



Surrey Compact

The Surrey Compact is a commitment to continually improve relationships between the public, voluntary, community and faith sector and organisations representing service users and carers.

Communication, Consultation
and Engagement Code

1.1 The Introduction

The Communication, Consultation and Engagement Code builds on the Surrey Compact principles and codes. It sets a benchmark of good practice for groups and organisations supporting the Surrey Compact. Its impact comes from the commitment of organisations in all sectors to support and use it.

1.2 The Purpose of this Code

The purpose of this code on Communication, Consultation and Engagement is to improve engagement between organisations and the communities they serve.

This will be achieved by encouraging and improving local engagement and making a positive impact on the way in which the public, voluntary and community sectors consult and communicate on policy and other matters.

Where organisations do not follow this Code, the organisation may be asked to explain its position and if appropriate the matter will be addressed in accordance with the Compact.

1.3 The Principles

- work together to improve planning and delivery of services;
- enable more people to contribute to the decision making process;
- present an opportunity to bring local knowledge, experience and expertise to bear on local decision making;
- take into account the potential impact of proposals on different sectors of the communities;
- ensure accountability, accessibility, inclusiveness, fairness, equality and transparency. These underpin all aspects of communication, consultation and engagement and are reflected in the way all organisations work together;
- ensure best practice three months response time to consultation.
- work together through the development of inclusive mechanisms for communication, consultation and engagement.

1.4 The Commitments

Communication

- i. establish reliable and ongoing channels of communication;
- ii. use existing infrastructures and networks to encourage participation in communication;
- iii. seek representation from and communicate with hard to reach organisations and networks;
- iv. seek representation from and communicate with other partners including voluntary and community sector organisations;
- v. respect the confidentiality of information;
- vi. provide an explanation if there are constraints that may limit the full application of the guidance contained in this code on Communication, Consultation and engagement;
- vii. share accurate, objective and relevant information.

Consultation

- i. build consultation into the regular planning cycles where issues are likely to affect organisations and other partners;
- ii. ensure that organisations and other partners will be involved in shaping the overall criteria for consultations wherever possible;
- iii. ensure that consultation documents include details of groups and organisations being consulted so that it is clear if someone has been overlooked or whether consultees are responding jointly or as part of a group;
- iv. ensure that feedback and analysis on the outcome of consultation is made available;
- v. explain why any requested changes have not been made;
- vi. make clear the scope for change as a result of consultation;
- vii. ensure that stakeholders have the opportunity to participate in communication and consultation;
- viii. notify the organisation conducting the consultation process if any appropriate voluntary or community sector organisation has not been consulted, when it should have been included in the list of consultees;
- ix. voluntary and community sector organisations need to consult with public sector partners when reviewing any of their plans, policies or procedures, which may significantly affect relationships and dealings with these partners.

Engagement

- i. ensure that engagement and involvement from the appropriate partners is agreed early in the planning process;
- ii. be clear about who and what the partners represent when responding.

Appendix 1

Surrey Compact Consultation Standards

In addition to the values and commitments stated in the Surrey Compact, the Surrey Compact Consultation standards are an important support to the code.

Why Consult?

There is no point in consulting if those consulting are not prepared to consider changing what they do in response to what is said. Before starting a consultation exercise it is necessary to:

- be clear about the reasons for consultation and what can and cannot be changed;
- be clear how the consultation exercise fits into the decision-making process;
- comply with legislative requirements to consult, all relevant policy guidance and Surrey Compact Codes and Principles. (*note: legislative requirements will prevail if different from the Compact*).

Who to Consult

All partners have a responsibility to engage with those affected by the services they deliver and to take into account others' requirements.

Partners will endeavour to seek the views of all those who will be affected by the service they are consulting about. This may include:

- organisations and community groups
- groups from existing service users;
- potential service users;
- organisations and community groups from the families and carers of service users;
- voluntary and community sector organisations, traveller and faith groups;
- public sector organisations;
- local businesses;
- residents' community groups;
- community groups from people who work in or visit the area.

At the end of a consultation exercise, it is important to assess who has responded in order to evaluate whether all groups have been reached to improve future practice.

It may be appropriate to ask some questions about those responding so that it is possible to find out whether the relevant groups have been reached.

How and where organisations consult depends on whose views are being sought. Methods of consultation should be appropriate to the topic under discussion and the groups involved.

There are many ways to seek views. These include:

- through established meetings and networks e.g. residents' groups, PTA, Neighbourhood Watch, travellers and faith groups;
- by qualitative methods such as discussion groups, workshops, face to face interviews;
- by quantitative research, involving large samples – such as telephone or postal surveys;
- via websites and the Surrey County Council website <http://online.surreycc.gov.uk/consult/consult.nsf>
- information in local newspapers and newsletters.

All sectors setting up a consultation need to ensure that:

- overlap and duplication are avoided;
- the subject and framework for consultation is made clear from the start, together with any limitations that may apply;
- inventive ways of obtaining views are sought and take into account literacy, mobility and other access issues;
- consultation documents are concise, clearly laid out and written in simple and appropriate language, avoiding jargon;
- accessible formats of consultation documents are made available;
- it is as easy as possible to respond;
- where appropriate, there is an explanation of who is likely to be affected and how, with an assessment covering the likely effect of the proposals;
- events are held at locations that are local, convenient and appropriate to the consultees;
- background papers are made available two weeks before a consultation meeting is convened to allow time for representatives to consult the organisations they are representing and that notes are available two weeks post meeting;
- venues are fully accessible with good public transport links and meetings are held where consultees meet normally, ie village halls;

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- events are given sufficient publicity;
 - events are at convenient times of day for those being consulted to allow for off peak travel;
 - car sharing and other measures to reduce the environmental impact of these events are encouraged.

When organisations are planning the start and finish dates of their consultation exercise they will:

- plan ahead whenever possible to ensure compliance with the Compact 12 weeks consultation expectation;
- be sensitive to holiday periods, cultural and religious days/festivals;
- allow enough time for gathering, analysing and feeding back responses to the participants before a final decision is made.

It is vital to give feedback to those who have been consulted. Organisations will:

- be specific from the outset about how, where and when feedback will be communicated;
- make provision for the name, address, telephone number and e-mail address of a person who can be contacted if there are further queries, except when anonymous responses are appropriate;
- explain how consultees views have been taken into account;
- give details of any further opportunities to comment;
- where appropriate continue to advise of further opportunities to comment before a final decision is made;
- where appropriate report the outcome of any consultation on the website.

It is important that all those involved in consultation exercises are able to learn from the process. Organisations should seek ways:

- to put monitoring in place to ensure feedback is effective and adequate;
- ask participants for their views about the consultation process and how it could be improved;
- identify any barriers which may have prevented people taking part and try to create a more inclusive process;
- build improvements into service or business plans.

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