

## MID SUSSEX DISTRICT COUNCIL

### Equality Impact Assessment

**Title of Policy/Service/Contract: Consultation and Community Engagement**

**Division: Performance and Partnerships**

**Lead Officer: Ioni Sullivan**

**Date Assessment completed: March 2013**

#### 1. SCOPING

##### **1.1 What are the aims of the policy, service/service change or contract?**

To provide corporate advice and guidance to services needing to consult with or otherwise engage public, stakeholders and partners. To ensure this is done in line with guidelines set out in the Council's Statement of Community Involvement.

##### **1.2 Who does the service/policy/contract affect? Who are the main customers (internal or external)?**

Internal customers are all service departments which use consultation or public engagement.  
External customers are all members of the public, partner organisations and other stakeholders who could be affected by any changes to Council policy.

##### **1.3 What equality information is available, including any evidence from engagement and analysis of use of services?**

As this service aims to improve access of all sections of society to influencing Council policies, it needs to take account of the widest possible equality information – i.e. census data about the makeup of the District and results of commissioned research such as the 2011 Experian profile of the District.

We do not currently routinely monitor equalities data of respondents to consultations or those attending public engagement events. In larger consultations, such as those of the District Plan, such data is requested.

In January 2012 an exercise was carried out to consult with hard-to-reach protected groups in the District. Among other issues discussed, this consultation asked members of protected groups what issues currently prevent them from taking part in Council consultation and engagement activity.

##### **1.4 What does this information tell us about the equality issues associated with the service and implications for the protected groups?**

Results of the 2012 exercise show that a common theme cited by those interviewed was the use of complicated and off-putting terminology in Council communications. This emphasises the need to use simple, accessible language when communicating with the general public. Respondents also noted that they were unlikely to respond to consultations unless they were directly affected by any proposals and that they were more likely to respond if the consultation was brought to them in places where they already live or meet. This suggests that better targeting of consultation is needed, and that non-traditional methods of consultation and engagement should always be considered, particularly when hard-to-reach groups need to be involved.

**1.5 Are contractors or partnerships used to deliver the service? Y**

If No go to section 2.

If yes, please refer to the guidance notes, particularly Appendix One of the MSDC Guidance “Integrating Equality and Diversity into Procurement”, and complete the next three questions.

**Identify the contractors/partnerships used to deliver the service.**

MSDC occasionally uses external providers to carry out consultation and engagement – such as the targeted equalities consultation in 2012. This is only done on an ad-hoc basis, though, and there are no long term contractual relationship in this area.

**What is their contribution to equality in service delivery and the promotion of equality?**

When contractors are used, their commitment to equality and diversity is paramount. Contractors have been used in the past specifically for their expertise in engaging protected groups.

**How are equality issues addressed through contractual arrangements and service level agreements?**

Any contracts to carry out consultation or engagement on behalf of MSDC would specifically state the need for contractors to engage protected groups and would oblige contractors to have regard to equality legislation.

## 2. Assessment of Impact; Analysis and Action Planning

Any gaps in information or provision, opportunities to promote equalities and good relations identified above need to be translated into SMART actions and recorded here. These actions need to be delivered and monitored through the service planning process.

| Opportunity to promote equality, good relations and/or address barriers to service/differential impact   | Current action taken to address these  | Further actions required and timescales   | Lead Officer                | How will impact be measured  |
|--|--|---|-----------------------------|--|
| The needs of different ethnic groups including white minorities, but also established white communities  |  |   |                             |  |
| <p>There are a number of issues BME groups may face which may make it harder for them to respond to consultations or engagement. This could include language barriers, cultural barriers making people less likely to access 'official' spaces where consultations and engagement activities are sometimes carried out/advertised. It is imperative to understand and tackle these barriers in order to allow BME groups to respond to engage, to ensure future policies are not developed that compound any inequality of access.</p> | <p>The 2011 Statement of Community Involvement sets out guidelines for services to follow, including requiring significant consultations to carry out their own equality impact assessments where appropriate. All services carrying out consultations are required to set out a Community Involvement Plan (CIP) stating who is to be involved and how they will be reached. This can include issues such as: ensuring materials carry signs offering translation of documents; taking face to face consultations to hard-to-reach groups; targeting consultation literature to community meeting places etc.</p> | <p>If any significant consultations or engagement events are identified which need to reach certain groups, use of specialist consultants to carry out this work could be considered.</p> | <p><b>Ioni Sullivan</b></p> | <p><b>Monitoring of BME data of respondees to significant consultations and engagement activities.</b></p> |
| The needs of men and women. Including taking account of pregnancy and maternity.   |  |   |                             |  |
| <p>There are not likely to be significant differentiation between needs of male and female respondents to consultation and engagement. However, there may be some consultations or engagement activities which are of specific interest to pregnant women or new mothers – e.g. changes to benefits for these groups.</p>  | <p>As above, all services are required to address needs of all protected groups through the CIP.</p>   | <p>None currently identified.</p>   |                             |  |
| The needs of disabled people   |  |   |                             |  |
| <p>There are a number of sensory, learning and physical disabilities which could</p>   | <p>As noted above, CIPs should take account of all protected groups</p>  | <p>If any significant consultations or engagement activity are identified</p>   | <p><b>Ioni Sullivan</b></p> | <p>As above</p>  |

|  |   |  |                             |                 |
|--|---|--|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| <p>impact on a person's ability to engage. There is also a need to hear the views of disabled people in order to ensure services are not shaped in ways that are detrimental to them.</p>  | <p>and set out ways in which consultations will be carried out to ensure equality of access.</p>                                    | <p>which need to reach certain groups, use of specialist consultants to carry out this work could be considered.</p>   |                             |                 |
| <p>The needs of people with a religion or belief</p>   |   |  |                             |                 |
| <p>It is not considered likely that there are specific barriers to responding to consultations related to a person's religion or belief. However there may be some consultations of particular interest to certain faith groups, e.g. planning guidance relating to spaces of worship.</p> | <p>Where faith/belief is identified as an issue to a consultation, a CIP should set out how specific groups should be targeted.</p> | <p>If any significant consultations or engagement activity are identified which need to reach certain groups, use of specialist consultants to carry out this work could be considered</p> | <p><b>Ioni Sullivan</b></p> | <p>As above</p> |

| Opportunity to promote equality and/or barriers to service/differential impact  | Current action taken to address these  | Further actions required and timescales   | Lead Officer         | How will impact be measured |
|---|--|---|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| The needs of gay men, lesbians, bisexuals and heterosexual people   |  |   |                      |                             |
| It is not considered likely that there are specific barriers to responding to consultations or engagement related to a person's sexuality. However there may be some consultations of particular interest to certain groups for which additional consideration how to engage these groups should be given.  | Where sexuality is identified as an issue to a consultation, a CIP should set out how specific groups should be targeted.                        | If any significant consultations or engagement activity are identified which need to reach certain groups, use of specialist consultants to carry out this work could be considered   | <b>Ioni Sullivan</b> | As above                    |
| Issues from marriage and civil partnership  |  |   |                      |                             |
| It is not considered likely that there are specific barriers to responding to consultation and engagement related to a person's marital/civil partnership status. However there may be some consultations of particular interest to certain groups for which additional consideration how to engage these groups should be given  | Where marital/civil partnership status is identified as an issue to a consultation, a CIP should set out how specific groups should be targeted. | None currently identified   |                      |                             |
| The needs of different age groups, for example older and younger people   |  |   |                      |                             |
| There may be some barriers associated with age to prevent people from responding to consultations. For example, younger people may be less likely to attend 'official' spaces where consultations are sometimes carried out and may be put off by formal or complex language. Evidence shows that older people are more likely to lack internet access so could be disadvantaged if consultation is done solely online. | CIPs should identify barriers such as these and put steps in place to address them.  | If any significant consultations are identified which need to reach certain groups, use of specialist consultants to carry out this work could be considered. Consultation and engagement should give consideration to using non-traditional methods in order to target both older and younger people where this would be beneficial. Consultations should continue to have 'off-line' presence in order to | <b>Ioni Sullivan</b> | As above                    |

|   |   |  |                      |          |
|---|---|--|----------------------|----------|
|   |   | not disadvantage the digitally challenged.   |                      |          |
| <b>The needs of transgender communities</b>   |   |  |                      |          |
| It is not considered likely that there are specific barriers to responding to consultation or engagement related to a person's transgender status. However there may be some consultations of particular interest to transgender communities for which additional consideration how to engage these groups should be given  | Where transgender status is identified as an issue to a consultation, a CIP should set out how specific groups should be targeted.  | If any significant consultations are identified which need to reach certain groups, use of specialist consultants to carry out this work could be considered   | <b>Ioni Sullivan</b> | As above |
| <b>The needs of people who are disadvantaged by socio-economic factors such as low incomes, skill or living in a deprived area</b>  |   |  |                      |          |
| Socio-economic disadvantage is statistically quite likely to affect a person's likelihood to respond to consultation or engagement. This can be culturally defined, due to lack of awareness of local authority business, or be related to low skill levels. Some deprived communities may have particular interest in consultations affecting them, for example any regeneration-type activity in their neighbourhood. Consultation can be seen to have potential for positive impact in ensuring that voices of more deprived residents are heard in developing Council policy. | CIPs should be used to identify any socio-economic barriers to responding to consultations. SCI guidelines emphasise the need for accessible and targeted materials to support consultation activity. | If any significant consultations are identified which need to reach certain groups, use of specialist consultants to carry out this work could be considered. Issues noted under BME, age and disabled communities are also of relevance in removing barriers to access for some socio-economically disadvantaged residents (e.g. lack of internet access, literacy difficulties etc.) | <b>Ioni Sullivan</b> | As above |
| <b>The needs of people who live in a rural area</b>   |   |  |                      |          |
| Transport barriers could prevent those living in rural areas from participating in consultations and engagement which require respondents to attend events far from people's homes. There are also a number of rural areas with no broadband access which could be disadvantaged by purely online consultation methods.   | CIPS should set out a plan of consultation, including where and how consultation will take place. This should identify if there are any barriers to people from rural areas responding.               | Issus noted above in relation to physical and online access should be taken into consideration here too.   | <b>Ioni Sullivan</b> | As above |

### 3. Mid Sussex District Council Equality Impact Assessment Summary

| Key Findings  | Future Actions   |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is essential that each consultation and engagement activity carried out assess who needs to be able to respond, including any protected groups. The Community Involvement Plan should then set out how these groups are to be consulted with and how any barriers can be overcome. Central support to ensure this approach is uniformly applied has recently been provided and it is important that this continue.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Council may wish to commission further specialist research with particularly 'hard to hear' groups who, research shows, are most unlikely to respond to consultation and engagement activity. The annual reviews of the Statement of Community Involvement should look at any disparities in rates of response to consultations from protected groups and action should be taken, where possible, to address this.</li> </ul> |

### 4. Signing off this assessment and action plan

Signature .....Jo Harper.....  
 Person undertaking the assessment

Date .....15/04/13.....

Signature .....Richard Hodson.....  
 Head of Service

Date .....15/04/13.....

Please send your completed impact assessment to Neal Barton for publication on the website.