

Isle of Wight Council/NHS Isle of Wight **CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY**

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1.1 Introduction

The Isle of Wight Council and NHS Isle of Wight are committed to effectively involving the Island community in making the Island a better place to live and work. This will be achieved through the use of agreed common principles to guide the way that officers across both organisations work together, achieving a common and consistent approach to consultation and public engagement that builds on best practice.

This strategy and supporting toolkit provides best practice approaches to community consultation and engagement providing information on:

- Recommended approaches to engaging with specific groups;
- Different methods of informing, involving and consulting;
- How to ensure consultation and engagement is meaningful, meets any legal requirements and that outcomes are measured.

The consultation strategy sets out how we will continue to effectively involve our communities using common principles to guide the way that officers build on best practice, making the most efficient use of the skills and abilities across both organisations.

From April 2009 the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act placed a duty on all local authorities and the NHS to 'inform, consult and involve' communities and members of the public. In 2010 the ethos of giving communities and individuals more influence over central and local government was further extended by the coalition government with the introduction of the Localism Bill and discussions around the Open Services White Paper.

The wide range of partnership engagement and consultation activity on the Island against a backdrop of reduced resources means there is a growing need to streamline and coordinate community engagement activities across the council, NHS and partner agencies.

1.2 Scope

This strategy covers all statutory and non-statutory public consultations carried out by the council and NHS either alone or potentially with partner organisations. Statutory consultation will also be subject to specific national guidance and protocols, and guidance for these will need to be considered along with this strategy as well as any relevant local joint protocols and strategies that may be signed up to by the council and/or the NHS.

Throughout the strategy there are references to the term 'engagement' this refers to the full spectrum of engagement which includes informing, consulting, involving, collaborating and empowering residents and community groups.

1.3 Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity

The council and the NHS are committed to delivering public services for everyone on the Island. We aim to provide policies and services that people need in a fair and equitable way for all. To do this we need to understand the experiences and needs of the Island community.

The diverse needs of the Island community are at the heart of effective service delivery. It is crucial that if both the council and the NHS are to meet their obligations under current

equalities legislation, we must involve local people. Equality and diversity are two main principles of community engagement. These principles must underpin any engagement activity so that we enable people on the Isle of Wight the opportunity to fully participate. We want to ensure that we do not discriminate against, victimise or harass anyone because of; age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

This Consultation and Engagement Strategy has been developed with equality and diversity in mind to ensure that we are inclusive in our approach by enabling everyone the opportunity to have their opinions heard regarding the services used by or available to them.

1.1 Our Aims and Aspirations

Create stronger links between communities and decision-makers.

- Engagement will be tailored to suit the needs of residents and communities
- Feedback will be provided on the results of our engagement activities to all, in an appropriate way including explanations of what it means, as well as any actions which will be undertaken as a result.

Improve service delivery for local communities through a community driven approach

- Involving our communities and residents can help us provide relevant services.
- Where appropriate, we will involve local communities in decision-making related to the services that are important to them and how these are delivered.
- Be more transparent and provide members of the public with meaningful data and information to support the consultation activity.

Increase community satisfaction levels

- By ensuring a consistent quality to our consultation activities so that local communities will feel engaged, and have the opportunity to be involved in the things that matter most to them.
- More opportunities will be created for people to engage in decisions about their own area or services that affect them.
- Opinions of local communities are used to inform changes to service delivery so that services are relevant to our community.

Reduce inefficiency and duplication in engagement practice

- Consider opportunities to share staff, skills and facilities with regard to engagement activity across the partner agencies which will make best use of limited resources.
- A coordinated approach to consultation across the council and NHS will reduce the risk of local communities and residents losing interest in engaging with consultations (consultation fatigue).

Strengthen partnership working

- This strategy will help inform partnership working building on existing networks and relationships.
- Consider opportunities for council service areas and partners to engage with residents whom they may not ordinarily have the opportunity to engage with through joint consultation and engagement activity.
- Engage with residents and address cross cutting issues that all partners are concerned about, sharing the information gathered as a result.

Create better knowledge of engagement practice

- This strategy provides best practice approaches to engaging communities and residents ensuring a standard approach across the council, the NHS and with partner agencies, should we carry out joint engagement activities.
- Commitment to this strategy means consultation and engagement exercises will be robust, follow best practice and be of the highest possible quality within the available resource.
- We will be clear when the community are able to influence decisions or are being informed.
- We will be able to more readily evaluate the effectiveness of each consultation and engagement activity.

1.4 Our Strategy

The following principles guide officers and partners in their engagement with our communities. Whenever the involvement of residents is being planned, the guidelines exist to support officers constructing their consultation.

The act of engagement must be based on a real commitment to improve communication, generate community involvement, engagement and active citizenship as well as reducing potential duplication. This must be balanced against the best use of resources and any financial considerations.

Engagement will only be carried out when necessary. There is little point wasting resources, time or goodwill by consulting local residents unnecessarily, on something that has already been covered elsewhere, or in an area where the decision has already been taken. It should instead take place in good time to inform the decision.

It is necessary to carry out engagement if any one of the following applies;

- Where it is statutory.
- Where we have consulted in the past therefore created legitimate expectations that we will.
- Where we have said we will consult.

Engagement will be robust, meaningful and carried out to the highest standards. This strategy has been informed by government best practice guidelines. Where possible the consultation period should be six weeks but if reporting deadlines do not allow for this then the consultation should run for a minimum of four weeks. If a consultation exercise is to take place over a holiday period, e.g. over the Easter, summer or Christmas breaks, or if the issue(s) under consideration is particularly complex, consideration should be given to allowing a longer period for the consultation or carrying out the engagement activity at a different time.

Time needs to be factored in for the development of the consultation material including a report on the issues under consultation, the service web page and any questionnaires or preparation for focus groups, depending on the methodology chosen. Early involvement of the consultation team (or communications team in the case of the NHS) is therefore essential as they will advise on consultation planning and timescales. Ideally the consultation team (or communications team for the NHS) need to be involved no later than six weeks prior to the consultation 'go live' date.

Activities will be fit for purpose. Engagement should use the right tools, at the right stage of the process, with the right people. It should be timely and recognise different levels of understanding of the topic in question. Accessibility is essential for effective engagement therefore it is important to provide relevant information in a clear and concise manner, avoiding jargon, in a format and at a location(s) that ensures it is available to all. Consideration

should be given to providing other resources as necessary dependent on the target audience. If any consultation events are to be set up, consideration needs to be given as to when and where the event is to be held and to consider accessible venues. These considerations must be balanced with what is practical and cost efficient.

Activities will be inclusive. We will aim to be inclusive by enabling all groups within our community to participate and/or their views to be represented when engaging on issues relevant to them. Attempts must be made to ensure that groups of people whose interests are affected by the issues the engagement will address, are well represented in the engagement activity; particularly sections of the community that seldom participate. This will mean using a methodology that is flexible enough to be inclusive and understanding how people wish to participate. Being inclusive also means enabling people to be involved if they want to be and removing any barriers to that involvement. This may be referred to as 'equality of access' and reasonable support should be provided to enable all those who want to get involved to participate as appropriate.

Activities will be carefully planned and their aims will be understandable

Every consultation or engagement exercise needs a consultation plan. If working with partners all parties involved should ideally agree to work to one consultation plan, however any specific actions may be incorporated in partners' own plans. There should be clear identification of the aims and objectives of the consultation activity and the issues in the consultation that participants can influence.

Findings will be taken into account. It is not enough simply to undertake consultation and engagement – the findings must be considered conscientiously in the decision making process and used to inform any equality impact assessments and appropriate service area needs assessments.

Findings will be shared across partnerships. Every engagement exercise needs to publicise the activity to ensure people are aware of the opportunity to get involved. The feedback needs to be communicated in a way which is understandable to all, including any changes made to services and their delivery. If changes are not made as a result of consultation or the decisions are in conflict with the results of the consultation the reasons should be clearly stated.

The engagement will be coordinated. Many service areas and partners want to get local people involved in decision-making and this can mean there is a danger of 'consultation fatigue' developing. It makes sense for council and NHS officers and partners to work together, pool resources and work on consultation and engagement jointly where possible. The Resident Information and Consultation Team will coordinate and support council staff and encourage consultation activity with partners as appropriate. For NHS officers, this work will be supported by the communications team.

The engagement will build better relationships with local people. Building trust with local people is vital. We want our services to be easy to access and of the best value for money. Residents involved in consultation and engagement should feel it is a positive experience, that they have been listened to and that they are contributing towards improvements to services on the Island.

The engagement activity will empower local people to have a say about their lives. Local people are better able to have a say about their lives if they have the understanding and knowledge about how decisions are made and how to influence service delivery and outcomes for local people. Involvement in consultation and engagement gives local people a better understanding of how decisions are made and an opportunity to get involved in making a difference to their local community. It is of paramount importance that the consultation

documents and any presentations provide sufficient detail of information and any options available so that people can make an informed contribution to the consultation.

In the 2009 Isle of Wight Residents' Survey 81 per cent of respondents felt they had little or no influence over decisions made by the council. In the 2010 survey of public perceptions of the NHS on the Isle of Wight, 46 per cent of respondents said they felt they could not influence decisions affecting the NHS on the Island. Whilst this is a fairly common position for local authorities and NHS bodies up and down the country, we want to ensure we increase residents' perception that they can influence decisions.

2.1 Supporting Guidelines

This strategy is supported by a practical guide to consultation intended to help council officers and staff in partner agencies who are involved in consultation exercises to ensure a consistent approach is taken and the same high standards are maintained across all consultations.

The guidelines are divided into 8 sections to help give structure to the process officers will need to go through to undertake a consultation or engagement activity. The contents and purpose of each section are summarised below. It is not prescriptive and officers may want to refer to the different parts of the guidelines in order to support the specific stage they have reached in their engagement exercise.

Section 1 includes the introduction and the overview of how the guidelines can be used.

Section 2 defines the spectrum of terms used to describe public engagement and provides steps to clarify the purpose of the activity – is it to inform, consult or engage?

Section 3 uses stakeholder mapping to identify who should be consulted and helps address other questions such as the aims of the consultation and when should it take place.

Section 4 helps officers put together the consultation plan which is a working document used to coordinate the work of all the officers involved, in order that all aspects of the consultation are considered and planned, prior to the consultation or engagement activity starting. It stresses the importance of the equality impact assessment and makes it clear when this work should be carried out. It also provides information on the different methods which can be used to consult or engage with the public and sets out the basic structure for a consultation timeline.

Section 5 contains information regarding inclusivity and engaging with different groups.

Section 6 provides information to help officers from service areas analyse and interpret the responses received and provide feedback.

Section 7 contains best practice guidance with regard to working with partner agencies.

Section 8 is a useful glossary of different terms used and their meanings. It also details lists of useful contacts, useful links and other useful documents.

Appendix 1 explains the different types of methods of engagement in more depth and Appendix 2 provides an example of an equality monitoring form which can be adapted for use for all consultations.

2.2 Acknowledgements

This strategy and the toolkit have been informed by Isle of Wight Community Engagement Framework and Isle of Wight Community Engagement Toolkit (North Harbour Consulting, 2007), as well as Southend Together's 'Strategy for Engaging our Communities' and staff at Southend Council are thanked for their advice and support.

In addition the views of a number of community representatives were sought to aid the development of this strategy and we would like to thank them for the input and support.

If you have difficulties reading this document please contact:

- Council - the Consultation Team on 821000 ext. 6256.
- NHS – the Communications and Engagement Team – 01983-822099 ext 5703