

Consultation Code of Practice

1. Definition

Consultation means involving voluntary organisations to development of services. Consultations take place when it is proposed to make a major change in the way that services are provided or during the development of a new service.

Effective consultation gives the public, public services' staff and voluntary organisations the opportunity to take part in the development of local policy. It builds trust and partnerships that can be used to monitor and improve services. It encourages exchanges of information that can lead to better understanding of local needs.

In a consultation a number of options may be offered. Feedback received will be a significant factor and may change the final policy or service.

2. Aims

- a. To ensure that the public, through the voluntary and community sector, is able to be part of the democratic society
- b. To ensure that the voluntary and community sector is able to comment on and influence the decision making process of policies, strategies, planning and services
- c. To set up a framework for both the public sector and voluntary and community sector on good practice for consultations
- d. To facilitate joint responses to government consultations in order to strengthen Swindon's voice at both regional and national levels
- e. To support the provision of service improvement

3. Shared Values

- a. Democracy – The general public, through the voluntary and community sector, should have more influence on the decision making process in a democratic society
- b. Inclusiveness – To be inclusive the consultation process has to be accessible. A variety of methods and formats will be used to encourage a broad diversity of viewpoints

- c. Accountability – All partners to the Code should be accountable for their actions to the relevant authority

4. Joint Undertakings

- a. To tackle and eliminate discrimination all partners should have an Equalities Policy or Statement and be actively committed to promoting good practices
- b. To develop and improve existing consultation processes
- c. To understand and acknowledge the constraints which each sector faces
- d. To work together to lobby at all levels for early publication of consultation timetables and realistic timescales for consultation process
- e. To use plain language and easy to understand formats that are accessible for all
- f. To identify and provide reasonable resources and methods needed to carry out consultation

5. Undertakings by the Public Sector

- a. To be clear about the purpose of consultations
- b. To provide sufficient information to enable the voluntary and community sector to provide meaningful responses
- c. To create a central calendar to inform community of the forthcoming consultations and co-ordinate them
- d. To take account of consultations. To analyse the results and provide feedback
- e. To develop a strategy for resourcing the implementation of the Code of Practice with the voluntary and community sector
- f. To work with the voluntary and community sector in the development of policies, strategies, plans and services

- g. To offer a mix of consultation methods and formats to meet the needs of the community and to be inclusive
- h. To ensure that realistic timescales will be given for consultations. Normally not less than 12 weeks (shorter periods may be required in emergency situations, but these are to be kept to an absolute minimum)
- i. To support infrastructure* organisations (such as: Voluntary Action and Swindon Federation of Community Organisations) and user led organisations in facilitating consultations

*Voluntary & Community Sector Infrastructure Organisations are those that play a supporting, co-ordinating, representative, policy making and development role for other voluntary and community organisations

6. Undertakings by the Voluntary & Community Sector

- a. To use their influence to encourage participation in consultations
- b. To consult with their target groups by a mix of methods to meet specific needs
- c. To promote good practice on consultation processes and effective representations
- d. To support the public sector on developing and delivering procedures for more effective and targeted consultations
- e. To ensure the response of the consultation properly reflects the views of those consulted
- f. To make the most of opportunities to present a co-ordinated response from voluntary and community organisations working in the same area of services
- g. To recognise the value of consulting the public sector to develop the voluntary and community sector's policies, strategies, plans and services