

HARROW COMPACT

HARROW CODE OF PRACTICE ON CONSULTATION

Effective consultation has many benefits for the community which include:

- § Helping to plan, prioritise and deliver better services.
- § Developing policies formed from a wide range of experience, utilising knowledge experience and expertise.
- § Increasing the credibility of the voluntary sector as a valuable source of informed opinion.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE CONSULTATION CODE OF PRACTICE

The aim of this code is to ensure that consultation is carried out in an effective manner with an underlying principle of not disempowering any organisation. However there does need to be a realisation that consultation needs to be coordinated to avoid overload. It is suggested that to ensure that organisations are consulted when they need to be, they are registered on an opt-in matrix maintained in the voluntary and community organisations database through a partnership newsletter to be discussed at the voluntary and community sector forum.

There should also be underlying principles of openness and transparency.

ACTIONS

The statutory sector will

- § Consult the voluntary and community sector on issues which are likely to affect it, particularly where new roles and responsibilities in the sector are proposed. This includes both issues that affect funding, support, recognition and partnering with the sector and issues that affect the clients of services provided by the voluntary and community sector.
- § Assess early in the developmental stage, the impact of new policies and procedures and changes to existing policies and procedures, for the voluntary and community sector.
- § Consult early and, where possible, involve the sector at an early stage of policy development taking into consideration that there is sometimes a need for sensitivity or confidentiality.
- § Prepare consultation documents that are concise, clearly laid out and written in simple language that will be understood by the intended audience.
- § Ensure that the information in consultation material is accurate and ensure that any research has been conducted in an objective and unbiased manner.
- § Give feedback on the outcome of consultation.
- § Be sensitive on a case-by-case basis to any additional resource implications for the voluntary and community sector arising from either the consultation process itself or from the policy or procedure changes about which consultation is being undertaken.

- § Accept as a principle that consultations should take place and that if it does not, explain why it has not happened.
- § Co-ordinate their consultation to reduce repetition and make consultation more focussed
- § Share information gained in order to reduce repetitious consultation
- § Include in any report of the results of consultation that is submitted to an ultimate decision-making body e.g. a Portfolio Holder, Cabinet, Council or Board, a statement of the impact of any issue that has material implications for the voluntary sector whether this relates to the funding, support, recognition or partnering with the sector or to the clients of services provided by the sector. This statement should include a summary of the consultation process, its outcome and impact on a specific community or the voluntary sector in general.

The voluntary and community sector will

- § Take account positively of the specific needs, interests and contributions of those parts of the sector which represent women, minority groups and the socially excluded.
- § Define and demonstrate how the voluntary sector represents their stated constituency, by stating who they are, what groups or causes in society they represent and how they involve those interest when forming their policies and positions, and in responding to the consultation itself.
- § Wherever possible consult their constituencies directly, including service users, volunteers, members and supporters; and where this is not practicable or appropriate, to indicate that they are responding on the basis of their accumulated knowledge and experience of working with the groups concerned.

Areas to consider

A GOOD PRACTICE CHECKLIST:

Plan and consult early – build consultation into plans for policy development, based on specific proposals and services and more generally. Consultation should be open and meaningful; it should be made clear in the process which matters that are open to change and those matters on which a firm decision has already been taken.

CONSULTATION METHODS:

There are many ways of consulting and using more than one method increases the chances of a good response, both in terms of quality and quantity. Methods to be considered include:

Focus Groups

Residents' Panels

Community Venues

Community Languages,

Plain and simple language

Accessible formats e.g. Braille and large print.

The Internet, although not everyone will want to use it or has access to it.

Consideration also needs to be given to the needs of people with learning disabilities and how their needs are met and at the way people receiving the information can use it e.g. those with different disabilities.

TIMESCALE

Accurate notice needs to be given to relevant specific bodies.

Sufficient time for consultation, it is suggested that **four weeks** as a minimum for standard consultations with **eight weeks** as a minimum for major complex consultations. Statutory consultation requires a minimum of **twelve weeks**

FEEDBACK:

There need to be mechanisms for effective feedback which will vary according to the scale of the consultation and the number of responses. Where individual and group responses number less than 200, each responder individual or group should receive a response. . Where responses number more than 200, feedback should be provided via the public sector organisation's website, through the media and other forms of public information provision.

Feedback should include the number of responses, the balance of opinion received and the action that the public sector body has decided to take on the issue concerned and why. It is important that if and when voluntary and community organisations are mentioned in connection with a consultation exercise, that they are agreeable to this.

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