

CONSULTATION CODE OF GOOD PRACTICE

A guide for the relationship between statutory agencies and the voluntary & community sector in Test Valley

Contents

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Purpose of the code**
- 3. Forms of consultation**
- 4. Principles**
- 5. Good practice checklist**
- 6. Monitoring progress**
- 7. Mediation**
- 8. Contacts and other related information**

1. INTRODUCTION

The Consultation Code of Good Practice is to be viewed in conjunction with the One Compact for Hampshire. Development of the Consultation Code of Good Practice has involved an extensive consultation process following input from a variety of voluntary organisations and community groups (hereafter all referred to as voluntary organisations) and statutory agencies.

This Code sets out how to ensure that consultation between voluntary organisations and statutory agencies is appropriate, easily understood and effective. All sectors have a role to play:

- Statutory agencies have a community leadership role, and work with other partners to secure the economic, social, health and environmental well-being of residents.
- Voluntary organisations fulfill a number of roles: as users of services; representatives and advocates for particular sections of the community; service providers.

By working together all parties can help to promote social inclusion and increase the involvement of those who may be harder to reach.

2. PURPOSE OF THE CODE

2.1. Scope and status of the code

- a. This local code of good practice is a supporting document of the One Compact for Hampshire, which is a framework for the working relationship between the Voluntary and Community sector and the Statutory Agencies. This code is not a legally binding document but should be seen as a good practice guide to strengthen the way the two sectors work together.
- b. The One Compact for Hampshire (section 4) states that both sectors recognise that consultation is a two-way process, which is in many cases influenced by Central Government. Both sectors agree to:
 - Build on, coordinate, develop and improve existing consultation mechanisms ensuring they are inclusive
 - Appraise together new policies and procedures, particularly at the developmental stage, to identify as far as possible the implications for both sectors.
- c. Members of the One Compact for Hampshire are committed to open and honest dialogue, subject to compliance with confidentiality where appropriate.
- d. This local code applies to all members who may wish to adopt it as a standard for their organisation. Where members do not follow the code for a particular consultation exercise they must satisfy themselves that they have good reasons for not doing so.

2.2. Aim

- a. The aim of this code of good practice is to enable a wide range of diverse views and experience to inform, improve and influence decision-making processes through effective and appropriate consultation.
- b. Consultation is a two-way process that aims to:
 - Enable others to contribute to the development of policies and services
 - Demonstrate a commitment to be open and accountable
 - Lead to more realistic and robust policy and procedures that better reflect individual and community needs
 - Create better partnership working and mutual trust and understanding
 - Enable policy development and service planning to be influenced by a wide range of experience and expertise
 - Provide opportunities to review policies and procedures
 - Help plan, prioritise and deliver better services.

2.3. Ways to involve people in decision making

- a. Organisations should be explicit about the level of involvement they are seeking and explain their reasons.
- b. Consultation is one way to involve others in the decision-making process. There are various other ways of involving people; depending on how much influence others will have on the final outcome:
 - **Consultation** is the intention to seek the views of others before a policy or service is developed. By taking this approach you intend to consider the views of other groups and people in the decision-making process.
 - **Delegation** is where others have the skills knowledge and experience for them to be involved in the decision-making process. For example where a local youth group is given the money to develop a skate park themselves.
 - **Partnership** is giving other people an opportunity to influence decisions and to take part in the development of policy or service delivery. For example where a person is given the opportunity to be part of a Steering Group or Management Committee.
 - **Information sharing** is where details of decisions already made are shared with others. Often decisions are publicised and explained before implementation without allowing others to make changes.
- c. The method chosen will depend on the circumstances. There will need to be a clear understanding of the aims of each particular decision. This Code only covers consultation but many of the principles also apply to Information, Partnership and Delegation.

3. FORMS OF CONSULTATION

There is a variety of methods in which to consult, including meetings, written consultations, focus groups, telephone survey and workshops. There is no one right method. What matters is that the approach taken should be flexible and respond to the needs of those being consulted. All forms of consultation should be easily accessible and all consultation documents should be concise, clearly written, in simple jargon-free language and appropriate to the audience at which they are aimed. Steps should be taken to reach all people.

4. PRINCIPLES

- a. Publicise the consultation to encourage wider involvement and to allow organisations time to plan their work.
- b. Plan and consult early. This will allow everyone time to be involved, discuss and exchange views and will help ensure that the maximum benefit is gained from the consultation exercise.
- c. Allow reasonable timescales for response. Plan for the recommended minimum of 12 weeks for organisations to respond to consultations and take account of particular times in the calendar when additional work may be more difficult to accommodate, for example holiday periods. If this is not possible then explain the reasons clearly, as sometimes external pressures can affect good intentions.
- d. Be open and honest. Consultation should be meaningful and open if it is to have credibility. This will enable everyone to make the best use of their time and resources to deliver useful results. Be clear about specific roles. Explain who has responsibility for what and how much influence others may have.
- e. Allocate sufficient resources. Limited funds can restrict the breadth or depth of consultation and undermine the intention to be open and honest. All parties should be clear about their commitment to the costs and time involved.
- f. Be inclusive. Voluntary and community organisations help represent the diverse needs of Test Valley residents. Therefore, it is important to understand that a variety of approaches will be required as traditional methods of consultation may exclude some people within communities. Active steps should be taken to identify under-represented interests or groups and to seek ways in which they can be involved.
- g. Keep talking, keep listening. Consultation is just one part of an ongoing discussion, which can help to keep everyone involved with developments, and avoid unnecessary surprises. Ongoing consultation can improve the development and delivery of programmes, policies and services, and help to improve mutual understanding.
- h. Give feedback. Organisations should offer people the opportunity to find out what has happened as a result of the consultation – even if that is a decision

not to do anything – and why. Careful analysis of the responses and participant feedback should be built into the consultation programme. Results of the consultation should be widely publicized so that those groups who were unable to respond are still kept informed.

- i. Communicate clearly. All consultation documents should be concise, clearly laid out, avoiding jargon and written in simple language. They should be available in different languages; other formats should be available on request.
- j. Work together. Agencies consulting with the voluntary sector should strive to reduce the number of consultations carried out by uniting on joint initiatives. Where this is not possible, or appropriate, agencies should share the results of such consultations with other agencies that might be interested in them.

5. GOOD PRACTICE CHECKLIST

Consultation documents should either contain or be accompanied by the following:

- a. A consultation calendar that makes clear to all parties the processes, overall timetable and highlights relevant deadlines for responses and feedback.
- b. The name, address and, wherever possible, the telephone number and e-mail address of a person who can be contacted for further information.
- c. A front sheet summary including:
 - the purpose of the consultation and how it will be carried out
 - a description of the issues, proposal or problem under consideration
 - how respondents views will be used and how feedback will be given.
- d. A fair presentation of the issues on which views are being sought. This should provide clear questions to answer, as well as inviting other additional comments and ideas.
- e. An explanation of who has responsibility for the final decision or outcome and what is open for change and what is not.
- f. Relevant background information.
- g. A list of those being consulted; this document may also ask consultees to suggest any organisations or individuals who should also be consulted.
- h. A request that organisations explain who they are, whom they represent, with whom they have further consulted and how those views have been reported back fairly and accurately.
- i. The opportunity for individuals to respond anonymously, if desired.
- j. An opportunity to feedback comments on the consultation itself and to suggest improvements that could be made in the future. Respondents may be invited to engage in ongoing participation.

6. MONITORING PROGRESS

Regular monitoring of the exercise will help organisations to keep track of progress and the rate of response, ensuring that responses have been received from a diverse range of groups and people. Monitoring will also ensure that the exercise conforms to the principles of the code.

6.1. After the consultation – analysis and feedback

- a. The results should be carefully analysed ensuring that the views of small organisations and individuals are not overlooked. Particular attention should be paid to the views of those most affected by the proposals.
- b. Once a decision is made on the way forward it should be publicised widely and all respondents informed. The consultation process should be explained, as should the justification of the decision made, in light of the views expressed. A full report should be made easily accessible. A list of those who responded should be included.
- c. It should be anticipated that some respondents may wish to question why their views have been rejected and ask for a full explanation.

6.2. Evaluation

- a. Effective evaluation provides information on what worked, what didn't and why. It helps to make sure that you get best value for money from your efforts and time. This will help continually to improve the process. The response forms will have some comments from participants but the organising body should also evaluate their approach and review what could be done differently the next time.
- b. Points to think about:
 - Were clear objectives set in the first place?
 - Did you receive the response you wanted from underrepresented or socially excluded groups?
 - Can you show which methods achieved success and which did not?
 - Was the timetable realistic and achieved?
 - Were sufficient resources allocated?
 - Was the information easy to access, relevant and available in alternative formats?
 - Has anything changed as a result of the consultation?
- c. Evaluation is also an effective way to identify any training needs, for organisations and participants, in relation to consultation and policy appraisal. It can be a useful way to share experience and best practice.
- d. Finally make sure that the views and information received are used to make a difference.

7. MEDIATION

7.1. General principles

- a. The One Compact for Hampshire has now been agreed. It relates specifically to the operation of the Compact framework and associated Codes of Practice (Click [here](#) for details of the One Compact for Hampshire and all Test Valley Codes of Practice). It is recognised that organisations will have their own mechanisms in place for dealing with other disagreements that do not relate to the operation of the Compact framework.
- b. As far as possible disagreements over the application of the framework of the One Compact for Hampshire and this Code of Practice should be resolved directly between the parties involved.
- c. Where there is still disagreement, both parties have access to the mediation procedure within Test Valley.

7.2. The mediation process

- a. Any organisation or individual that feels they have not been treated in accordance with the spirit of the Compact should contact either:
 - The Chief Officer of Test Valley Community Services on 01794 519998
 - The Community Development Officer at Test Valley Borough Council on 01264 368000
- b. If mediation is required then a Mediation Panel will be convened. This Panel will be the group of people that developed the Compact Codes of Practice for Test Valley and will include representation from:
 - Test Valley Community Services
 - Test Valley Borough Council
 - Hampshire County Council
 - Primary Care Trusts
 - Other voluntary sector organisations
- c. The aim would always be for mediation to result in a mutually agreed solution that is acceptable to all parties. This is the sole purpose of the Mediation Panel.
- d. The Mediation Panel has no powers of enforcement. If no mutually agreed solution can be found then any further course of action would be a matter between the parties concerned.

8. CONTACTS AND OTHER RELATED INFORMATION

8.1. Contacts

For more information about the One Compact for Hampshire, any of the Codes of Good Practice or how they are implemented within Test Valley please contact either:

The Chief Officer
Test Valley Community Services
2nd Floor
Coopers House
The Horsefair
ROMSEY
SO51 8JZ

OR

Community Development Officer
Test Valley Borough Council
Housing Service
Beech Hurst
Weyhill Road
ANDOVER
SP10 3AJ

01794 519998
romsey@tvcs.org.uk

01264 368000
housing@testvalley.gov.uk

8.2. Other related information

Other information that might be of interest is (click to access the document):

- [One Compact For Hampshire \(including Funding and Volunteering Codes\)](#)
- [Test Valley Borough Council Consultation Strategy and Guidelines](#)
- [Test Valley Borough Council Planning Framework for Community Involvement](#)