



Consultation and Policy Appraisal Code of Practice

coming together is a beginning

staying **together** is progress

working together is **SUCCESS**



What is Wolverhampton's Compact?

It is a commitment between the Statutory Sector and the Voluntary and Community Sector in Wolverhampton which aims to ensure we work better together.

The Wolverhampton Compact Partnership came together in 2004 to develop the Wolverhampton Compact, it's Codes of Practice and steer their implementation. Local Compacts are based on the Compact between National Government and the Voluntary & Community Sector that was agreed in 1998.

The Wolverhampton Compact Partnership is made up of:



“The development and maintenance of strong and effective working partnerships between statutory organisations and the voluntary sector and community organisations is important in the provision of good quality services for the community. In Wolverhampton we are proud of those working relationships.

The Compact is designed to demonstrate a commitment to open and transparent partnerships. The Compact will apply to all statutory agencies and voluntary and community sector organisations operating within the City; complementing existing joint working arrangements.

By signing up to the Wolverhampton Compact organisations signal their commitment to uphold the 10 jointly developed principles that will underpin Compact working in our city”.



Jon Crockett.
Chair,
Wolverhampton Partnership.

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1.0 Introduction

This Code of Practice sets out the undertakings for the statutory and the voluntary and community sectors in Wolverhampton on good practice for involvement and consultation. In common with the national code, the undertakings aim to promote the involvement of the voluntary and community sector in the consultation and engagement process and contribute to statutory sector policies and procedures particularly where these have a direct impact on voluntary and community organisations.

The Consultation and Policy Appraisal Code of Practice is to be viewed in conjunction with the Wolverhampton Compact. 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. The code has been developed following several consultation events involving local statutory agencies and a variety of voluntary and community organisations.

This Code of Practice also relates closely to Wolverhampton Partnership's Community and Public Involvement Strategy, which sets out the public and voluntary agencies joint commitment to involving the public and communities more effectively in the services they deliver.

2.0 Definitions

Community organisations are generally understood to represent community interests, have few or no paid staff and lower or no income when compared with larger voluntary organisations.

Voluntary organisations are those which employ staff who lead the organisation and are usually managed by a management committee or a Board of Directors.

The Statutory Sector includes organisations which provide public services required by law such as the local authority, the Primary Care Trust and the Fire Service.

Mutual undertakings refer to the things that apply to both the voluntary and community sector and the statutory sector.

Involvement and engagement are where organisations invite local people to become involved in the decision making processes.

Consultation involves organisations asking members of the public about issues on which they require advice, feedback and/or information.

Constituency is a group of people served by an organisation, or representative of an organisation.

Service user involvement is the involvement of direct users of particular services.

Experts by experience are people with particular experience of specific issues which gives them knowledge and insights into those issues.

Outcomes are the changes, benefits or learning or other effects which actually occur as a result of an organisation's activities.

(Charities Evaluation Service (CES) www.ces-vol.org.uk).

Impact is the change, effect or benefits that result from services or activities on a wider society than its direct users (CES).

3.0 Fundamental Principles of Consultation and Policy Appraisal

Inclusivity

It is important that both sectors seek to involve a fair representation of groups and individuals. This includes age, gender, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, race and ethnicity, religious belief and disability¹.

Confidentiality

All consultation and engagement events 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.

Honesty

Engagement and involvement events and consultation activities should be conducted in such a way to ensure an honest exchange of information between the different sectors.

Feedback

Feedback on engagement and consultation events and activities should be provided to the respective constituencies at the earliest opportunity.

¹ This is not an exhaustive list. Many other groups and individuals can feel excluded. For further information please consult the Wolverhampton Compact Equality and Diversity Code. See also 4.1.1.

4.0 The Consultation and Policy Appraisal Code of Practice

4.1 Mutual undertakings

All sectors agree to:

- 1** Take account of the specific needs, interests and contributions of individuals and groups on the basis of gender, disability, race and ethnicity, religious belief, sexual orientation, gender reassignment and age in the involvement process. Consideration should be given to other factors such as culture, economic circumstances, education and health, for example.
- 2** Wherever possible, be innovative and involve direct service users and 'experts by experience' in the engagement and consultation process.
- 3** Respect the confidentiality of information provided in consultations and engagement events within the constraints of the law and the proper performance of public duties.
- 4** Ensure that the information exchanged between the sectors is accurate and honestly provided and that any research has been conducted objectively.
- 5** Prepare consultation information and materials that are concise, clearly laid out and written in plain language that will be understood by the intended audience.
- 6** Create a comfortable, open and confidential environment to produce an honest exchange of information.
- 7** Work within the regulations that govern their organisation e.g. constitution, memorandum and articles of association and policies and procedures, when representing their constituency.
- 8** Provide their respective constituency with relevant and appropriate feedback at the earliest opportunity.

4.2 Statutory Sector Undertakings

Wolverhampton Statutory Sector is committed to establishing and maintaining best practice in effective consultation, engagement and policy appraisal.

When involving voluntary and community organisations it undertakes to:

- 1** Engage the voluntary and community sectors at the start of the service planning process and explain any decisions already reached.
- 2** Build involvement with the voluntary and community sector into plans for policy and procedure development and appraisal at the start of the process, identifying as far as possible any implications for the voluntary and community sectors and ensure these implications are adequately communicated and considered.
- 3** Seek agreement with the voluntary and community sector where the statutory sector is proposing new roles and responsibilities for voluntary and community groups and involve them in policy development (subject to conditions of urgency, sensitivity or confidentiality).
- 4** Involve the voluntary and community sector in developing the engagement and consultation process. Where this is impractical or not feasible because of factors such as shortened timescales imposed externally, explain and demonstrate the reasons why this cannot be done.
- 5** Seek agreement with the voluntary and community sector on designing consultation and engagement activities/events taking account of the resources needed (including attendance allowances, refreshments and expenses) and the involvement methods to be used.
- 6** Recognise that responding to consultations in prescribed timescales can be challenging for some voluntary and community groups and will programme consultations over 12 weeks where practical. Explanations will be given where a shortened timescale is not possible.
- 7** Wherever appropriate use direct service users and 'experts by experience' as paid consultants in the engagement and consultation process.
- 8** Evaluate and analyse the results of its engagement and consultation exercises and processes and use the learning from this to inform future consultation and best practice.
- 9** Provide feedback on the process, results and outcomes of the consultation/ involvement in a reasonable timescale. It is recommended that this should be within 4 weeks and if a full feedback is not possible, provide regular updates.

4.3 Voluntary & Community Sector Undertakings

Wolverhampton Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) is committed to pursuing recognised good practice in its representational work. In responding to statutory sector consultations and engagement, voluntary and community organisations undertake to:

- 1** Encourage participation by their constituents including known direct service users and 'experts by experience' in statutory engagement and consultations based on the resources they have available.
- 2** Wherever possible consult their constituency directly. 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.
- 3** Explain who they are, how they represent their constituents, what groups they represent and how they have involved their constituents in obtaining their views in responding to engagement and consultation events.
- 4** Represent their constituency, not personal self interest, when attending engagement and consultation events and activities.

Appendix 1: Involvement Process

The following is a series of key points based on the national Consultation and Policy Appraisal Code of Practice adapted to produce a good practice checklist for statutory organisations in implementing the involvement process.

		✓	X
1	Build consultation and engagement into the very beginning of your regular planning cycle and consult early.		
2	Appraise new policies and procedures with voluntary and community group representatives, particularly at the developmental stage, identifying as far as possible any implications for the sector at the local level arising from national and regional directives and consult with VCS about these implications.		
3	Publicise involvement to ensure as wider representation as possible.		
4	Give consultees sufficient time to respond - 12 weeks is recommended.		
5	Provide background information to enable the VCS sector to respond to involvement activities in an informed way.		
6	Be clear about the purpose and process of consultation/ engagement events.		
7	Ensure that consultation and engagement is well planned and that there is no unnecessary duplication of activities.		
8	Make use of existing data so that the same questions are not asked repeatedly.		
9	Write information and materials in plain English and use other formats where appropriate e.g. visual and or interactive.		
10	Wherever possible, encourage direct 'service user involvement' and 'experts by experience' in the engagement process.		
11	Make clear to those involved what can be changed and what cannot.		
12	Carefully consider suitable methods of engagement/consultation and use more than one method where possible. (See Appendix 2). Learn from others in both the statutory and the voluntary and community sector to share and encourage best practice.		
13	Be flexible and sensitive to the needs of those you wish to consult and engage – think about how to reach all of the intended target audience. (See Appendix 3).		
14	Meet the specific needs and interests of excluded communities and think how their contributions can be valued.		
15	Encourage those consulted to give honest views, for example by assuring confidentiality in consultation events and interviews.		
16	Formally thank participants for attending events and activities by letter or email.		
17	Evaluate and analyse the process, results and outcome of the consultation and engagement and feedback within a reasonable timescale on how the views have informed the decision-making. 4 weeks is recommended.		

Appendix 2: Engagement and Consultation Methods

There are a variety of forms of engagement and consultation methods. Before beginning the engagement or consultation planning process, it may be helpful to examine some of these to identify the most suitable method to use.

'Involve' has developed an approach called 'Deliberative Public Engagement' a full description can be found on their website www.involve.org.uk

This site is linked to www.peopleandparticipation.net which is described as:

'... an online interactive tool which helps those seeking to engage with the public to select participatory methods based on their specific circumstances. It provides a comprehensive methods database, covering traditional and innovative approaches to public participation from around the world and a selection of case studies, enabling site users to post their own stories to inspire others.'

(Source: involve.org.uk homepage, March 2008).

Appendix 3: Working with 'User Consultants'

This checklist is especially important when working with 'user consultants', 'experts by experience' and volunteers. However most of the points here are also key to the engagement process and ensuring participants feel and are respected.

Getting Started

Some approaches give more genuine involvement and engagement than others. Prior to involving 'user consultants' it is important to make the following considerations.

- 1** Be honest about decision making, who will make the final decision?
Where does the power lie?
- 2** Have 'user consultants' chosen their representatives or have you invited 'safe people' (someone who the 'user consultant' feels comfortable with)?
- 3** Are your staff team all on board, have any potential concerns / problems been addressed?
- 4** Have you involved 'user consultants' in the whole process?

Before

- 1** Is the venue close to public transport? Where necessary ensure transport is arranged.
- 2** Ensure that clear directions are given to people about venues.
- 3** Ensure that prior to any consultation participants receive all the appropriate paper work - well in advance.
- 4** Provide your contact address and phone number – you may need to clarify some points.
- 5** Let people know who will be facilitating / speaking at the consultation.
- 6** Travel and childcare expenses should be paid on the day to 'experts by experience', 'user consultants' and 'volunteer representatives' involved in the planning and delivery of consultation events.
- 7** Do not start events before 10.00am as this restricts people who use bus passes or have to get children to school.
- 8** Let participants know how long the event will take.

During

- 1** Any speakers / facilitators and, where feasible, participants should introduce themselves and explain their role.
- 2** Make the purpose of the event clear at the beginning.
- 3** Be aware of the language and style of the meeting/event, avoid using jargon and terminology; if used give explanations.
- 4** Have you made arrangements for drinks (ensure caffeine free drinks are available).
- 5** Plan for breaks during a long event.

At The End

- 1** Ensure you are available to answer any queries participants may have.
- 2** Make certain that payment and travel arrangements have been made.
- 3** Thank the participants for attending.

After

- 1** Ensure where appropriate that the contact details for the user consultant are passed on to the note taker.
- 2** Send out any paperwork as soon as possible and a formal letter/email of thanks.
- 3** Ensure participants are informed of any changes to venue, date, time, etc of future meetings.
- 4** Ensure participants know who to contact for further information or clarification.

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www.wolverhamptoncompact.co.uk

Copies of the Wolverhampton Compact and Codes of Practice are available from:

www.wolverhamptoncompact.co.uk

If you require this document in any other format or community language, please contact Saffi Price at the above address / telephone.