**Code of Practice on Consultation and Community Engagement**

Consultation and engagement plays a key role in partnership working. Listening to and engaging with partners helps to ensure that proposals are supported and leads to better planning and delivery of services. There should be a commitment to continually improve the quality of consultation and engagement, by learning from experience and building on good practice.

1. **Definition**

**Consultation:** a two-way process by which an organisation seeks views to check whether proposals are right and supported, gauge their impact and identify alternatives before decisions are made. This means options can be properly appraised in advance of policy or service changes or new laws being made. Consultation allows choice but not an opportunity to take part in implementing plans.

**Engagement:** this is active, ongoing and informed joint working and it means including people in decision making processes and working together to implement change and ongoing service delivery. Community engagement refers to activities designed to give communities an opportunity to contribute to local decision-making and service delivery.

2. **Aim**

To develop and promote best practice in meaningful and effective consultation and engagement between the Public and Voluntary and Community Sectors, so that:

- public services will better reflect the views and concerns of local people and be better planned, prioritised and delivered;
- the public will have a greater sense of ownership;
- public solutions will be sustained by the active involvement of the communities concerned;
- partnerships will be effective; and
- policy will be more realistic and robust and better reflect peoples' needs and wishes.

3. **Commitments**

1. Gather evidence of the need for consultation and engagement, the issues to be addressed and the resources available to support engagement and use this evidence to agree the purpose, scope and timescale of the engagement and the actions to be taken.

3. Give early notice of forthcoming consultations, where possible, allowing enough time for Voluntary and Community Organisations to involve their service users, beneficiaries, members, volunteers and trustees in preparing responses.

4. Allow twelve weeks for Voluntary and Community Sector responses, unless this is prevented by legislative restrictions placed on the Public Sector or by other restrictions outside their control (for further guidance on this please refer to ‘How long to consult’ document).

5. Agree and use clear procedures that enable participants and others with an interest in the consultation/engagement to work with one another effectively and efficiently.

6. Ensure that necessary information is communicated between participants and feed back the results explaining how respondents have influenced the design and development of policies, programmes and public services, including where respondents’ views have not been acted upon.

7. Voluntary and Community Organisations should seek the views of service users, clients, beneficiaries, members, volunteers, and trustees when making representation to Public Sector organisations. Be clear on who is being represented, in what capacity, and on what basis that representation is being made.
Consultation and Community Engagement Checklist

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This checklist guidance aims to promote best practice in meaningful and effective consultation and engagement.

**Planning and methodology**

- The purpose of the consultation and engagement is clearly stated
- The topic and issues to be addressed during the consultation and engagement are clearly stated
- The process for consultation and engagement is clearly described
- The target audience and format of the consultation and engagement is clearly explained
- Fairness, equality and inclusion underpin all aspects of the consultation and engagement policy
- Existing good practice has been respected and followed where appropriate
- All participants, especially those with a specific interest in the consultation and engagement subject, or who may be particularly affected, are involved in planning from the beginning of the process
- Enough resources are allocated to support the consultation and engagement process
- The scope and timescale of the consultation and engagement process are reasonable and clearly documented (12 weeks is usually accepted to be a reasonable minimum timescale)
- The delivery methods of consultation and engagement are clear in purpose, accessible and appropriate for the needs of the participants; when possible, attention should be paid to the importance of outreach work and face to face engagement

**Involvement and support**

- It is clear whether the response to the consultation and engagement is based on views of the individual or on behalf of a group
- Any barriers to involvement are identified and attempts are made to overcome them
- Existing communication networks are maximised and participants work together to help facilitate quality responses

**Feedback and monitoring**

- The consultation and engagement is monitored and evaluated against its initial purpose
- Results from the consultation and engagement are communicated back to participants in good time and conveyed accurately and in an appropriate format
- Any decisions that follow as a result of the consultation and engagement are clearly publicised and explained
- There is a commitment to continually improving the quality of consultation and engagement by learning from experience, building on good practice and developing a consistent approach across different agencies