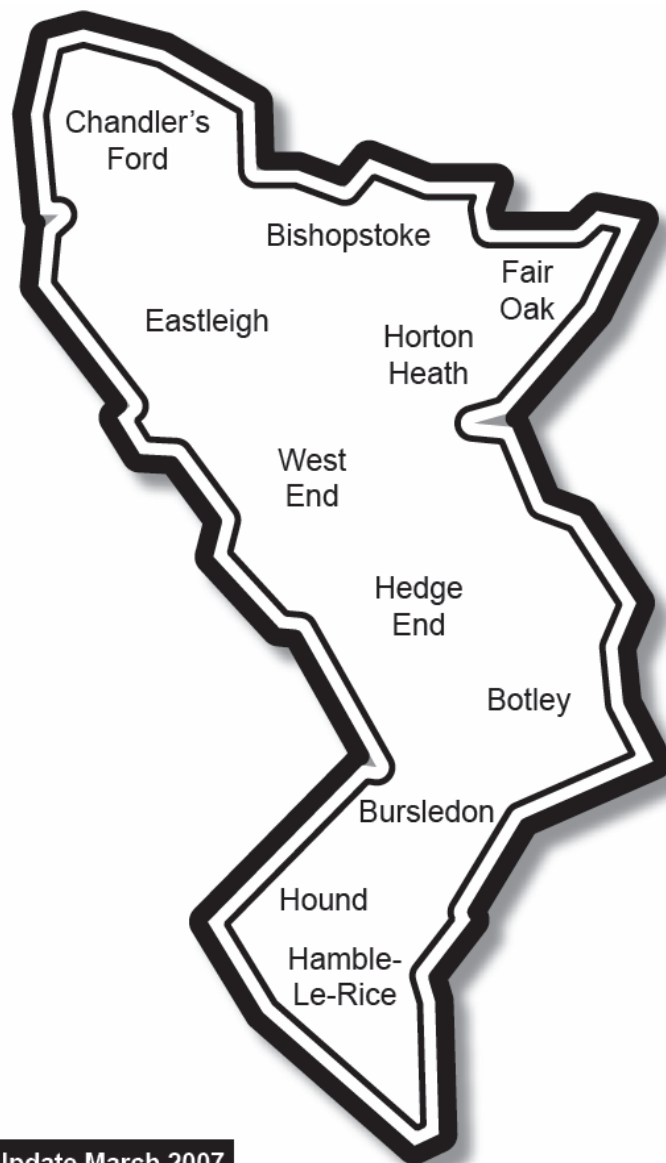


Code of Good Practice in Consultation



A partnership between Eastleigh Borough Council,
One Community and the Voluntary and Community Sector

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EASTLEIGH COMPACT

Code of Good Practice in Consultation

1. Introduction

1.1 This document sets out the guidance to develop the relationship between the voluntary and community sector and the public sector. It has been developed in accordance with the aim of establishing a code of good practice for all voluntary and community organisations as required by Section 6 Para 6.1 of the EASTLEIGH COMPACT launched in March 2004. The Eastleigh Compact sets out the general principles of the agreements between the Council and voluntary and community organisation. In this document they are together referred to as 'Organisations'

1.2 Each year Eastleigh Borough Council allocates about £300k of taxpayers' money to voluntary and community organisations working within the Borough. These organisations are supported because the Council recognises the benefits they bring to the community. So that misunderstandings and difficulties do not arise, it is important that both the Council and the organisations have a common understanding of the nature of voluntary support, and of current best practice where volunteers are used to provide services in the Borough Council area.

1.3 The lead in this work is the Community Development Manager at Eastleigh Borough Council as Chair of the Eastleigh Compact Steering Group, who will review and if necessary revise this 'code of good practice in consultation' at least annually.

1.4 The Eastleigh Compact and the codes of good practice derived from it should apply to any organisation working within the Council area. Although not legally binding, organisations will be encouraged to sign their acceptance of the principles in the Compact and their commitment to working towards the good practice codes.

1.5 This paper states the principles and obligations by which Eastleigh Borough Council will provide support to organisations that use volunteers and the principles and obligations which the volunteers themselves must adopt to receive support from Eastleigh Borough Council. Together this constitutes good practice.

2. What is the Eastleigh Compact?

2.1 The Eastleigh Compact is an agreement between public sector agencies and voluntary and community organisations in Eastleigh. It outlines how all parties will work together and provides a framework for working together in the future. While the compact establishes the framework the codes of good practice give further detail about specific issues. In addition to this code there is the volunteering code, funding code and the consultation code.

The compact and codes are not legally binding. They are a set of mutually agreed documents that have been jointly created and consulted upon.

3. The Code of Good Practice in Consultation

3.1 The consultation code of good practice is to be viewed in conjunction with the Eastleigh Compact. Development of the consultation code of good practice has involved an extensive consultation process following input from a variety of voluntary organisations and community groups (hereafter all referred to as voluntary organisations) and statutory agencies.

This Code sets out how to ensure that consultation between voluntary organisations and statutory agencies is appropriate, easily understood and effective. All sectors have a role to play:

- Statutory agencies have a community leadership role, and work with other partners to secure the economic, social, health and environmental well-being of residents.
- Voluntary organisations fulfil a number of roles: as users of services, representatives and advocates for particular sections of the community, and as service providers.

4. Purpose of the Code

4.1 Scope and status of the code

- a. This local code of good practice is a supporting document to the Eastleigh Compact which is a framework for the working relationship between the voluntary and community sector and Eastleigh Borough Council. This code is not a legally binding document but should be seen as a good practice guide to strengthen the way the two sectors work together.
- b. The Eastleigh Compact (Section 5) states that it acknowledges that good communication underpins the effectiveness of the Compact. It also recognises that local statutory organisations

and the voluntary and community sector have distinct but complementary roles.

- c. Members of the Eastleigh Compact are committed to open and honest dialogue, subject to compliance with confidentiality where appropriate.
- d. This local code applies to all members who may wish to adopt it as a standard for their organisation. Where members do not follow the code for a particular consultation exercise they must satisfy themselves that they have good reasons for not doing so.

5. Forms of Consultation

5.1 There is a variety of methods in which to consult, including meetings, written consultation, focus groups, telephone survey and workshops. There is no one right method. What matters is that the approach taken should be flexible and respond to the needs of those being consulted. All forms of consultation should be easily accessible and all consultation documents should be concise, clearly written in simple jargon-free language and appropriate to the audience at which they are aimed. Steps should be taken to reach all people.

6. Principles

- a. Publicise the consultation to encourage wide involvement and to allow organisations time to plan their work.
- b. Plan and consult early. This will allow everyone time to be involved, discuss and exchange views and will help ensure that the maximum benefit is gained from the consultation exercise.
- c. Allow reasonable timescales for response. Plan for the recommended minimum of 12 weeks for organisations to respond to consultations and take account of particular times in the calendar when additional work may be more difficult to accommodate, for example holiday periods. If this is not possible then explain the reasons clearly, as sometimes external pressures can affect good intentions.
- d. Be open and honest. Consultation should be meaningful and open if it is to have credibility. This will enable everyone to make the best use of their time and resources to deliver useful results. Be clear about specific roles. Explain who has responsibility for what and how much influence others may have.
- e. Allocate sufficient resources. Limited funds can restrict the breadth or depth of consultation and undermine the intention to be open and honest. All parties should be clear about their commitment to the costs and time involved.
- f. Be inclusive. Voluntary and community organisations help represent the diverse needs of Eastleigh residents. Therefore, it is important to understand that a variety of approaches will be required as traditional methods of consultation may exclude some people within communities. Active steps should be taken to identify under-represented interests or groups and to seek ways in which they can be involved.

- g. Keep talking, keep listening. Consultation is just one part of an ongoing discussion, which can help to keep everyone involved with developments, and avoid unnecessary surprises. Ongoing consultation can improve the development and delivery of programmes, policies and services, and help to improve mutual understanding.
- h. Give feedback. Organisations should offer people the opportunity to find out what has happened as a result of the consultation.

7. Monitoring progress

7.1 Regular monitoring of the exercise will help organisations to keep track of progress and the rate of response, ensuring that responses have been received from a diverse range of groups and people. Monitoring will also ensure that the exercise conforms to the principles of the code.

7.2 After the consultation – analysis and feedback

- a. The results should be carefully analysed, ensuring that the views of small organisations and individuals are not overlooked. Particular attention should be paid to the views of those most affected by the proposals.
- b. Once a decision is made on the way forward it should be publicised widely and all respondents informed. The consultation process should be explained, as should the justification of the decision made, in light of the views expressed. A full report should be made easily accessible. A list of those who responded should be included.
- c. It should be anticipated that some respondents may wish to question why their views have been rejected and ask for a full explanation.

7.3 Evaluation

- a. Effective evaluation provides information on what worked, what didn't and why. It helps to make sure that you get best value for money from your efforts and time. This will help continually to improve the process. The response forms will have some comments from participants but the organising body should also evaluate their approach and review what could be done differently the next time.
- b. Points to think about:
 - Were clear objectives set in the first place?

- Did you receive the response you wanted from underrepresented or socially excluded groups?
 - Can you show which methods achieved success and which did not?
 - Was the timetable realistic and achieved?
 - Were sufficient resources allocated?
 - Was the information easy to access, relevant and available in alternative formats?
 - Has anything changed as a result of the consultation?
- c. Evaluation is also an effective way to identify any training needs, for organisations and participants, in relation to consultation and policy appraisal. It can be a useful way to share experience and best practice.
- d. Finally make sure that the views and information received are used to make a difference.

8. How to use this code

8.1 This document is intended to safeguard relationships and actions of both the voluntary and community, and public sectors in Eastleigh. It is a good practice document and if there are disagreements we will undertake to find a mutually agreed resolution. If no such resolution can be agreed, the matter will be taken to an independent mediator.

8.2 The Eastleigh compact working group will promote this code throughout Eastleigh. It will review how it is used and will encourage local groups to participate in Compact events.

8.3 All of the Compact documents will be reviewed by the compact working group. This is an open group and if you would like to come to compact working group meetings please contact Nikki or Helen at the addresses below.

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