

The Essex Compact: Public Engagement Code of Practice

What do we mean by public engagement?

The term “Public Engagement” covers a wide spectrum of processes that enable differing intensity of public involvement in decision-making. Engagement can take the form of written or verbal consultation, and may be conducted face-to-face, by telecommunication or by post. The aim of any Public Engagement exercise is to gather opinions of potentially affected individuals or groups. Public Engagement can be carried out at any stage of developing a project or policy, and more than one period and/or type of Public Engagement can be applied to any one proposed activity.

In the context of this Compact and of this code of practice, Public Engagement refers to engagement with groups and individuals. It is not intended to offer guidance for engagement with the general public.

Why have an Essex public engagement compact? Our Aims

1. To provide good quality information to enable appropriate decision-making.
2. To provide a standard good quality experience for the public across Essex
3. To maximise the value of public engagement activities for statutory and voluntary organisations

1. Our Shared Values

These are our over-arching standards for practice:

Public Engagement should be:

Relevant – so that responses are useful and unnecessary consultation is avoided

Accessible – in terms of language, method, time and place

Accountable – all views are recorded, reported on, given due consideration, and feedback is made available

Inclusive – so that communication, method and opportunities offered do not disadvantage any particular group of people

Informed – so that maximum benefit is gained from the process

Timely – to allow adequate time for responses to be compiled from individuals and groups, and for the information gathered to be included in the decision making process

Balanced – information provided should not be designed to influence the response

Transparent – so that people understand the context and process

Honest – that all information provided by both parties is based on all known facts

2. Our Shared Commitments

1. To respect confidentiality
2. To put in place protection measures when working with potentially vulnerable people and groups
3. To develop clear guidelines on involving local groups in community planning

3. Commitments by voluntary sector partners

1. For infrastructure bodies to advise statutory partners which appropriate groups could or should be consulted, and highlight opportunities for joined-up consultation with similar groups
2. Advise statutory partners regarding methods, timing and accessibility requirements of the VCS
3. To comply with published deadlines
4. To ensure that responses are accurate and relevant and fairly reflect the views of those they purport to represent
5. Inform and involve volunteers, members, trustees and employees in the activity, and share any outcomes
6. To consult directly with service users and other involved individuals where appropriate
7. To recognise the importance of consultation and the value of providing accurate and comprehensive information
8. To provide feedback on engagement processes to assist with future improvements

4. Commitments by statutory partners

1. To ensure that activities are planned to allow maximum time and opportunity for individuals and groups to make a considered and comprehensive response, recognising that 12 weeks is the recommended time to be allowed
2. To provide adequate resources so that engagement is appropriate and effective
3. To plan in public engagement from the beginning of any decision-making process so that it is a genuine dialogue carried out with integrity
4. To provide information about the engagement process
5. To provide concise but adequate and accurate contextual information to enable people to form a considered view
6. To ensure that people have the opportunities and support to empower them to be able to shape decisions
7. To enable the participation of a wide range of individuals and groups and to recognise the need for different approaches and appropriate resources to achieve this
8. To engage with both umbrella and individual organisations
9. To make the process rewarding and enjoyable
10. To value the input of participants, and to demonstrate this by recording, reporting and taking into account their views, and be willing to change policies and plans as a result of this

11. To publish consultation results and final outcomes in a timely manner, including reasons and justification
12. To list the Voluntary and Community Sector organisations that were contacted and those who responded
13. To ensure engagement is co-ordinated and appropriate so that individuals and groups are not over-consulted. Consider the merits of undertaking an equality impact assessment of the activity.
14. To monitor and evaluate engagement processes with participants to identify areas which can be improved
15. To respect and value the campaigning and lobbying role of the VCS; acknowledging they may have different objectives and working practices, without penalising them.
16. To make available public engagement training – to other sections within their organisation as well as to the VCS.

This document is available on request in alternative formats, including other languages