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**Northamptonshire's Partnership
Participation Principles**

Northamptonshire's Partnership Participation Principles

What is the Northamptonshire Partnership?

The Northamptonshire Partnership is made up of agencies across the public sector all working together to deliver better results for residents using their services. It is the partnership for the county and provides leadership and direction for working together in Northamptonshire and facing out into the wider region and beyond.

What do we mean by participation?

There are a number of terms that are used interchangeably to reflect work where the input from groups or individuals is used to shape decisions. This could be through a number of different levels:

- Consultation
- Deciding together (engagement)
- Acting together (empowerment)
- Supporting independent community initiatives

For the purposes of this document, these different levels will all be referred to as 'participation'.

Participation is at the core of strategic partnership developments including Northamptonshire's Sustainable Communities Strategy, Local Area Agreement, and Comprehensive Area Assessment and is a central aspect of key strategies for most partner agencies and authorities. Key legislation around consultation includes the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction

Bill; Communities in control real people, real power; the citizen focused policing agenda; the delivering world class commissioning agenda; developing a thriving third sector and the Local Government Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (LGPIH). A new duty came into force on 1st April 2009, and is set out in the LGPIH Act 2007. The new duty to involve seeks to ensure that local people have greater opportunities to have their say. The aspiration for the new duty is to embed a culture of engagement and empowerment across local government. Whilst this document looks at undertaking participation in a partnership context it acknowledges that there will be occasions where a partner organisation may need to conduct its participation independent of the partnership.

What we did

A working group was set up made up of participation leads from public service providers including NHS Northamptonshire, Northamptonshire Police, Northamptonshire Police Authority, Northamptonshire County Council, districts and boroughs, third sector representatives and the Northamptonshire Partnership Support Unit. The working group reviewed the existing approaches to participation across the county and worked to see how these could be taken forward in the future and this leaflet sets out aims, principles and benefits for an effective consultation and engagement plan. These have been developed with partners and other stakeholders in Northamptonshire.

The Partnership's approach has been designed to develop and enable people's



participation in decision-making, adding value for those involved, contributing to improving community cohesion and improving service delivery.

Public participation needs to be taken forward and owned collectively, and represent a sustained core commitment over months and years rather than a one-off 'special project', and without undue emphasis on particular 'initiatives'. The principles outlined, and the plan represents a step towards overall improvement, and not an end in itself.

In this leaflet the Partnership outline the aims, principles, benefits for a successful and effective participation plan. We have developed these ideas with partners and other stakeholders in Northamptonshire.

Our shared aims

- Add value, helping to shape and improve services to meet user's needs
- Provide information to create a dialogue and develop common understanding between public/ service users and service providers
- Let local people feel that they are truly able to influence decisions made about services that they receive
- Allow the outcomes of participation activities to drive the way in which organisations deliver their services in the future

Our Shared Principles

Public participation should...

- Be commissioned where there is a real and stated commitment to involve people in shaping services and decisions
- Be clear about the parameters for the participation activity; whether the purpose is to provide information, consult, engage or empower
- Develop sustainable, cost effective approaches to participation
- Support community cohesion
- Be coordinated, identifying opportunities for collaboration between organisations, including the voluntary and community/ third sector
- Be transparent and accessible in order to meet the diverse needs of the public
- Provide useful information to the public about services so that they can make informed decisions
- Seek to use timely, innovative and inclusive approaches which offer an opportunity for all local people affected by or interested in particular services, a genuine opportunity to be informed and meet the diverse needs of the public
- Provide transparent, accessible feedback for local people on the outcomes from participation activities, including as appropriate reasons if suggestions have

not been implemented and responses to any areas of concern

- Be evaluated to enable ongoing development and learning across all organisations; the approaches to participation should not be prescriptive, but learning about 'what works' should be shared and used to shape future approaches
- Be supported by technological solutions where appropriate; this will be ongoing and long term as new ideas and technologies emerge that support innovative approaches that develop to meet local needs within a changing political, financial and social environment
- Have an impact

Shared benefits for Organisations

In order to contribute to effective participation in Northamptonshire, all organisations will be able to:

- Plan participation activities to make the best use of combined resources from all partners and eliminate duplication of effort
- Share resources, skills and experience with other organisations to ensure the most effective and inclusive participation approaches are used
- Offer support to each other in the delivery of these activities

- Share outcomes and analysis from these activities enabling comparisons of data and learning across the Partnership
- Demonstrate effective partnership working in the delivery of participation activities as measured through the Comprehensive Area Assessment

Our shared benefits for people living in Northamptonshire

Delivering participation activities in line with these principles will offer clear benefits for members of the public

- Inclusion in participation activities
- Reduction in consultation fatigue by appropriate, planned and targeted participation
- Narrow the gap between public expectations and service delivery:
 - Local people have greater opportunities to share their views
 - Local people can see the influence they can have on decision making
 - Public services are better attuned to user needs
- Greater community cohesion
- Better outcomes and satisfaction for users



Third sector involvement

The following are examples of ways in which the third sector could be involved:

- Third sector organisations might be affected by or interested in a particular authority function
- Third sector organisations might have a role as advocates for local people
- Third sector organisations might be able to provide relevant expertise and specialist knowledge that might help in reaching out to marginalised and vulnerable groups

Our work streams

Whilst these principles for participation represent long-term, often ongoing activity, there are some key delivery tasks required to facilitate effective implementation of the strategy and its principles. Work is being undertaken to identify all previous participations through a mapping exercise undertaken across the Partnership.

In addition the working group will be preparing an accessible and user friendly Participation Toolkit that provides an overview of participation for member partners who are required to undertake participation activities with their local communities.

The working group also arranged training by the Consultation Institute, with courses for a selected group of trainees on; effective focus groups, effective surveys and questionnaires, evaluating public engagement and a master class on consultation before and after. The Institute will provide a Certificate of Professional Development to trainees attending all four courses.

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Contact details:

The Partnership Participation Principles are being taken forward together with partners and is being supported by the Partnership Support Unit for Northamptonshire.

If you require further information please contact the Partnership Support Unit on Telephone 01604 237358 or email psu@northamptonshire.gov.uk

www.northamptonshireobservatory.org.uk



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