

The Staffordshire Compact

Consultation and Policy Code of Practice



Staffordshire Strategic Partnership

Consultation and Policy Code of Practice

“Understanding and responding to our communities”

Introduction

This code of practice sets out the undertakings for third sector organisations and public organisations in Staffordshire on good practice for involvement and consultation.

The Consultation and Policy Code of Practice is to be viewed in conjunction with the Staffordshire compact. The Staffordshire compact is an overarching working document that underpins and supports those of the district and borough compacts. This code is one of a number of codes which describe how the compact will work in practice and is based on the national code.

What do we mean by consulting and engaging with our communities?

Community engagement is understood to be a dialogue between agencies and the community; from informing, to consulting and empowering.

What does this code of practice aim to achieve?

- To implement effective consultation processes.
- Enhance partnership working.
- Understanding the need and purpose for effective consultation and engagement.
- Encourage better practice in planning and undertaking consultation.
- Enable policy development and service planning to take account of the needs of a diverse range of groups.

Benefits of using this code

- By engaging we can ensure that services are relevant to local needs and tailored to service user requirements.
- There is a consistent approach to consulting and engaging with communities that is aligned with best practice.
- This will assist in achieving high quality services and drive performance improvement.

Principles of Consultation and Policy

Inclusivity

It is important that third sector organisations and public organisations in Staffordshire seek to involve both the people they represent, and the wider public. We must also ensure that those involved are representative of our diverse communities. This requires consideration of factors such as age, gender, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, religion or belief and disability, as well as wider equality and diversity issues such as economic deprivation, rural isolation, social exclusion etc. (The **Equality & Diversity Code of Practice** outlines our broad, inclusive approach to equality and diversity).

Confidentiality

All consultation and engagement activity should be conducted in strict confidence to encourage openness and honesty.

Clarity and transparency

Consultees should be informed about the purpose, boundaries, expectations, limitations and potential of involvement and informed of what is achievable and what is not. All information and materials should be presented in plain language and in an appropriate and accessible format.

Honesty

All consultation and engagement activity should be conducted in a way to ensure an honest exchange of information between the different sectors. Where there are restrictions on what can and can't be achieved, participants should be informed from the outset.

Feedback

Adequate and clear feedback to participants, and the wider community to demonstrate how their comments and views have influenced service delivery and made a difference. All feedback should be provided to participants at the earliest possible opportunity.

Promote a positive approach

Improving the quality of community engagement requires commitment to learning from experience.

Appendix 1 - Involvement Process

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1	Consultation and engagement should be carried out to better understand what our communities needs and priorities are and at a stage when there is scope to influence policy outcomes.		
2	The third sector where appropriate should play a full and active part in the planning stage of the consultation process.		
3	Recognise the resource implications imposed on third sector organisations in engaging their members, service users and other stakeholders in consultation and engagement.		
4	Build consultation and engagement into your regular business/ service planning cycle and consult early.		
5	Appraise new policies and procedures, particularly at the developmental stage, identifying as far as possible any implications at national, regional and local level.		
6	Subject to considerations of urgency, sensitivity or confidentiality, public organisations will consult the voluntary and community sector on issues that are likely to affect it. Such consultation to follow the national guidelines, it should take account of the needs of organisations to consult their users and stakeholders.		
7	Give consultees enough time to respond to the consultation. National standards recommend a minimum consultation period of three months and where possible we should work to this standard. The duration of your consultation must be flexible to take account of the audience you are consulting with and the methodology being adopted to ensure sufficient time is allowed for people to respond. Also consider any additional time that may be needed to produce your consultation materials in alternative formats.		
8	Be flexible and sensitive to the needs of those you wish to consult – think about how to reach all of the intended target audience, and take account positively of the specific needs, interests and contributions of those parts of the sector which represent vulnerable, disadvantaged and marginalised groups.		
9	Be clear about the consultation purpose.		
10	Explain where decisions have already been made – make clear what you can change and what you can't.		
11	Where appropriate publicise the consultation and encourage participation by involving membership and infrastructure organisations.		
12	Use more than one method of engagement where appropriate to ensure inclusivity and learn from others in both public organisations and the third sector.		
13	Write documents in simple language and be clear about their purpose. Consider the accessibility of printed documents and be ready to provide alternative formats, as necessary.		
14	Encourage those consulted to give honest views.		
15	Respect the confidentiality of information provided by the sector, within the constraints of the law and the proper performance of public duties, when given access to information on a confidential basis.		
16	Analyse carefully the results of the engagement and report back to participants on the views that were received and what you have done as a result.		

17	Communicate and represent accurately the views recorded in the course of consultation exercises.		
18	Evaluate carefully after consulting, and learn lessons for next time.		