

Ensuring Meaningful Engagement when Consulting

March 2012

"One of the commitments which people value most in the Compact is the undertaking to effectively engage with organisations and communities in the development of policies, programmes and public services.

This guidance provides much needed clarity about what that means in practice and sets a minimum standard for both local and national government to ensure that the relevant views are being heard."

Simon Blake OBE, Chair of Compact Voice

"The pace of change to policies and programmes has been swift since the coalition government took office. In some cases, shorter consultations are unavoidable, but they provide a valuable means to bring together the views of the sector and engage with the key issues at hand.

Ensuring these consultations are meaningful is a priority for government and this document from Compact Voice is a helpful resource."

Nick Hurd MP, Minister for Civil Society

Commitment 2.4 of The Compact states:

'Where it is appropriate, and enables meaningful engagement, conduct 12-week formal written consultations, with clear explanations and rationale for shorter time-frames or a more informal approach.'

This briefing provides a benchmark of the minimum expected in order for engagement on consultations to be considered meaningful, in particular when the public body is unavoidably restricted to less than a twelve week consultation period. If this happens a clear explanation as to why this is needed should also be provided.

It aims to be helpful to public bodies and civil society organisations in understanding this commitment, as well as being short and easy to use. This briefing is specifically concerned with meaningful engagement in consultations; and does not describe how to undertake proper on-going engagement.

For meaningful engagement, a public body needs to show that it has done the following:

- 1. Goes beyond the 'usual suspects' to attempt to ensure all those affected by a decision have been heard.**
While it may not be possible to reach absolutely everyone, there should be an active attempt to reach a wide range of people, with a published record of what has been attempted.
- 2. Looks at the impact on different groups separately as well as collectively.**
While it may not be possible to accommodate every different viewpoint, active understanding of the impact on different groups and their viewpoints should be sought.
- 3. Ensures questions are answered and enough context has been provided so that stakeholders can make informed decisions.**
- 4. Provides information on what is open to change, and what has already been decided.**
- 5. Provides information on how and where feedback will be provided on what has changed as a result of the consultation**
- 6. Provides a variety of methods for people to feed in to the consultation, ensuring that they are accessible.**
Examples include websites, events, stalls, focus groups and targeted dissemination
- 7. Holds meetings and events at times and places that allow as many people to take part as possible.**
- 8. Provides feedback on the consultation, and what has happened as a result**



For more information about Compact Voice and how we can help support your organisation or department to better implement the Compact, visit www.compactvoice.org.uk or call 020 7520 2451.