

3. Voluntary and Community Sector Engagement

Engagement with the Voluntary and Community Sector

As a collection of independent, not for profit organisations, the voluntary and community sector brings distinctive value to society and fulfils a crucial role that is distinct from both the state and the market. The overall purpose of engagement with the voluntary and community sector is to ensure that the process of policy, strategy and service development makes best use of the knowledge, experience and expertise of voluntary and community organisations and the communities they serve.

Effective engagement is a two-way process built on mutual understanding, which forms part of regular and ongoing dialogue between statutory, voluntary and community sectors. Policies, strategies and services that are developed as a result of views expressed through engagement are more likely to succeed at the implementation stage.

Voluntary and community organisations in Trafford have a valuable contribution to make in the planning and development of policies, strategies and services that affect them:

- as a total sector
- as deliverers of a particular service
- as a means for statutory partners to engage with the general public

AIMS & OBJECTIVES

This code of practice will overcome inconsistencies in relation to voluntary and community sector engagement and will:

- * Make a commitment to voluntary and community sector engagement at a range of levels within the decision making process.
- * Maximise the value of engagement for both the statutory and voluntary & community sector.
- * Seek to provide a coordinated strategy for identifying and supporting voluntary and community sector representatives within Trafford Partnership structures and the structures of partnership members.
- * Make engagement transparent, accessible and open to all
- * Ensure good co-ordination and delivery of engagement, through the partnership's engagement strategy and action plan.
- * Review existing mechanisms for voluntary and community sector engagement, including networks and forums, with a view to avoiding duplication and improving efficiency and effectiveness.
- * Make engagement a two-way process that is part of ongoing dialogue between the sectors.

Local Context:

There are some examples of good practice of members of the Trafford Partnership working closely with voluntary & community sector partners in developing policies and services in the Borough. But our approach to engagement has been ad hoc - often relying on the commitment of individuals, rather than organisations as a whole.

This code of practice is designed to complement the Trafford Partnership's Community Engagement Strategy which was adopted in July 2008, which, for the first time, saw a joint commitment to improving and coordinating a whole range of information giving, consultation, research and collaborative activities.

Key Principles of the strategy

- Effective community engagement will help the Trafford Partnership and its members respond to people's priorities, make sure we're providing the right services, at the right time in the right place and that we're developing the borough to improve the long-term future quality of life for people in Trafford
- Our Community Engagement Strategy recognises that 'one size does not fit all' and that we should use the most appropriate means for communities and customers and non-customers to be involved and give feedback.
- Greater coordination of community engagement across partners, including joint working and partner contributions of resources to shared activities, will minimise waste and duplication, and will ensure best value for community engagement.
- Community engagement will be inclusive, making considered effort to reach those who may not have previously been involved, and take into account race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age and religion.

The Trafford Partnership approach to Community Engagement

Decisions made by members of the Trafford Partnership are complex and must take into account a wide range of factors, but putting local people's views and priorities at their heart of their decisions.

Other factors include legal powers and responsibilities, finances, national policies and targets, changing demographics and the demand for other services.

It is important that partners provide clear information on their decision-making processes and the external factors that impact them, in order to allow residents to understand fully and participate.

The Partnership celebrates that every type of involvement is important in the community engagement process, each playing vital and complementary roles and different methods will be used depending on the activity and circumstances.

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Trafford Community Engagement Strategy - Model of Participation

Inform	Research	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Providing quality information to support public understanding of (council) services and activities	Obtaining the views of the public on a range of open issues.	Obtaining public feedback on proposals to inform decision making.	Working with the public to ensure issues and concerns are addressed.	Working in partnership with the public in decision-making.	Public decision making and/or devolved budgets leading to service commissioning
Examples of how this might be achieved					
E.g. Brochures, newsletters, web	e.g. surveys focus groups	e.g. surveys focus groups	e.g. user panels	e.g. neighbourhood needs analysis.	e.g. referenda, user management of services.
Current examples from Trafford					
Trafford Today newspaper Trafford Partnership & Partner Websites Partners' Newsletters	Partnership Residents Survey Partnership Business Survey	Budget Consultation	Neighbourhood Forums Online discussion forum	Pot of Gold – youth grants scheme	Sale Moor Community Partnership



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UNDERTAKINGS

The Code of Practice is made up of a series of undertakings for all or specific partners, which all work towards the main aims of the Code, as set out above.

SHARED UNDERTAKINGS:

- Develop effective engagement partnerships between the statutory and voluntary & community sector.
- Promote the importance of community engagement as an effective tool in decision making.
- Avoid over engagement of the same groups (the 'usual suspects') on the same issues, plan clearly.
- Monitor and evaluate the impact of engagement from both sides to improve future delivery.
- Make it easier for vulnerable and seldom heard members of the community to participate in engagement activities.
- Working with VCAT to increase capacity and understanding of engagement in our diverse communities
- Deliver appropriate training on engagement process, and take advantage of training opportunities offered.
- Respect the confidentiality of each other's information, when working together to deliver community engagement activity

STATUTORY SECTOR UNDERTAKINGS:

- Provide adequate information and resources to make engagement effective and publish all materials in plain language and various formats appropriate to the community.
- Plan engagement from the start and revisit the plan to ensure effectiveness; ensure engagement includes the voluntary and community sectors.
- Provide feedback in a timely and appropriate manner.
- Ensure people have the opportunity to shape decision making and service delivery, Value and promote the contribution that is made by the voluntary and community sectors.
- Use a wide range of engagement techniques.
- Be open about what can realistically be achieved and what policies can be changed.
- Provide named contact for each department involved in the process.
- With support from VCAT, actively seek out a wider range of voluntary & community sector organisations to represent the sector within engagement activities.
- With support from VCAT, proactively seek out specific voluntary and community groups that may hold experience or knowledge in a specific area of present or future policy development in order to inform decision making

Voluntary & Community Sector Undertakings

- Ensure a wider range of voluntary & community sector organisations take part in engagement activities on behalf of the sector as a whole, advising the statutory sector on areas of expertise within the voluntary and community sector.

- Ensure responses to community engagement activity on behalf of others is based on gathering the views of those being represented and informing them about why they are being consulted on and what are realistic outcomes
- Encourage members, volunteers and paid staff to take part in engagement opportunities.
- Provide feedback on the engagement process, techniques and assist in the planning of future engagement work.
- Understand that there may be constraints which affect what can realistically be changed.

Action Plan:

An action plan will be drawn up annually in relation to the undertakings:

Links to other codes of practice:

The Trafford Compact group will seek to identify areas of common concern for all Codes of Practice Work streams.