

DUDLEY COMMUNITY



PARTNERSHIP
achieving together

LOCAL COMPACT
CODE OF PRACTICE ON CONSULTATION

CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

Consultation Period: 5 July – 6 October 2006

1. Introduction

1.1 What is the Consultation Code of Practice?

The Code of Practice forms part of the Dudley Compact. It is one of a number of Codes of Practice being developed that will supplement the Compact.

1.2 The Code aims to make a positive impact on the relationship between the public sector and the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in Dudley Borough in respect of consultation taking place in the Borough. The aim of the Code is to improve the planning of, involvement in and impact of consultation that is a vital part of the partnership between the public sector and the VCS.

1.3 The Dudley Compact

The Dudley Compact was published in 2003, and is an important building block in improving and strengthening relationships between the local sectors. It recognises the unique role and added value of the work of Voluntary and Community Organisations and has been endorsed by the Dudley Community Partnership (DCP) and a wide range of organisations in both sectors.

1.4 Aims and Context

The Code has been drawn up using the principles expressed within the Compact by a sub-group of the DCP's Compact Steering Group. The Code aims to set a shared vision and framework for:

- Understanding what is meant by consultation
- Promoting knowledge of best practice in undertaking consultation
- Increasing the degree to which local people feel their views are valued.
- Encouraging greater involvement of local people in consultation
- Further work to remove barriers to consultation and encouraging a diverse range of people to participate
- Enabling greater joint working in the planning, undertaking, review, and sharing of the outcomes of consultation within and across sectors.

2. What is consultation?

2.1 Consultation covers a wide range of methods of obtaining views on e.g. the development of policies, the way services are provided and what services are provided. To be effective, consultation needs to be part of a continuing process of dialogue between the parties involved. Consultation should always lead to a decision which is shared with the participants even where this is a decision to do nothing.

2.2 This code relates specifically to consultation involving the voluntary and community sector, although many of its principles apply to other consultation that public sector agencies may undertake with other types of organisations and with individuals.

- 2.3 A number of organisations have set out their individual commitments to effective consultation. For example, Dudley Council has adopted a number of principles of consultation which can be found on its website www.dudley.gov.uk

3. Why consult?

- 3.1 Public sector agencies consult with the VCS to ensure that, in developing their policies and in providing their services, they are informed by a wide range of experience and expertise and can respond to the needs of different parts of society. For VCS organisations, consultation presents an opportunity to bring this experience and expertise forward to help shape policies and services on behalf of the people and issues they work for.
- 3.2 We recognise that through consultation:
- Services can be targeted more effectively to provide what people want and expect
 - Problems arising from proposed changes to services can be highlighted and solutions identified to avoid potential conflict
 - Performance standards relevant to customer needs can be set up and monitored
 - Customer satisfaction becomes a recognised aspect of service quality; user satisfaction with services can be monitored over time
 - Results of consultation can be used to help make decisions about policies, priorities and strategies
 - Local people can be involved more in decision making, which will in turn strengthen interest in the local democratic process
 - The opportunity is provided to strengthen community leadership roles; elected members/board members can obtain a balanced view of local people's opinions relating to a particular service or policy.

4. What do we consult about?

- 4.1 All consultation should relate to a decision that it is intended to make and that can be influenced by the result of the consultation. People should feel when they are taking part in consultation that this is important, that their contribution will be valued and that the process can genuinely influence the outcome.
- 4.2 There are a wide range of decisions that can be informed by public consultation. Typically, consultation will concern:
- Major policy decisions, where the public agency does not know much about local people's view
 - Controversial decisions in which there is likely to be a high level of public interest
 - Services that have a significant impact upon users' quality of life
 - Services that account for a significant amount of overall spending
 - Newly developed services or new statutory duties

- Services or decisions where consultation is a statutory requirement
 - Services that are being reviewed as part of Best Value or similar regimes
- 4.3 A database of consultation in the Borough is available on the Dudley Council homepage www.dudley.gov.uk, which provides information upon:
- What consultation is planned, including when, how, and who with
 - How to find out about the outcome of consultation that has taken place.
- 4.4 Currently this information covers Dudley MBC events but we will work to extend it to other public sector agencies.

5. How should consultation be undertaken?

5.1 The approach to any specific consultation exercise will need to reflect a variety of factors including:

- The nature of the issue(s) subject to consultation
- The target audience for consultation
- The resources available for consultation
- The potential links with other events

5.2 Public sector agencies' undertakings:

- To develop clear consultation processes explaining aims, procedures and timescales
- To consult, wherever possible, with the VCS on issues likely to affect it prior to new policies or services being developed
- To ensure that resources are available for consultation
- To plan and publicise consultation as early as possible to ensure widespread involvement and to take opportunities for 'joined-up' approaches
- To state clearly what is being consulted on and what is not up for discussion
- To provide clear, accurate and up to date background material or other support where appropriate
- To explain which groups are being consulted and why
- To allow wherever possible at least 12 weeks for consultation and to explain why if a shorter period is required
- To respect and value the campaigning role of the VCS and acknowledge that this may at times conflict with their policies, plans or decisions
- To give clear feedback about the consultation and its outcomes

5.3 VCS undertakings:

- To advise public sector agencies of groups that should be consulted and share proposals with other interested groups

- To respect any confidentiality requirements attached to the consultation exercise
- To ensure that, wherever possible, service users, carers, volunteers, members and supporters are informed of and involved in consultation exercises as appropriate
- To promote opportunities for liaison on consultation between VCS organisations working in similar fields
- To provide responses by the deadline where this is reasonable
- To ensure that responses are accurate, relevant and fairly reflect the views of consultees

5.4 **Ensuring a partnership approach to consultation**

It is recognised that by working together public agencies and the VCS can help support one another to achieve more effective approaches to consultation. Our approach to consultation will:

- be part of an ongoing relationship between the sectors where information is routinely shared and trust is developed;
- recognise the different strengths and interests of the partners and create arrangements to support and sustain the partnership;
- recognise that resources are finite and that we do have to make choices about how we consult, and work within the resources available to us
- aim to adopt a Borough wide approach rather than a single agency or sector one
- focus on the quality of consultation rather than the number of activities, making sure that we ask the right people about the right issues at the right time

5.5 As part of our approach we recognise that there are valuable networks and community structures that exist and through which consultation can be directed. For example, Dosti provides an umbrella link to numerous community groups or bodies. Similarly DCVS itself has an extensive membership of local VCS organisations. Through using the existing networks effectively, we will aim to avoid reinventing wheels.

5.6 **Ensuring the widest possible participation**

There are a number of ways to consult and it is important to choose the right methods. Some public sector agencies have policies and toolkits which offer detailed guidance in undertaking consultation. An example of these is Dudley Council's Consultation Strategy and Toolkit which can be found at www.dudley.gov.uk .

5.7 In undertaking consultation with the VCS and in deciding how to do this, a number of principles apply alongside the partnership approach in order to ensure widest possible involvement:

- all documents are as concise as possible, written in plain language and other formats such as large print and community languages are available
- consultation documents are widely available and easy to access

- consultation exercises are well publicised
- the location and timing of any events is carefully selected to be convenient, accessible and acceptable to participants, e.g. in the usual meeting place of participants or in conjunction with other activities
- arrangements are put in place to enable people to participate e.g. providing transport, crèche facilities, interpreters where appropriate
- more than one method of consultation should be used to reach more people and particular efforts are made to reach organisations involving for example, children and young people, BME communities and disabled people
- it is clear to participants how and when to respond and easy for them to do so
- it is clear how and where feedback from the consultation will be available and that this will be easy to access

6. How to give feedback

It is essential to give feedback to all the participants in the consultation and to learn from the exercise so:

- Be specific from the outset about how and when feedback will be communicated
- Ensure it is known who has responded to the exercise so that an assessment can be made of whether all appropriate groups have been reached
- Tell participants in the consultation what the results of the exercise are and what decisions have been made
- Give details of any further opportunities to comment
- List the VCS participants that took part in the exercise
- Share learning from the exercise with partners, both in terms of processes – what worked well and what did not work - and views expressed

7. Review of consultation exercises

- 7.1 Issues of principle and compliance with the standards set out in this Code of Practice arising from any individual consultation exercises will be considered through the Compact Steering Group and raised, as appropriate, with the organisation concerned.
- 7.2 A sub-group of the Compact Steering Group will meet periodically to review recent and forthcoming consultation exercises. Dudley Council will produce in March each year a statement of the planned or probable consultation activities for the forthcoming year and update this during the year.

8. Implementing the Code of Practice

- 8.1 The Compact and its associated Codes of Good Practice are not intended to be documents that are never changed. All parties involved in the Compact will have much to learn and experience will undoubtedly show the need to revise some aspects of the documents. Therefore there will be regular opportunities to revise and update this document in light of experience.
- 8.2 Responsibility for overseeing the implementation and development of the Dudley Borough Compact and its associated Codes of Practice lies with Dudley Community Partnership's Compact Steering Group. This group is made up of key partners from the statutory and voluntary and community sectors.
- 8.3 The steering group meets quarterly to review implementation, monitor targets and timescales and further develop the Compact and its Codes of Practice.
- 8.4 As a minimum standard this Code will be reviewed each year as part of the Compact annual review process. This will be linked to the Borough Conference.
- 8.5 Partners will work together to encourage all public sector organisations and voluntary and community organisations that involve volunteers to adopt this code.
- 8.6 Feedback from statutory partners and voluntary and community organisations on their experience of using this document is essential.
- 8.7 Each of the agencies, and within Dudley MBC each directorate, has a Compact 'champion' to oversee the implementation of the Compact within their area of work.

Their role is to:

- oversee Directorate contact with voluntary and community sector bodies;
 - review the effectiveness of the service in adhering to the Compact; and
 - provide a point of liaison and referral for the Sector if there are felt to be issues arising from that service's contact with the Sector.
- 8.8 It should be emphasised this does not mean that contact with partners is limited to, or should be exclusively directed towards these Champions. The Compact Champion will, however, try to help you with any queries under the Compact. Issues can also be raised with Andy Gray, Chief Officer, Dudley CVS (Chair of Steering Group) and any questions of principle will be referred to the Dudley Community Partnership's Compact Steering Group.

Responses to Consultation on the Draft Code

1. Consultation on the draft code of practice runs from 5 July to 6 October 2006. Responses can be made to:
 - Andy Gray, Chief Officer, Dudley Council for Voluntary Service, 7 Albion Street, Brierley Hill DY5 3EE
tel. 01384 78166/573381; fax: 01384 484587
email: andygray@dudleycvs.org.uk
 - Simon Manson, Chief Executive's Directorate, Council House, Priory Road, Dudley DY1 1 HF
Tel. 01384 814713; fax 01384 815257
Email: simon.manson@dudley.gov.uk
2. Responses will be considered by the Consultation sub-group of Dudley Community Partnership's Compact Steering Group and a final document recommended to the full steering group. The code will be submitted to the DCP Executive for formal approval and sign-up by its members.
3. Feedback on the consultation responses will be given at meetings of the Voluntary Sector Network, through the DCVS newsletter and in Dudley Council's consultation web pages - see <http://www.dudley.gov.uk/council--democracy/consultations/dudleys-consultation-database->
4. Copies of the consultation document can be provided in alternative formats on request to the above.