

North East Lincolnshire

Compact

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Consultation and Policy Appraisal
Code of Good Practice

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Consultation and Policy Appraisal

North East Lincolnshire Compact Code of Good Practice

Introduction

Good practice in consultation will build and sustain relationships between the community, voluntary and public sectors in North East Lincolnshire.

This good practice code's key objective is to help that process, and underpin the principles of the North East Lincolnshire Compact.

Effective consultation:

- enables others to contribute to the policy making process;
- symbolises the public sector's commitment to be open and accountable;
- leads to more realistic and robust policy that better reflects people's needs and wishes;
- helps to plan, prioritise and deliver better services;
- can create a working partnership and mutual understanding with those consulted;
- identifies problems quickly, enabling matters to be put right before they escalate.

Joint undertakings

- Consult early;
- Be sensitive to resource implications and to the most appropriate methods of consultation;
- promote good practice;
- take account of the specific needs, interests and contributions of those who represent women, minority groups and the socially excluded;
- respect the confidentiality of information;
- provide feedback on the results of consultation;
- analyse the results of its consultation exercises;
- evaluate consultations.

Undertakings by the public sector

- consult North East Lincolnshire voluntary and community sector through appropriate representative bodies on issues that are likely to affect it;
- appraise new policies and procedures, particularly at the developmental stage, identifying as far as possible any implications for the sector;
- prepare consultation documents that are concise, clearly laid out and written in simple English;

Undertakings by the voluntary and community sector

- use their infrastructure to encourage participation;
- define and demonstrate how they represent their stated constituency;
- wherever possible to consult their constituency directly, including service users, volunteers, members and supporters;
- where this is not practicable or appropriate, to indicate that they are responding on the basis of their accumulated knowledge;
- ensure the information they present to the public sector is accurate and that any research has been conducted in an objective and unbiased manner; and
- have regard to the regulatory framework that governs their organisation when representing their constituents.

The right approach

When developing policy initiatives, an impact assessment statement should be prepared covering the likely effect of the proposals on North East Lincolnshire's voluntary and community organisations.

This can be done by involving the sector in the development of proposals prior, during or after to consultation.

Consultation at a sufficiently early stage of policy development can help to ensure the resulting proposals are in line with current experience and thinking in the field and avoid incorrect assumptions and misunderstanding.

Ongoing dialogue can help to keep both sides informed about developments and avoid unnecessary surprises.

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

The public sector should make clear in the consultation process those matters which are open to change and those on which it has made a firm decision.

Consultation methods

There is no right method for any given circumstance. All sorts of conditions influence which methods will provide useful information, and there are no guarantees that just because one method worked well once it will do so again.

Sometimes talking to people will be as valuable as writing to them. Or it may be appropriate to use a variety of methods.

It can be helpful to seek views from voluntary and community organisations as to how best to carry out a particular consultation exercise.

Written exercises provide a formal means by which people can be invited to comment on policies and proposals.

Other ways include opinion surveys, meetings, focus groups, user panels and the internet.

Consultation documents

Consultation documents will ideally contain or be accompanied by:

- a summary;
- a description of the issue, proposal or problem being addressed;
- the purpose of the consultation and, if appropriate, the objective which the proposal is intended to deliver;
- the issues on which views are being sought;
- an explanation of what decisions, if any, have already been taken and an explanation of why a particular option is favoured;
- if relevant, various sources of opinion and information, and factual statements that are properly referenced;
- where appropriate, an explanation of who is likely to be affected, and how;
- where appropriate, an invitation to respondents to submit their ideas or assessment of how the proposals will impact on voluntary and community organisations;
- the deadline for responses, and wherever possible an outline of the proposed timetable for the rest of the decision-making and implementation processes including a statement of how feedback will be given;
- the name, address and, wherever possible the telephone number and e-mail address of a person whom respondents can contact if they have further queries;
- a list of those being consulted;
- a request that those responding should explain who they are and, where relevant, who they represent and specifically who they have further consulted;
- a statement that responses will normally be made available unless the respondent has requested that they remain confidential;
- an explanation of any constraints that may have limited the full application of the guidance contained in this Code of Good Practice;
- an invitation to provide feedback on the consultation and make suggestions for improving consultation in the future.

Other factors

Where necessary, consultation materials should be provided in accessible formats, for example, Braille, large print or audio formats.

The consultation exercise should be appropriately publicised (for example, through an appropriately targeted press release).

For written consultations, wherever possible 12 weeks should be allowed for replies in order to accommodate the work cycles of organisations working with voluntary management committees and to reach the local level or member organisations.

Where less than 12 weeks is allowed the document should specify the reason why a shorter response time has been set.

Acknowledgements will normally be sent to those replying to the consultation giving information about the next stages of the process, where this is known.

After consultation

The results of all consultation exercises should be carefully analysed and views should be adequately weighted.

Once a decision has been made on the way forward, respondents should be notified promptly how the work will proceed.

This should explain: the consultation process followed; how the decision reflects the results of the consultation; and include any modified assessment of the impact of the proposals on voluntary and community organisations.

Where circumstances permit, a summary of views should be produced and made available together with other information collected from the consultation exercise. Where respondents ask why their views have been rejected, they should be given a prompt and full explanation.



Yorkshire & Humber
Regional Development Agency

North East Lincolnshire Compact

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Voluntary Action
North East Lincolnshire

14 Town Hall Street
Grimsby
North East Lincolnshire
DN31 1HN



European Regional
Development Fund



Voluntary Action
North East Lincolnshire

Telephone: (01472) 231123
E-mail: enquiries@vanel.org.uk



Volunteer Centre
North East Lincolnshire



North East Lincolnshire **NHS**
Primary Care Trust



Churches Together
in North East Lincolnshire

