



# Advisory committee

Advisory committees are small groups of 10 to 20 people formed from representatives of various stakeholder groups. The committee members meet regularly to discuss issues and raise ideas. The aim is to find out the stakeholders' views and priorities regarding specific issues rather than set detailed recommendations for action. Members should represent a broad range of interests and they can be selected by interviewing potential individuals. The committee should be provided with comprehensive information in order to reduce reliance on experts and technical knowledge, and background information, minutes and agendas should be sent out before each meeting. Several other methods of participation ([Site visits](#), [Presentations](#), [Working groups](#)) can be used to encourage members to explore and analyse issues and to gradually arrive at a consensus about the way forward. A third party may be needed to facilitate the process. When setting up an Advisory committee it is important to define clearly the roles and responsibilities of all parties. The working process of the committee should lead to a final report that gives non-binding recommendations for action.



An Advisory committee (forest panel) on a forest site visit (Ae Forest District).

## Resources and requirements

### Skills

- Facilitation skills are useful for participating staff, but a third party facilitator may be needed.
- Active listening skills are essential.

### Equipment

- Basic requirements are good/quiet meeting facilities and standard office resources to produce written information, minutes and final report.

## Level of engagement

INFORMING:

CONSULTING: ★

INVOLVING: ★★★

PARTNERSHIP: ★

## Strengths

- Contentious decisions can be made more acceptable to the public.
- The process is democratic and representative of opposing points of view.
- Participants' understanding of other perspectives increases, leading towards compromise.
- There is scope for detailed analysis on planning issues.
- The long time scale provides the opportunity to raise issues and to allow for more in-depth debate.

## Weaknesses

- The process is time and labour intensive.
- Members may not reach consensus.
- Not all groups may be properly represented.
- The legitimacy of the process is dependent on the attitude and commitment of managers to listen to committee members.
- Participants may have unreal expectations of their influence over the process.

### Time

- Committees normally run for several months and require considerable time commitment from all parties.

### Costs

- For an advisory committee formed of three groups of 16 people, running for six months, the costs were estimated to be between £100,000 and £150,000 (Petts and Leach, 2000).

## Useful sources of information

### Books

- Evaluating methods for public participation: literature review. J. Petts and B. Leach (2000). Environment Agency Technical Report E135. Environment Agency, Bristol.
- Evaluating the effectiveness of deliberative processes: waste management case studies. J. Petts (2001). *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management* **44** (2), 207–226.
- Public participation in environmental decisions: an evaluation framework using social goals. T. C. Beierle (1998). *Resources for the Future*, Washington, DC. Available from: [www.rff.org](http://www.rff.org)

### Web

- The International Association for Public Participation: [www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org)
- Public involvement techniques for transportation decision-making by United States Department of Transportation: [www.fhwa.dot.gov/reports/pittd/cac.htm](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/reports/pittd/cac.htm)

This toolbox is designed to assist Forestry Commission staff when they are considering which tools they could use to involve the public in the forest and woodland planning process. For more information please visit the website at: [www.forestry.gov.uk/toolbox](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/toolbox)