



COMPACT

CONSULTATION **A LOCAL CODE OF GOOD PRACTICE**

AIMS

The aim of these guidelines is to make a positive impact on the way statutory partners working in the Staffordshire Moorlands, consult and appraise their policies in respect of the Moorlands voluntary and community sector.

This will then allow voluntary and community groups to make an effective contribution to the development and implementation of policy and supports the principles of the 'Compact way of working'.

These guidelines apply to all the Compact partners and carry the authority given by the members of the Local Strategic Partnership and others who have signed the Compact document.

WHY CONSULT?

Statutory partners can ensure that policy development benefits from a wide range of experience, and takes into account the impact of its proposals on the wider community they serve.

For Voluntary and Community partners, consultation brings the opportunity to bring knowledge, experience and expertise to bear on statutory partners policy making, to the benefit of their area of community activity.

ALL PARTNERS BENEFIT FROM EFFECTIVE CONSULTATION.

What does a consultation framework look like?

Statutory Partners undertake to:

- Consult the Voluntary and Community sector, through LSP structures, on all issues likely to affect it.
- Build consultation into all their policy-making plans.

- Consult at the earliest opportunity. Involving the Voluntary and Community sector in the early stages of policy making.
- Consider allocating resources to allow partners to engage in the consultation process.
- Adhere to the consultation timescales, i.e. a minimum of 12 weeks for responses to be given.
- Prepare consultation documents that are clear, concise and in simple language.
- Make documents available in a variety of formats both electronically and hard copy.
- Analyse the responses received and give appropriate feedback, showing in clear terms the impact of consultation on the policies made.
- Evaluate all consultations undertaken with a view to develop and spread good practice values.

Voluntary and Community Partners undertake to:

- Use their available infrastructure to participate in the consultation processes of statutory partners, subject to suitable resources being made available.
- Wherever possible consult directly with service users, volunteers, members and supporters, or clearly indicate their response is based on the local knowledge and expertise they bring to the process, accumulated in the work done with representative groups.
- Ensure that the consultation work done is objective and unbiased and reflects all the information gained.
- Respect the confidentiality of information given during the process and provide feedback to contributors.
- Promote good practice and the 'Compact way of working' amongst the wider Community and Voluntary sector.

WAYS TO CONSULT

There are many ways to consult. There is no right or wrong method for any given circumstance. Partners need to consider the needs of those to be consulted and apply the most appropriate method. In addition to the tried and tested methods of paper or electronic documents being circulated, routes such as focus groups or neighbourhood forums should be considered. The statutory partners should always be able to show that the most appropriate consultation method was used in each case. Using more than one method is usually a good idea.

Whenever possible a consultation should start with a summary, outlining in a few sentences what is required and who is involved. The timescales and contact point for the responsible officer should be made available.

A series of questions should follow, which allow an open response. Always avoid the Yes/No format. Honesty and openness should be promoted at every opportunity.

Contributors should be encouraged to offer all their views and be given details of how and when feedback will be given.

WHO SHOULD BE CONSULTED?

- The easy answer is to say that all partners in the Local Strategic Partnership should be involved.
- This, will rarely be the case as not all voluntary and community groups have committed to the LSP.
- Consultation needs to be relevant to the groups in the subject area, so it is probably wise to publicise forthcoming consultations widely and seek the help of local infrastructure groups in identifying potential partners.
- Those groups that offer to be involved will almost certainly give their best efforts in contributing.
- If in doubt, ask and publicise. Forward planning on consultation will almost certainly prove to be beneficial.

Remember the aim is to achieve better policy outcomes, through the 'Compact way of working'.