

Appendix 2

Equality and diversity – guidance on inclusion

For a variety of reasons, some communities or individuals within Northamptonshire rarely take part in engagement activities. It is your responsibility to identify the barriers that prevent people from becoming involved and put in place measures to overcome them. There are some legal requirements in this regard related to the Equality Act 2010.

Things to do:

- Decide who you are going to involve. See the section on stakeholder analysis below.
- Plan how you will engage those that rarely get involved. Ensure that you have enough time to do this effectively. People won't just 'turn up' for an engagement. You will need to work hard to involve them. Work with the NHCP comms and engagement team to develop a communications plan that details how you will contact people and encourage them to get involved. Please see the section on consultation and equalities below.
- Be careful to think about people's access requirements to ensure that you get the most inclusive response you can.
- Consider if voluntary and community sector involvement will strengthen your approach – often this sector has contact with people that many public agencies does not.
- Check if the methods you have chosen are suited to the needs of those you are involving. Check that you know peoples' preferred method of communication.
- Ensure you have enough resources to involve everyone that you have identified. Distribute any accompanying information in plain language and in alternative formats.

Use existing data and information to:

- Learn about particular communities in the county. You can get this information from a range of places such as the public health reports, and Office of National Statistics (ONS) local equality duty reports.
- Check if previous involvement activities have looked at similar issues with particular communities. This may reduce the amount of times that an individual is consulted on similar themes, helping to avoid 'consultation fatigue.'
- Look at what equalities data you might already have available. Are any groups under-represented? Are there any gaps in service that your activity could address or better understand?

Consultation and equalities

Equality and diversity considerations should underpin any engagement activity. Equality and diversity issues are important as they involve treating people fairly and with dignity and respect. NHCP is committed to considering equalities issues in all aspects of work. As such, it is vital that engagement activities are fully inclusive.

The need for an inclusive approach

There is a need to ensure that all relevant groups can take part in NHCP engagement activities and that NHCP can demonstrate who and how they have been involved. This is particularly important when decisions are taken towards the end of the activity in the form of formal consultation and the feedback is used to inform change.

NHCP lead partners need to be able to show those taking the decisions that they have worked to include people protected by the Equality Act 2010. Some exercises will be wide-ranging, for example a large representative sample of the population, while others will be aimed at a specific group, for example those directly affected by a proposal. Whatever the case, every consultation and engagement activity will have an equality dimension that needs to be identified and put into practice.

Barriers to inclusion

Rarely will a consultation or engagement activity deliberately exclude a group from being involved or providing a viewpoint. However, this can happen for a range of reasons, most commonly when the requirements of various groups are not taken into account. This can create barriers to participation. When planning a consultation, it is important to think through who might be excluded by such barriers and to take steps to address this.

Barriers might include:

- The methods used, for example over-reliance on one method such as social media that require high levels of literacy, or the time of day an event is organised.
- Physical barriers, for example inaccessible venues or lack of facilities.
- Attitudinal barriers, for example the way professionals and employees approach or respond to groups and individuals or the assumptions they make.
- Financial barriers, for example some groups might lack the resources to respond to a consultation.
- Cultural barriers, for example using inappropriate language and facilities.

Identifying groups

Some groups have been widely described as 'hard to reach' or 'seldom heard', however with a bit of effort there is no reason for this to be the case. There are a number of approaches that can be used to include people in the engagement and consultation process. In the same way that we would choose our engagement, a range of approaches are recommended:

- Contact umbrella organisations.
- Voluntary Impact Northamptonshire (VIN) has a database of voluntary and community sector organisations in the city, which can be filtered by area of interest.
- Work with grass roots community members and organisations. You could organise a special event or conduct some outreach work.
- Ask a third party (perhaps a voluntary sector organisation) to conduct this engagement on your behalf. You may have to resource this.
- Technology. While over-reliance on IT can exclude some people, used alongside other methods it can include others who might not otherwise get involved. Approaches include video conferencing, Skyping, setting up an online survey, Facebook and other social media.