



**Consultation and Policy Appraisal
in Southend-on-Sea**

A Code of Good Practice

'Success Through Partnership'

A Compact for Southend-on-Sea and the Codes of Good Practice

The Compact is a framework for partnership working between statutory organisations and the voluntary and community sector.

The Compact sets out:

- A shared vision.
- Undertakings from both sides.
- Commitment to respect the independence of the voluntary and community sector.
- Systems to help make sure that the agreement works.

The Compact will be supported by Codes of Good Practice in the areas of Funding, Consultation and policy appraisal, Volunteering, Community Groups, including those, which are Faith Based and Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) organisations.

This Consultation and Policy Appraisal Code is the fifth of the Codes of Good Practice. It adds more detail to the principles laid out in The Compact document. The Code was written by a working group of representatives from the Voluntary and Community Sector and Statutory Bodies.

This Code describes how statutory organisations and voluntary and community organisations should work together in a positive way. It sets out their undertakings as part of a commitment to working in partnership for the benefit of all.

Key Principles

- Planning and consultation should start early, right from the policy design stage
- There should be clarity about what areas are open to change, and any potential impact on the Voluntary and Community Sector
- Information should reach those most affected
- Written materials should be clear and concise and be available through a variety of formats and languages
- Maximum participation should be encouraged through accessible and varied consultation methods
- Consultations should be announced in advance to maximise opportunities for responding; and sufficient time allowed for responses
- All feedback should be analysed and communicated and promoted widely
- Consultation documents should include details of how consultation will be acknowledged

Scope and Application of the Code

The Code of Practice is not a legally binding document; it is an enabling one, to strengthen and bring into focus the relationship between statutory organisations and the voluntary and community sector.

As part of the process of making the Compact work, there will be an annual review by statutory organisations and the sector to assess the development and operation of the Compact, including this Code of Practice.

Aim of the Code

This Code of Good Practice aims to make a positive impact on the way in which the statutory agencies in Southend-on-Sea consults and appraises its policies in respect of the voluntary and community sector. In so doing, it should enable voluntary and community organisations to make an effective contribution to the development and implementation of policy.

The Statutory Sector will:

- consult the sector on issues that are likely to affect it,
- build consultation with the sector into plans for policy development;
- appraise new policies and procedures, particularly at the developmental stage, identifying as far as possible any implications for the sector;
- consult early and, where possible, involve the sector at a sufficiently early stage of policy development (subject to considerations of urgency, sensitivity or confidentiality);
- be sensitive on a case by case basis to any additional resource implications for the sector in disseminating consultations, and to the most appropriate methods of consultation to encourage responses from the sector, including timescales, making consultation materials available in accessible formats, and giving advance notice of, and publicising, consultations;
- prepare consultation documents that are concise, clearly laid out and written in simple language that will be understood by the intended audience;
- take account positively of the specific needs, interests and contributions of those parts of the sector which represent, women, minority groups and the socially excluded;
- respect the confidentiality of information provided by the sector, within the constraints of the law and the proper performance of public duties, when given access to it on that basis;
- analyse carefully the results of its consultation exercises;
- provide feedback on the results of consultation;
- evaluate its consultations with a view to developing and spreading best practice.

The Voluntary and Community Sector will:

- use their infrastructure to encourage participation in consultations (commensurate with their available resources);
- define and demonstrate how they represent their stated constituency, by stating who they are, what groups or causes in society they represent and how they involved those interests in forming their policies and positions, and in responding to the consultation itself;
- wherever possible consult their constituency directly, including service users, volunteers, members and supporters;
- take account positively of the specific needs, interests and contributions of women, minority groups and the socially excluded;
- ensure that the information they present is accurate and that any research has been conducted in an objective and unbiased manner;
- respect the confidentiality of information, when given access to it on that basis;
- give their constituency feedback on the outcome of consultation;
- have regard to the regulatory framework that governs their organisation when representing their constituents, for example, the Charity Commission issues guidance for charities on what they should and should not do in relation to their representational and campaigning work; and
- promote good practice among their members (in the case of intermediary bodies) by issuing guidance on effective representation for voluntary and community organisations, and include consultation performance in quality systems and self-evaluation reports.

How long to allow for consultation

- 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. It should, however, be recognised that for a variety of reasons a 12 week period will not always be possible.
- Where less than 12 weeks is scheduled the document should specify the reason why a shorter response time has been set.

Acknowledgement of receipt of responses

Acknowledgements will normally be made to those replying to the consultation giving information about the next stages of the process, where this is known. However, it is accepted that it will not generally be possible to respond directly to points made in individual responses.

Confidentiality

Where respondents request confidentiality for their comments, their wishes will be respected.

After the consultation period: analysis and feedback

- The results of all consultation exercises should be carefully analysed. Particular attention should be paid to the views of representative bodies and those most affected by the proposals. Care should be taken to ensure that appraisal does not place undue weight on responses from larger organisations or marginalise the views of smaller organisations.
- Once a decision has been made on the way forward, respondents should be notified promptly how the work will proceed. Where circumstances permit, a summary of views should be produced and made available (unless they are confidential) together with other information collected from the consultation exercise.

This document can be provided in other formats and translation of this document is also available.

A glossary of terms relating to Compacts can be accessed through the Compact web-site at: www.thecompact.org.uk

Further information on the Local Compact and a list of signatories to the Compact can be found on agencies web-sites including:
www.southend.gov.uk

For further information, or to learn more about **A Compact for Southend-on- Sea and The Codes of Good Practice** please contact:

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When developing policy initiatives, an assessment or impact statement should be prepared, where appropriate, covering the likely effect of the proposals on voluntary and community organisations at local level

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. It should be clear in the process those matters which are open to change and those on which it has made a firm decision.

All consultation documents should be concise, clearly laid out and written in simple language that will be understood by the intended audience, avoiding jargon. Consideration should be given to making the document available in accessible formats and different languages.

The voluntary and community organisations to be consulted should not be limited to those in receipt of departmental funding, but should include those with which a department has regular contact or which are likely to have views on the issue in question.

The consultation exercise should be appropriately publicised, through voluntary and community sector intermediary bodies (such as the local Council for Voluntary Service) and other national and regional organisations and networks. Attention should be given to how best to consult community groups and Black and Minority Ethnic organisations.