



The Care Forum

South Gloucestershire Parenting Support Strategy **Twelve good practice points** **to consider in consultations with parents and carers**

April 2008

This document outlines good practice for those wishing to undertake consultation exercises with parents and carers living in South Gloucestershire.

1 The purpose of the consultation

Before beginning any consultation exercise, agencies should consider:

- What is the scope, remit and aim of the consultation?
- Who is to be consulted? For example, is it important that particular parents and carers are reached in the course of the consultation?
- What are the possible outcomes of the consultation? What kinds of changes or developments are possible as a result of the consultation?
- Who is considered to be important to contact for the purposes of a particular consultation? For example parents living with children, parents not living with children, foster carers, grandparents, etc.

Gaining clarity about the purpose of consultation will enable the service to communicate more clearly about what is expected from parents in the course of the consultation.

2 Review of consultations

Agencies would be wise to review any recent consultation work that has been undertaken with similar subject matter. In certain cases, this exploration may lead to the required information being traced. In other cases, agencies should examine the following questions before starting a new consultation process:

- What recent consultations have taken place within the geographical area?
- Are there ways in which the proposed consultation covers the same ground as recent consultation exercises? If yes, can this overlap be justified?
- What positive, negative experiences did parents have in the previous consultation?
- Were parents given feedback about the outcomes of this previous consultation?

By examining previous consultations, service providers can anticipate parents' expectations about being involved and they may also be able to use the current consultation as an opportunity to feed back on recent service developments.

3 Parent needs

Regard should be given to the needs of parents while they are engaged in the consultation. Where possible, the following should be provided:

- Refreshments for parents and/or a meal, depending on the time of the consultation event
- A crèche (where parents have younger children, a crèche is often preferred to child care expenses but parents should be given a choice).

Where the event is being organised by the agency, venues should be fully accessible for disabled children and parents.

4 Methods for consultation

If practical, services should aim to use more than one method of consultation for any exercise. This will enable parents to choose a method of involvement which suits their needs. A full range of methods should be considered including:

- Questionnaires (paper and web based)
- Individual interviews
- Group meetings (within these, consider using different methods to consult on different topics)
- Telephone interviews.

Where possible, consultations should be undertaken in settings which are known to the parent. Depending on the nature and scale of the consultation, agencies should consider the use of external facilitators in order to present an unbiased listener for the views of parents and carers.

5 Engaging and enjoyable consultation

The methods for consultation should be varied and designed to be enjoyable and engaging to parents. Within any planned consultation event the meeting should be flexible enough to incorporate time for parents to chat informally.

6 Rewards and incentives

Parents should be thanked for their participation in any consultation exercise. Small tokens of thanks are also well received by parents for whom it is an acknowledgement of the time they have taken to be involved. The rewards chosen should be appropriate to the parents involved in the consultation. Where participation is sustained and involved over a long period of time, consideration should be given to parents being paid for the time given

to consultation work. However issues regarding benefits/ tax credit should be considered carefully. Incentives can be chosen so that they are beneficial to the wider aims of an agency. Rewards and incentives might also be used to:

- Increase the take-up of a service
- Increase awareness of a service
- Promote better health, parent involvement in education, etc.

7 Reimbursement of parents' expenses

Parents should be offered any out of pocket expenses incurred as a result of taking part in the consultation. These should include full reimbursement of:

- Child care expenses
- Travel costs.

8 Feedback to parents and carers

Where possible, services should feed back on what plans have been made and what changes have occurred as a result of the consultation. At the end of any consultation event, parents should be asked if they wish to receive feedback on the results of the consultation and their details recorded separately from the responses they have given. Feedback should also be given in more general settings such as:

- Agency websites
- The local press
- Community newsletters
- Library, community and children's centre notice boards.

9 Opportunities for further involvement

Towards the end of consultation events, and where such opportunities exist, parents should be made aware of any other relevant consultations and how they might take part if they are interested. This linking of consultations may make it easier for parents to participate in future events.

10 Evaluation

Consultation events should seek feedback from parents and see what kinds of parents have attended an event and how parents found the experience of taking part. Parents should be asked about their opinion of the practicalities of the consultation as well as its content. Improvements can be made to future events by using this information.

11 Information giving

Consultation events are opportunities for parents to ask for information that they require for their families. In certain situations parents will ask for information on specific issues. If these issues can be anticipated, consultation organisers can provide the required information at the time of the consultation. Where specific issues have not been anticipated the organiser can give parents details of where they can obtain the required information.

12 Planning cycles and consultation

Any consultation event should be considered in the light of the planning cycle for a particular change or development; or if the consultation is ongoing, consultation events should be timed so that parents can have the maximum possible input into service developments.

Further Reading

Birmingham City Council (October, 1997) 'Ready to Listen? A handbook for better consultation'.

Jones, Peter (2005) 'Involving Parents in Strategic Developments: Guidelines on good practice from the SEN Regional Partnership (South West)'.

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