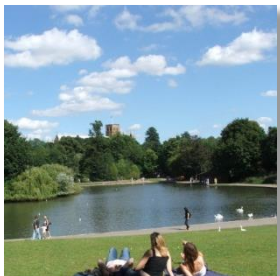




# Consultation on options for Local Governance in High Wycombe



**Dale Hall**  
**Opinion Research Services**  
8th July 2019



# Opinion Research Services



**Rigorous social research – university spin-out**

Health, housing, local government, ombudsmen,  
public agencies, emergency services

**Complex and controversial statutory consultations**

**Major local government reorganisations**

2016-17: Dorset / Northamptonshire / Oxfordshire

Earlier programmes: 2001-2 / 1999 / 1992-3

**Health services**

Greater Manchester / Wales / Dorset / Lincolnshire

**Other local government**

Libraries / Leisure services / Social services / Tourism



# What is Consultation For?



Not a yes/no referendum or poll...

Consultation is a 'public review' of...

Evidence, arguments, reasons for options/proposals – and their implications

Opportunity... to re-think in the light of contrary evidence/arguments... and...

To amend or abandon proposals – or continue with them...

Often requires difficult or unpopular decisions!

# Consultation Risks



Consultation often misunderstood as  
'referendum' – kind of popularity contest  
– numbers game



Critics who dislike proposals/outcome →  
attack the process



Gunning principles – formative stage,  
sufficient time, sufficient information and  
properly taken into account



Legal challenges more common →  
Judicial Review

# Consultation Document



Different audiences – public, stakeholders,  
staff – little awareness/interest...?

Clarity, simplicity – context and issues  
Current system → Unitary Council (BUA)

Options and criteria for High Wycombe

Not just about £££ (precept / running  
costs)...

...But also...Democracy, representation  
and accountability within BUA

# Consultation Programme



**Deliberative  
focus groups  
with public?**

**Survey**

Proper samples  
and fieldwork -  
representative

**Stakeholder  
events?**

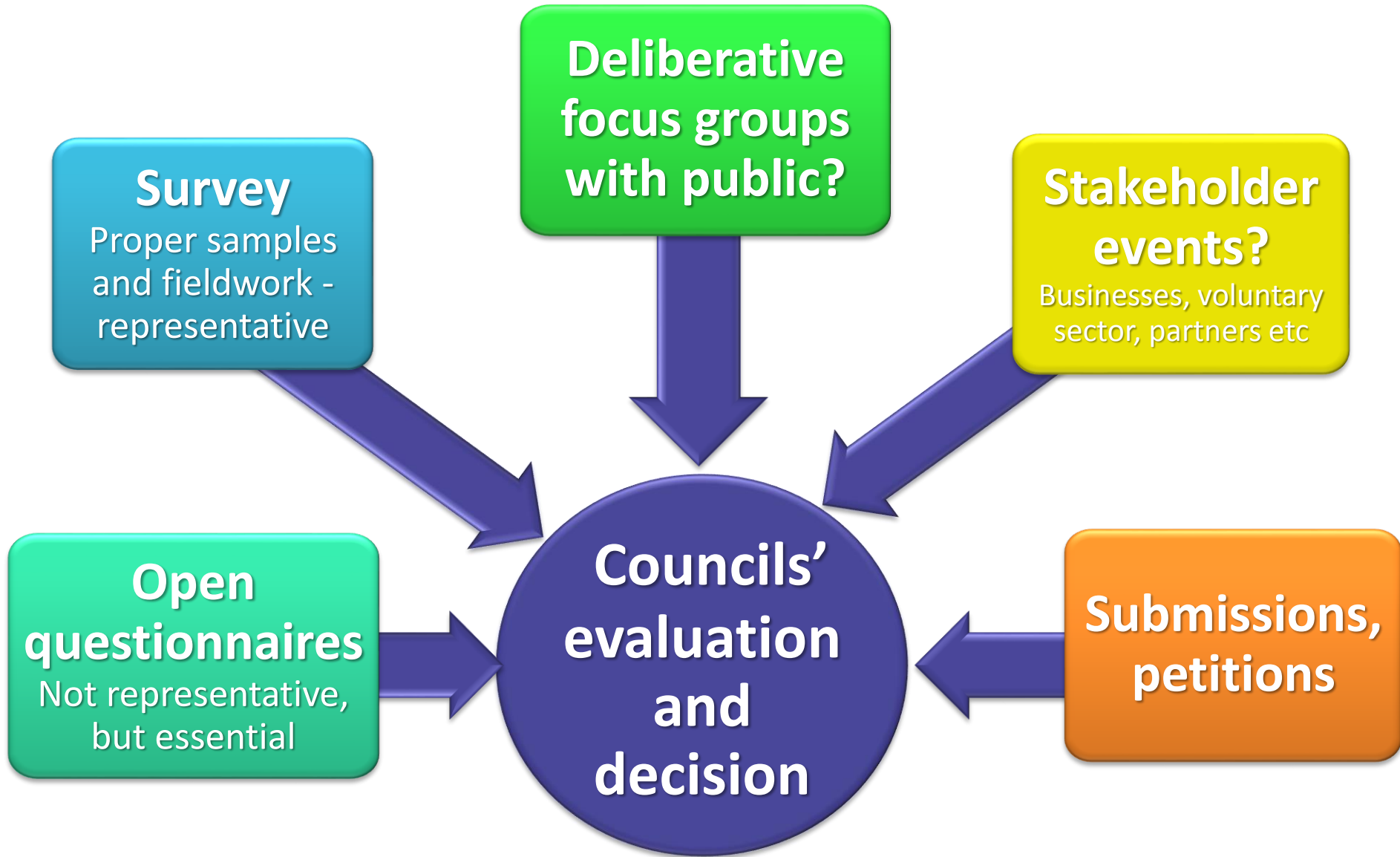
Businesses, voluntary  
sector, partners etc

**Open  
questionnaires**

Not representative,  
but essential

**Councils'  
evaluation  
and  
decision**

**Submissions,  
petitions**



# Taking into Account



All methods/elements important – but will differ in outcomes

OPEN QUESTIONNAIRE – more likely to be critical – motivated opponents and campaigns – no “overall result”

RESIDENTS’ SURVEY – more representative – not to be combined with Open Questionnaire

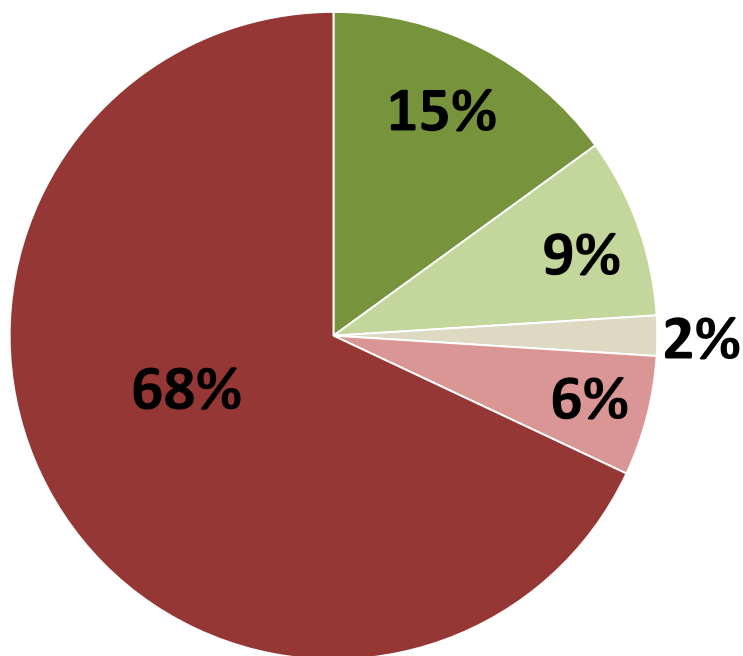
QUALITATIVE METHODS – “fair hearing” and in-depth “before and after” comparisons

Focus on evidence, arguments, reasons, considerations, issues = **COGENCY**



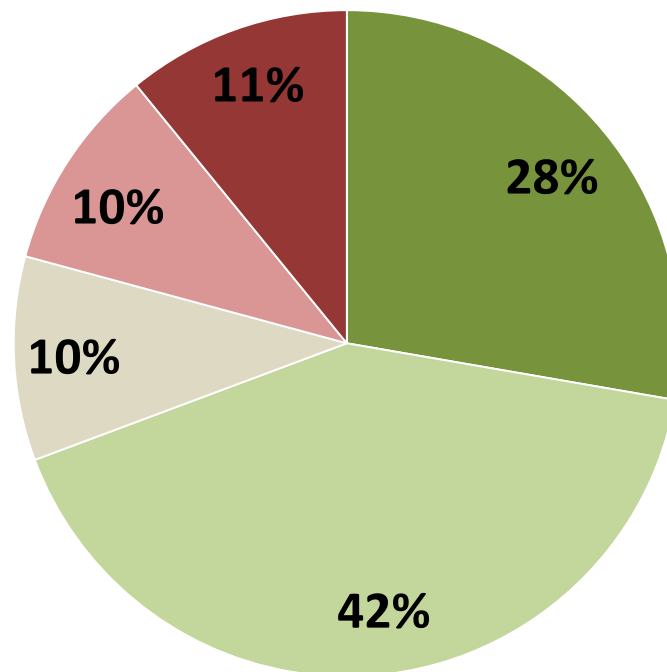
## Agree / disagree with one 'unitary council' for all-Oxfordshire?

**OPEN QUESTIONNAIRE:  
Individuals**



Base: 5,363

**RESIDENTS' SURVEY:  
Representative of all residents**



Base: 491



# Residents' Survey Samples



## OVERALL RESULTS

| Error margins | <u>95% Confidence</u> | <u>90% Confidence</u> |
|---------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 600 SAMPLE    | +/- 4% points         | +/- 3% points         |
| 800 SAMPLE    | +/- 3.4% points       | +/- 3% points         |
| 1,000 SAMPLE  | +/- 3.0% points       | +/- 2.6% points       |

## WARD-LEVEL RESULTS (illustrative)

| Error margins | <u>95% Confidence</u> | <u>90% Confidence</u> |
|---------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 50 SAMPLE     | +/- 14% points        | +/- 11% points        |
| 150 SAMPLE    | +/- 8% points         | +/- 7% points         |

# Sampling proposal



Overall sample of c.800



3 Petitioning wards 150 each



3-member wards 60



2-member wards 40

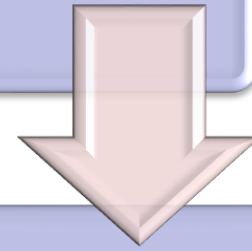


Weighted to give fair and accurate picture in overall results

**LGR = “Good deal of support across  
the whole area of the proposal”**



**District by district?  
Or ward by ward for HW?  
[compare “assessed in the round”]**



**Across each UA area?  
Or HW area?  
[compare “area of the proposal”]**



**Helpful to have an orientation on  
these points for interpretation**

# Rigorous Reports



Fair processes and nature of consultation reviewed explicitly



Points of view reported in depth (and quantity)...



Full attention to critics' arguments – especially important – due consideration



Indicate effect of local campaigns, special factors, different methods



“Evidence-based” reports that are not “arguing a case”

# Elected Members' Roles



Support the Consultation programme and encourage participation...



...Recognise that consultation itself will not make the decision



Consider the outcomes from different strands *critically*... Not just about numbers



Cogency of reasons, informed opinions, arguments → ALL the evidence



Shadow Executive will then make final decision



Thanks for your attention –  
any more questions  
or comments?

Dale Hall  
Chair, ORS  
[dale@ors.org.uk](mailto:dale@ors.org.uk)

