

## Sheffield Health Compact Participation and Consultation Protocol Executive Summary

### What is the Sheffield Health Compact?

It is an agreement between the NHS Trusts and the voluntary, community and faith (VCF) sector, about how they work together. All parties signed up to common principles in April 2004. Since then, working groups have been developing protocols on funding, partnership, and participation and consultation.

### Why have a protocol?

- The aim of the three protocols is to make a positive impact on the relationship that exists between the statutory agencies and the VCF Sector in Sheffield. The protocol will help to develop and sustain effective procedures that result in a more effective relationship between NHS trusts and the VCF sector.

### Aims of The Participation and Consultation protocol

- This Code of Good Practice aims to make a positive impact on the way in which we consult and appraise policy and decision-making. Independent, not-for-profit, charity, voluntary, community and faith organisations bring distinctive value to society and fulfill a crucial role that is distinct from both the state and the market. In particular, they enable individuals to contribute to public life and the development of active communities by providing opportunities for voluntary action. Effective participation and consultation is an essential part of ensuring that the relationship works and that the sector is able to fulfill its strategic role.

### Main principles

- To ensure that the independent voice of patients, the public, voluntary/community and faith sector is heard at all levels where decisions are made;
- To aspire to involve the public in all its diversity, especially those not normally engaged;
- To be cost effective and clearly add value to health improvement;
- To recognise that the experience is not defined by organisational boundaries;
- To operate effectively within the wider active citizenship agenda.

### Guidelines

- It is recognised that the issue of when and how to proceed with consultation is a complex one. However, the implementation of the Compact should address this and aim to ensure that consultation takes place on all issues which may affect the sector, currently and in the future;
- Consultation processes should be clear, open and accessible;
- Consultations should allow sufficient time for those being consulted to respond and to influence a decision and should address the whole sector, a sample, or targeted groups, depending upon the issue(s).
- Consultation needs resourcing within health and in the V&CS. The resource implications of consultations by voluntary and community umbrella and infrastructure bodies should be recognised;
- Responsibility for ultimate decision making on matters of Health policy and practice rests with the Health Trusts.

## Consultation should

- Enable the voluntary and community sector to contribute to policy-making and other processes and help plan, prioritise and deliver better services.
- Enhance collaborative and partnership working and enhance the understanding between the sectors.
- Enable service providers to move towards greater openness and accountability.
- Be part of a continuous service-planning loop where respondents can see their views translated into action.
- Be honest from the outset about why the consultation is being undertaken and what it will achieve.

## Making it work

Consultation needs to be undertaken in the knowledge that it will contribute to effective development and delivery of services. For VCF organizations, consultation presents an opportunity to bring their knowledge to bear on NHS policy on behalf of the people and causes they work for. It is important to:

- Research whether the issues have previously been consulted on, or whether there is ongoing consultation on similar issues by other organisations.
- Avoid duplication that will contribute to consultation fatigue.
- Establish whom the groups/organisations represent such as individuals or organisations, geographical community or interest groups, disease specific groups etc.
- Establish whether they have the relevant knowledge and expertise to participate in the consultation.
- Establish the access needs of different groups and individuals.

Once you have identified the purpose of the consultation and clarified the issues around participation and power relationships, it is important that you think about the methods that you will use Consultation Code of Practice and Guidance to consult. There are a variety of methods for you to choose from that can include questionnaires/surveys, interviews, focus groups, public meetings, (formal and informal) and promotional campaigns.

The methods you choose can help to ensure inclusivity and enable you to achieve your aims and objectives. A variety of methods could be used to suit the purpose of the consultation and the target audience. These can include different formats for printed information, for example, large print, audiotape and computer files or email attachments, community languages, different venues and accessible venues, timescales, including allowing adequate time for consultees to be involved and times of meetings.

The resource implications regarding the consultation should be considered carefully to ensure that the scale, methods and so on that have been decided can be realistically met: do you have the resources and equipment to carry out your consultation? Can you meet participants' expenses?

Just as it is important to establish clear timescales and processes when planning and undertaking the consultation, it is equally important to be clear as to how consultees will receive feedback, timescales for follow on work and so on. Will you listen to the views of those you consult, but not necessarily act?

## Checklist for Participation and consultation

	Key things to consider	✓
1.	Your organisation is signed up to the COMPACT and this code of conduct	
2.	Consultation should be clear, open and accessible	
3.	Consultation needs resourcing	
4.	Timescales should be realistic	
5.	The purpose of the consultation should be clear	
6.	The results of the consultation need to be made available to those consulted	