

## CONSULTATION GUIDELINES

The Association is committed to consulting tenants, customers and other stakeholders on matters that affect them.

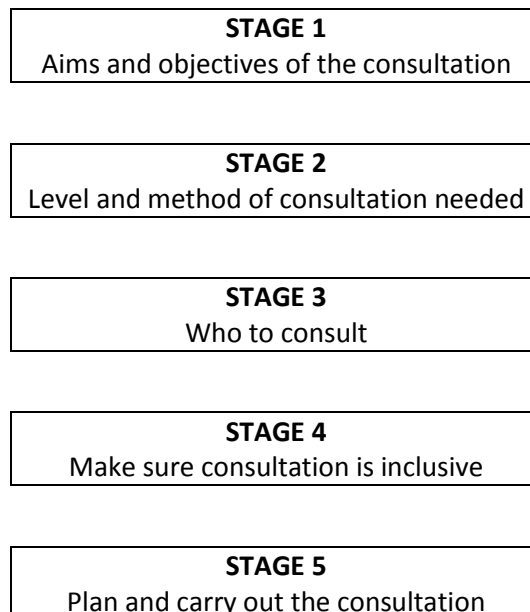
These guidelines demonstrate the principles the Association will apply to consultation exercises and outlines the minimum standards that will apply to ensure a consistent and effective approach.

### The minimum standards are:

- 1) Allow a minimum of 4 weeks for people to respond. Timescales should reflect the nature and complexity of the consultation, however any proposal to use a timescale shorter than 2 weeks requires the prior approval of the Chief Executive.
- 2) Be clear about the proposals, who may be affected, what questions are being asked and the timescales for responses.
- 3) Ensure that consultation is clear, concise and widely available.
- 4) Provide a variety of response mechanisms and ensure tenants who have literacy or numeracy issues are assisted or provided with supplementary guidance.
- 5) Give feedback on the responses received and give information on how the consultation influenced the policy or service.
- 6) Monitor and report on the outcome of consultation exercises.

## CONSULTATION PLANS

At the start of any project that will require consultation, the lead officer should develop a **Consultation Plan** that outlines the following six key stages that will form the consultation process:



## **STAGE 6**

Use the results and give feedback

### **STAGE 1: Aims and objectives of the consultation**

- Identify why the consultation is being carried out.
- Consider in particular how the outcomes might influence decisions.
- Make sure that those being consulted understand how the results will be used.

In terms of objectives, consider which of the following might be applicable:

- Compare and challenge an existing service
- Identify unmet needs
- Shape the way a service is delivered
- Measure satisfaction with a service
- Prioritise future spending
- Set targets for a service
- Assess reaction to new ideas or initiatives
- Identify opportunities for service improvements
- Anything else?

Also take account of:

- Other data or research relevant to the subject matter
- What other consultation is being undertaken – either by the Association or others
- Is there other planned consultations – is there an opportunity for joint working

**Within the aims and objectives, highlight importance of communication and identification of mechanisms for feedback.**

### **STAGE 2: Level and method of consultation needed**

Be clear from the start what level of engagement is appropriate:

- Engagement for information – where people cannot influence the outcome (communication)
- Engagement for consideration – where people can influence the outcome (consultation)

Consultation methods:

- Focus groups
- Telephone surveys
- Postal surveys
- Forums
- Seminars/workshops
- Website
- Public meetings
- Exhibition/roadshow

### **STAGE 3: Who to consult**

To a large extent, this will be dependent on the subject matter. Consider:

- Service users
- Dissatisfied or former customers

- People who might need the service in future
- Internal customers (staff)
- Partner organisations
- Interested agencies

Also try to identify any existing community groups or networks that could be consulted – or who could potentially help carry out the consultation.

#### **STAGE 4: Make sure consultation is inclusive**

Particular consideration must be given to groups that are defined as hard-to-reach – i.e. any group or section of the community who it is difficult to access for any reason such as:

- Physical inaccessibility (e.g. disability, older or frail people)
- Language
- Cultural views and traditions
- Social expectations


Hard-to-reach groups may include:

- Asylum seekers
- Children and young people
- Drug users
- Faith communities
- LGBT
- Homeless people
- Minority ethnic communities
- Offenders/ex-offenders
- Older people (especially frail and/or isolated older people)
- People with disabilities
- People with learning difficulties
- People with mental health problems
- Single parents
- Victims of domestic abuse

Once hard-to-reach groups have been identified, it is necessary to take measures that will help overcome possible barriers. For example, using interpreters, visual aids, accessible venues. There should also be flexibility over timing, location and transport issues.

#### **STAGE 5: Planning and doing the consultation**

Start at the end – the date at which decision or approval is required – and work back.

	<b>TASK</b>	<b>TIMESCALE</b>
 <p>END</p> <p>START</p>	Board approval / legislative compliance required	End date
	Senior Management Team approval/agreement	Minus 4 weeks
	Conclude report	Minus 2 weeks
	Collate, analyse and consider consultation outcomes	Minus 2 weeks
	Run consultation	Minus 4 weeks
	Advertise and publicise consultation	Minus 2 weeks
	Produce consultation plan	Minus 2 weeks

## **STAGE 6: Using the results**

Analyse the results, using quantitative and qualitative data – consider the following questions:

- What are the main findings
- Are people satisfied/dissatisfied
- What are the areas on which there is a majority consensus
- Where do views and opinions differ
- What are customer priorities/expectations
- What can we act on
- What can we do little about

Produce the results – take into account

- Which findings do not need action – low priority or good results
- What can't be changed in the short-term – how will this be communicated
- Identify “quick wins”
- What longer-term actions are required – action plan

Feedback

It is crucial that all those involved in the consultation are given direct feedback on the outcomes. This may require different formats dependent on who has been involved and could include:

- Presentation
- Seminar/workshop
- Summary reports
- Feedback documents
- Website
- Newsletter