

*Putting Our Customers First*

# User Involvement Policy



### Introduction

#### ***“Citizen participation is citizen power”***

*(Arnstein 1969)*

People deserve and expect public services that are of the highest possible quality. They want services that are designed and delivered to meet individual needs rather than a ‘one size fits all’ approach. More importantly they want, and are entitled, to be involved. Fundamental to this approach is a commitment by the Social Work Department to be responsive to people who need and use our services.

#### **What does this mean for staff?**

Consultation and involvement is a core element of a quality social work service, especially as part of continuous improvement. The department treats consultation and involvement as a key part of its business and ensures that it uses its resources to make it happen.

All staff working in the department encourage active involvement of customers, stakeholders and communities in Dundee in the planning, development and improvement of services. Our public consultation and involvement activities are undertaken in partnership, where appropriate, with other council departments, health services and the voluntary and private sector in the city.

A User Involvement Policy enables us to:

- embrace a personal approach that puts people at the heart of service planning, development, delivery and evaluation;
- meet the needs of diverse groups of people; and
- co-ordinate consultation and involvement activities across the department.

#### ***What we mean by Consultation and Involvement***

There are several key components that are important in user involvement. The components can be described as 4 levels of involvement, ranging from provision of information to full user involvement. The amount of influence that people have increases from level 1 to level 4.

#### **Level 1 - Provision of Public Information.**

##### **This means:**

- o We publish information on existing services, eligibility criteria and our processes of decision-making.
- o There is some influence by service users or the public at this level.



## Level 2 - Communication.

### This means:

- o We exchange the right information at the right time, for example during assessment and care planning
- o We monitor and review personal care packages and service provision and we encourage people to make suggestions to change and improve services.
- o There is some influence by service users at this level.



## Level 3 - Consultation.

### This means:

- o We seek out the views and ideas service users, citizens and relevant agencies, including those that provide services for our customers or represent their interests.
- o We respond to people's views and ideas and use them to inform decision-making and improve service delivery.
- o We feed back to people, explaining the outcomes of consultation to them.
- o There is more service user and public influence at this level.



## Level 4 - Full involvement.

### This means:

- o We promote the active involvement of the public, service users and stakeholders, at an individual level to influence personal care packages and at a strategic level, in the social work decision-making processes of planning, developing, delivering and evaluating services.
- o There is a lot of service user and public influence at this level.



### What does this mean for staff?

Staff must understand and make it clear to people whether they are:

- telling people what already exists (informing - some influence);
- discussing individual circumstances (communication - some influence);
- asking for their views on existing or future services (consultation - more influence); or
- asking them to become involved in decision-making (involvement - high influence).

## **Why we consult with and involve people**

In order to assist in the process of continuous improvement we must continue to consult with and involve people. Only by listening to people can we continue to accurately plan for, and deliver, effective quality services to meet needs and deliver better outcomes.

There are many examples of good practice within the Social Work Department where we consult with and involve people. This includes a variety of user groups, e.g.

- the eSAY group,
- the OPEN project,
- Celebrate Age Network
- The Five Digits
- Community Family Support
- Recruitment involving young people
- SAFE Project
- User Groups at East Port House

## **Who we consult with and involve**

At all times we will consult with and involve people directly. Where appropriate we will engage with user representatives and consumer organisations to make sure that everyone has an opportunity to have their views heard

To ensure that our involvement and consultation process is inclusive we make additional efforts to reach groups and individuals from marginalised communities, such as those on low incomes, children and minority ethnic communities.

Some people are required to use our services for their safety and well being, for example children who are looked after, people who have mental health problems or people who have offended. The views of these service users are equally important and we consult with and involve them at every opportunity.

## **How we will consult and involve people**

We use a range of methods for consulting with people and involving them in our planning processes. These are explained in more detail below but include:

- Surveys
- Focus groups
- Research
- Strategic Planning Groups
- Local Community Planning Partnerships

We will provide support to ensure that people are able to participate in consultation and involvement activities. We will ensure that representatives are representing the views of people.

## Consultation and Involvement - our vision, values and principles

Dundee City Council Social Work Department has introduced a Customer Charter and Customer Care Standards. The Customer Charter tells people about what they can expect from our services and informs them how to pay compliments, make suggestions or complaints. The Charter states:

*"The Social Work Department works with people when they need it most. Social work services support, protect and care for people of all ages, helping them to take responsibility for their daily lives."*

Our commitment to Customer Care means we:

- provide good quality services in a friendly, efficient and helpful way;
- continually strive to improve services;
- ensure good communication; and
- display a positive attitude.

As a department we have adopted a vision and a set of values that put people at the centre of what we do.

### **Vision**

"Dundee City Council's Social Work Department will continue to make a real difference to the quality of life of citizens of Dundee by providing effective services for people with needs."

### **Values**

We will:

- listen to, respect and value each person as an individual;
- encourage honesty and openness about services we provide and decisions we make; and
- ensure that everyone who uses our services is treated with courtesy and respect while receiving a reliable, prompt and efficient service.

Our commitment to consultation and involvement is also underpinned by the following principles:

### **Principles**

*Transparency* - We ensure that people understand the reasons for their involvement, the purpose of any exercise and issues to be addressed. We report back to people on the outcomes of consultations.

*Social inclusion* - We remove social or structural barriers that may prevent involvement, such as ensuring buildings are physically accessible. We provide suitable methods of communication, in plain English, including alternative languages, British Sign Language (BSL) and Braille. Where necessary, we provide interpreters and advocacy support to ensure that everyone has a chance to have his or her say.

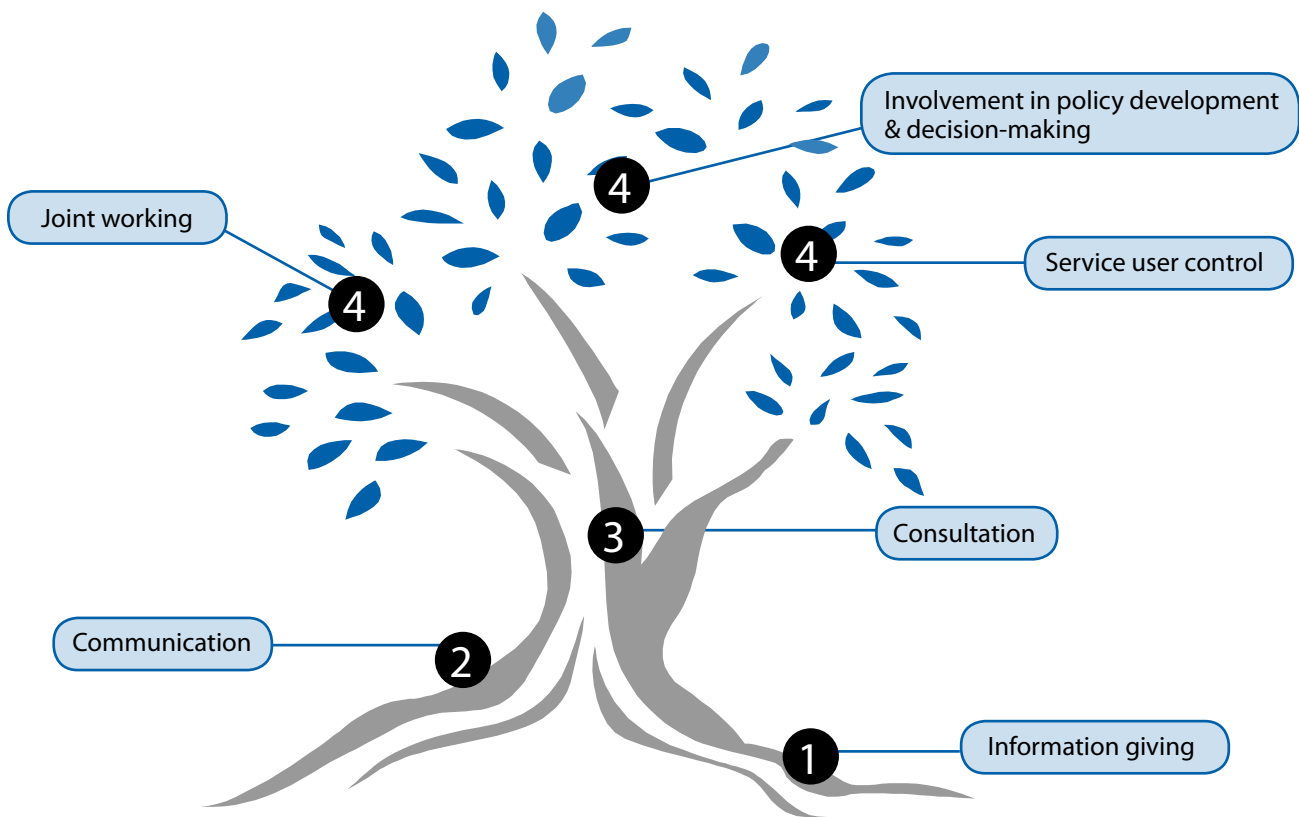
*Partnership* - We work in partnership with statutory, private and voluntary organisations, community and consumer interest groups, carers and individuals.

### **What does this mean for staff?**

- Putting customer needs first
- Committing to a customer service culture
- Getting it right first time for the customer
- Providing a choice of ways to access services and information
- Ensuring accessibility of services to all groups
- Challenging barriers to better service delivery (Open Scotland, 2005)

## The Participation Tree

The 4 levels of user involvement are illustrated in a 'participation tree'. (Adapted from Scottish Consumer Council 2006).



At the roots there are two essential activities (levels of involvement) that are necessary for any user involvement policy. Without these basic activities, or 'essential nutrients', there will be poor or limited customer satisfaction. These are:

- information giving, e.g.
  - o service information
  - o eligibility criteria
- communication, e.g.
  - o assessment & care planning
  - o monitor & review
  - o compliments, comments & complaints

In the trunk consultation successfully builds on the processes and relationships established at levels 1 & 2.

In the branches there are several possible activities that will promote a deeper level of participation and involvement. These are:

- involvement in policy development and decision-making;
- joint working; and
- service user control.

The level of involvement here will be appropriate to the 'environment', that is the type of service and intended outcomes. What this all means in practice is described in more detail below.



## Level 1 - Information giving

We publish and provide a range of public information on our services and processes of decision-making. This includes:

- a Customer Charter and Customer Care Standards
- an electronic Public Information Resource Guide
- a Guide to Meeting Your Needs - this details all our Community Care services, including eligibility criteria, charging and access arrangements.
- Children's Services Directory - Local Services and Resources
- the Social Work Department Service Plan, Community Care Plan and Children's Plan - which set out planning arrangements and structures
- a variety of leaflets, booklets and easy read guides
- various media and advertising strategies for campaigns and events.

We have a Public Information Strategy and a Public Information Officer who is responsible for the production, distribution, review and update of public information. Information is available in social work offices, libraries and other key public outlets and on the Council website. We distribute a variety of information to external bodies.

Our information is available in a range of languages and Braille. Our website has a pod cast that summarises our services and information. The website address is <http://www.dundee.gov.uk/>

### What does this mean for staff?

The A-list for information - it must be:

- Accurate, up-to-date, useful and practical
- Accessible in language, format and tone
- Adaptable for individual needs and circumstances
- Available at different levels of detail at different times
- Aligned and consistent with other sources of information (SCC, 2006)

## Level 2 - Communication

We communicate with people during the assessment and care planning process and when we monitor and review service provision.

We encourage people to make suggestions as this gives us valuable feedback, which we use to address problems and improve services. We also encourage people to give compliments where they are happy with services, as this is important for letting staff feel valued.

### **What does this mean for staff?**

Staff have skills to effectively engage with, explain and communicate with service users.

This includes the ability to enable effective communication with service users for:

- understanding what they are wanting to communicate
- communicating this understanding back to them so they know they have been heard
- providing suitable mechanisms for their views to be heard

## **Level 3 - Consultation**

We gather people's views on the services they receive and listen to views on wider needs and concerns, from:

- service satisfaction surveys, at least annually;
- focus groups as and when required for specific purposes; and
- community meetings for larger issues.

We ask people to give us their views when we are developing new plans, policies and services.

- We listen, learn and respond.
- We consult with people using forums, surveys and research.
- We provide feedback to people on the outcome of their input to the consultation process.

We work in partnership with other council departments through local community planning partnerships. This ensures that the views of social work service users are incorporated into the community planning process.

### **What does this mean for staff?**

Supporting involvement by:

- meeting people where and when it is convenient for them
- allowing time for discussion
- providing support and resources for people to attend meetings
- building the capacity of people to be able to participate through training events

## **Level 4 - Involvement in policy development and decision-making**

**4.1** We will 'do with' people rather than 'doing for' or 'doing to' them.

- We involve people and communities in determining outcomes and quality indicators.
- We support people through consultation mechanisms and through participation in Strategic Planning Groups to influence and inform key policy and service developments.

### **4.2 Joint working**

We encourage people to work in partnership with us to plan and prioritise resource allocation, for example to:

- develop eligibility criteria for access to services; and
- implement recommendations from national policy documents.



### 4.3 Service user control

We ensure that people have more say about the services they receive and when they receive them.

- We involve people in making decisions about the services they receive, through assessment and care planning procedures.
- We share information gathered from assessment, care planning and reviews.
- We enable people to take responsibility for organising and arranging their own service with Direct Payments.
- We encourage service initiatives that promote geographical community interests.

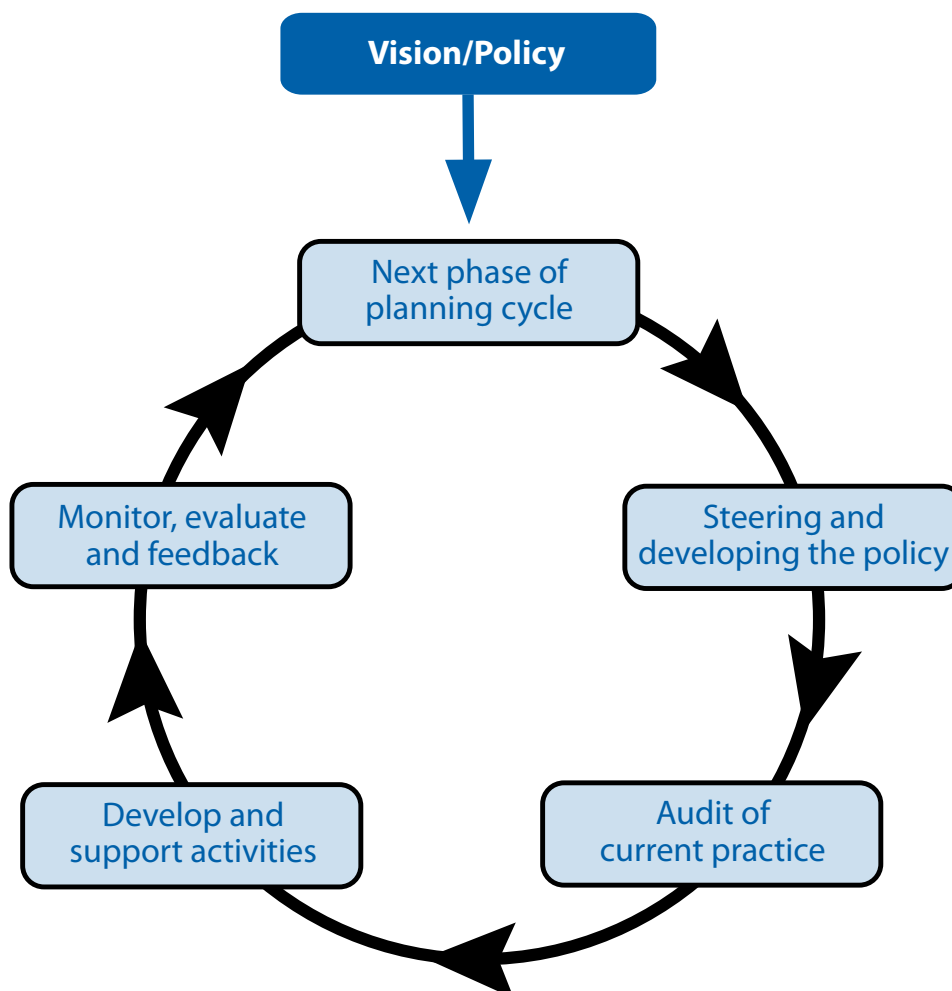
#### **What does this mean for staff?**

- Putting people at the centre of everything they do
- Shifting the balance of power towards service users
- Integrating consultation and involvement into their everyday work activities

## Monitoring the Policy

We have mechanisms in place to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the policy. We report on our progress in the Social Work Public Performance Reporting Framework.

Consultation and involvement are not an add-on to existing work but rather they are integral to our organisational culture. We see consultation and involvement as a cycle of activities:



### What does this mean for staff?

- Set a vision & develop a policy
- Steer and implement the policy
  - Audit current practice
- Develop and support activities
- Monitor, evaluate and feedback
- Inform next phase of planning (adapted from SCC, 2006)

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