Version	1
Last Revision Date	May 2010

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Consulting with Hard to Reach Groups Guide

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DOCUMENT CONTROL	
POLICY NAME	**Consulting with Hard to Reach Groups** Guide
Department	Human Resources
Telephone Number	01443 424075
Initial Policy Launch Date	May 2010
Reviewing Officer	Dilys Jouvenat
Review Date	Annual
Date of Equality Impact Assessment	N/A
REVISION HISTORY	
Date	Revised By
May 2011	Dilys Jouvenat
DOCUMENT APPROVAL	
This document has received approval from:	Date of Approval
HR Senior Management Team	N/A
Corporate Management Team	N/A
Cabinet	N/A

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Introduction

This guide will provide some basic guidance about how to include 'hard to reach' groups in the involvement, engagement and consultation processes of the Council.

The guide will provide pointers to ensure that those 'hard to reach' communities (geographic or interest) within the Council area are able to participate effectively and that there is a clear purpose for engagement with these groups, that consultation is successful and that services improve as a result.

Why consult with the 'hard to reach'?

There are a variety of potential benefits in listening to the views of the people that use, don't use or are affected by our services. At its best consultation can improve and inform the development of our policies and practices helping us to deliver appropriate and efficient services that meet our customer needs. At its worst it is a tick box exercise that reinforces the view that 'the Council does not listen'.

Effective involvement, engagement, and consultation will also assist the Council in carrying out its Equality Impact Assessments and provide the evidence needed on which to base recommendations.

Over targeting of those individuals or groups who regularly respond to consultation can lead to the views of harder to reach groups being overlooked.

Who are the Hard to Reach?

There are many definitions of the term 'hard to reach' in the Home Offices '*Delivering Services to hard to reach families in On Track areas*' report it identifies three types of definition as follows:

Minority Groups – traditionally under represented groups, marginalised, disadvantaged or socially excluded, this includes service users such as minority ethnic groups, travellers, disabled people, and asylum seekers.

Slipping through the net – the overlooked 'invisible' or those unable to articulate their needs. This includes those with caring responsibilities, mental health problems and service users who fall just outside the statutory or usual remit of a provider, or those whose needs are apparently not so great as to grant access to a service.

The service resistant – unwilling to engage with service providers, the suspicious, and the over targeted or disaffected. This includes families 'known' to agencies such as social services, who are wary of engaging with

providers or others who are distrustful and potentially hostile to service providers possibly due to a link to drug use, alcohol abuse or criminal behaviour.

(Adapted from the Delivering Services to hard to reach families in On Track areas – Home Office Development and Practice Report)

It should be recognised that the groups mentioned above are not always hard to reach for all services and in some cases may engage frequently with some services and not at all with others.

However engagement with hard to reach groups is a fundamental part of service delivery.

Before You Start

You should ask the following questions:

Will the result of the consultation contribute towards changing or improving your service? – If the answer is no there is no need to consult

Who do you want to engage with?

Are there any other Council surveys that could provide the same information?

Does the normal feedback and data collection in your service area provide the information you need to know?

Do you have a specific target group or groups? How have you identified these? Are you making assumptions about the interests of other groups?

Are there opportunities to share workload? Does another service area have the information you are looking for?

How are you going to collect and analyse the data?

How will you share the results with other service areas, service users and partners?

How sensitive is the information you are going to collect? Have you taken appropriate security measures that comply with the Data Protection Act?

What specific barriers may hard to reach groups face? How will you overcome those?

Choosing your method

When identifying your consultation method you should give consideration to your target group or groups and use the most appropriate method to engage them successfully.

Methods available include:

- Face to face
- Interviews
- Focus groups
- Conferences
- Ward walks
- Surveys and questionnaires
- Ballots/votes
- E mail correspondence
- Online surveys and votes

This list is not exhaustive and you should talk to colleagues who have already carried out successful consultations to help identify appropriate methods.

Whatever the method you use you should follow the Council's Clear Print, Plain English and Accessibility Guidelines to assist in ensuring full participation.

Further information is available from:

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