

DRAFT 2- Consultation Document

Consultation and Involvement - Code of Good Practice

Worcestershire Partnership

The Worcestershire Partnership brings together local government, public services such as health, learning providers, police and probation, voluntary and community organisations and local businesses within Worcestershire. The work of the Partnership is based on a shared common purpose and goodwill.

In order to tackle issues that affect the quality of life of Worcestershire residents, crime, health, jobs, education and transport, for example, the partnership works together, sharing ideas and pooling resources.

The vision of the Worcestershire Partnership is:

'A county with safe, cohesive, healthy and inclusive communities, a strong and diverse economy and a valued and cherished environment'.

Introduction

The Worcestershire Compact that was signed in June 2006 provides a framework for the way the statutory and VCS organizations to provide services together in order that the people of Worcestershire receive better services. The Compact is designed to ensure respect and equality between different organisations by providing a code of behaviour and lays responsibilities on each side.

Reasons for the Code of Practice for Consultation and Involvement

The VCS fulfill a crucial role in enabling individuals to contribute to public life and the development of active communities. They act as pathfinders for the involvement of users and carers in the design and delivery of services and often advocate for those who would otherwise not have a voice. In doing so the sector promotes both equality and diversity. Consultation and involvement can create a working partnership and mutual understanding with individuals, groups and organisations that choose to engage.

Purpose of the Code

This Code of Practice aims to make a positive impact on the relationship between the public sector and the VCS and their joint commitment to implementing effective consultation and involvement processes so that the VCS is able to fulfill its strategic role in contributing to improved services for the community. It aims to set a framework for:

- Understanding the purposes and need for effective consultation
- Encouraging better practice in planning and undertaking consultations
- Enabling policy development, monitoring and reviewing services and future planning to take account of the needs of a diverse range of individuals and groups

Consultation and Involvement are elements in a continuum:

Information - Consultation - Involvement - Engagement

What is Consultation?

Consultation is the process by which organisations seek the views of individuals, local groups and the wider community in the course of planning and delivering services. Effective consultation helps to ensure that public sector bodies develop and review their policies, strategies and procedures taking into account the potential impact that these policies and proposals may have on different sectors of society.

For the VCS consultation presents an opportunity to bring their knowledge, experience and expertise to bear on behalf of the people and causes for whom they work.

The VCS may also carry out consultation exercises with their member organisations, users or with public sector partners.

What is Involvement?

While consultation is generally seen as asking questions and taking note of the replies, involvement is much more – bringing on board service users and carers from the start so involving them in designing any consultation and addressing the results and by giving them a voice and encouraging them to contribute to the design, delivery and monitoring of services.

Key Principle

Consultation, including involvement, has to be an open and meaningful process if it is to command credibility and make the best use of time and resources for all those involved.

The Process of Consultation

- Plan and consult at early stages of policy development and be build it into planning and commissioning cycles
- Public sector bodies should make clear those matters which are open to change and those on which firm decisions have already been made
- A variety of methods may be used, including postal and email surveys, meetings, focus groups, providers or user panels. Each method may involve a different level of participation, and it is important to be clear about the level of participation required from those being consulted. Using more than one method increases the chance of a better response both in terms of quality and quantity. Ensure the methods used are appropriate for the target audience E.g. large text for elderly or partially sighted, Braille etc and even in home language if a group does not read or speak English”.
- Electronic methods alone should not be used.
- Consultations should be in accessible formats
- Consultation documents should be concise and written in clear language with jargon avoided.
- Information should include the intended timetable for the decision-making and a statement of how feedback will be given
- A named individual and their contact details should be provided for respondents who have queries.
- At least twelve weeks should be allowed for consultations to accommodate work and committee cycles and enable information to be disseminated to front-line groups. If this timescale is not possible reasons should be given.
- There should be a report on the views received and details of what has been done as a result of the consultation.
- If individuals, groups or organizations choose not to respond by the deadline specified ‘silence procedure’ will be taken as consent
- Consultations should invite respondents to feedback on the consultation and make suggestions for improving such exercises in the future.

The Code of Practice

Based on the national code, the Code identifies the principles and practices that cover all forms of consultation whether relating to the development of new policies, strategies and services, or to the review of existing ones. Enabling others to contribute to this process will lead to more realistic policy which better reflects people’s needs and wishes, and will help to deliver better services.

All partners in this Compact agree to abide by the requirements of this Code of Practice. It is not a legally binding document but a framework describing good practice. Once agreed, the Code, like the Compact, will be kept up-to-date by the Compact Steering Group which is a subgroup of Worcestershire Partnership.

Commitment by All Partners

In response to the Key Principle we as partners commit to:

- Working together to ensure consultations are appropriate and inclusive so as to achieve better results
- Being open about the different interests within the sectors and about potential conflicts of interest
- Respect confidentiality when respondents request it.

Commitment by Statutory Sector Partners

In response to the Key Principle we as partners in the statutory sector commit to:

- Consulting the VCS, as early as possible, on issues that are likely to affect them, particularly where new roles and responsibilities for the sector are being proposed
- Build consultation with the VCS into plans for policy development
- Appraise new policies and procedures, particularly at the developmental stage, identifying as far as possible any implications for the sectors
- Take into account the specific needs, interests and contributions of groups who are hard to engage
- Involve users, carers and the VCS in identifying potential solutions to issues and concerns
- Publicise consultations including on the Worcestershire Partnership website
- Recognise the role of infrastructure organisations and networks in disseminating consultations to individuals, groups and organisations and possible cost implications

Commitment by Voluntary and Community Sectors Partners

In response to the Key Principle we as partners in the voluntary and community sectors commit to:

- Use infrastructure organisations and networks to encourage participation in consultations and to streamline the consultation process
- Consulting, whenever possible, service users, carers, volunteers, members and supporters; 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
- Take into account the specific needs, interests and contributions of groups that are hard to engage
- Ensure that information presented to public sector bodies is accurate and that any research undertaken has been conducted in an objective and unbiased manner
- Respect the confidentiality of information when given access to it on that basis

Adopting the Code

The statutory sector and the VCS are expected to adopt this code as recommended good practice in their work. The code will inform the development of and implementation of the Worcestershire Compact.

Reviewing the Implementation of the Code

The Worcestershire Compact Steering Group will, on a regular basis, review the consultations that have been listed on the Worcestershire Partnership Consultation website. An evaluation of a sample of consultations will be conducted.

Resolving disputes arising between partners

Disagreements relating to the Consultation and Involvement Code of Practice will, where possible, be settled by the parties involved using internal complaints/ dispute resolution procedures. If this is not possible a consiliation process, coordinated by the Worcestershire Compact Steering Group will be implemented.

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