

## Building an Involving Culture

# Standards for Engagement

July 2009

## **What do we mean by ‘engagement’**

Engagement is a process through which organisations responsible for local services connect with local people. This may be by sharing information, inviting views and ideas, involving people in plans and service changes or supporting local people to take a lead role in finding solutions for themselves and their communities. The range of activity and the terms often used to describe different sorts of engagement are described in more detail in **Appendix 1.**

## **Why do we need standards for engagement for health and social care in Birmingham?**

Shared standards for engagement will enable the City’s Health and Wellbeing Partnership to:

- ensure engagement about health and social care in Birmingham is carried out consistently and to the highest possible standard;
- ensure we are listening to local people in a way that does not exclude anyone;
- be accountable;
- measure and improve engagement practice across Birmingham;
- encourage joint working and make best use of local resources;
- ensure well planned, good quality engagement leads to improvements in what we commission and provide, and
- recognise our responsibility to nurture and develop relationships with local communities across Birmingham.

## **How these standards will be maintained?**

- Complaints about the standards of engagement will be taken through the relevant organisation’s complaint process, with the expectation that the person with the responsibility for maintaining standards in engagement is involved.
- An annual report to be presented to the Birmingham Health and Wellbeing Partnership Board.

## Outcomes: What do we want the standards to achieve?

- Local people's views shape and improve services.
- Everyone who gets involved can contribute with confidence and feel that their views are valued.
- No one is excluded from having a say about services that affect them.
- People know what has happened as a result of their involvement.
- Local health and social care organisations are open and accountable.

## Engagement and the law

Both National Health Service (NHS) organisations and local councils are legally required to engage with local people. These duties to *inform, consult and involve* are laid out in the NHS Act 2006 and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

These statutory requirements to engage reinforce our understanding that involving local people can lead to improvements in provision, stronger relationships between local people and health and care organisations, and better informed and empowered individuals and communities.

**Appendix 2** provides more information about legislation.

## 1. Planning

With the early involvement of local people engagement will be carefully planned, clearly explained, and efficiently targeted.

- The relevant decision-makers have agreed to listen to what people say through engagement as part of the decision - making process. They are willing to feedback why decisions are made.
- We ensure that our planning takes account of our legal duties to involve people.
- Before we ask local people we check the Be Heard database to ensure the information needed does not already exist.
- Partners work together, using existing evidence from local people to determine how we need to engage, and what about.
- We involve local people at the earliest opportunity.
- We give careful thought to the resources we need to make sure engagement is efficient and effective.
- We ensure that all participants are clear about their role, and whether they reflect or represent their own views or those of a particular group.
- We provide an outline timetable for each engagement activity, including reporting back to those involved.
- Where necessary we undertake the relevant Impact Assessment of our proposal. These might include an Equalities Impact Assessment or Health Impact Assessment.
- We make particular plans to make sure those whose voices are not often heard are able to give their views.
- In planning engagement we include a range of local people and organisations likely to be affected by any proposed change.
- We discuss our plans with the groups that monitor how we engage, such as the Birmingham LINK and Birmingham City Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees.
- From the planning stage we keep people informed about what we are doing.

## 2. Empowering and Supporting

All partners are enabled to contribute with confidence.

- We ensure information is accessible to all participants and we communicate using their preferred method of communication to enable them to understand and participate fully.
- We provide opportunities that enable all communities and interest groups to participate in matters that affect them.
- We make sure all opportunities for involvement are user-friendly by:
  - timetabling events at most suitable times,
  - arranging transport, where necessary,
  - using accessible venues, in locations that are easy to get to,
  - providing translation and interpretation support,
  - supplying equipment and appropriate support for people with sensory impairments,
  - arranging advocacy support, and
  - making it clear if expenses can be claimed, at a pre-agreed rate, or if payment for contributions will be offered.
- We recognise that some areas of health and social care will require engagement to be exclusive, by gender, for example. When this happens we will make the reasons explicit.

## 3. Methods

Partners use the most appropriate methods to engage with people fully.

- We use a variety of methods to listen to and involve people from different backgrounds, of different ages and with different needs.
- We design engagement activity that is proportionate and appropriate for the individuals, families and groups involved.
- We use a range of approaches that are stimulating and inclusive and that encourage us to work together. We will try new approaches to improve how we engage.

- We promote engagement activity at all levels of the partner organisations to enable local people to influence the services they receive currently and to shape future services.
- We agree and use clear procedures so all participants can work together effectively.

## 4. Information and Communication

All partners are well-informed and communicate in ways that are meaningful and accessible to all.

- We recognise that people prefer a range of formats for information and communication and we provide clear, accurate and timely information in a variety of ways, including plain English, as well as pictorial and audio versions.
- We will share news responsibly, always mindful of its impact.
- We promote effective communication across and inside partner organisations.
- All partners will be responsible for making sure that the information they provide is kept up to date.
- When we are unable to share information we will explain the reason.
- We comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998
- We preserve individuals' rights to confidentiality.
- Each engagement activity is recorded on the online Be Heard Consultation Database, so key details are available on line to all.

## 5. Partnership

Organisations, groups and individuals work together openly and effectively.

- Where appropriate we work together in engagement activities to make the best use of our resources and of participants' contributions.
- We agree to listen to each other and take account of each other's priorities.
- We sustain relationships with existing networks as well as fostering and developing new groups, to encourage full community participation.

- We work together to seek solutions.
- We acknowledge all partners' contributions.

## 6. Feedback

Outcomes of engagement are shared widely.

- The timescale and process for feedback will be clear to all from the beginning of the planning process.
- We share the outcomes of consultation with participants and explain how sharing their views has made a difference.
- We feed back progress and the results of the engagement to the wider community and those groups who will be affected by any changes made.
- Subsequent decisions and actions are explained publicly. This will include information being held and publicly available on the Be Heard Consultation Database.
- Feedback is provided in a way that is accessible and acceptable to the individuals and groups concerned.

## 7. Monitoring and Evaluation

Engagement achieves its purpose and meets these standards.

- We ensure each process meets the relevant national standards for community engagement.
- Engagement and its effects are regularly evaluated.
- At the start of the process all participants agree what information will be collected and how the information will be recorded.
- We maintain an audit trail, identifying stakeholders and the nature and outcomes of engagement.
- Good practice is shared with partners and others.
- Results of evaluation are shared as part of the feedback process.
- Written evidence of the impact of engagement is available for evaluation purposes.

## 8. Learning and Improvement

Skills and knowledge inform practice.

- We always evaluate engagement activity, seeking the views of all involved, including partner agencies, their staff and the public.
- We use our experiences of working with local people to improve how we carry out engagement activity.
- We develop actively the skills and knowledge of all the participants.
- Participants share their skills, experience and knowledge with colleagues and community partners.
- All participants identify their own learning and development needs in relation to community engagement.
- Engagement processes will be regularly evaluated by all participants and amended as necessary.
- We are willing to try new approaches.
- We act on lessons learned.
- We will acknowledge good practice.
- We will share and monitor and examine good practice regionally and nationally.