which each person in the target population has an equal, or at least a known, chance (probability) of being selected.

The surest way of providing equal probability of selection is to use the principle of random selection. As the results need to be compared across local authorities the

Government considers that data on all of the indicators must be collected using probability sampling. With probability sampling authorities will be able to estimate the precision of the resulting statistic (see below).

Therefore, consultation fora which are already established, such as citizens panels, can be used as the sample (or sampling frame) for those surveys where the target population is 'all of the local authority residents' providing that the panel was drawn using probability sampling (further details on citizens' panels are provided in Chapter 11). Authorities may use any method of data collection (face to face, telephone, postal or a combination of these).

Once the authority has decided which sampling frame would be most appropriate for the general survey (PAF or Electoral Register) they have to select a sample of respondents.

3.3.1 What is a non-probability sample?

In order to identify what a probability sample is it might be useful to give further details about non-probability samples. As explained earlier, a probability sample is one in which each person in the target population has an **equal, or at least a known**, chance (probability) of being selected. Whereas a non-probability sample is one in which each person in the target population has an **un-equal, or unknown**, chance of being selected.

The most common type of non-probability sample used is quota sampling. As with probability samples, these samples are often drawn from a list of the population. The researcher/organisation then selects a few of the characteristics of the local authority population (maybe taken from the census) i.e. percentage of women, men, ethnic minorities and so on. They then set quotas for each of these groups that correspond to the percentages in the population. The interviewers can have very precise briefs (i.e. 'to get 20 women aged 18-24'). If the survey is postal the researchers choose quotas from the list according to the characteristics that they have selected as important. The research is completed when enough questionnaires or interviews have been achieved with people who fit the specifications set by the quotas.

A difficulty arises, however, in that the researchers can not guarantee that each person in the population had an equal or known chance of being selected, given that, once the quotas are achieved, the research is terminated and no random selection takes place. It follows, therefore, that the quota method assumes a sample that matches the make up of the population in important characteristics should be like the population in other ways too. However, research experience has proved consistently that this is an unsafe assumption.

It is worth mentioning that many organisations have introduced tight geographic controls, specifying postcodes and addresses where respondents may be selected.

However, even with these controls, non-probability samples have two key weaknesses. Firstly, they do not control for bias in the selection of respondents by the researcher or interviewer. Secondly, it is not possible to calculate the precision of the statistic (confidence interval, see section 3.4).

3.3.2 Types of probability samples

Simple random sampling: each person (or household) in the sampling frame is given a number, none of the people (or households) should appear in the list more than once. Thus, once a person (or household) has been selected he/she should have no further chance of being selected. The process is like drawing balls out of a lottery wheel, for example, for a population of 100,000 people from which we want to select a sample of 2,000 people, the 100,000 numbers will be inserted in the wheel and the first 2,000 numbers would be the selected random sample. The easiest way to generate a random sample when the sampling frame is large is to draw a table of computer generated random numbers. Some of the statistical packages that will be needed for data analysis have a facility for the production of random samples.

Systematic sampling: systematic sampling has a equivalent precision to that of a simple random sample. It is widely used particularly if the sampling frame is stratified by any particular characteristics (see below). To draw a systematic sample the researcher needs to know the number of people (or households) in the sampling frame, e.g. using the previous example - 100,000. Then they need to determine the number of people (or households) to be selected (ie. 2,000). Dividing the desired number in the sample by the number in the sampling frame will produce a fraction (2,000/100,000= 2/100= 1/50) meaning that 1 person (household) out of each 50 is to be selected for the sample. In other words, the researcher takes every 50th person on the list. In order to commence the systematic sampling a random start from 1 to 50 is selected. Therefore, if the first random person was 31, the next will be 81, then 131 and so on.

Stratified sampling: stratification can be done when the researcher knows before hand some of the characteristics of the people (or households) in the sampling frame. For example, from the PAF (post code address file) the researcher would know the ward within which the household is, also from the electoral register the researcher would know the street or ward where the person lives, in some cases, even the gender if the electoral register has been kept adequately. When such characteristics are known before drawing the sample they can be used to structure the sampling frame list. This would reduce the sampling variation, producing a sample that is more likely to reflect the total population.

For example, an authority wants to carry out a face to face survey using the PAF. Using the previous example, the PAF list would have the 100,000 addresses, these could then be organised by ward, then the same systematic sample fraction can be used (1/50) which would ensure that the sample of 2,000 will end up with some households from each of the wards (unless any of the wards have less than 50 addresses in them). Thus

enhancing the possibility of making the resulting sample more representative of the local authority and giving the researcher more control over the representativeness of the sample. (See appendix 4 for an example of a stratified sample)

When doing stratified samples there is another step which can improve the representativeness of the sample, this is called, **differential probabilities of selection** (sometimes refered to as 'boosting' a strata or disproportionate stratified random sampling). This is can be used when it is known that one group of people is less likely to respond to the survey. For example, an authority that has stratified the sampling frame by Wards may know from previous research that Ward X tends to have very low response rates. For that ward only, the researcher can alter the sampling fraction to 2 people of 50 rather than 1 of 50. Once the field work has been completed the researcher would have to give respondents of Ward X a weight to compensate for the fact that they were sampled at twice the rate of the rest of the population. The weight to be given needs to be calculated carefully to make the response representative of the population as a whole (see chapter 6). Although the probability of case selection varies from strata to strata, differential probabilities of selection still constitutes a probability sample because the probability of case selection is known.

The other main reason for using differential probabilities of selection is when the researcher wants to compare statistics for two or more groups in the population and it is known that one of the groups is a very small percentage of the population and which will not be sufficiently large if the same sampling fraction is used to sample from it. For example, ethnic minorities may be only 2% of the population, if using the same figures as for the other examples this would mean that only 40 people would be from an ethnic background. Furthermore, if the response rate is 60%, only 24 questionnaires will be achieved from ethnic minorities. If the authority wanted to statistically analyse whether there are any differences between ethnic minorities and the rest of the sample they would probably need to boost the sample of ethnic minorities from the outset and then weight the data for the overall population statistics.

Multistage cluster sampling (or cluster sampling): this sampling method involves drawing several samples, initially a sample of areas. For example at a national level one could draw a random sample of Regions, within those regions a random sample of cities, within those cities a random sample of wards, within those wards a random sample of streets, within those streets a random sample of houses and within the houses random sampling of the individuals. Cluster sampling is normally used when the research needs to cover a large geographical area, such as a country and to cut the cost of the field work.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS ON PROBABILITY SAMPLING:

- **It is important to remember, when doing probability sampling, the researcher <u>chooses before hand</u>, either the households or the individuals for the sample**. Unless carrying out a face-to-face survey where the researchers have to have rules of

how the interviewers should do sampling in buildings that have many households and within household selection of respondents.

- **The researcher chooses from a sampling frame a sample using probability methods.**
- **Once the sample has been selected, these individuals or households are the only ones from which we want information.** The interviewers do not get to select respondents (unless they have strict rules on how to carry out random sampling for households and respondents), the authority does not send questionnaires to more addresses (unless another probability sample has been drawn).
- **After probability sampling, the next key to get a more representative sample is to maximise the response rate. Thus, sending reminders to the selected sample (or revisiting the address if face-to-face), giving them encouragement, engaging them in the research.**

3.3.3 Extracting the sample addresses

Whichever route you follow, this will generate a list of addresses the size of your sample. You should mark these on your spreadsheet or database creating a new column (perhaps titled "sample") and marking up the sample cases (eg, 1 = Yes, 2 = No).. Make a copy of your original sample frame file. It may be useful in future. Then take the original and delete all the addresses that were not selected. The resulting set of addresses should be the correct number for the sample.

You should then ascribe an individual reference number to each record. Start with 0001. This code is used in the mailout to link each questionnaire with the correct individual (or household) record. The code should be printed on the front of the questionnaire. This will allow checking-off returned questionnaires as they come in and links the questionnaire with any other internal data or information obtained from the resident database.

3.4 Output: Sample size and confidence intervals around the estimates

3.4.1 Confidence Intervals

Surveys produce statistics, which are estimates of the real figure for the population under study. These estimates are always surrounded by a margin of error of (± x %). For example, a survey estimate for the general survey may show that 75% of the respondents were very satisfied with their local authority. However, this estimate, due to intrinsic characteristics of sampling, will be surrounded by a confidence interval, say, ± 3%. This indicates that the real figure of satisfaction in that authority's population lies

between 72% and 78%.

3.4.2 Sample size

Authorities might need expert advice in drawing the sample, working out the sample size and design if they do not have the expertise in-house. There are 5 key issues that need to be considered in order to workout the sample size:

a. Desired confidence level (95% confident that we did not arrive to the estimate by chance)
b. Variance in the population
c. Desired confidence interval (± x %)
d. Non-response
e. Deadwood

Desired confidence level[1]**:** the minimum confidence level required by the Government for each of the performance indicators is 95% meaning that we can be 95% sure that the authority did not arrive at the estimate by chance.

Variance in the population: how variable is the thing that we try to measure in the population? (variance[2]). There might be some information available about variance of the population in previous studies, such as a census, or other published statistics.

Desired confidence interval: the desired confidence interval is key to working out the ideal sample size for a survey. The sample for each of the target populations will be drawn to ensure that the estimated satisfaction for the total sample has a maximum of ± x% confidence interval (margin of error) around it at the 95% confidence level. The maximum confidence interval for each of the user satisfaction performance indicators is specified in each of the tables for the general or specific surveys.

The two most important factors when working out the sample size are: the degree of accuracy we require for the sample (confidence interval) and the extent to which there is variation in the target population in regard to the key characteristics of the study.

The following table illustrates the sample size (number of achieved responses) required for various confidence intervals at the 95% confidence level, using simple random sampling and assuming a 50/50 split on the variable (which represents the maximum variation possible):

[1] Confidence level also known as 'alpha': A confidence level set at 95% indicates that we can be 95% confident that we did not arrive at the estimate by chance. Confidence level is not to be confused with 'confidence interval (margin of error)' or with sampling error.
[2] The sum of the squared deviation from the sample mean over n.

Confidence interval	Achieved sample[3]
± 2.0	2500
± 2.5	1600
± 3.0	1100
± 3.5	816
± 4.0	625
± 4.5	494
± 5.0	400
± 5.5	330

Figure 3-1 Achieved number of questionnaires/interviews needed for an specific confidence interval if variance is 50/50

Source: De Vaus D A (1996:71) Surveys in Social Research Fourth Edition UCL Press

Although the above table of confidence intervals assumes a simple random sample, it has been widely used as a rule of thumb for other kinds of probability samples. The following section illustrates how the formula works:

Figure 3-2 Calculating the sample size - steps 1 and 2

Step 1. If the desired confidence interval is ± 3% and the desired confidence level is 95% we can work out the standard error of a mean (SE).

SE = Desired confidence interval/ Desired confidence level (1.96 is the constant for a 95% confidence level)

SE = 3/1.96

SE = 1.53

[3] Achieved sample: number of questionnaires which need to be returned or (for telephone/face-to-face surveys) number of interviews that need to be completed.

Step 2. Once the standard error has been worked out we need to find out as much as possible about our population. How variable is the thing that we try to measure in the population? (variance). There might be some information available about variance of the population in previous studies, such as a census, or other published statistics. However, if we are unsure we can use the maximum possible variance which is a 50/50 split in the response to the question. For simplicity, the maximum variance can be understood as 50% of the respondents saying that they are 'very/fairly satisfied' with a service and 50% saying that they are 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, fairly dissatisfied or very dissatisfied'. Then we simply use a formula to work out the sample size, we already know from step one what the standard error should be to achieve a ± 3% confidence interval (SE=1.53):

$$n = (\text{proportion} * \text{proportion}) / (SE^2)$$

$$n = (50 * 50) / (1.53)^2$$

$$n = 2500/2.34$$

$n = 1{,}068$ (rounded to 1,100 in the De Vaus (1996)table above – total number of achieved responses needed)

Key:
n = size of the sample or size of interviews or questionnaires that need to be completed
SE = Standard error of the mean is the standard deviation of the means in a sampling distribution.
Sampling distribution = a theoretical distribution of sample results (means, proportions and so on) that would result from drawing all possible samples of a fixed size from a particular population.
Variance= the sum of the squared deviation from the sample mean over n.

Response rates and sample size: Once the desired number of achieved responses has been determined the expected response rate needs to be considered. An authority which normally gets a 70% response rate to their surveys as well as considering a wide variety of methods to improve the response rate will also need to take the likely response rate into consideration when calculating the sample size (the actual number of people who should be selected).

Figure 3-3 Calculating the sample size - step 3

Step 3. Non-response

Once we know the confidence interval desired (± 3.0%) and we have worked out the number of achieved responses needed (1100) we need to consider the response rate. An authority may have an average response rate to postal questionnaires of 70% or 30% this needs to be taken into account.

Example 1: Say for example that the authority administers surveys very professionally and that they normally get a 70% response rate:

$n = 1100 * 100/70 = 1{,}572$ (should be the sample size)

Key: n = desired sample size
1100 = number of achieved interviews needed, see step 1 and 2 in previous table
70 = average response rate that the authority gets

Example 2: if the authority gets a 30% response rate:

n = 1100 * 100/30 = 3,666 (should be the sample size)

With a postal survey, you want to aim to achieve a response rate of at least 60% - higher is better. This will probably require several reminder letters, and there are examples of other good practice in maximising responses later in this chapter.

Deadwood: the final step to calculate the sample size is to estimate the percentage of 'deadwood'. Deadwood are individuals (or households) that have been selected as part of the sample but that can produce no data, these need to be carefully distinguished from 'refusals', people that are not available during the fieldwork (such as people on holiday or in hospital) or people that simply do not reply to any reminders or are never at home when the interviewer visits. The main example are:
If sampling households for the general survey – not eligible addresses such as business addresses or buildings that have been pulled down.
If sampling individuals - the most common reason is when people have moved away permanently or have passed away.

Figure 3-4 Calculating the sample size - step 4

Step 4. Deadwood

Say for example that an authority estimates that 5%[4] of the sample will be deadwood, then taking from step 3 the sample size calculated for a 70% response rate (1,572), the sample size should be calculated as follows:

Estimated deadwood = 1,572 * 5/100 = 78.6

n = 1,572 + 79 = **1,651 Final Sample Size Desired**

Authorities may consider getting an statistician to calculate the sample size more accurately taking into consideration the size of the population (relevant if the target populations is small) and the sampling effect (whether the sample is simple random, stratified and so on).

[4] Deadwood is around 11% on PAF on average (but can be higher in urban than rural areas) and usually between 4% and 8% on the electoral register (depending on population mobility and timing of the survey).

3.5. Maximising the response rate

The success of the survey depends on a good response. The better the rate, the more representative the survey will be of the population. A response rate above that anticipated will bring more confidence and reliability to the results. A response rate that falls short of the anticipated rate may bring into question the reliability and representativeness of the findings.

The main factors that can effect response rate are:

- The information made available to residents, through media or other means about the importance of the survey
- the immediate impression made when the mailing arrives
- the content and quality of the covering letter in the questionnaire
- the design and appearance of the questionnaire
- the subject matter in the questionnaire
- size and complexity of postal questionnaires
- your effectiveness at monitoring response rates
- your follow-up tactics to deal with those who do not respond in the first instance
- the timing of the survey
- whether other surveys or questionnaires have been in circulation among your residents recently - 'survey fatigue'

As a rule of thumb, a response rate that falls below 50% needs to be treated with care. The results may be affected by biases unknown to the researchers. The researchers will be able to check if the composition of the achieved sample is representative, for example, in terms of gender, age and ethnicity. However, it would be difficult to check for other important characteristics which may cause bias, i.e. under-representation of people on housing benefits, people that do not vote and so on.

There are various actions you can take to address some of these factors and maximise the response rate. Some are noted below, while chapter 5 covers the mailout and follow-up.

3.5.1 Actions you can take to maximise responses

- **Publicity**: - publicising the survey in advance eg. through resident representatives, resident and/or staff newsletters etc.
- **A clear and user friendly questionnaire** - the format of the general questionnaire (see appendix 1) can be improved. Authorities should consider getting the questionnaires professionally set and printed. However, authorities should do their best to keep the cost low as many residents will see a glossy questionnaire as a 'waste of local authority resources'.
- **A short and simple questionnaire**

- **Limited number of open questions –** open questions take more time from the respondents and often have a negative effect as respondents see them as an indication that the research has not been fully thought through.
- **Provision of translation services** - authorities should provide a translation on the covering letter to help respondents whose first languages is not English, and supply translated copies of the questionnaire for the most commonly used languages amongst their residents.
- **Clear and informative covering letter** - sending a covering letter written in plain English which explains the purpose of the survey and assures residents of their confidentiality.
- **Personalised names and addresses** - residents are much more likely to open the envelope, and read the covering letter and questionnaire if they are addressed personally.
- **Use white envelopes** - not brown ones, which are associated with bills and junk mail
- **Pre-paid envelopes**: - providing an addressed, stamped or pre-paid envelope for the questionnaire return.
- **Personal collection or personal delivery** - where feasible, if questionnaires can be collected or delivered to the respondents addresses this will boost response rates.
- **24 hour helpline** – a 24 help line is very effective, the authority should also provide a contact name within the authority to answer queries and give further legitimacy to the research.
- **Monitoring response rates** - response rates may vary across areas and within groups across the authority, it is important to monitor these response rates, as you will want to focus resources in those areas and groups that do not show a good response rate
- **Sending out reminders** - sending out reminders, and then a second copy of the questionnaire to those who have not responded. For some of the 'specific surveys' the authority may have the telephone numbers of the sample in this occasions it may be possible to use telephone reminders.
- **Timing**: - response rates can vary greatly depending on the time of year the questionnaire is posted. Posting questionnaires during the holiday periods will usually result in lower response rates.
- **Separate mailing for the survey only -** ensure that the mail includes only the survey information and not additional unrelated publicity and information. Do not enclose it with demands for payment or political statements **!**
- **Briefing staff in advance** – give a local authority name and contact number in the covering letter and questionnaire for queries. Some respondents undoubtedly will ring other parts of your organisation about the questionnaire. You should ensure staff - including reception and switchboard - are aware of the exercise and it's purpose before the questionnaire goes out. Make sure they are aware of the name and number of the project manager if complex queries arise.

- **Prizes -** consider the use of a gift or prize draw for those who respond by the deadline. If it is decided to use incentives such as these they should be kept to reasonable levels, and the winners chosen at random from the returned questionnaires.
- **Incentives** - alternatively, investigate whether a small but useful incentive could be given for *each* returned questionnaire. For example, Vale Housing Association arranged for all respondents to their survey to receive a free energy-saving light bulb, worth around £40 per annum in electricity bill savings (the bulbs being donated by a fuel savings campaign, at no cost to the association).

3.6. Piloting

Piloting is when you send the finished questionnaire and covering letter to a small sample of people other than those you have selected for your actual sample before the fieldwork period. Piloting is particularly useful if the authority has included other questions to those prescribed by the Government.

You would send your questionnaire to a pilot sample (say around 30-50 people) explaining that it is a pilot. As part of the covering letter you would ask them to give you feed back on questions that they did not understand, length of the questionnaire, clarity, time that they took to fill it in and any other issues of importance.

You can then use the results to improve the questionnaire before sending it to the main sample.

The other main use of piloting is to predict the likely response rates. If the response rate to the pilot after a couple of reminders is, say, 60% you can use this figure to calculate the overall sample size for your real sample.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS:

- **A decision on the sampling procedure should be reached at least two months before the fieldwork is due to commence**
- **Make sure that your sampling frame is as comprehensive as possible, delete repeated records before sampling**
- **Use a probability sampling method to select the sample.**
- **The sample is pre-selected by the researcher. The interviewers do not get to select respondents (unless they have strict rules on how to carry out random sampling for households and respondents)**
- **To calculate the sample size the authority needs to know: the desired confidence level (95%); variance in the population (50/50 max.); desired confidence interval (as set by the Government on each indicator); estimated response rate; and estimated deadwood.**
- **Authorities must do their best to maximise the response rate**

4 ACHIEVING THE OUTPUTS REQUIRED FROM BEST VALUE AUTHORITIES – THE QUESTIONNAIRE

4.1. Introduction - Specific questions to be asked

The questionnaire design needs to start very early on. Although the BVPI questions are specified by the Government many authorities will consider including questions around specific local issues for which they want to collect data. Questionnaire design should, ideally, commence at least four months before the fieldwork period begins and it should not take longer than two months to agree the design and content.

User satisfaction indicators are needed for several service areas. For each service area, the same questions on satisfaction will need to be asked of service users in each local authority to ensure comparability of results. The surveys do not have to be dedicated exclusively to the 'best value indicators' and could include other questions which the authority might find useful for alternative consultation exercises. However, it is important that additional questions should be added after or before each of the modules (not incorporated as part of modules) of Best Value Indicator questions (and before the socio-economic questions - gender, age, occupation an so on), so that question ordering does not affect responses too much. The questionnaires should also be non-political in context and, ideally, reasonably short to encourage a better response rate. Where authorities are unsure, expert advice should be sought about this.

Each user satisfaction BVPI has one or more modules of questions which need to be asked. The relevant modules of questions for each of the BVPIs should always be asked in the same questionnaire. Authorities may decide to, for example, to carry out a special survey on transport issues and thus ask the transport question modules in that specific survey, provided that all of the other survey requirements are met. On the other hand, authorities may choose to carry out a survey which will cover the question modules for several indicators, for example, corporate health, litter, and waste.

4.2 The general survey questionnaire

A questionnaire has been designed for the collection of data on the seven user satisfaction indicators that can be measured by asking the questions to a representative sample of the local authority population (see appendix 1):

Figure 4-1 General survey indicators

BVPI no.	Service	Indicator
BVPI 3	Corporate Health	The percentage of citizens satisfied with the overall service provided by their authority.

BVPI4	Corporate Health	The percentage of those making complaints satisfied with the handling of those complaints.
BVPI89	Litter	Percentage of people satisfied with cleanliness standards.
BVPI90	Waste	Percentage of survey respondents expressing satisfaction with Recycling Facilities, Household Waste Collection and Civic Amenity Sites.
BVPI103	Transport	Percentage of users satisfied with local provision of public transport information.
BVPI104	Transport	Percentage of users satisfied with local bus services.
BVPI119	Culture	The percentage of residents by targeted group satisfied with the local authorities cultural and recreational activities.

A word version of this questionnaire is available in http://www.local-regions.detr.gov.uk/bestvalue/indicators/indicatorsindex.htm and can be used by authorities once they have filled in all of the sections that are relevant to their authority and inserted/ deleted the questions that are not relevant. The questionnaire can be copied onto twelve sides of three A3 pages or alternatively onto twelve sides of six A4 pages and stapled.

The questions are arranged into the eleven main sections and cover the minimum requirement for the collection of data on seven of the Best Value user satisfaction indicators:

a) Letter to the selected resident
b) The duty to keep relevant land clear of litter and refuse
c) Household waste collection
d) Recycling facilities
e) Civic amenity sites
f) Public transport information
g) Local bus service
h) Local authority's cultural and recreational activities
   Service departments
i) Satisfaction with the authority as a whole
j) Complaint handling
k) About yourself

The questions themselves are as specified by the Government (DETR and Audit Commission (1999a) 2000/2001 Performance Indicators Guidance – see Appendices 7 and 8) most were obtained either from existing surveys, or were specifically created for the best value performance indicators.

Please note: Due to a printing error one response category was missed in DETR and Audit Commission (1999a) 2000/2001 Performance Indicators Guidance (see Appendices 7 and 8) *from BVPI104 'Percentage of users satisfied with local bus services' (module 1) and BVPI119 'The percentage of residents by targeted group satisfied with the local authorities cultural and recreational activities' (module 1). The new category needs to be added to the modules and taken into consideration when analysing the results. See below highlighted in bold:*

Answer categories:
Almost every day
At least once a week
At least once a month
Within the last 6 months
Within the last year
Longer ago
Never used
I don't know

Within each of the above services separate statistics should be provided for the overall group, for users and non-users.

All of the respondents (excluding those that did not know whether they used the service or not)
Users within the last year (users are respondents to; Almost everyday, At least once a week, **At least once a month**, Within the last 6 months and Within the last year)
Non users (non users are respondents to; Longer ago and Never used)

4.2.1 Using *the questionnaire*

The questions set in the questionnaire are those which the Government requires each authority to ask in order to measure the performance indicators. Additional questions can be added after each block of user satisfaction performance indicators questions and before the social groups questions.

Alternatively, the questions for each service area can be used as modules to be inserted in more specific surveys (ie. On transport or culture). However, the requirements for the indicators (confidence intervals and so on) will remain as set out in the DETR and Audit Commission (1999a) 2000/2001 Performance Indicators Guidance (see Appendices 7 and 8).

Adding questions to questionnaires to collect more detailed information on services and issues which are relevant to the local area is to be done with caution. The questionnaires should remain non-political. Adding questions will change the emphasis of the questionnaire, alter the length of the questionnaire (completion time and/or number of pages), and may influence how a respondent answers the remaining questions.

If despite this an authority decides to add its own questions these should **only be inserted after the performance indicator questions and before the socio-demographic questions** and **kept to an absolute minimum.**

When adding questions/items, local authorities should:

- use plain English and avoid jargon;
- not include 'double barrel' questions, that is, not ask about two separate things in a single question. For example, 'How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the application forms and the telephone manner in department x', this question is asking about both forms and

telephone manner when the respondent may have different views on each;

- ensure that, overall, the questions are balanced, that is, do not lead respondents towards positive or negative response;
- avoid indicating the authority's point of view or concerns;
- avoid leading questions. For example, 'Do you oppose or favour cutting council tax even if cuts mean that refuse collection will only be done once a month?'
- avoid irrelevant questions or issues;
- make sure that the respondents will have the necessary knowledge to answer the question
- ensure that the words have the same meaning for everyone
- make the frame of reference for the question clear. For example an unclear frame of reference would be 'Do you use the public swimming-pool?' a clear sampling frame would be 'Have you used the public swimming-pool within the last year?'
- try to keep the flow of the questionnaire, don't ask questions about waste then move to transport, then ask about waste again, then about transport again. Try to keep the questionnaire in themes that are easy to follow.

It may also be tempting for some organisations or authorities to alter the wording of some of the questions. **This should never be done** since it will remove any ability to make comparisons with other authorities using the questionnaire. As noted, the questions are the tools to gather the data for the user satisfaction performance indicators, altering them will undermine their ability to do so.

4.2.2 What authorities need to do to get the general questionnaire ready

The questionnaire (see appendix 1) includes several sections that need to be filled in by the authority. These have been highlighted in blue. Where possible it is advisable that authorities keep to the space made available for their descriptions.

District and County councils will need to delete the modules and questions that are not relevant to the services they provide.

Where authorities are asked to specify the services that they provide they should ensure that the information is kept objective. Authorities should cover broadly and written in plain English all of the services they provide under each of the headings. This should be part of the questionnaire, not a separate leaflet.

It is very important to give to every address or person in the sample a reference number which will be written or merged in each of the questionnaires. This will help with the monitoring of respondents, reminder letters and representativeness of the achieved sample.

It is also recommendable to send the questionnaire with a self addressed stamped envelope or pre-paid addressed envelope.

Authorities should think very carefully on ways in which they can encourage the highest response rate possible (see section 3.5).

The very last question gives the respondent the opportunity to express their views about any other issues that they feel they haven't been able to express in the questionnaire which they want to bring to the attention of the authority. This is the only question in the questionnaire which is not required by the Government. However, it is good practice to allow respondents to make other comments and authorities are recommended to analyse these responses for their own benefit.

4.2.3 About yourself - Social subgroups

The information gained from this section is important as it allows the authority to analyse levels of satisfaction between different groups of the population such as those who are in various states of employment or age.

Estimates for the subgroups of the population (age, gender, ethnicity, social class, disability, geographical location and so on) are desirable because they will allow authorities to examine the impact of the service on a given population subgroup. However, the Government does not ask authorities for a standard precision of estimates for these social subgroups at this stage. Instead, each survey is required to ask questions around these issues. For comparability across authorities and for authorities to be able to check the representativeness of their survey responses. There is a statutory duty for all surveys to contain questions on gender, age, employment status, occupation, ethnicity, disability and postcode. For most surveys the local authority will know the postcode of the respondent, therefore a question on postcode only needs to be asked in the library survey. Figure 4-2 recommends some questions which have been used in many nationally representative postal surveys and those that are proposed in the '2001 Census of Population' white paper (March 1999). However, it is <u>not</u> a statutory requirement to ask precisely the recommended questions. Authorities may want to use alternative questions around these issues. Authorities are also encouraged to ask more questions on socio-economic issues if they consider that their specific local circumstances deem it necessary.

Figure 4-2 Social subgroups for all surveys

Minimum requirement	Recommended questions for postal questionnaires (these will need to be altered slightly if other methods of data collection are being used provided that the same categories are covered)
Gender	Are you male or female? Male/Female
Age	What was your age on your last birthday?

Employment	Which of these activities best describes what you are doing at present? (please tick one only – only tick 'looking after the home' if this is your main activity and none of the other options apply) 1. Employee in full-time job (30 hours plus) 2. Employee in part-time job (Under 30 hours) 3. Self employed full or part-time 4. On a Government supported training programme (eg Modern Apprenticeship/National Traineeship/Training for Work/Adult Training) 5. Full-time education at school, college or university 6. Unemployed and available for work 7. Permanently sick/disabled 8. Wholly retired from work 9. Looking after the home 10. Doing something else (please write in)
Occupation/ social class	What is/was your occupation? (please write in)
Ethnicity	To which of these groups do you consider you belong? a. White British Irish Any other White background (please write in) b. Mixed White and Black Caribbean White and Black African White and Asian Any other mixed background (please write in) c. Asian or Asian British Indian Pakistani Bangladeshi Any other Asian background (please write in) d. Black or Black British Caribbean African Any other Black background (please write in) e. Chinese or Other ethnic group Chinese f. Other (please write in)
Disability	Do you have any long-standing illness, disability or infirmity? long-standing means anything that has troubled you over a period of time or that is likely to affect you over a period of time? Yes/No Does this illness or disability limit your activities in anyway? Yes/No
Postcode (only needs to be asked in the library survey)	Postcode (please specify)

***please note**: due to a typing error in* DETR and Audit Commission (1999a) 2000/2001 Performance Indicators Guidance (see Appendices 7 and 8) *specifically in the recommended ethnic question section d, the last category should be as above 'any other **Black** background' and not 'any other Asian background'. Also the employment question category 2 should be 'Employee in part-time job (**Under** 30 hours)'*

4.3 Confidentiality and anonymity

All questionnaires will need to specify a confidentiality statement in their covering letter

explaining that '*all of the data will be treated in the strictest confidence and will only be used to monitor the local authority's services'*. The letter/ statement will also need to explain that '*anonymised responses may be passed on to the DETR Local and Regional Government Research Unit which will use the data to study national patterns of service satisfaction*.'

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS ON QUESTIONNAIRE:

- **Start questionnaire design very early on, at least four months before the fieldwork period begins.**
- **Do not take longer than two months to agree the questionnaire design**
- **the questionnaire covers the minimum requirement set up by the Government for the collection of seven user satisfaction BVPIs**
- **Authorities can add questions to the questionnaire, provided that the questions are objective, that the questionnaire follows a rational flow and that they are not asked within the modules specified by the Government.**
- **Authorities need to fill in the blue sections of the questionnaire.**
- **If authorities are designing their own questionnaire they must include the confidentiality and anonymity statement as required.**
- **The social subgroup questions proposed in this paper are recommended. Therefore, authorities may choose to use alternative questions around each of the seven social group areas.**

5 RUNNING THE SURVEY

This chapter covers the following topics

- **planning and ordering supplies**
- **producing the questionnaire**
- **producing the covering letter**
- **'booking-in' and monitoring returns**
- **reminders**

5.1 Introduction

Once the design of the questionnaire and the sampling strategy have been finalised, the authority will need to start running the survey. Running a survey in-house involves a range of administrative tasks. These were outlined in the flow chart in chapter 2.

This section covers them in more detail. The principle tasks are:

- planning and ordering supplies
  - envelopes
  - labels
  - arranging licence for and printing of reply paid envelopes (if needed)
  - printing of reminder cards
- arranging printing and numbering of the questionnaire
- drafting, mail-merging and printing the covering letter (if it is not part of the questionnaire already)
- doing the mailout
- 'booking-in' the returned questionnaires and monitoring rate of return
- sending reminder cards
- sending reminder letters and second questionnaires.

5.2 Planning and ordering supplies

The principle supplies are:

- **The envelopes**

The envelope should preferably be white. This will make the letter look less like junk mail and ensures, hopefully, that the resident opens it. Use C4 envelopes so that the questionnaire, letter and reply-paid envelope do not have to be folded, and so a mail-merged letter can be inserted with the address visible. Calculate you will need enough envelopes to mail 160% of your sample.

- **Reply-paid envelopes**

A pre-paid envelope (preferably C5) should be included for respondents to return their completed questionnaire. This adds to the ease in returning the questionnaire and reduces the risk of returns going astray in the mail. You may already have a business-reply licence and stock, but if you do not arrange this as early as possible as the process can be take time. Assume you will need reply-paid envelopes for 160% of your sample. Stamped addressed envelopes may be feasible as an alternative for small samples.

- **Reminder cards**

If you are going to use these, get them drafted and printed in advance. Assume you will need 65% of your sample.

- **Labels**

Depending on what type of monitoring and 'booking-in' system you use (see below) you may need to print five times as many labels as the size of the sample. Use 16 to a page or more labels.

- **Paper supplies**,

Required for the initial letter and the follow-up letter (160% of the sample in total)

5.3 Printing and numbering the questionnaire

You - or your contractors - will need to print sufficient copies for:

- **the initial mailout:** ideally your printer should overprint consecutive numbers on the questionnaire, starting with 0001 (which should be sent to person 0001 from your sample database – see section 3.3.3) and including an authority identifier if you are going to contract out your data processing (e.g. The London Borough of Islington could suffix all their questionnaires 'LBI'). This is a purely precautionary measure, as the fieldwork for data collection in all authorities will take place at around the same time, thus, there may be several questionnaires being processed at the same time at a particular data input firms. If you cannot get overprinting done, the alternatives are to print off a set of labels with the numbers, or use a consecutive number stamp.
- **follow-up mailing**: assuming you are going to do a follow-up mailing of the questionnaire to boost your response rate, you need to have printed extra copies corresponding to 60 % or 65% of the sample size (depending on whether you have used a reminder card as well). These should not be numbered at this stage (though your identifying suffix should be printed).

5.4 Producing the covering letter

The covering letter can be part of the questionnaire. This is the preferred option as it keeps all of the literature relating to the questionnaire in the same document, making it more self contained and accessible. However, authorities may want to write a separate covering letter for particular administrative reasons. The role of the covering letter is to:

- inform your residents about the survey
- motivate them to complete and return the questionnaire
- give them a point of contact if they are worried or have queries about the survey and should be written to motivate completion of the questionnaire.
- inform them about the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses

The best way to produce the covering letter is to mailmerge it against the sample database.

If you decide to write your own covering letter, you should consider the following when drafting:

- **use headed notepaper and good quality paper**
- **keep it short -** no more than one side of A4 (plus the translation statement)
- **personalise the letter -** if possible use the resident(s) name(s).
- **include the unique reference number** - in that way you can ensure that the numbered questionnaire goes with the right letter; this is easily done by mail-merging software.
- **stress confidentiality and anonymity as required, see section 4.3 -** this will help reduce any fears respondents may have about their responses.
- **state the survey objective and keep it 'objective' -** you should state that the survey is being carried out in order to improve the services provided. Do not use the letter or questionnaire for political aims.
- **use plain language -** keep the letter clear and concise and do not use authority jargon or political statements.
- **a contact phone number and person -** give a phone number and contact name of a member of staff so that residents with any questions or concerns can make direct contact.
- **giving a deadline for the questionnaire to be returned -** this may encourage respondents to return the questionnaire in time.
- **translation statement and translations -** give a statement (best on the back of the letter) in the most common languages, other than English, amongst the resident population, informing them how to obtain translated copies of the questionnaire (and have arrangements in hand to do this if necessary). If your residents have significantly-sized groups with languages other that English, you will want to consider translating the questionnaire in advance.
- **large-print** - using a photocopier, 'blow up' a few copies of the questionnaire to A3 size in case elderly people or others with impaired sight request these. If your sample has a high proportion of elderly people you may want to target these.
- **signatories -** the letter could be signed by the Chief Executive, this will give added weight to the letter and demonstrate the whole organisation's commitment to gaining feedback. As a minimum use a scanned-in image of the actual signature.

Figure 5-1 Example of an initial covering letter

Mr A Resident
Flat A
25 Elms Lane

Wessex
7TG

<Date>

Dear local resident <name if available>,

Having your say about the way your local authority runs things !!!

I am writing to you to ask for help in monitoring the services that we provide you with. We are interested in hearing your views about local services such as street cleaning, local transport, leisure facilities, local authority schools and social services.

It doesn't matter if you've only just moved into the area, or if you don't pay Council Tax, it is important that we hear everybody's views. Our short questionnaire is the first of a series, every three years the same questions will be asked to a different sample [or 'same' if using citizen's panel] of the local authority residents and it will help us to invest our money where it really matters.

We would very much appreciate your help. You can do this by completing the enclosed questionnaire and returning it to us in the pre-paid envelope supplied by xxxday xxxdate, xxxmonth and xxx year.

All of the data will be treated in the strictest confidence and will only be used to monitor the local authority's services. Anonymised responses may be passed on to the Local and Regional Government Research Unit which will use the data to study national patterns of service satisfaction.

If you have any questions or concerns about this survey please do not hesitate to contact <name> on <telephone number> who will be very happy to help you.

I very much hope you will be able to take part, and feel sure that you will find it interesting. Thank you very much for your help in advance.

Yours sincerely,

<electronic or hand signature>

Chief Executive + Chair + others

5.5 The fieldwork period – the mail out

For the general survey, the fieldwork period specified is anytime between the beginning of September and the end November. This represents the period within which the questionnaires are administered to the sample selected.

The despatch of the survey, is vital because this is the point when the contact is made with the residents. Gaining the trust of respondents and ensuring that they want to respond to the survey is critical. You should make every effort to see it runs smoothly.

Remember all the elements that go into the envelope:

- the questionnaire
- translation information
- the covering letter (if printed separately from the questionnaire)
- the reply-paid envelope

Carefully check that the right covering letter is with the right questionnaire. If you have contracted out this task, one method of checking the accuracy of the firm you use is to insert a sprinkling of 'dummy' questionnaires and letters scattered *throughout* the sample, perhaps sent to staff volunteers at their home addresses. You ensure yourself both of the accuracy of the operation, and of its timeliness.

Most authorities will use, or have their contractors use, franking machines to post questionnaires. If using stamps is feasible, do this instead it gives a much more personalised appearance thus improving the chances of the respondent opening the letter promptly.

5.5.1 'Booking in' and monitoring the returns

Ideally, you will use a copy of the spreadsheet or database file holding the sample as your control system for returned questionnaires. As completed questionnaires begin to arrive back they need to be checked off as 'returned' in a column on the spreadsheet. You will also want to record:

- whether the questionnaire was fully or partly completed
- if it was returned by the Post Office as an untraced address
- whether it was returned as 'no longer at this address'

In the latter two cases you will want to check your address database/voids records for accuracy, and follow-up accordingly.

Keep a graph showing on a daily basis how many questionnaires are returned.

If you are doing this using a computer file you should use spare sets of sample labels to record the questionnaires that have not been coded as returned to generate labels to send reminders to, and subsequently a second letter and copy of the questionnaire (see below). If you are booking in and monitoring manually, you can emulate this by striking through returned questionnaires reference numbers on two spare sets of labels. You will use the first set to send the reminder card, and the second set of untouched labels for the follow-up letter and second questionnaire.

Monitoring returns in either of these ways - either via computer of manually - allows the response rate to be calculated at all stages leading up to the final deadline for returns. This will help you decide when a reminder needs to be sent out and whether special action needs to be taken to encourage a higher response rate in certain areas. Targeting reminders to those people who have not replied saves postage and stationery, and avoids annoying respondents who have already sent in their questionnaires.

5.5.2 Reminder cards and letters

Sending out a reminders and additional questionnaires to residents that have not responded, after the given deadline, is essential practice for boosting the response rate and encouraging them to respond.

Given the emphasis on increasing the response rate and getting a large enough database to compare sub-groups, use the following suggested procedure, if your resources allow;

- The initial mailout of the survey can be expected to give a response rate of around 35-40%. As soon as it appears, through your tracking, that responses are 'flattening out' on your graph (or immediately after any published deadline), send a reminder card, using the labels generated for non-respondents. This would normally be about two weeks after mailing. The card should say something like the words in the example overleaf:

Dear resident

I recently sent you a questionnaire asking for your views on the services we, <name of authority> provide. We have now received most questionnaires back. However, our aim is to get a representative response so that we can be sure that we are fairly representing the views of all of the residents. Your opinions will help us improve our services where it really matters.

Therefore, we would be very grateful if you could also return the questionnaire if you have not already done so to <address>.

If you have any questions or concerns about this survey please do not hesitate to contact <name> on <telephone number> who will be very happy to help you. Again, thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely

[Chief Executive]

Figure 5-2 Reminder card

5.5.3. Final follow-up letter

Log returns from the reminder card on your database (or on the remaining set of labels). You can expect this reminder to boost responses by 10-15%. When this additional response starts to slacken off, send a final follow-up letter, additional copy of the questionnaire (which will have the code of the person (household) you are sending it to) and reply-paid envelope to the remaining non-respondents to jog their memories. This would typically be about two weeks after the reminder card went out. The letter should be fairly short, and similar to the reminder card. As a rule of thumb, you should close your booking in system around six weeks after the first mailout.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS:

- **assess and organise your supplies well in advance**
- **a unique identifier should be used to identify each questionnaire**
- **the covering letter should make be clear and concise and motivate respondents to complete the questionnaire by the defined deadline**
- **returned questionnaires should be checked off to allow targeted reminders to be sent and for the data to be matched with any additional internal information**
- **think about all of the other methods to encourage higher response (see section 5.3)**

6. DATA PROCESSING

This chapter covers the following topics:

- **Preparing the data to input**
- **Inputting the data**
- **Weighting the data**
- **Data at the National level**

6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides you with an introduction to undertaking the data processing and analysis of your returned questionnaires. This area is the most complex and technical of those involved in running surveys, and are particularly amenable to contracting-out. Your data processing and analysis should be planned well in advance as it is a labour-intensive and time-consuming task (especially if carried out in-house). This chapter will:

- Provide you with a general understanding of what goes into data processing and analysis so that:
  - if the tasks are done in-house, staff needing training will have some understanding of managing the process
  - if you contract it out, you will be better informed in drawing up your specification and monitoring your contractor in-house.
- Provide you with an outline of the key tasks involved
- Give you an introduction to 'weighting' and data analysis.

'Data processing' means converting the written responses on each of the questionnaires into an electronic format - a spreadsheet or database - so that the information can be brought together in a coherent manner, for analysis and interpretation. Chapter 1, under 'resources' discussed the

type of software and hardware you will need to carry out data entry and analysis in-house.

Using a manual system for this aspect of the process is not an option - you will find them to be too time consuming and prone to error. If you do not have the in-house resources to do the data processing on computer, and staff trained in the relevant software, you should seriously consider contracting it out. If you should do so, ensure that your agreement sets high standards for data entry, verification of the accuracy of the data, and data cleaning. There is not space in this manual to discuss this in depth, but several publications in the bibliography cover the subject.

6.2 Preparing the data for inputting

When the questionnaires start to come in, you will have two immediate tasks to do:

- coding the data
- checking and 'cleaning' the data

6.2.1 Coding the data

Responses to each question will typically need to be 'coded' in order for them to be analysed and interpreted by most computer packages. A code is simply a number that corresponds to a particular answer to a question. A standard coding system has been created for questionnaire in appendix 1 and the codes appear hand written inside the response box for each question on the questionnaire (see the questionnaire in appendix 1). For the questions required by the Government is advisable that only these codes should be used. If you use different codes any detailed comparisons of results with other organisations will be much more difficult.

Whatever computer package you use, you should set each question up on your spreadsheet or database with its own column. This column should be set up with textual labels that describe all the possible categories of coded responses to that particular question. For example, for question A1 "How satisfied or dissatisfied are you that <name of authority> has fulfilled its duty to keep this land clear of litter and refuse", the following categories and codes for each category would apply:

Response Category	Standard Code
Very satisfied	1
Fairly satisfied	2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	3
Fairly dissatisfied	4
Very dissatisfied	5
It does not apply	9

In question 2 for example there are effectively 6 questions:
Satisfaction/dissatisfaction with:

1. the receptacle provided for your household waste
2. The place you are required to leave your waste for collection

3. …

For each question a new column will need to be set up. On the questionnaire on Appendix 1 there are suggested names for each column which contains data on each question. These start with the prefix 'VARxx', VAR meaning variable in social research terminology. Thus, one column, will contain the data on question B1 (VARB1), another column will contain the data on question B2 (VARB2) and VARK3 will contain data on employment. This will help the analyst to recognise the question to which answers are contained in that column.

Question K2 asks for numerical responses these numbers are themselves the relevant codes (e.g. if someone has written '18' years old in the box the code is 18).

Question K6 for example asks respondents for their ethnic background. The column will contain numbers from 1 to 16 depending on the ethnic group that the respondent comes from. However there will be a need to add an extra column in which the authority will need to write the actual responses to 3, 7, 11, 14 and 16. These are known as an 'open-ended' questions, and cannot be coded in the same way as the others because it asks the resident to respond in their own words.

A further example of where the authority will need to type in the respondents answer is in the final question 'Is there anything that you would like to add?'. This question gives an opportunity for respondents to express any views they feel have not been dealt with elsewhere in the questionnaire. Often respondents will use it as an opportunity to bring up individual issues. All of these response should be read through. Particular concerns (for example, incomplete housing repairs, request for a council tax statement) should be passed to the relevant staff members. The responses to this question also need to be summarised in some way for the results. You do this by creating a 'coding frame'.

At the end your spread sheet should look something like this:

RESPONDENT CODE NUMBER	VAR A1	VAR B1	VAR B2	VAR B3	…	VARK6	VARK6B	VARFINAL
0001	3	4	3	5		3	Europe	I would like a copy of my council tax statement
0002	2	3	1	5		6		I would like the authority to provide more pavements in Grove st..
0003	9	1	2	5		11	African Asian	When is the council going to do something for cyclists

Coding frames

In survey data analysis it is quite common to create coding frames with open questions. The following is an example of how this can be done:

- print out all the questions that have responses to the final open question.
- read the first response and summarise its gist on to a list.
- if it deals with multiple unconnected matters, make a separate list entry for each item
- go on to the next response; if it makes a similar or connected comment to a previous one,

put a tally (use the five bar gate method) by the comment.)

If it raises a different matter, make a new list entry.

- you will end up with a list showing groups of common answers
- give these answers numerical codes, with the most frequently occurring being numbered 1, the next 2 etc.
- you will probably find you have several items which have been raised by only one or two people. Batch them together as 'Other'

Do not wait for all the questionnaires to come it before starting to build your code frame. You won't be able to start data-inputting until you have a code frame for the question. You also do not need to go through all the questionnaires to complete your list - you will find that after a while no new items come up, or the ones that do are idiosyncratic and can be coded as 'Other'.

After you have constructed your code frame, go back and write in the relevant code or codes by the question on the questionnaires you used to construct the frame.

An example of a code frame list is given below.

Figure 6-1 Example of code frame list for last question on the survey

Response	Number of responses	Code
Complaints about the political parties	**27**	**1**
Council Tax complaints	**20**	**2**
Street Cleaning complaints	**17**	**3**
Would like more citizen involvement	**13**	**4**
Positive comments about the new sports centre	**11**	**5**
Other	**7**	**9**

6.2.2 Coding age and occupation/social class

Both suggested questions on age and occupation are open questions, they are not pre-coded. The most common way of coding age is into the following age groups: 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65-74, and over 75.

Occupation is normally coded using the 'Standard Occupation Classification' which is available from the Stationary Office and divided into three volumes:

The Stationery Office
PO Box 276

London
SW8 5DT
Tel. 0870 600 5522:

SOC volume 1: The structure and definition of major, minor and unit groups (1990)
ISBN: 0116912847

SOC volume 2: The coding index (second edition) (December 1995)
ISBN: 0116916478

SOC volume 3: Social classifications and coding methodology (1991)
ISBN: 011691338X

There is also a software package for coding job titles to SOC which will help you code occupation in a much quicker way. The software is designed to run on most microcomputers using the DOS 2.0 or higher operating system. Before purchasing it is worth speaking with someone in the Stationary Office's help-line to discuss further details on the software package:

CASOC Software – Computer assisted standard occupational coding
ISBN 0116913592

6.2.3 Checking and cleaning the data

- Each questionnaire should be checked for accuracy and completeness as it comes in (and 'booked-in' accordingly - see chapter 5). You will find that some respondents will give impossible or conflicting responses to various questions. You need to check (or 'clean') the responses to correct for this before data-inputting. You can only change a response when there is a strong likelihood that you can work out the correct answer. If you cannot, you must recode it as an unanswered question (usually known as a 'missing value'). To do this, you should go through each questionnaire by hand correcting any responses with a different coloured pen for the data-inputter to follow. The following lists the common types of errors that may occur on the standard questionnaire:

- **'Missing values' and 'not applicable' -** residents may have inadvertently or deliberately failed to answer some questions. Unless there are other questions from which you can impute an answer, then these needed to be coded as a missing value. The convention is to use the number 99 for this. However, where residents have not answered questions because they have been 'routed' around them (that is, the question was not relevant to their circumstances) these should be coded differently, as 98.

- **'Range' errors -** If the response is not clear, an unanswered question code (sometimes known as a 'missing value' code '99') should be entered.

- **Consistency errors -** these are responses inconsistent with other information given in the questionnaire. In some cases, it may be more difficult to decide which answer is correct, and a

missing value code entered.

- **Mistakes in routing -** routing is the process by which respondents are directed to different parts of the questionnaire depending on their answers to a particular question. An example of a routing mistake would be if a respondent answers "no" to question K5 "Do you have any long-standing illness, disability or infirmity?", and then answers question K5A about whether the illness or disability limit his/her activities in any way. Most probably the respondent meant to answer "yes" to question K5 (so question K5 is coded '1') and the answer to question K5A should be included.

- **You should also code the open questions** while you are checking the questionnaires

- **Incomplete questionnaires and mistakes –** some authorities may have access to the telephone number of the respondent particularly for service specific surveys this would be very useful for the completion of questionnaires.

6.3 Inputting the data

Once each questionnaire has been checked and any responses corrected, the questionnaire is now "clean" and ready to be input into the software package using the standard codes.

Begin data-inputting as soon as you have some "clean" questionnaires. Don't wait for them all to come in - processing them in smaller batches reduces the size of the task to manageable proportions and the possibility of the data inputting delaying the project. Most people find that inputting the questionnaires in batches increases the speed and accuracy of the process, and reduces the amount of repetitive strain on the inputter.

If you have contracted-out data entry, you will want to know what quality control mechanisms are in place to ensure data has been accurately transferred from questionnaire to computer. This should be apparent from the contractors' tender. One common method is 'double keying' - that is, each questionnaire is input twice. If you are data-inputting in-house you are unlikely to have the resources to do this. Instead, the project manager should periodically take a random sample of questionnaires and check these against the data input.

Once a cut off point for accepting completed questionnaires has been reached it is time to finish the data inputting and begin the data analysis.

6.4 Checking for internal consistency

'Data analysis' is the process that converts the processed data into information about your respondents, in the form of tables and charts. However, your first step into data analysis will also be another stage of the data checking process. You now need to produce a set of basic tables showing how many respondents gave each answer to each question. These are known as

'frequency tables' . Basic bar charts can also be generated to display the responses visually. These initial basic tables should be used as a further check on the accuracy and completeness of the data, and for their internal consistency. For example, you could check that all the totals are the same (taking 'missing values' into account) to assure your self that no coding has been missed in the inputting. Any questions raised should be investigated before continuing. A frequency count is also useful for giving an initial indication of the likely results.

6.5 Weighting the data

Whether you have carried out a census or used a sample, you will need to check that the distribution of responses is representative of the target population as a whole. If the responses are not representative they will need to be weighted. It should be stressed that weighting is not an alternative to making every effort to maximise response rate. A poor response rate cannot be fully-compensated for by weighting.

Weighting is the application of correction factors to the analysis of the data, to ensure it is representative of the make-up of the target population. Most survey software packages can carry out weighting functions, and can analyse using weighted data. The exact procedures for carrying this out on any particular software package will need to be covered in the training undertaken by staff.

Weighting is used in two main ways in the analysis of this type of survey :

- to adjust for the effects of boosting sub-groups
- to help correct the bias which may be introduced by a low response rate.

6.5.1 Weighting for the effects of boosting sub-groups

'To weight the sample is to multiply different interview records by different numbers. There are several reasons for doing this' Prescott-Clarke (1993: 44):

6.5.1 Weighting to account for differential probabilities of selection

If part of the original sample was chosen by boosting the numbers in a particular sub-group of the population, the data will need to be adjusted or weighted to ensure that the responses from this group are not over represented in the ***overall*** results (see chapter 5 for details on boosting sub-groups).

For example, suppose 20 of 100 (20%) of residents living in ward x were sampled because they are less likely to respond, and only 10 of 100 (10%) of the rest of the population from other wards. Assuming that, surprisingly, the response rates were the same for residents living in ward

x and the other residents, then the views of residents living in ward x would be represented twice as much as those other residents. In this example, weighting would correct for this by making each respondent from ward x represent 'half a response' i.e. each ward x response would have a 'weight' of 0.5.

Calculating the weighting factor

$$\text{weight} = \frac{\text{actual proportion of respondents within the total population (excl. ward x)}}{\text{actual proportion of respondents from ward x}}$$

$$\text{weight} = \frac{10}{20} = \text{weighting factor of } 0.5$$

The weighting is applied by multiplying the respondents and their responses from ward x by 0.5

6.5.2 Correcting for an unrepresentative response

Because postal surveys sometimes have a lower response rate than other types of survey, they run the danger of being less representative of particular groups of people or households than interview surveys. Some types of respondents may be more (or less) likely to respond than others, and consequently, their views would be over (or under) represented. To correct for this these responses can be weighted to make them more representative, in the same way as the adjustment for boosting sub-groups explained above.

The higher the response rate the more representative your sample is likely to be. However, it is best to check this, by comparing the make-up of the respondents with that over your overall population.

To weight your data you should examine the information you have for your population as a whole. Unless you currently systematically collect demographic and household data about all your population (or you have recently carried out an interview-based survey that had a very high response rate) you are not likely to have recent robust enough data about your population, to feed into this. Most authorities will only have access to the Census data and area-based data (i.e. percentage of residents living in Ward x, y and so on). Then all you need to do is to run off some frequency tables for the key characteristics which you consider are most important (ethnic groups, gender, age, ward and so on) for the returned questionnaires, and compare them with the profile which resulted from the most recent Census. If the comparison shows that some groups are significantly different from what they are in the Census, you should weight for those sub-groups that are over or under represented.

Calculating the weighting factor

For example, if the Census says that the proportion of women in your authority is 40%, but the proportion of questionnaires returned from women was only 20%, then:

weight = Actual proportion of women for the total population (Census figure)
proportion of women for the returned questionnaires

weight = 40 / 20 = weighting factor of 2

The example below shows how information on important characteristics can be used to weight the responses.

However, in this case if women are under-represented, it must necessarily mean that men are over-represented. Therefore, you also have to give men a weight of 60/80.

The weighting is applied by multiplying women and their responses by 2 and men and their responses by 0.75

6.5.3 Example of Weighting

In this example we imagine that the authority has five main wards, it can be seen that when the questionnaires are returned, it is not representative of the population - far more respondents in Ward 1 and far fewer from Ward 2 than would be expected. Normal practice is to ignore weighting if all the weighting factors are between 0.8 and 1.2. However, in this example most Areas' factors are outside those limits, so it should be used. This is a simplified example. You may want to incorporate other categories, such as gender, ethnicity and age.

Figure 6-2 Working out weighting factors

Stock type	Proportion of residents from Census data (%)	Proportion of all questionnaires returned (%)	Weighting factor
Ward 1	20	29	0.68
Ward 2	30	22	1.36
Ward 3	25	18	1.38
Ward 4	15	17	0.88
Ward 5	10	14	0.71

6.6 Data at the National level

The DETR and Audit Commission (1999a) 2000/2001 Performance Indicators Guidance (see Appendices 7 and 8) asked to send a data file[5] for each of the indicators to the Local and Regional Government Research Unit at the DETR, User Satisfaction BVPIs, 5/D5 Eland House, Bressenden Place, London, SW1E 5DU. The data file will contain all of the survey responses (anonymised). For each respondent the following details will be needed: the social subgroup characteristics (gender, age, employment, occupation, ethnicity, disability and

[5] The data file should be in a format that allows for mathematical calculations to be carried out with the data. For example, simple frequency counts, working out ~~the~~ means and~~, the~~ percentages ~~and so on~~.

postcode) and their answers to all of the questions asked around the indicator/s. The data file will need to be carefully labelled with the authority name, service area that the data covers and an authority contact name.

In some rural areas it will not be possible to send the post-code of the respondent given that one post-code might coincide with one person only. Therefore, in authorities where this may compromise the agreement of anonymity of the respondent authorities can send the Electoral Ward number of the respondent instead.

The following figure provides a guide on when to send the data to the Department:

Figure 6-3 When to send the data to the Department

BVPI no.	Service	Indicator	Data sent by
BVPI 3	Corporate Health	The percentage of citizens satisfied with the overall service provided by their authority.	Last day in March
BVPI4		The percentage of those making complaints satisfied with the handling of those complaints.	Last day in March
BVPI89	Litter	Percentage of people satisfied with cleanliness standards.	Last day in March
BVPI90	Waste	Percentage of survey respondents expressing satisfaction with Recycling Facilities, Household Waste Collection and Civic Amenity Sites.	Last day in March
BVPI103	Transport	Percentage of users satisfied with local provision of public transport information.	Last day in March
BVPI104		Percentage of users satisfied with local bus service.	Last day in March
BVPI119	Culture	The percentage of residents by targeted group satisfied with the local authorities cultural and recreational activities.	Last day in March
BVPI80	Benefits	User satisfaction survey covering issues of accessibility, staffing issues (helpfulness etc.) and communications/ information (understandability etc.)	Last day in March
BVPI111	Planning	Percentage of applicants satisfied with the service received	Last day in July
Other indicators not covered by this guidance:			
BVPI175	Housing	Satisfaction of tenants of council housing with opportunities for participation in management and decision making in relation to housing services provided by their landlord	Last day of April
BVPI174		Satisfaction of tenants of council housing with the overall service provided by their landlord	Last day of April
BVPI118	Culture	The percentage of library users who found the books/information they wanted or reserved it, and were satisfied with the outcome	Last day of March

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS:

- **Consider carefully whether you have the expertise and resources to carry out data entry in-house**
- **Use the standard coding system for coding responses to the questionnaire**
- **Check and clean all the data thoroughly before beginning the inputting**

- **Make the results as representative as possible by using weighting if necessary**

7. ANALYSIS, CALCULATING THE FINAL RATINGS, AND INTERPRETATION

This chapter covers the following topics:

- **Calculating the overall response rate**
- **Specifying how the data is to be analysed**
- **Analysing the data**
- **Calculating the final ratings for the user satisfaction BVPIs**
- **Calculating the confidence interval**
- **Interpreting the results**

7.1 Introduction: specifying the data analysis

Once any weighting of the data has been carried out it is now ready to be analysed. If the authority included other questions not specified by the Government, as discussed in chapter 3, at the outset you should have discussed and reached agreement with stakeholders about what areas or topics the survey report will focus on. At this stage you need to revisit this, and agree what cross tabulations or other outputs are needed. Clearly, if you have contracted out data analysis you need to be certain how much analysis and what type will be provided by your contractors, as part of the discussions around the contract. Any late extras will probably be charged for. If you do it in-house you will have as much or as little freedom to do extra analysis as time allows.

For the nationally set indicators the guidance document specifies how to calculate the final rating for each indicator and the specifications are included in each of the tables.

The final rating should be based on the total number of respondents who answered the question appropriately. For each question there will be people that forget to tick the box (item non-response) or that use a new category which is not in the original question asked such as 'I don't know', these will be treated as 'missing values' and will not be used. Therefore, all of these responses should be excluded from the calculation of the final rating.

Authorities are required to provide the confidence interval and the base number[6] when reporting the results. Authorities will need to give details of all of their efforts to improve response rates and to make the results as representative of the target population as possible.

[6] Base number: is the number of respondents on which the statistic is based.

7.2 Calculating the response rate

The overall response rate achieved can be worked out as follows:

$$\text{Response rate} = \frac{100 * \text{Number of questionnaires returned}}{(\text{Number of people in the sample} - \text{deadwood})}$$

For example an authority may have had a sample size of 1,651 (see section 3.4 on working out the sample size). Of that sample, 100 cases were deadwood and 1050 questionnaires were returned:

$$\text{Response rate} = \frac{100 * 1050}{(1651 - 100)} = 68\ \%\ \text{overall response rate}$$

7.3 Analysing the data

7.3.1 Frequency tables

Frequency tables are an excellent method for illustrating the results for each question in the survey. Because they are easy and quick to produce, and contain the basic information to draw results from, they are usually produced for all of the questions in the questionnaire. They should contain both simple counts and percentage information. Ideally one percentage column in the table should exclude 'missing values' so that the percentages shown are those of the number that actually answered the question. A frequency table would look as follows:

Figure 7-1 Example of a Frequency table

How satisfied or dissatisfied are you that <name of authority> has fulfilled its duty to keep this land clear of litter and refuse QA1:

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Very satisfied (1)	101	7.0	7.1
Fairly satisfied (2)	300	20.9	21.0
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (3)	500	34.8	34.9
Fairly dissatisfied (4)	480	33.4	33.6
Very dissatisfied (5)	36	2.5	2.5
I don't know (9)	13	0.9	0.9
Missing value (99)	5	0.3	
Total	1435	100	1430

Key:
Frequency: is the actual number of people or cases who gave that response in particular
Valid percentage: does not count missing values. This is the percentage which is normally reported. In this case due to the small number of missing values, it does not affect the percentages much.

7.3.2 Cross-tabulations

Cross-tabulations or 'cross tabs' are tables in which the responses to a question are compared to

responses from other questions, or information on the type of respondent. For example, a you may wish to analyse satisfaction by different ethnic groups, work status or age groups. Viewing the results in this way can bring to light any significant differences in the responses of these different types of respondent.

Cross-tabs can also be used to illustrate relationships between the answers to different questions. For example, there may often be a relationship between satisfaction with how the local authority runs things and one or all of the service areas. An example of a typical cross-tabulation for this survey is given below.

Figure 7-2 - Example of cross-tabulation: QA1 x QK3[7]

How satisfied or dissatisfied are you that <name of local authority> has fulfilled its duty to keep this land clear of litter and refuse (QA1) x Which of these activities best describes what you are doing at present (QK3)

Total		Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	I don't know	*Base No.= No. of people*
All Categories	%	16	40	20	15	6	2	*1153*
Employee in full-time job (30 hours plus)	%	11	38	23	18	9	0	*201*
Employee in part-time job (under 30 hours)	%	16	39	20	18	5	3	*127*
Self employed full or part-time	%	22	50	11	17	0	0	*109*
On a Government supported training programme	%	25	49	0	0	25	0	*29*
Full-time education at school, college…	%	31	26	26	11	0	5	*284*
Unemployed and available for work	%	0	46	11	22	22	0	*35*
Permanently sick/disabled	%	12	23	21	22	22	0	*11*
Wholly retired from work	%	28	31	14	12	6	9	*120*
Looking after the home	%	10	51	20	13	2	4	*226*
Doing something else	%	12	23	21	22	22	0	*11*

When deciding what cross-tabulations to run, remember the base numbers you will be dealing with. If the base number for one of the subgroups is very small e.g. Permanently sick/disabled (11 cases) you will not be able to carry out statistical tests between this group and another group. There are several rules of thumb of how big your subgroups have to be before statistical analysis can be carried out or even before you can safely say that one group seems to be different to the other. Some say it should be more than 30 cases per sub-group, others 50 to 100. Therefore, in the above example it would be advisable not to make any inferences about the 'permanently sick/disabled' subgroup as the base number is very low. Cross-tabulations can run across rows, down columns, or both. In the example above they are designed to run across the row.

You may be tempted to find out as much as possible and therefore to request numerous cross-

[7] QA1 x QK3 is read as percentages of QA1within categories of QK3

tabulations. Before finalising the specific data analysis you want, ask yourself for each potential cross-tabulation you may request - "What will this data tell me, and how important is it ?"

Divide your answers into the following categories:

- essential to know
- interesting to know
- unimportant

Your data specification should include all cross-tabs that fall into the "essential to know" category and only those in the "interesting to know" category if you think they will be useful.

You should also make sure that the tables will be accessible and easy to read. You should ensure that tables make the following clear:

- the wording of the question and the relevant question number
- headings for the categories of answer and cross-breaks
- who answered each question (e.g. if routing has been used)
- the base number - respondents answering the categories in each cross-break
- the percentage of 'don't knows'
- sometimes the authority may want to show missing values (the percentage of missing answers to each question or cross-break). In Figure 7.2 there is no column for missing values, therefore it understood that these have been taken out of the percentage (thus, 100% is formed only by very satisfied, fairly satisfied, neither, fairly dissatisfied, very dissatisfied and I don't know). In the calculating the final ratings section some indicators clearly specify *% stating that they are very or fairly satisfied (the percentage should be worked out so that the first five categories form 100%: very satisfied, fairly satisfied, neithe, fairly dissatisfied, very dissatisfied, thus, excluding those that said I don't know) with he authority's fulfilment of its duty to keep relevant land clear of litter and refuse' (see page 112 of DETR and Audit Commission (1999a) 2000/2001 Performance Indicators Guidance- see Appendices 7 and 8).* Therefore, taking figure 7.2 we need to work out 100% excluding 'I don't know' as follows:

Figure 7-3- Example of frequency table: QA1 excluding 'I don't know'

How satisfied or dissatisfied are you that <name of local authority> has fulfilled its duty to keep this land clear of litter and refuse (QA1)

Total		**Very satisfied**	**Fairly satisfied**	**Neither**	**Fairly dissatisfied**	**Very dissatisfied**	*Base No.=No. of people*
All Categories	%	16	**41**	**21**	15	6	***1130***

In the above example given that those that said 'I don't know' was a very small percentage (2%) it does not make very much difference to the previous percentages.

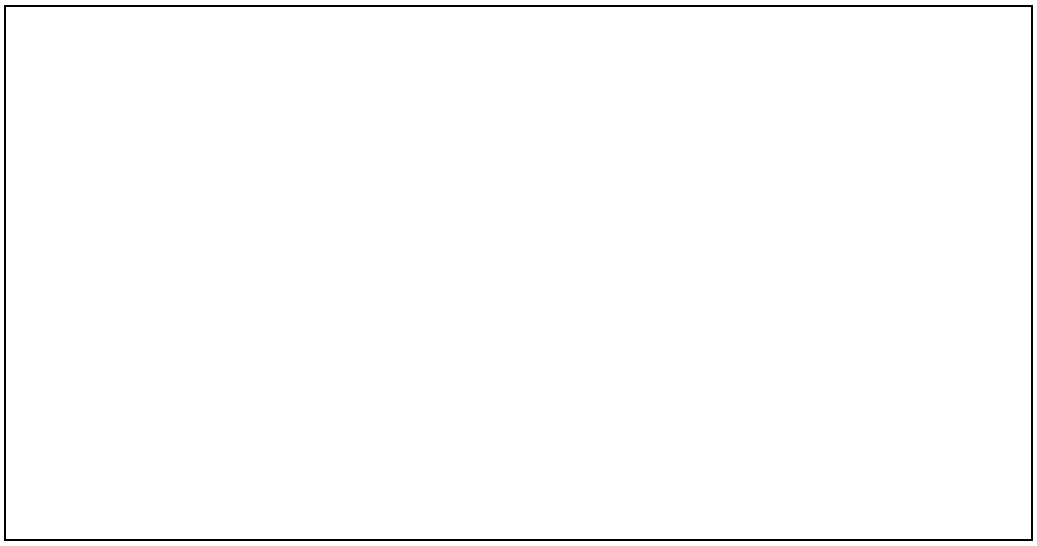
A further issue to point out is that tables of percentages due to rounding sometimes do not

exactly add up to 100%.

7.3.3 Using charts and graphs

Although tables can provide excellent detailed information, they can be time consuming and difficult for some people to use leading to the risk of key results and trends being overlooked. You can use of charts to complement the information gained from cross-tabs by displaying responses visually, allowing the reader to quickly or more easily observe trends or differences. Most research packages provide chart facilities for displaying results. Figure 7.4 below gives an example of a chart.

Figure 7-4 Histogram



7.4 Calculating the final ratings for the user satisfaction BVPIs

There are several frequencies and cross-tabulations that will be needed to satisfy the requirements of the user satisfaction BVPIs. The following table illustrates the analysis (frequencies and cross-tabulations) that the authority will need to carry out:

Figure 7-5 General survey – calculating the final ratings				
BVPI no.	**Service**	**Indicator**	**Calculating final ratings**	**Frequencies/cross-tabulations to report in the performance plans**
BVPI 3	Corporate Health	The percentage of citizens satisfied with the overall service provided by their authority.	% stating that they are very or fairly satisfied with the way the authority runs things (module 2)	Frequency valid percentage of answers to QI: % very satisfied + % fairly satisfied (show base No. + confidence interval) *It is recommended that the following figures are also published in the performance plan:* % neither (show base No.) % fairly dissatisfied + % very dissatisfied (show base No.)
BVPI4		The percentage of those making complaints satisfied with the handling of those complaints.	% stating that they are very or fairly satisfied with the way in which the complaint(s) was(were) handled.	Frequency valid percentage of answers to QJ3: % very satisfied + % fairly satisfied (show base No. + confidence interval) *It is recommended that the following figures are also published in the performance plan:* % neither (show base No.) % fairly dissatisfied + % very dissatisfied (show base No.)
BVPI89	Litter	Percentage of people satisfied with cleanliness standards.	% stating that they are very or fairly satisfied (the percentage should be worked out so that the first five categories form 100%: very satisfied, fairly satisfied, neither, fairly dissatisfied, very dissatisfied, thus, excluding those that said I don't know) with the authority's fulfillment of its duty to keep relevant land clear of litter and refuse.	Frequency: valid percentage of answers to QA1 excluding 'I don't know' so that the first five categories form 100%: % very satisfied + % fairly satisfied (show base No. + confidence interval) *It is recommended that the following figures are also published in the performance plan:* % neither (show base No.) % fairly dissatisfied + % very dissatisfied (show base No.)

<table>
<tr>
<td>BVPI90</td>
<td>Waste</td>
<td>Percentage of survey respondents expressing satisfaction with Recycling Facilities, Household Waste Collection and Civic Amenity Sites.</td>
<td>% stating that they are very or fairly satisfied with the waste collection service overall

% stating that they are very or fairly satisfied with the provision of recycling facilities overall

% stating that they are very or fairly satisfied with the civic amenity site service overall</td>
<td>Frequency: valid percentage of answers to a) QB6, b) QC4, c) QD7:

% very satisfied + % fairly satisfied (show base No. + confidence interval)

It is recommended that the following figures are also published in the performance plan:
% neither (show base No.)
% fairly dissatisfied + % very dissatisfied (show base No.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BVPI103</td>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>Percentage of users satisfied with local provision of public transport information.</td>
<td>% stating that they are very or fairly satisfied with:
The provision of public transport information overall.

Separate statistics should be provided for:
The overall sample (‘total’)
Those who have received or seen some information (‘have seen info’)
Those who have not received or seen any information (‘have not seen info’)</td>
<td>Cross-tabulation: valid percentage cross-tabulation of QE 1d “The provision of public transport overall” x QE 2 “Have you received or seen any of the information that we provide on public transport services in the last 12 months”

<table>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td>Very satis</td><td>Fairly</td><td>…</td><td>Base No..</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>Have not seen info
Have seen info
Total</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>Base number</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
</table>
% very satisfied + % fairly satisfied (show base No. + confidence interval)

It is recommended that the following figures are also published in the performance plan:
% neither (show base No.)
% fairly dissatisfied + % very dissatisfied (show base No.)</td>
</tr>
</table>

BVPI104		Percentage of users satisfied with local bus services.	% stating that they are very or fairly satisfied with: The local bus service overall Separate statistics must be provided for: The overall sample (excluding those that said they did not know whether they used the service or not) Users within the last year (users are respondents to; almost everyday, at least once a week, at least once a month, within the last 6 months and within the last year) Non users (non users are respondents to; longer ago and never used)	Cross-tabulation: valid percentage cross-tabulation of QF1e "Please indicate whether you are dissatisfied with each of the following elements of the local bus service whether you normally use the bus or not: the local bus service overall" x QF 2 "How frequently, if at all, do you use the local bus service". Before carrying out the cross-tabulation, those that said they did not know whether they used the service or not should be excluded from the analysis (treated as missing values). % very satisfied + % fairly satisfied (show base No. + confidence interval) *It is recommended that the following figures are also published in the performance plan:* % neither (show base No.) % fairly dissatisfied + % very dissatisfied (show base No.)
BVPI119	Culture	The percentage of residents by targeted group satisfied with the local authorities cultural and recreational activities.	% stating that they are very or fairly satisfied with each of the following: Sports/leisure facilities Libraries Museums/galleries Theatres/concert halls Parks/open spaces Within each of the above services separate statistics (percentages of very/fairly satisfied) should be provided for the overall group, for users and non-users. All of the respondents (excluding those that did not know whether they used the service or not) Users within the last year (users are respondents to; Almost everyday, at least once a week, at least once a month, within the last 6 months and within the last year) Non users (non users are respondents to; longer ago and never used)	Cross-tabulation: valid percentage cross-tabulation of : QG6a x QG1 (satis sports/leisure facilities x frequency of use) QG6b x QG2 (satis libraries x frequency of use) QG6c x QG3 (satis Museums/galleries x frequency of use) QG6d x QG4 (satis Theatres/concert halls x frequency of use) QG6e x QG5 (satis Parks/open spaces x frequency of use) Before carrying out the cross-tabulation, those that said they did not know whether they used the service or not should be excluded from the analysis (treated as missing values). % very satisfied + % fairly satisfied (show base No. + confidence interval) *It is recommended that the following figures are also published in the performance plan:* % neither (show base No.) % fairly dissatisfied + % very dissatisfied (show base No.)

			Data from indicator BVPI 3 of those satisfied or very satisfied with "…cultural and recreational services" will be reported as part of indicator BVPI119. Separate statistics should be provided for: % of people satisfied/very satisfied with the service overall (all of the respondents) % of respondents from ethnic minority communities satisfied/very satisfied overall, whether they are users or not. Ethnic minority is defined by those respondents who belong to sections b, c, d, or e of the ethnicity question section 4.2.3. % of non-ethnic minority people satisfied/very satisfied – non ethnic minorities is defined by those respondents who belong to section 'a'. % of women satisfied/very satisfied % of men satisfied/very satisfied	Cross-tabulation: valid percentage cross-tabulation of : QH7 x QK6 (satis cultural/recreational services x ethnic group) QH7 x QK1 (satis cultural/recreational services x gender) % very satisfied + % fairly satisfied (show base No. + confidence interval) *It is recommended that the following figures are also published in the performance plan:* % neither (show base No.) % fairly dissatisfied + % very dissatisfied (show base No.)

7.4.1 Statistical calculations

Most authorities, however, will want to carry out a more comprehensive study of the results, computer packages can perform a range of statistical calculations on the data. For these purposes the use of means (usually known as averages), medians (the point at which half the answers fall on either side), totals and frequencies are normally enough to analyse the results.

7.5 Calculating the 'confidence interval'

The Government has set up the maximum requirement for the confidence interval around each of the indicators. The maximum confidence interval applies to the total achieved number of responses on a specific question. When analysing subgroups, such as; users – non users; women-men and so on, the authority needs to work out and report the confidence interval but the Government has not set up a maximum confidence interval around subgroups.

The confidence interval is also called the '*margin of error*'. In other publications it is called '*sampling error*', however, many argue that it should not be called sampling error as it does not measure unknown sampling errors or biases such as non response bias, selection bias or biasing effects due to seasonal variations.

As explained in chapter 3 there is a widely used formula for the calculation of confidence intervals, however, it assumes that the sample was drawn as a simple random sample. This formula is often used as a rule of thumb for all types of sample. Therefore, if the sample was drawn using other more complex sampling techniques such as stratification or clustering, authorities may want to consider getting an statistician to work out the confidence interval more accurately. The following table shows an example of how to calculate the confidence interval using the above mention rule of thumb:

Figure 7-6 Calculation of the confidence interval

Step 1. Once we have carried out the survey, we know the number of respondents on which responses are based and the proportions of people who said one thing or the other. For example, to question A1 once we exclude those that answered 'they did not know' we could have found that there were 1200 respondents to that question and that, 36% of them said that they were 'very/fairly satisfied' with the service and 64% said that they were 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, fairly dissatisfied or very dissatisfied'. Then we simply use a formula to work out the standard error (SE).

$$SE = \sqrt{(\text{proportion} * \text{proportion}) / n}$$

$$SE = \sqrt{(36 * 64) / 1200}$$

$$SE = \sqrt{2304 / 1200}$$

$$SE = \sqrt{2304 / 1200}$$

SE = 1.4

Step 2. Once we know what the standard error is, we use another simple formula to find out what the confidence interval is:

Confidence interval	=	standard error of a mean (SE)	*	confidence level (1.96 constant for a 95% confidence level)
CI	=	1.4	*	1.96
CI	**=**	**±2.7%**		

Therefore, we can be 95% confident that 36% (±2.7%) of the population are very satisfied/ fairly satisfied with the service provided. The real figure in the population probably lies within the 33.3% to 38.7% range.

Key:
n = size of the sample or size of interviews or questionnaires that need to be completed
SE = Standard error of the mean is the standard deviation of the means in a sampling distribution.
Sampling distribution = a theoretical distribution of sample results (means, proportions and so on) that would result from drawing all possible samples of a fixed size from a particular population.
Variance= the sum of the squared deviation from the sample mean over n.

7.6 Interpreting the data

When presenting and analysing the results you can use the tables and charts to give you the statistical findings. Your authority will probably want to see further interpretation and conclusions than those required by the Government. It is therefore crucial that you ensure any interpretation is soundly justified by the results

As a guide to drawing conclusions that are justified and valid you should keep the following suggestions in mind:

- always be aware of the number of responses underlying any particular question. Percentages on their own can be misleading, particularly when looking at sub-groups which may involve small numbers and / or many ' missing values'. If you feel you cannot be confident of an interpretation, but still want to flag it up, give it a 'health warning'

- be careful to differentiate between factual information (e.g. gender, income, employment) and opinions (e.g. satisfaction levels). The views of the public expressed are not the same as facts. It is important to bear in mind that not all the people have the same expectations of the service. The authority may consider carrying out some qualitative research with some of the respondents to find out more about the motivation behind their answer.

- look for patterns in the data - do older residents tend to be more satisfied with more services than younger respondents for example ? or specific ethnic groups?

- look for lower levels of satisfaction and higher levels of dissatisfaction - it may make gloomier reading, but one of the main purposes of running a survey is to identify and

improve problems areas.

- record only the results that the analysis demonstrates. You should avoid assumptions about the reasons for residents' responses or personal opinions. For example, if you find that an ethnic group that shows significant dissatisfaction compared with other ethnic groups with their area, you should highlight this fact, but you cannot make any assumptions about why this is the case. Only further study through alternative feedback methods will begin to unravel what the causes are likely to be.

- you should take into account any major or significant changes in service delivery which may have impacted on the responses, but again it is important not to draw conclusions on the basis of this evidence alone. You may want to refer to them in the introduction, or as part of a policy discussion in the report.

- information about residents views and perceptions represent their current situation only. Expectations of standards of service are not fixed and will generally rise over time. An increase in dissatisfaction may be partly due to residents expecting more from the services that are provided. This is not to say that those expectations should not be met, but that an authority should be aware that they will change over time.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS:

- **consider carefully whether you have the expertise and resources to carry out data analysis in-house**

- **Specify data analysis tables which are useful and relevant**

- **Ensure your interpretation of the data is based on the findings only and not on opinion or speculation**

8. BEYOND COLLECTING DATA FOR THE BVPIs - REPORTING AND ACTING ON THE RESULTS

This chapter covers the following topics:

- **Communicating the findings**
- **Acting on the findings**
- **Comparing the results**
- **Linking the survey with other feedback methods**

8.1 Introduction

Having completed the survey you will want to make full use of the results. At the planning stage of the survey you should have already:

- drawn up a strategy for communicating the results
- begun building an action plan, to review and improve service provision, in the context of the survey results.
- considered how the results could be benchmark or compared with other authorities and across service areas
- planned how to link the survey findings to other feedback and consultation methods, and considered what additional techniques may be needed.

8.2 Communicating the findings

8.2.1 The survey report

You need to collate the key findings into a comprehensive report. The report is the major product of the survey and will form the source from which action plans, summaries, presentations or articles will be produced.

You will want to involve your steering group in considering drafts of the report, and recommending emphasising particular areas or topics of concern .

The report needs to give all the relevant information from the survey and communicate the key findings in a concise and easily understood manner. The audience for the report will be very broad and may have little or no experience of research or surveys. You should ensure therefore that the main body of the report avoids technical terminology and jargon as much as possible. If technical terms are used, they should be explained fully. Use some - but not too many - diagrams and charts to communicate the findings. Specialised information about drawing the

sample, working out the confidence intervals and so on can be included as an appendix.

It is important that the report is kept objective, all good and bad news should be disclosed – areas where the authority is doing well and areas where the authority is not doing so well. The report should not cover information about how the authority is going to tackle problems of dissatisfaction, this belongs to further communications and information in which the local authority will tackle these issues.

The normal contents would be:

- **An 'executive summary'** (a synopsis of the key findings) at the beginning of the report is useful for those who do not have time or inclination to read the whole report . It can also act as a means for re-enforcing critical conclusions and can act as a means for attracting people into the main text

- **An introduction**: the report needs to begin by explaining the objectives of the survey. It should give the practical details of when the questionnaire was sent out, sample size and the level of response.

- **A profile of your respondents**: the next section will usually give a profile of the respondents. This provides a context for the report. This needs to include details of ethnic origin, household type, age, incomes, benefits and work status.

- **The results of the opinion questions**: This is usually done by grouping various themes or topics, for example following the questionnaire sections. The results can then be displayed using easy-to-read summary tables or charts. It is important not to use any original frequency or cross tabulation tables as these will may contain confusing statistics or terms.

- **A summary or conclusion chapter** : bringing together the key findings. It can alert the reader to areas of service delivery that may need to be addressed. It should also highlight any need for additional research that you have identified. If you have carried out other forms of feedback in parallel with the survey these should be tied in here.

- **An action plan**: if possible, it should conclude with an action plan to address the areas of concern.

8.2.2 Other types of report

It may sometimes be necessary and useful to write a **preliminary report** containing some of the more important findings, especially if there is urgent interest in these and the full report cannot be produced in time for, for example, a Board meeting. Initial tables and results will usually be available as soon as the data has been cleaned and weighted. A preliminary report also helps to maintain interest in the project. This report should state that the results are preliminary, advice

about disclosing any details at this early stage and whether any of the results are likely to change when the full report is produced.

A **free-standing executive summary** can be a useful way of communicating the results to those who are unable or unwilling to read the full report. Ideally this should be around four pages in length, and written in a clear and simple style which a wide range of people will understand. It is very good practice to send a copy of the executive summary to the respondents. This will not only encourage them to participate again, but it will also make them feel more involved in the process of improving their area.

8.3 Subcontracting the report writing

Writing a thorough report takes time and requires a good understanding of the survey and of what the results are saying. If your organisation feels that because of the time demands of report writing, you are unable to complete this task in-house, you can contract this work out. If a contractor is chosen it is important that they have at least some understanding of the organisation, as well as some experience in writing reports on satisfaction surveys. You will find that you need to spend a lot of time briefing and providing information to the contractor, and then commenting on report drafts, as a contractor new to the project has a steep learning curve to climb. Your brief must be full and include:

- the purpose of the survey, and issues of particular interest to the authority
- a detailed plan for the contents of the report
- the expected length of the report
- the need for plain English that is easily read by a wide audience
- whether or not an executive summary is required
- a timescale to carry out the report, and be aware of any urgent meetings or forums for which it will need to be available for

8.4 Distributing the results

Once the survey report has been completed it is time to distribute and disseminate the findings to all those with an interest. The planning process described in Chapter 2 should have clarified the different audiences that might have an interest in the survey findings and decided how the results should be communicated. This plan should now be reviewed, and decisions taken on how and when the findings will be made available to them.

Examples of audiences who may have an interest in the results include:

- residents

- staff
- Management Board(s), members or committee members
- DETR, LGA, IDeA
- members of a benchmarking group
- partner organisations as part of any group structure
- other local agencies
- local and specialist press

As the list above illustrates, the audiences will vary greatly. They will have very different levels of knowledge, expertise, and will want very different things from the survey. The project manager and steering group should carefully consider the most appropriate means of presenting the results to particular audiences. Some ideas are:

- articles or features in resident or staff newsletters
- details mentioned in the authority's annual report and Report to Residents
- presentations or reports made available at resident and business meetings or conferences
- results presented at staff conferences or training days
- use of exhibitions and roadshows
- the use of local press or radio
- information or the summary made available on the organisations web site
- articles included in other corporate literature

Every organisation would like the survey findings to give positive news about their services. Positive aspects of the service given by residents should be disclosed. On the other hand, a report that glosses over failures and poor standards will be dismissed as a public relations exercise by readers - and especially by residents. Where your survey has discovered weak areas, do not conceal them, but highlight the measures you are taking to improve things. This should be backed up with a strategy for monitoring and reporting back on service improvements, in the spirit of Best Value.

8.5 Acting on the findings

The results should help you identify some key service-delivery issues. In some instances they are likely to throw up more questions than answers, and prompt further qualitative research to unpick the issue. In other cases you may decide that you want to address several issues en masse and report back to residents rapidly. Your course of action will depend on the resources available to you and the need for any action to fit within a corporate Best Value strategy.

Whatever your approach, you should always develop an action plan based on the survey findings. Apart from anything else, it acts as a prompt to ensure you translate the resources you have put into the survey into service improvements. The full report is a good base from which to start action planning. Some key areas to consider are:

- any particular areas of dissatisfaction common to all groups of residents
- any high levels of dissatisfaction that are particular to certain types of residents
- any particular areas for dissatisfaction which are surprising
- any particular areas where satisfaction is high and the lessons to be learnt from this
- what is realistic for your organisation to change and where you need to co-operate with others (e.g. dissatisfaction with the authority, waste, transport etc).
- link the information with other PIs around the service area and try to unpick relationships of satisfaction/ dissatisfaction with the other indicators.
- the likely timescale to carry out any action needed. There may be good reasons immediate action on a particular aspect of service delivery is not appropriate. If so explain why this is the case, and how and when this area will be addressed.
- who will be carrying out any action, whether it be staff, members, other agencies or organisations or all.
- ensuring the linkages with the Best Value service review and performance planning process are tight.

Your senior management and Board or committee members will be the key people who make the decisions involving resources. In particular, in the context of Best Value, residents need to be involved in setting priorities for action, and in implementing them.

8.5.1 Involving residents

Below are some suggestions for involving residents:

- arrange meetings or workshop sessions to discuss the findings. Focus groups can be useful here. They can use the findings as a starting point for discussion and developing explanations for particular results. These groups can also highlight further the priorities identified by them and what issues or details may have been missed from the survey findings.

- present the key findings at a resident's conference and gain further feedback. This can also be used as a forum to show residents that their views are being taken on board and that action will follow as a result of this. Publicise the outcomes of the conference.

- use existing established resident groups or panels to come up with suggestions for service improvement following the survey results. These suggestions could then feed back into the organisation's performance plans.

- use articles in the residents' newsletter to prompt further suggestions from residents about action to be taken

When discussing solutions for action with residents, you should make them aware of the budgetary, practical and regulatory constraints facing the organisation. This will help concentrate residents input on areas that have a greater likelihood of being carried through, and avoid

falsely-heightened expectations.

8.5.2 Involving staff

Team meetings, staff conferences and staff working groups can all be useful in helping to formulate performance and action plans. Each section of the report should be worked through to address areas for action and how they could be taken forward. Brainstorming sessions on what 'quick wins' are possible are useful. As with residents, senior management needs to make it clear about what is and is not possible within resource constraints.

Whatever the approach taken, it is important that your organisation addresses the issues together and takes collective responsibility for the service improvements required. If staff or particular divisions of the organisation feel that they 'own' the plans they will feel motivated to implement them.

8.6 Comparing the results

To give added depth and context to the results, you need to compare the results from your survey with other similar data for your authority, other authorities or at national level.

8.6.1 Comparing results with earlier research in your organisation

Many authorities will already have undertaken research on the levels of resident satisfaction of services. Generally, comparisons between surveys are of limited use, because of different questions asked and different methods used. However, if you have carried out similar research in the past, it is helpful to have reference to it in performance planning and publications, to give context to new results from. Another starting point can be national levels of satisfaction with services from the Peoples' panel (peoples.panel@mori.com or Tel. 0171 9285955) or from "Revisiting Perceptions of Local Government: A decade of change?" London: DETR (2000) from which many of the questions were taken (DETR Publications Sales Centre Tel. 01709 891318)

Often satisfaction survey results can be very similar using very different types of feedback techniques. Demonstrating these similarities will add weight to the results. Widely different results may call into question the accuracy of earlier feedback methods.

The best form of comparison is to repeat the survey. At present, the Government requires that the collection of data for the BVPIs happens every three years, commencing in 2000/2001. You may want to carry out the surveys more often, however, consideration needs to be paid to the possibility of saturating the residents willingness to cooperate. Also, if residents can not see changes year on year it may cause cynicism and reduced enthusiasm for involvement.

8.7 Benchmarking

8.7.1 Internal benchmarking

The standardised nature of the questions makes it a powerful resource for benchmarking satisfaction. Benchmarking is the process of comparing performance in order to seek best practice. This is usually done by using simple performance indicators as 'can openers' to help focus on underlying processes that make good or poor performance.

Comparisons can be made by an organisation with itself over time, between different departments or divisions of the organisation, or between different organisations. Benchmarking has become an increasingly popular way to measure performance and is an integral part of the Best Value framework.

Internal benchmarking can be used for the following:

- to measure changes in the authority's satisfaction over time
- to establish whether a change in practice has led to service or resident satisfaction improvements
- to compare the performance of different area offices or departments or divisions

Repeating the survey will allow measurement of changes in resident satisfaction over time. This may in turn illustrate whether any policy or action changes have impacted on residents perceptions of the services provided. Comparing performance across area offices, or departments or divisions can help identify areas within the organisation where lessons can be learned. However, you should be careful when making direct comparisons between area offices or divisions. Very different factors may be present. For instance, an area office covering a particularly deprived area may face very different challenges in carrying out its work than another area office operating in a comparatively better off area. Issues such as these should be borne in mind before drawing conclusions and extending good practice throughout the organisation.

8.7.2 External benchmarking

Benchmarking clubs are used to compare performance across organisations. Their main aims are:

- to share information about performance and practice
- understand why performance between various providers varies
- to identify those aspects of service provision that are contributing to under-performance or which are not providing value for money
- to identify processes and practices that will help improve performance

If you are looking to join or set up a benchmarking club you should check that potential members share common characteristics and face similar challenges.

8.8 Linking the survey to other feedback methods

Although the questionnaire will provide a wide range of information on the views of an organisation's residents, some may wish to go into more detail about why residents are expressing the views they have. If these additional methods do not exist, the reporting stage of the survey presents an opportunity for the organisation promote further work.

The findings from are likely to bring up issues which your organisation may want to explore further. Some examples of these are given below:

- particularly high or low satisfaction found in an area or ward may require further attention or study
- you may want to change a particular aspect of the service as a result of the survey, and you will need more detailed feedback from residents on the pros and cons of doing this.
- you may be interested in using qualitative methods such as focus groups to get residents to provide ideas for change
- you may want to find out the reasons for differences in views of different groups of residents

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS:

- **the survey report should be objective, well structured, give the relevant information even if it is bad news, give key findings and be easy to read.**
- **communicate the results appropriately to different audiences.**
- **develop an action plan firmly linked in to the Best Value review and performance planning model**
- **involve and inform residents and staff of the action to be taken and the timetable for implementation**
- **implement your plans**
- **benchmark internally and externally, and develop a time-series of survey results**
- **explore options for building on the information obtained from the survey**

SECTION II – TELEPHONE SURVEYS

9. TELEPHONE SURVEYS

This chapter covers the following topics:

- **telephone surveys in context**
- **planning and managing a telephone survey**

9.1 Telephone surveys in context

For the collection of data on some of the indicators an authority may consider the use of a telephone survey. At the outset you will need to weigh up the strengths and weaknesses of telephone surveys. For most of the indicators, carrying out a telephone survey would not be viable, for example, for the general survey it would not be advisable to carry out a telephone survey, since it would be near impossible to assess if everyone in the authority had an equal chance of selection. However, for some of the specific surveys, for example, planning, the authority may have a contact number for each of the applicants, this would constitute a very good sampling frame.

9.1.1 The advantages of a telephone survey

- **Cost –** telephone surveys tend to be more expensive than postal surveys but cheaper than face to face surveys. Some argue that beyond a certain sample size telephone surveys become just as cost effective as postal surveys.
- **Response rates –** they can produce higher response rates than postal surveys
- **Complexity –** the questionnaires can be relatively complex if interviewers are trained appropriately.
- **Relatively quick field work –** the telephone survey fieldwork can be done in a relatively short time, however, this is not always the case. In many occasions the telephone interviewer has to call the respondent up to 10 times until contact is made.
- **Supervision** – telephone interviewers are easier to supervise than face to face interviewers given that they are normally in a telephone unit.
- **Identity of the respondent** – when the sample has been pre-selected from a data file there is more guarantee, than with postal questionnaires that this individual will be the one that answered the questions.
- **Can reach isolated areas at no extra cost**
- **Can use CATI** (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) whereby the telephone interviewer will key in the answers straight into a computer.
- **Use of proxy respondents –** in occasions where the selected respondent is elderly or their disability does not allow them to respond other people may respond on their behalf.

However, if proxy respondents are used this should be annotated in the questionnaire and in the resulting database of responses.

9.1.2 Weaknesses of telephone surveys

- **limited number of questions** – it is not recommended that telephone surveys should last for more than 15 minutes.
- **Coverage problem** – many people still do not have a telephone, particularly among socially excluded groups.
- **Specialised interviewers** – telephone interviews are very difficult to manage, specially if using CATI. Therefore authorities will either need to train a group of their staff to do interviews solidly for the fieldwork period or will have to contract out the work to specialised interviewing companies.
- **Can't use visual aids**
- **Complex explanations –** telephone questionnaires are not recommended where complex explanations need to be recited to the respondent on the telephone. A way around this is to send background information in the post and allow the respondent a few days to read it before interviewing him/her.
- **excluding groups** - because of the nature of surveys some groups or individuals may be excluded or under-represented. In some cases the interviewers can be briefed so that when they come across a non-English speaker a translator can be brought in to carry out the interview.

9.2 Planning and management of the project

The principles covered in *Basis of the project*, *Involving, informing staff and residents (or target population)* and *Managing the project* would be the same as in chapter 2. The stages of the project, however, would vary slightly.

9.2.1 Stages of the project

When planning to run the survey the project manager should be aware of the tasks that will have to be undertaken at various stages of the project, and how long they are likely to take. Figure 9-1 illustrates the main stages of the project, the respective tasks which need to be undertaken at each stage.

Figure 9-1 The main stages telephone survey

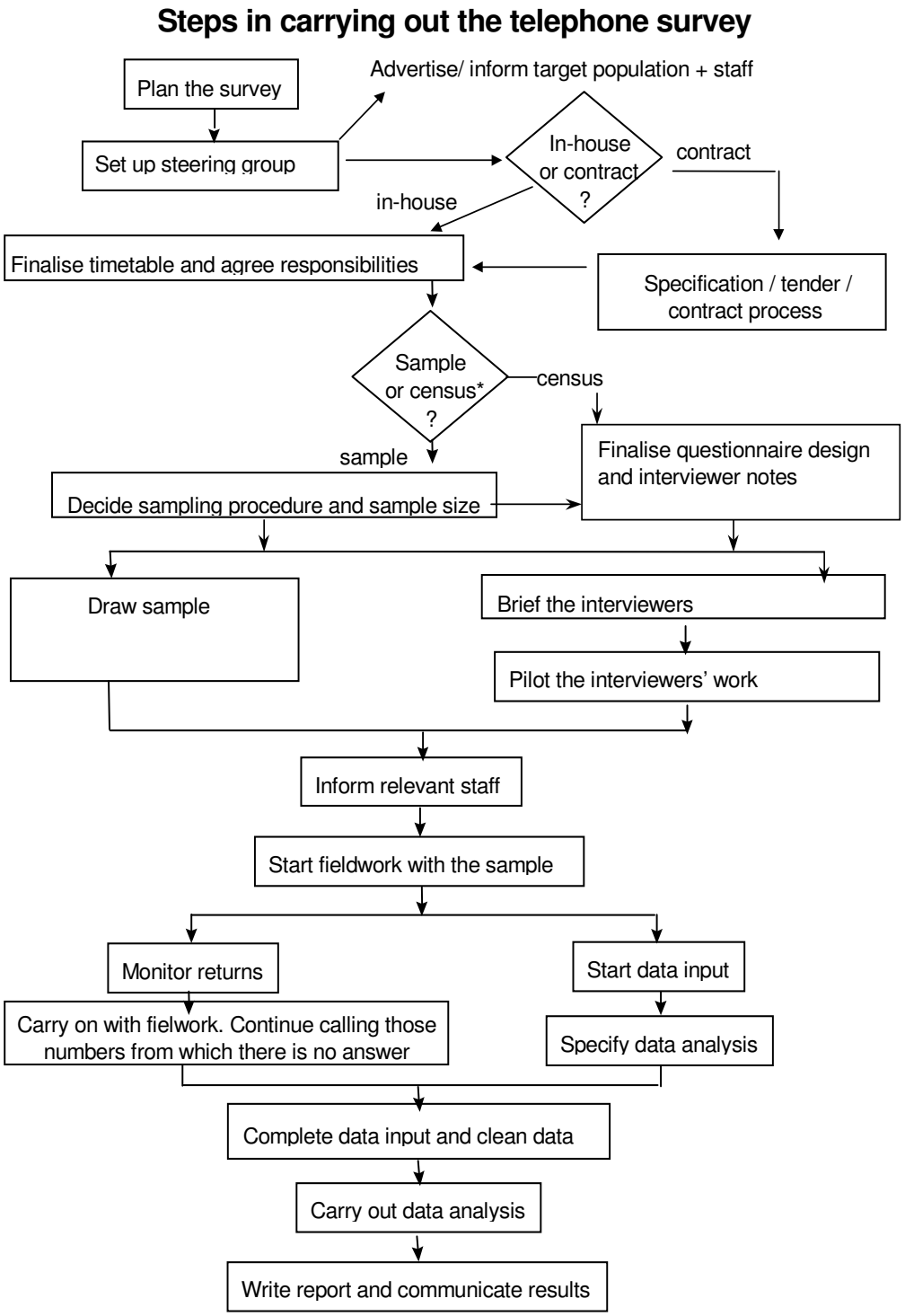
SURVEY STAGES	TASKS
1. Planning	Deciding whether to contract out or not, creating a steering group, identifying the processes involved, raising awareness, determining resources

2. Sampling	Deciding on a sampling method and a sample size, and drawing the sample Setting up the database, booking the telephone unit, preparing interviewer notes.
3. Field work questionnaire:	Monitoring progress
4. Data inputting	Inputting the completed questionnaires into a computer file. (not necessary if using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing)
5. Data analysis and interpretation	Manipulating the data into tables, cross tabs etc., and interpreting the results
6. Comparative data analysis	Comparing the results of the survey with other authorities
7. Communicating the results	Writing up the report and/or summary report, distributing the findings, follow through of action plan

Figure 9-2 Steps in carrying out the telephone survey

The figure below shows how these various tasks may overlap and flow throughout the life of the project. It assumes that you will decide whether or not to contract out all or part of the work; clearly who carries out later tasks will depend on whether contractors or your own organisation are doing the work.

*Census: means 100% sample of the target population



9.2.2 Estimating the time required

It is important to be as accurate and as realistic as possible in estimating the amount of time the survey process is likely to take. Delays at any stage in the process can mean crucial dates for the results of the survey being missed. An element of flexibility should be built into the planning process to allow for such setbacks.

Figure 9-3 Example of time-table for planning survey

March	**Plan survey**
	Set up steering group
	Advertise/target population – on-going process
	Decide whether to do the field work, data input and data analysis in-house or contract out
First sampling window	
April	Start preparing the list for the first sampling window 1 (in-house work)
	Write specification
	Tender
May	Carryon with the list of applicants – sampling window 1
	Contract out
	Agree responsibilities
	Decide sampling procedure
	Specify data analysis
	Questionnaire design and interviewer brief – CATI programme ready or paper copies ready
	Start Pilot
June	Carryon with the list of applicants – sampling window 1
July	First week delete all duplicates from list, set out the sample (or census)
	hand the data file to the contractor (or interviewer)
	Inform relevant staff
	First 3 weeks in July commence the field work – monitor returns
Second sampling window	
July	Start list of applicants for sampling window 2
August	Carryon with the list of applicants – sampling window 2
September	Carryon with the list of applicants – sampling window 2
October	First week delete all duplicates from list (including any people that already appeared in sampling window 1)
	Inform relevant staff
	First 3 weeks in October commence the fieldwork – monitor returns
Third sampling window	
October	Start list of applicants for sampling window 3
November	Carryon with the list of applicants – sampling window 3
December	Carryon with the list of applicants – sampling window 3
January	First week delete all duplicates from list (including any people that
(In year one authorities	already appeared in sampling window 1 or 2)
may choose to publish	Inform relevant staff
results to date in their performance plans)	First 3 weeks in January commence the fieldwork – monitor returns

Fourth sampling window	
January	Start list of applicants for sampling window 4
February	Carryon with the list of applicants – sampling window 4
March	Carryon with the list of applicants – sampling window 4
April	First week delete all duplicates from list (including any people that already appeared in sampling window 1, 2 or 3) Inform relevant staff First 3 weeks in April commence the fieldwork – monitor returns
May	**End field work** **Complete data input and clean data** **Carry out data analysis** **Write top line report and communicate results**

9.2.3 Options for contracting-out or running the survey in-house

Telephone interviewing needs specialised staff which will ensure objectivity, professionalism, possibly the use of CATI, interviewer reliability and coding reliability[8]. Therefore, it is highly recommended that telephone interviewing fieldwork is contracted out. However, where authorities want to carry out the fieldwork in-house they will need to have staff that will be totally dedicated to interviewing, they will also need to train them and set up in-house reliability tests for data collection.

Using external market research professionals to complete all or part of the survey can bring greater legitimacy and independence to the survey results, expertise and research experience, less disruption to other in-house services, and greater resources.

9.2.4 Other elements of the planning and managing the survey

Please see chapter 2 for *Areas to keep in-house*, *Options for contracting out, Improving in-house skills and resources,* and *Assessing the resources required.*

There are some key issues that need special consideration:

- **the need to produce a questionnaire that interviewers can follow easily or perhaps a computer programme for Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI):** Computer assisted questionnaires take a long time to set up and authorities will need a specialist to set them up. An alternative is to print the questionnaires and interviewers will need to fill in paper copies instead.
- **the need to produce interviewer notes/brief:** the interviewer brief is most useful to involve and inform the interviewers fully. The authority should write a note about the aim of the research: why is it being done; why is it important; and, any other service specific issues that interviewers may need to know.

[8] By interviewer reliability it is understood that all interviewers should keep to strict guidelines ensuring objectivity, therefore, the same results should be reached in spite of who the interviewer is. By coding reliability it is understood that tests will be carried out to check on whether the coding is being done accurately.

- **the need to train or use trained telephone interviewers:** telephone interviewing needs specialised staff which will ensure objectivity, professionalism, possibly the use of CATI, interviewer reliability and coding reliability.
- **Interviewer reliability and Coding reliability:** most research companies have a listening facility whereby they can randomly check that the interviewers are conducting the interview appropriately (i.e. Without leading the respondents' answers) and that they are coding the answers properly. If contracting out authorities should ask for these service to be provided. If doing the research in-house authorities may consider recording (without the interviewers knowledge) some of the interviews. They can also add to the sample dummy interviews with friends and colleagues which can then be checked for coding reliability.

9.3. Achieving the outputs required from Best Value

The principles of sampling and working out the sample size for a telephone survey remain the same as with postal surveys. Probability sampling needs to be applied, whereby each person in the target population has an equal, or at least known, chance (probability) of being selected. Thus, telephone interviewing should only be used when each person in the target group has a telephone and where the authority has access to the telephone number for each of the members of the target population. Therefore, its use is very limited and most probably authorities will only be able to use telephone interviewing to collect data for the planning indicators. Please see chapter 3 for further details on sampling and sample sizes.

9.3.1. Maximising the response rate

There are several actions which you can use in order to maximise the response rate:

- **Information that the authority may have given to the target population about the exercise:** authorities may consider including a leaflet, for example, in planning applications explaining to applicants that this survey will be carried out this will make them aware of the exercise and more likely to collaborate if they get a phone call.
- **the introductory line of the interviewer:** the first words that the interviewer says to the respondent are key to gaining an interview. It is important to have a very quick statement first asking the respondent whether they would like to take part:

Interviewer: Ask for <name of respondent>
Respondent answers.
Interviewer: Good morning/afternoon/evening, my name is <name of interviewer>. I am calling from < research company>. We are carrying out a research programme on behalf of <name of the authority>. As you may know <name of authority> is committed to monitor the service provided by the <planning department> as you have recently made an application would you be happy to answer a few questions about the service that you received? It will only take about 5 minutes of your time.

If respondent says 'no'
Interviewer: would it be better if we called at a more convenient time?
If respondent says 'yes'

Interviewer: what day and at what time would be most convenient for you?

If respondent agrees to be interviewed on the spot the interviewer will need to tell him/her about the confidentiality and anonymity of the research:

All of the data will be treated in the strictest confidence and will only be used to monitor the local authority's service. Anonymised responses may be passed on to the Local and Regional Government Research Unit which will use the data to study national patterns of service satisfaction.

At the end of the interview is good practice to ask an open question: *Is there anything that you would like to add?*

The interviewer should finish offering a contact name and telephone number for any queries that they may have.

If you have any questions or concerns about this survey please do not hesitate to contact <name> on <telephone number> who will be very happy to help you.

- **arrangements to follow-up those who do not answer the telephone (total number of times that a interviewer will dial each telephone number before giving up)** If the authority is contracting out the work they will have to decide how many times the interviewers will contact a telephone number before giving up. The more times the better, however, there will be cost implications.
- **possibility of evening and weekend interviewing to catch people at home -** It is important that the contractors or in-house people are able to do evening and weekend interviewing, these will probably be the most productive times of the fieldwork, unless, the authority has day-time telephone numbers.
- **opportunities for re-scheduling an interview –** the opportunity to re-schedule the interview is very important, however, the exercise will LOSE respectability if the interviewers do not call back at the time and date agreed.
- **checks on questionnaire answers and missing information –** in some cases if the information received seems contradictory or there is some missing data, it is important that the respondent can be contacted again to fill in the gaps.

9.4. Further issues

Data processing, analysis, calculating the final ratings, interpretation and reporting are much the same as set out in Chapters 6 to 8. The only key difference is when working out the response rates, whereby, there will be a new group of people - those who could not be contacted (no-one answered the telephone at all). These should not be confused with deadwood. Deadwood should be mostly formed by people who have moved away and are no longer in reach or people who passed away.

$$\text{Response rate} = \frac{100 * \text{Number of questionnaires returned}}{\text{Number of people in the sample (including non contacts)} - \text{deadwood}}$$

For example an authority may have had a sample size of 1,651 (see chapter 3 on working out the sample size). Of that sample, 100 cases were deadwood and 1,050 questionnaires were returned:

$$\text{Response rate} = \frac{100 * 1{,}050}{(1651 - 100)} = 68\% \text{ overall response rate}$$

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS:

- **Telephone surveys should only be carried out when everyone in the target population has a telephone and the local authority has the number available**
- **Duplicates should be deleted**
- **Probability sampling applies**
- **Authorities should seriously consider contracting out the fieldwork to professional telephone interviewers**
- **Authorities have to stress the importance of maximising response rates**

SECTION III: FACE TO FACE SURVEYS

10. FACE TO FACE SURVEYS

This chapter covers the following topics:

- **Face to face surveys in context**
- **planning and managing a face to face survey**

10.1 Face to face surveys in context

For the collection of data on some of the indicators authorities may consider the use of a face to face survey. Once again, at the outset you will need to weigh up the strengths and weaknesses of face to face surveys. This chapter aims to help authorities to make an informed decision at the time of choosing the method of data collection to suit the authority's circumstances better.

10.1.1 The advantages of a face to face survey

- **Length** – it is advisable for postal and telephone questionnaires to be kept relatively short, failing this, it is very difficult to get appropriate response rates. On the other hand face to face questionnaires can last slightly longer and still produce good response rates.
- **Response rate** - face to face based surveys normally have a higher response rate than postal surveys and telephone surveys. However, it is worth noting that the response rate is totally dependent on the quality of the administration of the survey.
- **Complexity** - the questionnaire can have complex definitions, instructions and visual aids.
- **Clarification –** the interviewer can make sure that the respondent understands the questions correctly. In the interviewer brief, the questions should be read and discussed, the brief is there to ensure that all interviewers understand the question in the same way. The brief allows them look at those questions which may need further clarification and a standard explanation is to be developed to be used by all interviewers. In some occasions a booklet can be produced to which interviewers can refer to when the respondent does not quite understand the question.
- **Probability sampling** – if the sample has not been pre-selected from a data file, the interviewer can carry out random sampling within the household, ensuring total confidence in probability sampling.
- **Can use CAPI** (Computer Assisted Personal Interview) - whereby the interviewer will key in the answers straight into a computer.

10.1.2 Weaknesses of face to face surveys

- **Cost -** face to face surveys are much more expensive than postal surveys and telephone surveys

- **Specialised interviewers** – face to face interviews are very difficult to manage, specially if they have to carry out random sampling in the households or if using CAPI. Therefore authorities will normally have to contract out the work to specialised interviewing companies.
- **Long explanations –** where respondents have to read extensive explanations about the service provided by the authority, much valuable interviewer time will be used for this purpose. It would be advisable to send background information in the post and allow the respondent a few days to read it before interviewing him/her.
- **Excluding groups** - because of the nature of surveys some groups or individuals may be excluded or under-represented. In some cases the interviewers can be briefed so that when they come across a non-English speaker a translator can be brought in to carry out the interview.
- **Interviewer effect** - the interviewer can influence the answers by the mere fact of being there, respondents may pick the answers that they think are more socially acceptable. For example, respondents may say that they go to the local museums every 6 months, when in fact they do not. Differences between interviewers has also been found as a cause of variance. For example, a very trendy interviewer may get very liberal answers from their respondents, an interviewer dressed in a suit may get more conservative views. It is, therefore, recommended to get professional interviewers to do the fieldwork.
- **Effect of people in the room** - other people may be present during the interview influencing the respondents answers, again, making their answers more socially acceptable or in accordance with the answers that the observers would give or they may simply affect the respondents' concentration on the interview questions (i.e. children). For this reason, whenever possible the interviewer should ask the respondent to be on his/her own at the time of the interview.

10.2 Planning and management of the project

The principles covered in *Basis of the project*, *Involving, informing staff and residents (or target population)* and *Managing the project* would be the same as in chapter 2. The stages of the project, however, would vary slightly.

10.2.1 Stages of the project

When planning to run the survey the project manager should be aware of the tasks that will have to be undertaken at various stages of the project, and how long they are likely to take. Figure 10.1 illustrates the main stages of the project, the respective tasks which need to be undertaken at each stage.

The main stages and the tasks involved in carrying out a face to face survey are as follows:

SURVEY STAGES	TASKS
1. Planning	Deciding whether to contract out or not, creating a steering group, identifying the processes involved, raising awareness, determining resources. Setting up the database, booking the interviewers, preparing interviewer notes and advance letters.

2. Sampling	Deciding on a sampling method and a sample size, and drawing the sample.
3. Field work questionnaire:	Monitoring progress.
4. Data inputting	Inputting the completed questionnaires into a computer file. (not necessary if using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing)
5. Data analysis and interpretation	Manipulating the data into tables, cross tabs etc., and interpreting the results
6. Comparative data analysis	Comparing the results of the survey with other authorities
7. Communicating the results	Writing up the report and/or summary report, distributing the findings, follow through of action plan

Figure 10-1 The main stages and the tasks involved in carrying out a face to face survey

The figure overleaf shows how these various tasks may overlap and flow throughout the life of the project. It assumes that you will decide whether or not to contract out all or part of the work; clearly who carries out later tasks will depend on whether contractors or your own organisation are doing the work.

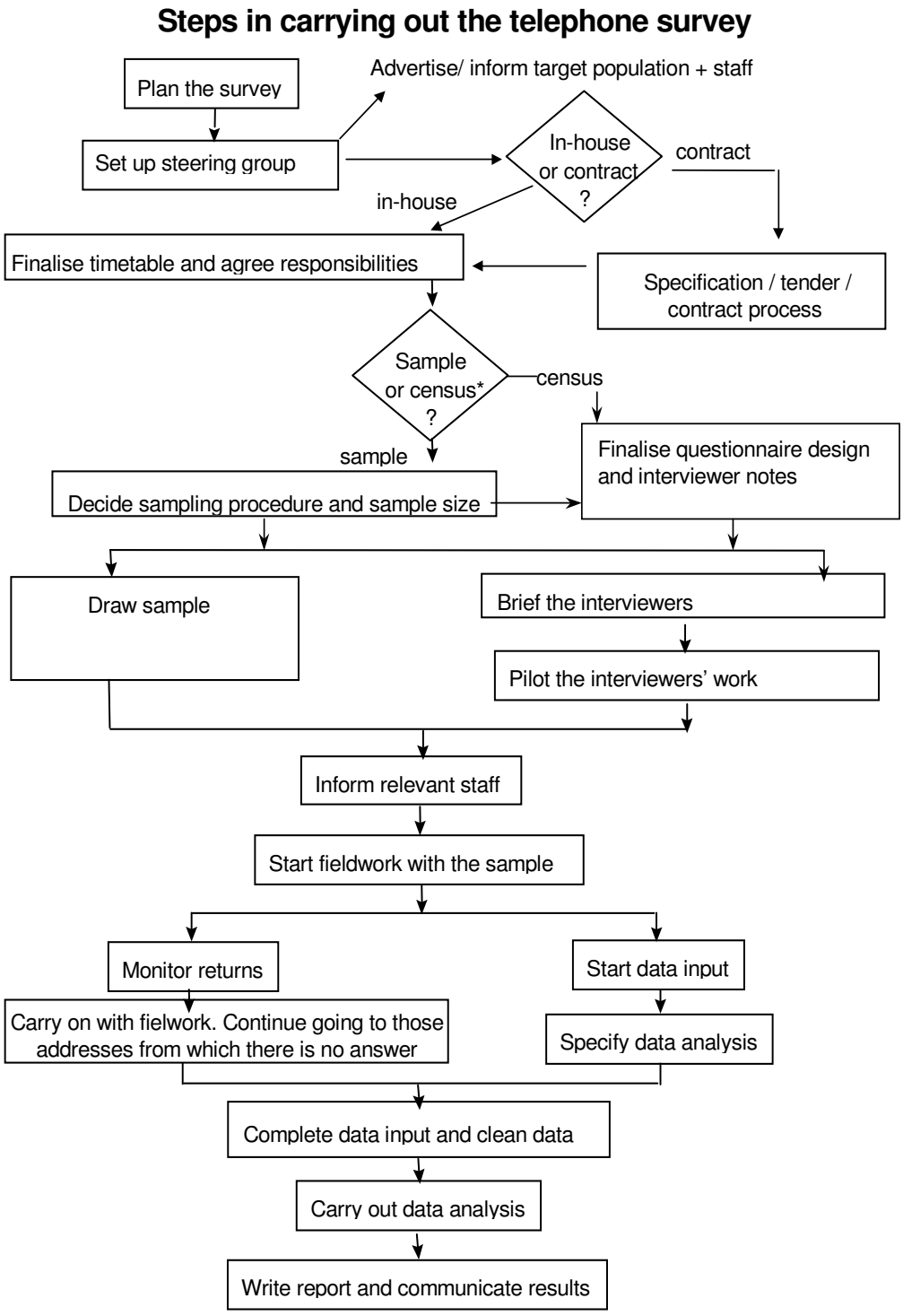


Figure 10-2 Stages on a face-to-face survey

*Census: means 100% sample of the target population

10.2.2 Estimating the time required

It is important to be as accurate and as realistic as possible in estimating the amount of time the survey process is likely to take. Delays at any stage in the process can mean crucial dates for the results of the survey being missed. An element of flexibility should be built into the planning process to allow for such setbacks. The time-table for a face-to-face survey of a sample of respondents as a whole would be very similar to that of a postal survey (see chapter 2).

10.2.3 Options for contracting-out or running the survey in-house

As with telephone interviewing, face to face surveys need specialised staff which are capable of carrying out probability sampling in the households, and can ensure objectivity, professionalism and possibly the use of CAPI. There are also other tasks that the interviewers have to carry out. For example, if the authority has selected a sample of postcodes and in a dwelling there happens to be several flats, the interviewer can select randomly one of the dwellings. They also have to fill in administrative paperwork to monitor how many times they have been in the dwelling, how many households there were, how many possible interviewees there were in the selected household, whether there was someone else in the interview room, the time of the visit, and so on. Therefore, it is highly recommended that the face-to-face interviewing fieldwork is contracted out. Contractors can also help to adapt the questionnaire into a face-to-face questionnaire.

Using external market research professionals to complete all or part of the survey can bring greater legitimacy and independence to the survey results, expertise and research experience, less disruption to other in-house services, and greater resources.

10.2.4 Other elements of the planning and managing the survey

Please see chapter 2 for *Areas to keep in-house*, *Options for contracting out, Improving in-house skills and resources,* and *Assessing the resources required.*

There are some key issues that need special consideration:

- **the need to produce a questionnaire that interviewers can follow easily or perhaps a computer programme for Computer Assisted Personal Interviews (CAPI):** Computer assisted questionnaires take a long time to set up and authorities will need a specialist to set them up. An alternative is to print the questionnaires and interviewers will need to fill in paper copies instead.
- **the need to produce interviewer notes/brief:** the interviewer brief is most useful to involve and inform the interviewers fully. The authority should write a note about the aim of the research: why is it being done; why is it important; and, any other service specific issues that interviewers may need to know. It is also advisable to brief interviewers face to face in groups of around 20, in these meetings the interviewers can read the questions aloud and make sure that they fully understand what they all mean and how they should be asked.

- **the need to use trained face-to-face interviewers:** interviewing needs specialised staff who can carry out probability sampling in multi-household addresses and individuals within the household (if the sample consists of a list of postcodes), it will also ensure objectivity, professionalism and possibly the use of CAPI.
- **Interviewer reliability:** authorities will need to make sure that the interviews were actually carried out with the respondents selected in the sample. Most research companies will include a section at the end of the questionnaire where respondents are asked to give their telephone number voluntarily. Then some of these people can be contacted to check that the interview actually took place. The authority can also add to the sample dummy interviews with friends and colleagues.
- **Other quality checks** - these include attending some interviews as an observer. Going back to some of the addresses where interviews have already been carried out.
- **Coding reliability** - tape recording some of the interviews is a good check on whether interviewers are coding or filling in the respondent answers correctly.

10.2.5 The role of the interviewer

The role of the interviewer can not be stressed enough. The interviewer has to find the right address, sample, complete administrative tasks, get the respondents' co-operation, ask the questions objectively, accurately and record their answers.

If an authority is using a sample from the Postcode Address File (PAF) the interviewer will need to locate the right address. If the address in a multiple household address, the interviewer will need to divide the address into households. Kish (1965) '*Survey Sampling*' is a commonly used method of selecting households by research organisations (see reference in bibliography). They normally provide the interviewer with what is called a multi-household selection sheet whereby interviewers use tables of random numbers to make the selection. When selecting the respondent within the household a common approach is to interview the person whose birthday was last.

10.3. Achieving the outputs required from Best Value

The principles of sampling and working out the sample size for a face to face survey remain the same as with postal surveys. Probability sampling needs to be applied, whereby each person in the target population has an equal, or at least known, chance (probability) of being selected.

Face-to-face interviewing is particularly good when using the Postcode Address File as the sampling frame. The authority can draw a sample of postcodes and then the interviewer can carry out random sampling in postcodes that have more than one household in them, as well as, random sampling of respondents in their houses. If using face-to-face interviewing for the general survey, the PAF would be the most comprehensive list. Electoral Registers are not always up-to-date or even complete, therefore, it would not be as comprehensive as the PAF.

Please see chapter 3 for further details on sampling and sample sizes.

10.3.1. Maximising the response rate

There are several actions which you can use in order to maximise the response rate:

- **Information that the authority may have given to the target population about the exercise:** authorities may consider including a leaflet or article, for example, in the local paper explaining that this survey will be carried out, this will make them aware of the exercise and more likely to collaborate if they get a visit.
- **an introductory letter** - it is particularly important to design a letter informing the selected sample that they will receive a visit from an interviewer and giving further details about the survey, much like the letter for postal questionnaires see chapter 5. For the general survey, for example, this would also be an ideal way to inform respondents about the services provided as required by the Government. However, if using the PAF, authorities should encourage all household members over 18 to read the leaflets as any of them may end up being selected by the interviewer.
- **the introductory line of the interviewer:** the key technique is to obtain and maintain rapport and to back off and return another time if a refusal looks likely.:

Interviewer: Good morning/afternoon/evening, my name is <name of interviewer>. I am from < research company>. We are carrying out a research programme on behalf of <name of the authority>. As you may know <name of authority> is committed to monitor the service provided by the <planning department>. We recently sent you a letter to inform you that your household has been selected randomly from a list of all of the households in the authority. Would you be happy for me to interview a member of your household (or name of person if sampling from electoral register or other name list) about the services that the authority provides? It will only take about x minutes of your time.

If respondent says 'no'
Interviewer: would it be better if we called at a more convenient time?
If respondent says 'yes'
Interviewer: what day and at what time would be most convenient for you?

If respondent agrees to be interviewed on the spot the interviewer will need to tell him/her about the confidentiality and anonymity of the research at some point before the interview commences:

All of the data will be treated in the strictest confidence and will only be used to monitor the local authority's service. Anonymised responses may be passed on to the Local and Regional Government Research Unit which will use the data to study national patterns of service satisfaction.

At the end of the interview is good practice to ask an open question: *Is there anything that you would like to add?*

The interviewer should finish offering a contact name and telephone number for any queries that they may have.

If you have any questions or concerns about this survey please do not hesitate to contact <name> on <telephone number> who will be very happy to help you.

- **arrangements to follow-up those who never seem to be at home -** it is good practice to make sure that in the contract the research company provides for each address to be visited a minimum of four times, one of which should be during the weekend and another in the evening.
- **opportunities for re-scheduling an interview –** the opportunity to re-schedule the interview is very important, however, the exercise will lose respectability if the interviewers do not call back at the time and date agreed. It is also advisable to re-schedule interviews with non-English speakers with a translator.
- **checks on questionnaire answers and missing information –** the authority needs to make sure that the research company exercises some kind of quality control to make sure that the interviews actually took place. Asking respondents for a contact number can sometimes fulfil the task. It can also be useful if in some cases the information received seems contradictory or if there is some missing data which can be filled by contacting the respondent again.

10.4. Further issues

Data processing, analysis, calculating the final ratings, interpretation and reporting are much the same as set out in Chapters 6 to 8. The only key difference is when working out the response rates, whereby, there will be a new group of people - those who could not be contacted. These should not be confused with deadwood. Deadwood should be mostly formed by people who have moved away, empty households or people who passed away.

$$\text{Response rate} = \frac{100 * \text{Number of questionnaires returned}}{\text{Number of people in the sample (including non contacts)} - \text{deadwood}}$$

For example an authority may have had a sample size of 1,651 (see chapter 3 on working out the sample size). Of that sample, 100 cases were deadwood and 1,050 questionnaires were returned:

$$\text{Response rate} = \frac{100 * 1{,}050}{(1651 - 100)} = 68\% \text{ overall response rate}$$

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS:

- **Probability sampling applies, each person or household in the sample should be visited until an interview is achieved or at least four times before classifying the person in the sample 'non-contact'.**
- **Unless, the authority already has a team of trained interviewers who can carry out the work, authorities should contract out the fieldwork to professional interviewers.**
- **It is important to have quality checks in place**
- **Authorities have to stress the importance of maximising response rates**

SECTION IV: CITIZENS' PANELS

11. CITIZENS' PANELS

This chapter covers the following topics:

- **Citizens' panels in context**
- **How to evaluate whether you should use the panel for the BVPIs**

11.1. Citizens' panels in context

Many authorities are already considering using their citizens' panel for the collection of data for the general survey indicators (those that need to be asked to a sample of the whole population of the authority). Others are thinking of setting up a panel for this purpose and for other consultation exercises. Once again, at the outset you will need to weigh up the strengths and weaknesses of citizens' panels. This chapter aims to help authorities to make an informed decision on whether to use the panel or use a fresh sample of respondents for the BVPIs.

11.1.1 The advantages of a panel

- **Method of data collection** – once the panel has been set up, any method of data collection can be used, face-to-face, telephone (providing that all of the members of the panel have a telephone), or postal.
- **Response rate** - panels normally produce good response rates, just for the panel members (see below for representativeness of the population).
- **Conditioning** - members of the panel will necessarily be conditioned by the mere fact that they have agreed to collaborate with the authority to monitor and improve its services. With time, this will make the people in the panel different to the population as a whole because they will take much more interest in local Government issues. This conditioning will, in many occasions, make the respondents more knowledgeable about local Government issues than the rest of the population, providing more informed answers to the questions.
- **Changes in views over time** - the panel can track changes on the views of the same group of people over time.
- **Subgroups** - the authority will be able to select people by subgroup and consult with them in issues that are particular to that group
- **Special needs** - some panel members will have special needs, these will be known about in advance and the researchers can prepare for this.
- **Quick results** - once the panel has been set up, it can produce quicker results as sampling has already been done.
- **Long term cost** - arguably, in the long term citizens' panels are cost efficient. However, this is dependent on attrition levels and whether the authority will need to refresh the sample (see below).

11.1.2 Weaknesses of citizens' panels

- **Method of data collection** – authorities will still have to approach the panel either face-to-face, by telephone or post. Therefore, all of the weaknesses of each of these methods of data collection will still be present when using the panel.
- **Response rate and representativeness of the panel** - it is said that panels normally produce good response rates.

However, this is dependent on how saturated the panel is. Response rates tend to go down if the panel members have been inundated with requests to collaborate in research, if the authority demands too much time from them, or if they are disillusioned, for example, if they have been in the panel for a couple of years and they have not seen any changes (improvements) emerging from the findings of the research.

The response rate is also totally dependent on the quality of the administration of the survey whether is face-to-face, postal or telephone.

Finally, the panel it self may not be representative of the population as a whole, therefore, even if the panel produces good response rates the information will be loaded with biases (see below for further details).

- **Conditioning** - as explained above, members of the panel will be conditioned, they will naturally be more interested and, probably knowledgeable about local Government. Therefore, for the purpose of collecting data for the BVPIs this will challenge the need to collect data that is representative of the population as a whole.
- **Attrition** - many panel members will decide not to take part after a while and will drop out from the panel. Therefore, the panel needs to be reasonably big to start with. After one year you can expect that 10% to 20% of the panel will drop out. It is important to evaluate the representativeness of the panel regularly and replace the membership where needed. In the long term this could become a **costly exercise**.
- **Subgroups** - attrition tends to be most common in young people, the very old and minority groups.
- **Strong element of self selection** - it is not the same to ask a person to take part on a one off survey than to ask a person to be part of a panel. Therefore, the element of self selection is stronger in panels and it is likely that those who agree to participate are already more interested in local Government issues than those that refuse to participate.

11.2 How to evaluate whether you should use the panel for the BVPIs

Citizens' panels are a very good tool to consult with the public. They provide a cross-sectional group of people who are interested in local Government and will think about the issues involved in improving the services and democratic institutions in their local authority. However, the

authority needs to ask the following questions: do they provide a good representative sample of the population?; Are they the best group to ask questions about satisfaction with the services?; and, Are they the best group to collect data for the BVPIs?. Authorities will need to evaluate three key issues carefully:

Representativeness of the sample
Attrition
Conditioning

11.2.1 Representativeness of the sample

To comply with the requirements of the BVPIs the sample has to be representative of the population as a whole. This implies that the sample has to have been selected using probability sampling methods. The sample also needs to be big enough to produce the confidence intervals required by the Government.

Probability sampling and response rates

In order to recruit the members of the panel, you will need to select a probability sample from either the electoral register or the PAF. As explained in Chapter 3 when drawing a probability sample the authority pre-selects a fix number of addresses or individuals and only those are the ones to be targeted. They are the ones that will need reminders and further encouragement for their involvement.

Two key issues will undermine the representativeness of the panel. In chapter 3 we discussed that once the sample has been selected, as a rule of thumb, a response rate falling below 50% may face serious biases.

This is a particularly salient issue when setting up citizens' panels and can be easily illustrated by the example below. The example can also be used as a rough guide to working out how many people should be sampled for recruitment to the panel:

Rough guide to achieve a sample of panel members, that does not challenge too much the requirement of 'representativeness':

1. Say for example that an authority expects that **60%** of the people will agree to be part of the panel (it is worth pointing out that achieving 60% agreement to the panel is very high and difficult to achieve)
2. They also expect attrition (people dropping out of the panel) within the first year to be around **10%.**
3. Once the panel has been set up they expect that the response rate will be of about **80%**
4. For the general survey indicators the minimum confidence interval has been set up at ±3% which using the rule of thumb in Figure 3.1 means that the authority needs to achieve interviews with around **1,100** people for a 95% confidence level.

Thus, in order to roughly calculate the sample size for the recruitment to the panel the authority will need to follow several steps:

Step 1. the number of people that need to be sent the questionnaire if we expect a 80% response rate:

n = 1100*100/80 = 1,375 people needs to be sent the BVPIs questionnaire

Step 2. If we expect to be able to recruit 60% of people for the panel, we need to find out how big the sample size needs to be for recruitment:

n = 1,375*100/60 = 2,292 people needs to be approached for recruitment to the panel

Step 3. We also expected that 10% of the people recruited would drop out after year one, therefore, we should aim to recruit at least 10% more (although it is advisable to target more, say 15% more):

n = 2,292*10/100 =229
Step 4. Therefore:

n = 2,292 + 229 = **2,521 people should be sampled for recruitment to the panel and a 60% recruitment should be achieved**

Following the above example, if an authority is only able to recruit say 10% of the people sampled. Say, for example they targeted 10,000 people and the recruited 10% (1,000 residents) of the people, the citizens' panel itself will be faced with many biases and will not be representative of the population as a whole. It will also mean that the sample will be too small for it to arrive at the confidence levels required.

This does not mean to say that the citizens' panel it self is invalid, but it would not be advisable to use it for the collection of data for the best value PIs. The panel may serve many other purposes, such as consultation with a specific service user group, finding out what panel members expect from the different services, it can also serve for the recruitment of focus group members, citizens juries and so on.

For the collection of data on the BVPIs it is advisable to aim for at least 50% recruitment level. Thus, if you have selected a sample 10,000 residents using probability methods, at least 5,000 residents have to agree to be part of the panel. Then the authority can either send the questionnaire to the 5,000 people or draw a random sample from the panel of at least 1,357 people if they expect an 80% response rate from the panel members.

The ways in which to improve the percentage of recruitment of panel members are very similar to those covered in the 'maximising response rates' section of the postal or face-to-face questionnaire (sections 3.5 and 10.3.1). It is recommended that recruitment should be carried out by a professional research company. Research professionals may also offer further methods of increasing the recruitment rate.

Attrition

Authorities will need to monitor the representativeness of the panel members regularly. The user

satisfaction BVPIs need to be collected at least every three years. Thus, it is very difficult to predict where the panel members will be in three years time or how many will have dropped out. If the authority is not planning to use the panel for any other reasons during those three years they will have to develop some way of keeping in touch with them which will, keep them interested and will serve to update any changes of address or circumstance. The authority may choose to send them a letter or postcard every year with a form for them to update their details and, details of future need for the panel stressing how important it is for the authority. An alternative idea is to refresh the panel every year with a percentage of new membership.

Conditioning

Conditioning is the most difficult issue to monitor and address. In year two of the collection of data for the BVPIs or when carrying out other surveys with the panel, the authority may choose to carry out checks by selecting half of the sample from the panel and half from a fresh probability sample. This will allow the authority to compare if there are any differences in the results. It is difficult to predict whether the conditioning will make them more satisfied or less satisfied with the authority than the rest of the population. However, it would be worth experimenting to see if there are any real differences and for the authority to re-evaluate whether to carry on with the panel for the BVPIs or not.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS:

- **Probability sampling applies**
- **For citizens' panels, recruitment rates are more important than the actual response rate to the questionnaire. It is advisable to aim for over 50% recruitment rate**
- **Authorities have to be aware of all of the weaknesses of the method of data collection used once the panel has been recruited (face-to-face, postal, telephone)**
- **Attrition rates are important, the representativeness of the panel needs to be monitored regularly, panel members have to be kept interested. Refreshing the panel can be very expensive**
- **Authorities should think about monitoring the 'conditioning' of the panel members**

SECTION V: SURVEY HOUSING AND COUNCIL TAX BENEFITS CLAIMANTS

12. SURVEY OF HOUSING AND COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT CLAIMANTS

This chapter covers the following topics:

- **Planning and management of the project**
- **Preparing the sampling frame and working out the sample size**
- **The questionnaire, running the survey, data processing**
- **Calculating the final ratings**

12.1. Introduction

The target population for the survey of housing and council tax benefit claimants is only a small proportion of the population of the authority as a whole. For this reason, a survey will have to be specifically designed for the collection of data from this specific group of people. The user satisfaction performance indicator covers issues of accessibility, staffing issues and communication. Authorities can use any method of data collection (face-to-face, telephone or postal) as long as everyone in the target population can be contacted through that method. This chapter aims to give more specific information about the collection of data for BVPI80, however, all of the principles highlighted in Section I of this guidance apply and should be read carefully.

12.2. Planning and management of the project

The principles covered in *Basis of the project*, *Involving, informing staff and residents (or target population)* and *Managing the project* would be the same as in chapter 2. The stages of the project, however, would vary slightly.

12.2.1 Stages of the project

When planning to run the survey the project manager should be aware of the tasks that will have to be undertaken at various stages of the project, and how long they are likely to take. Figure 12.1 illustrates the main stages of the project, the respective tasks which need to be undertaken at each stage.

Figure 12-1 The main stages and the tasks involved in carrying out the benefits' survey are as follows:

SURVEY STAGES	TASKS
1. Planning	Deciding whether to contract out or not, creating a steering group, identifying the processes involved, raising awareness, determining resources. Setting up the database, preparing the questionnaire and covering letter.
2. Sampling	Deciding on a sampling method and a sample size, and drawing the sample.

3. Field work questionnaire:	Sending out questionnaires, monitoring progress, and sending reminders
4. Data inputting	Inputting the completed questionnaires into a computer file
5. Data analysis and interpretation	Manipulating the data into tables, cross tabs etc., and interpreting the results
6. Comparative data analysis	Comparing the results of the survey with other authorities
7. Communicating the results	Writing up the report and/or summary report, distributing the findings, follow through of action plan

These various tasks may overlap and flow throughout the life of the project. See chapter 2, 9 and 10 for illustrations of 'steps in carrying out a postal survey' 'telephone' or 'face to face' respectively.

12.2.2 Estimating the time required

It is important to be as accurate and as realistic as possible in estimating the amount of time the survey process is likely to take. Delays at any stage in the process can mean crucial dates for the results of the survey being missed. An element of flexibility should be built into the planning process to allow for such setbacks.

Figure 5.2: Example of time-table for the benefits' survey

March	**Plan survey**
	Set up steering group
	Advertise/target population – on-going process
	Decide whether to do the field work, data input and data analysis in-house or contract out
	Set up data base for sampling frame
April	**Write specification**
	Tender
May	**Contract out**
	Agree responsibilities
	Decide sampling procedure - sample size
	Specify data analysis
	Questionnaire design and letter ready
	Start pilot
First sampling window	
June	Start the inputting in the database the names and addresses and other details of claimants that are sent a determination letter from 1st June
July	Data input continues until the last day of July
	Print questionnaires

August	**First week delete all duplicates from list, set out the sample (or census)** **Inform relevant staff** **First 3 weeks in August commence the field work – monitor returns**
September	**Send first reminder around 4 weeks after the mailing of the questionnaire went out**
Second sampling window	
November	Start inputting in the database the names and addresses and other details of claimants that are sent a determination letter from 1st November **Send second reminder letter with questionnaire to those that have not responded from sampling window 1**
December	Data input continues until the last day of December
January	**First week delete all duplicates from list (including any people that already appeared in sampling window 1)** **Inform relevant staff** **First 3 weeks in January commence the fieldwork – monitor returns**
February	**Send first reminder around 4 weeks after the mailing of the questionnaire to sample from sampling window 2 went out** **End of February send second reminder**
March	**End field work** **Complete data input and clean data** **Carry out data analysis** **Write top line report and communicate results**
April	**Write detailed report**

Authorities should read sections on *'Options for contracting-out or running the survey in-house'* and '*Assessing the resources required*' of chapter 2.

12.3 Preparing the sampling frame and working out the sample size

12.3.1 The target population

The target population is all the people who pursue a new or renewal claim for Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Benefit during the course of two sampling windows for which the authority has made and notified a determination.

The aim is a representative sample of all the people who pursue a new or renewal claim for HB and/or CTB during the course of a year ('the target population'). That is, we require a sample of claimants (not claims). This can be difficult to achieve efficiently. Random selection (probability selection) is a requirement. However, giving everyone a known random chance of selection is not easy to do in practice.

Firstly, no-one should be overlooked, including those whose claims are quickly rejected.

Secondly, no-one should get two or more chances of selection. Many people claim both HB and CTB and several make more than one claim in a year. These types of duplications should be removed before any sampling. Finally, one needs to use a consistent definition of 'a claimant'. This could sensibly be everyone who submits a claim form, however incomplete. However, for this indicator we will include **only claims for which the authority has made a determination**. This should help with sampling and fieldwork (see below).

In summary, the survey should encompass all claimants with a claim which reached determination. That is:
new and renewal claims;
rent allowance and rent rebate cases;
both successful and unsuccessful claims;
Council Tax Benefit including Second adult rebates;
all customer groups, for example, the elderly, unemployed, lone parents.

The survey should exclude:
claims withdrawn before determination
unprompted reporting of a change of circumstance

12.3.2 *Sampling windows*

Sampling will take place in two parts done on the basis of the dates claims are determined rather than submitted.

The two parts may be called sampling windows. That is, the sample will be drawn using claims determined during these windows, which should be two months in duration. The first window shall be **June/July** and the second **November/December.**

It is vital that selection is NOT done on the basis of the claims in payment on a single date. This would ignore rejected claims, under-represent short term claimants and lead to inappropriate timing of questionnaires (see below).

As mentioned, duplicate entries for individual claimants should be removed from databases prior to selection. The authority should, therefore, build a database with the names, addresses and any other details of each person whose claim has been determined during the two sampling windows, then before carrying out the sampling, duplicated names should be deleted. That is, no-one should have two chances of selection because they claimed both benefits or claimed on more than one occasion during the sampling windows. Every claimant in the windows must have one, equal chance of selection.

Within each of the sampling windows, the sample must be selected using probability methods, see chapter 3.

12.3.3 Sample Size

Working out the sample size is the same as outlined in chapter 3, however, for this indicator the degree of precision (or accuracy) required is a maximum of ± 4 confidence interval and a 95% confidence level. For simplicity, if during the two sampling windows the actual determinations are lower than the desired sample size the authority will have to send the questionnaire to all of the people in the sampling windows 100% population.

It is worth pointing out that specialised statisticians can work out accurately the sample size for the desired confidence interval when the population in the two sampling windows is very small. However, if the authority is planning to carry out a postal questionnaire there is not much difference in cost whether the authority has a 800 people sample or a 400 people census. In those cases, for simplicity, is advisable to follow the rule of thumb for working out the sample size or carry out a census if the target population within the two sampling windows is too small to sample from.

Authorities should work out the desired sample size, taking into consideration the above, foreseen response rate and deadwood (which in this case should be minimum). Say for example that the desired sample size is 800 people, then the authority should select at random 400 people from the first sampling window and 400 from the second. The number selected during second window may be adjusted in light of the outcome of the first part of the survey.

These sample sizes would not permit reliable sub-group analysis at authority level. Sample sizes for each of the sub-groups would have to be boosted to the required sample size to permit this.

12.3.4 Timing

Timing is crucial to this survey. If people are sent a questionnaire before their claim is determined, they might think this document is part of the claim process. They could also reasonably complain about being asked to fill in (yet) another form before their entitlement is established. And their opinions could well be affected or incomplete. So questionnaires should be sent out after determinations are made and notifications dispatched. (It is for this reason we have suggested sampling on the basis of dates of determination rather than dates claims are submitted.)

On the other hand, we are asking people to recall the service which they received. The longer the gap the less good will be people's memory. It needs to be borne in mind that claims may have been submitted several weeks before determination and that some determinations will have taken place at the beginning of each two month sampling window. Therefore, **questionnaires should be dispatched three to four weeks after the end of each sampling window and must be sent no later than six weeks after this date.**

12.4 The questionnaire, running the survey, data processing

12.4.1 The questionnaire

The Government proposed that the survey be conducted by post for reasons of economy, and because people without telephone or living in remote places can be involved on an equal basis. However, this needs to be tested to check whether sufficient response rates are achievable. If not, either telephone or face-to-face interviewing will be needed.

A questionnaire has been developed which authorities can download from http://www.local-regions.detr.gov.uk/bestvalue/indicators/indicatorsindex.htm example of the questionnaire is attached in Appendix 2. Authorities may choose to get printing advice in order to make the questionnaire more attractive, however, authorities should aim to keep the cost low as many respondents may perceive an expensive questionnaire as a 'waste of resources'. Authorities have to ask the questions as specified in the DETR and Audit Commission (1999a) 2000/2001 Performance Indicators Guidance (Appendix 7 and 8) and include the confidentiality and anonymity statement as required. Authorities will need to note the amendments to the Guidance set out in Appendix 8.

Local authorities may, of course, add further questions, but are advised against adding a large number. Any additions must be placed after the questions to be used for the PI and before the social subgroup questions. A short questionnaire encourages a good response (see chapter 4 for further details on the questionnaire).

12.4.2 Running the survey and data processing

Authorities should read chapters 5 to 8 of section I before carrying out the survey. Following below are some reminders of key issues to take into consideration:

- Claimants have already filled in forms; many of them think too many! This questionnaire needs to be distinctive, clear and straightforward to complete. The opportunity for claimants to give their own views and suggestions - as opposed to detailed personal information - and to help improve the service should be emphasised;
- There must be space at the end in which claimants are invited to write their own comments;
- Confidentiality needs to be assured. This can be underlined by using Independent researchers. Where local authorities do wish to conduct design and analysis work in-house, we urge them to use a contractor to receive and process responses and dispatch reminders.
- Pre-paid and addressed return envelopes should be provided.
- Reminders There should be a minimum of two reminders, one of which includes a second copy of the questionnaire. Often a postcard is used as the first reminder, though in this case care is needed not to identify the addressee as a benefit claimant. Whatever the level of response, this will make a substantial difference. More intensive follow-up could be considered, for example by phone or personal visits, but careful thought would need to be given to whether this could be wrongly confused with other activities (e.g. fraud visits) or whether any groups were being excluded from this type of follow-up.
- No aspect of the survey should ever be linked to other aspects of benefit administration.

- When weighting the data the authority will need to weight it to be representative of the population of claimants as accurately as they can from their own records

12.5 Calculating the final ratings

See Chapter 7 for further details.

Figure 12-2 Benefits survey – calculating the final ratings

BVPI no.	Service	Indicator	Calculating final ratings	Frequencies/cross-tabulations to report in the performance plans
BVPI 80	Benefits	User satisfaction survey covering issues of accessibility, staffing issues (helpfulness etc.) and communications/information (understandability etc.)	Calculating final ratings: % stating that they strongly agree/agree with (each indicator only calculated for those that have used these services, thus, excluding those who ticked 'not applicable' to any of the 'overall I am satisfied…' questions): Overall I am satisfied with the facilities to get in touch with the benefits office Overall I am satisfied with the service in the actual office Overall I am satisfied with the telephone service Overall I am satisfied with the staff in the benefits office Overall, I am satisfied with the clarity and understandability of the forms, leaflets and letters Overall I am satisfied with the amount of time it took them to tell me whether my claim was successful For each of the above the data should be presented for: - overall satisfaction of all respondents (strongly agree/agree with the statement) - satisfaction of those whose claim was successful (strongly agree/agree with the statement) - satisfaction of those whose claim was not successful (strongly agree/agree with the statement)	Cross-tabulation: valid percentage cross-tabulation excluding answers to 'not applicable' of: QA1e x G1 QB2e x G1 QC2e x G1 QD1g x G1 QE1e x G1 QF1 x G1 Claim successful / Claim not successful / Total / Base number × Strongly Agree … Agree × Base No. % Strongly agree + % Agree (show base no + confidence interval) *It is recommended that the following figures are also published in the performance plan:* % neither (show base No.) % disagree + % strongly disagree (show base No.)

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS:

- **Probability sampling applies, duplicates need to be deleted**
- **The research is carried out in two key stages dependent on the sampling windows**
- **Authorities have to prepare a database containing details of all the claimants who have been sent a determination letter within each of the sampling windows. This will represent the sampling frame.**
- **Authorities will need to decide whether they can select a sample or carry out a census (100% sample of those falling in the sampling windows)**
- **When weighting the data, the authority will need to look at the composition of the target population, in this case benefits' claimants and weight it as accurately as possible**

SECTION VI: SURVEY OF PLANNING APPLICANTS

13. SURVEY OF PLANNING APPLICANTS

This chapter covers the following topics:

- **Planning and management of the project**
- **Preparing the sampling frame and working out the sample size**
- **The questionnaire, running the survey, data processing**
- **Calculating the final ratings**

13.1. Introduction

The target population for the survey of planning applicants is only a small proportion of the population of the authority as a whole. For this reason, a survey will have to be specifically designed for the collection of data from this specific group of people. Authorities can use any method of data collection (face-to-face, telephone or postal) as long as everyone in the target population can be contacted through that method. This chapter aims to give more specific information about the collection of data for BVPI111, however, all of the principles highlighted in Section I of this guidance apply and should be read carefully.

13.2. Planning and management of the project

The principles covered in *Basis of the project*, *Involving, informing staff and residents (or target population)* and *Managing the project* would be the same as in chapter 2. The stages of the project, however, would vary slightly.

13.2.1 Stages of the project

When planning to run the survey the project manager should be aware of the tasks that will have to be undertaken at various stages of the project, and how long they are likely to take. Figure 13.1 illustrates the main stages of the project, the respective tasks which need to be undertaken at each stage.

The main stages and the tasks involved in carrying out the planning survey are as follows:

SURVEY STAGES	TASKS
1. Planning	Deciding whether to contract out or not, creating a steering group, identifying the processes involved, raising awareness, determining resources. Setting up the database, (contracting out field work if necessary), preparing interviewer notes if telephone interviewing (or questionnaire and advance letters if postal).
2. Sampling	Deciding on a sampling method and a sample size, and drawing the sample.
3. Field work questionnaire:	Starting the fieldwork, and monitoring progress.

4. Data inputting	Inputting the completed questionnaires into a computer file.
5. Data analysis and interpretation	Manipulating the data into tables, cross tabs etc., and interpreting the results
6. Comparative data analysis	Comparing the results of the survey with other authorities
7. Communicating the results	Writing up the report and/or summary report, distributing the findings, follow through of action plan

Figure 13-1 The main stages and the tasks involved in carrying out the planning survey

These various tasks may overlap and flow throughout the life of the project. See chapter 2, 9 and 10 for illustrations of 'steps in carrying out a postal survey' 'telephone' or 'face to face' respectively.

13.2.2 Estimating the time required

It is important to be as accurate and as realistic as possible in estimating the amount of time the survey process is likely to take. Delays at any stage in the process can mean crucial dates for the results of the survey being missed. An element of flexibility should be built into the planning process to allow for such setbacks. In Chapter 9 we showed an example of the time-table for the planning survey if the method of data collection is by telephone. The following time-table shows how if the authority decides to send a postal questionnaire, most of the key tasks have to be carried out more or less at the same time as when doing it by telephone, it is likely however that the field-work period after each of the sampling windows will be longer as reminders need to be sent:

Figure 13-2 Example of time-table for planning survey (postal)

March	**Plan survey**
	Set up steering group
	Advertise/target population – on-going process
	Decide whether to do the field work, data input and data analysis in-house or contract out
First sampling window	
April	Start preparing the list for the first sampling window 1 (in-house work)
	Write specification
	Tender
May	Carryon with the list of applicants – sampling window 1
	Contract out
	Agree responsibilities
	Decide sampling procedure
	Specify data analysis
	Questionnaire design and covering letter
	Start pilot
June	Carryon with the list of applicants – sampling window 1

July	First week delete all duplicates from list, set out the sample (or census)
	hand the data file to the contractor (or interviewer)
	Inform relevant staff
	First 3 weeks in July commence the field work – monitor returns.
Second sampling window	
July	Start list of applicants for sampling window 2
August	Carryon with the list of applicants – sampling window 2
	Send reminder to non-respondents from sampling window 1
September	Carryon with the list of applicants – sampling window 2
	Send second reminder to non-respondents from sampling window 1
October	First week delete all duplicates from list (including any people that already appeared in sampling window 1)
	Inform relevant staff
	First 3 weeks in October commence the fieldwork – monitor returns
Third sampling window	
October	Start list of applicants for sampling window 3
November	Carryon with the list of applicants – sampling window 3
	Send reminder to non-respondents from sampling window 2
December	Carryon with the list of applicants – sampling window 3
	Send second reminder to non-respondents from sampling window 2
January	First week delete all duplicates from list (including any people that
(In year one authorities	already appeared in sampling window 1 or 2)
may choose to publish	Inform relevant staff
results to date in their	First 3 weeks in January commence the fieldwork – monitor returns
performance plans)	
Fourth sampling window	
January	Start list of applicants for sampling window 4
February	Carryon with the list of applicants – sampling window 4
	Send reminder to non-respondents from sampling window 3
March	Carryon with the list of applicants – sampling window 4
	Send second reminder to non-respondents from sampling window 3
April	First week delete all duplicates from list (including any people that already appeared in sampling window 1, 2 or 3)
	Inform relevant staff
	First 3 weeks in April commence the fieldwork – monitor returns
May	*Send reminder to non-respondents from sampling window 4*
	End of May send second reminder to non-respondents from sampling window 4
June	**End field work**
	Complete data input and clean data
	Carry out data analysis
	Write top line report and communicate results
July	**Write detailed report**

Authorities should read sections on *'Options for contracting-out or running the survey in-house'* and '*Assessing the resources required*' of chapter 2.

13.3 Preparing the sampling frame and working out the sample size

13.3.1 The target population

The target population is all the people who make a planning application and received a decision letter during the course of four sampling windows which cover a whole financial year.

Local planning authorities should only include in their sample applications which have been determined by the local authority itself and not, for example, those called in thy the Secretary of State.

13.3.2 Sampling windows

Sampling will take place in four parts done on the basis of when the authority despatches the decision letter rather than when the application is submitted.

The four parts may be called sampling windows. That is, the sample will be drawn using applications determined during these windows, which should be three months in duration. The first window shall be **April/May/June**, the second **July/August/September,** the third **October/November/December** and, the fourth **January/February/March.**

The authority will need to set up a database which will contain the names, addresses, telephone numbers and outcome of application of all of those applicants that were sent a letter within each of the sampling windows.

As mentioned, before carrying out the sampling with the list of each sampling window duplicate entries for individual applicants should be removed from databases prior to selection. Even if the applicant is an agent acting on behalf of many clients throughout the year this person should only be given one chance of being selected. This means that once a particular agent or applicant has been selected for inclusion in the sample, any further decisions handled by them should be removed from the base population from which sampling is taken place. It is important that agents are asked to complete a questionnaire for a particular application. They should not be invited to give a view across all the applications which they have handled in a particular period. If an agent has been sent several determinations in a sample window, for example 3 determinations, only one of the three should be chosen at random.

At the end of the year the total sampling list should not contain any duplicates. That is, no-one should have two chances of selection because they applied twice for planning permission during the year or applied in more than one occasion during one of the sampling windows.

Within each of the sampling windows, the sample must be selected using probability methods, see chapter 3.

13.3.3 Sample Size

Working out the sample size is the same as outlined in chapter 3, however, for this indicator the degree of precision (or accuracy) required is a maximum of ± 5 confidence interval and a 95% confidence level. For simplicity, if during the four sampling windows the actual determinations are lower than the desired sample size the authority will have to send the questionnaire to all of the people in the sampling windows 100% population.

It is worth pointing out that specialised statisticians can work out accurately the sample size for the desired confidence interval when the population in the four sampling windows is very small. However, if the authority is planning to carry out a postal questionnaire there is not much difference in cost whether the authority has a 600 people sample or a 200 people census. In those cases, for simplicity, is advisable to follow the rule of thumb for working out the sample size or carry out a census if the target population within the four sampling windows is too small to sample from.

Authorities should work out the desired sample size, taking into consideration the above, foreseen response rate and deadwood (which in this case should be minimum). Say for example that the desired sample size is 600 people, then the authority should select at random 150 people from the first sampling window, 150 from the second and so on. The number selected during the consecutive windows may be adjusted in light of the response rate on the first window of the survey.

These sample sizes would not permit reliable sub-group analysis at authority level. Sample sizes for each of the sub-groups would have to be boosted to the required sample size to permit this.

13.3.4 Timing

Timing is crucial to this survey. If people are sent a questionnaire before their application is determined, they might think this document is part of the application process. They could also reasonably complain about being asked to fill in (yet) another form before their outcome is established. And their opinions could well be affected or incomplete. So questionnaires should be sent out after determinations are made and notifications dispatched. (It is for this reason we have suggested sampling on the basis of dates of determination rather than dates applications are submitted.)

On the other hand, we are asking people to recall the service which they received. The longer the gap the less good will be people's memory. It needs to be borne in mind that applications may have been submitted some time before determination and that some determinations will have taken place at the beginning of each three month sampling window. Therefore, **questionnaires should be dispatched three weeks after the end of each sampling window.**

13.4 The questionnaire, running the survey, data processing

13.4.1 The questionnaire

A questionnaire has been developed which authorities can download from http://www.local-regions.detr.gov.uk/bestvalue/indicators/indicatorsindex.htm example of the questionnaire is attached in Appendix 3. Authorities may choose to get printing advice in order to make the questionnaire more attractive, however, authorities should aim to keep the cost low as many respondents may perceive an expensive questionnaire as a 'waste of resources'. Authorities have to ask the questions as specified in the DETR and Audit Commission (1999a) 2000/2001 Performance Indicators Guidance (see Appendix 7 and 8) and include the confidentiality and anonymity statement as required.

The questionnaire can also include further questions which would be useful for authorities if they want to make comparisons between individual applicants, agents for individuals and business. For example:

Are you applying on behalf of your business, are you an agent or are you an independent individual applicant?

Answer categories:
On behalf of a business (my own or my employer's) – if ticked 'yes' please fill in section 'x' about your business and 'y' about yourself.
I am an agent applying on behalf of an individual or business owner or occupier of the site in question (not my employer or my own business)– if ticked 'yes' please fill in section 'y' about your self
Independent individual applicant – if ticked 'yes' please fill in section 'y' about your self

Other questions about business:

Approximately how many people does your company employ? (please specify)

What is your company's main business activity? (please specify)

Local authorities may, of course, add further questions, but are advised against adding a large number. Any additions must be placed after the questions to be used for the PI and before the social subgroup questions. A short questionnaire encourages a good response (see chapter 4 for further details on the questionnaire).

13.4.2 Running the survey and data processing

Authorities should read chapters 5 to 8 of section I before carrying out the survey. Following below are some reminders of key issues to take into consideration:

- Applicants have already filled in forms; many of them think too many! This questionnaire needs to be distinctive, clear and straightforward to complete. The opportunity for applicants to give their own views and suggestions - as opposed to detailed personal information - and to help improve the service should be emphasised;

- There must be space at the end in which applicants are invited to write their own comments;
- Confidentiality needs to be assured. This can be underlined by using Independent researchers. Where local authorities do wish to conduct design and analysis work in-house, we urge them to use a contractor to receive and process responses and dispatch reminders.
- Pre-paid and addressed return envelopes should be provided.
- Reminders There should be a minimum of two reminders, one of which includes a second copy of the questionnaire. Often a postcard is used as the first reminder. Whatever the level of response, this will make a substantial difference. More intensive follow-up could be considered, for example by phone or personal visits, but careful thought would need to be given to whether this could be wrongly confused with other activities (e.g. enforcement visits) or whether any groups were being excluded from this type of follow-up.
- When weighting the data the authority will need to weight it to be representative of the population of planning applicants as accurately as they can from their own records.

13.5 Calculating the final ratings

See Chapter 7 for further details.

Figure 13-3 Planning survey – calculating the final ratings

BVPI no.	Service	Indicator	Calculating final ratings	Frequencies/cross-tabulations to report in the performance plans
BVPI 111	Planning	Percentage of applicants satisfied with the service received.	Overall percentage of those fairly satisfied/very satisfied with the service provided by the local authority in processing the application	Frequency: valid percentage of answers to: B1 – Setting aside whether your application was successful or not, and taking everything into account, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the service provided by the council in processing your application? % very satisfied + % fairly satisfied (show base No. + confidence interval) *It is recommended that the following figures are also published in the performance plan:* % neither (show base No.) % fairly dissatisfied + % very dissatisfied (show base No.)

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS:

- **Probability sampling applies, duplicates need to be deleted**
- **The research is carried out in four key stages dependent on the sampling windows**
- **Authorities have to prepare a database containing details of all the applicants who have been sent a determination letter within each of the sampling windows. This will represent the sampling frame.**
- **Authorities will need to decide whether they can select a sample or carry out a census (100% sample of those falling in the sampling windows)**

SECTION VII: CONTRACTING OUT

14. CONTRACTING OUT

This chapter covers the following topics:

- **Pros and cons of commissioning research**
- **Options for areas to keep in-house or contract out**
- **Preparation**
- **Timetable**
- **The research brief**
- **Selecting the contractor**
- **Managing the contract**
- **Costs**

14.1. Introduction: Pros and cons of commissioning research

Many authorities will not have the time, resources or expertise to undertake the research in-house. All or part of the process can be commissioned from outside agencies, such as market research companies or local universities.

Using external market research professionals to undertake all or part of the survey process can not only provide expertise but also demonstrate independence and objectivity and therefore greater legitimacy. It is also a way of accessing people and other resources which are required for a limited period and which the authority may find it difficult to supply . However contracting out brings some loss of control and the risk that problems may need to be dealt with later by the authority. There is still a demand on resources in contracting, to project manage the process, to monitor and manage the contract to ensure it is undertaken on time and to the required specifications. Also, the company is unlikely to know much about local conditions, so it is important to provide background information which doesn't take too much for granted.

14.2 Options for areas to keep in-house or contract out

14.2.1 Areas to keep in-house

Whatever the areas of work contracted out, you should ensure you and your organisation remain a strong 'client'. This means, from the planning stage onwards:

- being clear about the objectives of the research
- understanding and communicating ***all of the BVPI requirements*** including how the BVPI questions need to be asked
- specifying other outputs you want from your contractor
- managing the interface with the rest of the authority to control for any unnecessary or unreasonable demands from other sections of the authority

- communicating problems rapidly and honestly to the contractor
- keeping control of the timetable and budget
- data analysis required for BVPIs
- presentation of results in reports and meetings with senior staff and residents

You should also control the following, even if they are carried out externally:

- planning the mailout (or fieldwork)
- wording the letters
- ensuring you are kept informed about the number and rate of returns
- decisions about how and when to send reminders and follow-up questionnaires.

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14.2.1 Options for contracting out

There are various different approaches to undertaking the survey ranging from carrying out all tasks in-house to contracting out all of the tasks involved. The range covers the following:

- Carry out all tasks in-house
- Contract out some of the tasks and stages - for example:
    - expertise for the methodology and sampling
    - the mailout
    - data entry and data analysis and interpretation services
    - writing up of a final report
    - post-survey qualitative work (for example, focus groups to explore why some groups from the survey are less/more satisfied than the other groups)
- Contract out all of the survey tasks

14.3 Preparation

Before commissioning the research, you need to be clear of the objectives, of what information you are trying to collect and how it will be used. You need to know from whom you are going to try and collect the information. To help in this task it is important to consult all relevant stake holders within the authority, including those who will make use of the results and those who have the expertise to comment constructively on the proposals. In asking for their views it is helpful to focus on what they will do with the information. (Clearly for the user satisfaction PIs, the required questions are given.)

The precise tendering process will of course have to take account of the council's standing orders, and if the sum involved is sufficiently large, EU procurement directives. You may also have other guidance within your authority on contracting and commissioning arrangements. This guidance is intended to complement rather than replace such guidance (which in any case may well be more detailed than that given here).

Early in your preparations you should map out a project plan. It can take longer to commission

research than you might expect.

14.4 Timetable

Depending on the particular requirements, and the circumstances of the authority you may need to leave time for discussing detailed requirements, obtaining ratification, advertising, receiving tenders, interviewing and choosing a contractor. Some idea of the possible time this could take is given in the table below. Given that that all authorities will have to undertake this research and a large number of them will be commissioning external contractors, the earlier you can embark on this process the better. For the authority this increases the chance of finding a contractor you will be happy with. Globally it increases the opportunities for the market research industry to gear up to the demands which will be made on it.

Stage	Time	Cumulative
Discuss objectives and process with senior officers	2-4 weeks	2-4 weeks
Discuss with senior members and/or take proposal to committee	2-6 weeks	4-10 weeks
Informal discussions with market research companies	1 week	5-11 weeks
Prepare brief and send out invitations to tender	2 weeks	7-13 weeks
Period for responses	3 weeks	10-16 weeks
Initial evaluation	1 week	11-17 weeks
Formal invitation to interview (dates previously given to all companies)	1-2 weeks	12-19 weeks
Selection and confirmation of award of contract	<1 week	13-20 weeks
Preparation of detail by company (questions, sample, etc.)	4-6 weeks	17-26 weeks
Agreement by the Council	1 week	18-27 weeks
Undertaking the survey and analysis	3 months	7-9 months
Presentations to relevant officers and members	2 months	9-11 months

14.5 The research brief or specification

Before selecting a research organisation, you will need to prepare a short research brief. You may find it useful to talk informally to one or two of them before putting the brief together to get a feel for what they will be able to provide and what they would expect to see in a brief (although care must be taken not to prejudice the outcome of the tender). An example of a research brief is

given in Appendix 5 also LARIA and LGMB published 'Guidelines for Commissioning Research' which may be a useful starting point. As a guide you may want to cover the following areas: background to the research; the overarching aims; objectives; method (if you have already decided); specific requirements by the government; outputs needed; project management outline; budget (if normal practice); time-table; personnel; confidentiality; and, key areas to be covered in the tender.

The research brief needs to be long enough to tell the research organisation what is required but not so long as to be unmanageable. About five-ten pages should be sufficient, with any supporting information. It should cover:

- The context of the work: why it is being undertaken, including background information about the authority, its environment and the subject matter
- The aims and objectives of the research
- The research hypothesis: what you are trying to find out, from whom and for what purpose. Highlight areas needing detailed probing or analysis. If you are only using the research for the user satisfaction PIs, sample wording which you can use is given in the example research brief.
- How the results of the research will be used
- Any particular requirements about the research (for instance, those matters specified in the PIs requirements, quality checks, number of reminders and so on)
- The desired timescale
- If the contractors are to do the data inputting and analysis, ensure you write into the specification a requirement to clean and verify the data
- An indication of the resources available including staff time and budgetary constraints (depending on the contractual policies of the authority you may want to give them an indication of your available budget)
- An indication of the basis on which the selection will be made (e.g. the relative importance of cost and quality factors)
- The date of further interviews

If the company is to be chosen on the basis of price, then indicating resources available could clearly influence the outcome. Another approach is to ask them to outline what could be provided for a given sum.

You will need to ask the companies to specify in their tenders:

- The research technique to be used (eg interviewer questionnaire administered in the home, on the street, phone interview). You may already have specified the broad approach but could still require details of how they will carry it out.
- the sampling technique (the PIs requirements specified a probability sample, but there are different ways in which this can be achieved).
- The sample size being proposed. Confidence intervals are specified in the PIs requirements, but the bidders should state how many people they will be targeting and what a response rates they expect.

- Number of reminders (or call back visits or phone calls)

They should give their reasons for each of their choices, including cost versus effectiveness.

The brief should also ask for examples of similar work done for other local authorities, two referees (who can comment on working relationships with the contractors), the name of the person who will be liaising with the council, the arrangements for liaison and payment arrangements.

It will normally be wise (and may in any case be required by standing orders or EU procurement regulations) to invite three or four companies to tender for the work. It is worth a quick phone call before sending the invitations out to make sure they would be interested in principle in putting in a bid. Otherwise, you may end up with no real competition.

Make sure that the tenderers understand all of the contractual conditions of your authority, such as, confidentiality and anonymity, ownership of the results and so on.

See chapter 1 of this guidance for information about some publications which offer listings of consultancies, universities, research institutes and individuals who would be able to tender for the research.

14.6 Selecting the Contractor

You will almost certainly have your own arrangements within the authority for selecting contractors. A good criterion to follow consists of: presentation of the tender; understanding of the brief; team composition and expertise; methods; outputs; and, cost-effectiveness. It is recommended that a in-house research expert should provide a technical analysis of the proposals. Other points to bear in mind include:

Check returned tenders for comprehensiveness - are, for example, travel costs included? Has everything been costed, for instance, sufficient copies of the report to be provided, any presentations to be made to officers and/or members.

14.7 Managing the Contract

The key to a successful relationship is fairness and understanding from both sides, and regular, clear communications. Make sure you are in regular and solid communication. Set up a schedule of meetings and phone / e-mail contacts, and stick to them. In this way there is less scope for unexpected issues emerging. Agree on key name contacts between your organisation and the contractor's staff.

Any amendments to the brief, especially if they have a financial implication, should be made and agreed in writing. However, don't be too rigid about insisting that potential contractors stick

slavishly to the brief: they may have ideas that improve it.

14.8 Costs

The cost of the research depends on such things as the method of surveying, number and complexity of questions ('open' questions which need coding afterwards are more expensive), and the numbers surveyed.

A postal survey with 1100 responses could cost anything between about £4,000 and £10,000. A survey which involves interviewers going to people's homes could be anything from around £20,000 to £30,000. These costs should include sampling, administration, data input, data analysis and report writing.

When making your decision, you need to be very careful about what exactly you are getting for your money. Some of these can be specified quite precisely (e.g. a two hour presentation to a group of 50 members and officers). Others are harder to identify. Some companies, for instance, have much more thorough quality assurance processes than others. Careful judgements will be needed to balance cost against other factors.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS:

- **Contracting out make take a long time, make sure that you have allowed enough time for contracting out in your time table**
- **Need a clear specification. As a guide you may want to cover the following areas: background to the research; the overarching aims; objectives; method (if you have already decided); specific requirements by the government; outputs needed; project management outline; budget (if normal practice); time-table; personnel; confidentiality; and, key areas to be covered in the tender.**
- **A good criterion to follow consists of: presentation of the tender; understanding of the brief; team composition and expertise; methods; outputs; and, cost-effectiveness**
- **Consider getting an in-house research expert to provide a technical analysis of the proposals**
- **Make sure that the tenderers understand all of the contractual conditions set out by your authority**
- **The key to a successful relationship is fairness and understanding from both sides, and regular, clear communications.**
- **Agree on key name contacts between your organisation and the contractor's staff.**

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