

Making

Consultation

Work



A guide for agencies that consult with people with learning disabilities, parents and carers

Communities
Scotland



SCVO

ENABLE Scotland is Scotland's leading charity supporting children and adults with learning disabilities and their families. It has over 4000 members across Scotland, a network of local membership branches and runs a wide range of community-based services.

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Foreword

Effective consultation improves the development of policy and practice by drawing on a wide range of experiences and views. It is vital that consultation reaches into every part of society, including people with learning disabilities and their families – who have traditionally been marginalised - in order to build a brighter future in Scotland for us all. But consultation alone is not enough. We can best deliver services for communities if we fully engage with them.

Partnership with the communities that we serve is a central aim of the Scottish Executive and of other public bodies. Partnership working enables local communities to contribute their ideas, knowledge and, most importantly, real life experiences to the development and implementation of public policy and public services.

This project is an example of social inclusion in action and of the benefits of engaging with local communities. The report and its accompanying leaflet outline some lessons and good practice for all agencies with a focus on specific ways to engage individuals and groups of people with learning disabilities and their family carers.

Consultation and involvement are not always easy. People with learning disabilities and their families, despite the real and direct understanding they have of what needs to be done, were not used to playing an active part in the development of policies and services for them until *The same as you?*, a review of services for people with learning disabilities, changed that. We know that good consultation and involvement ensures that policies better meet the needs of the community.

The new disability equality duty in the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 means public authorities must assess the impact of their policies and practices on equality for disabled people and the involvement of disabled people in this process will be key.

We must involve people at an early stage, and working together, our determination to create a better Scotland for all can be realised.

Johann Lamont
Deputy Minister for Communities

Taking part in community planning

Local services are vital for people with learning disabilities and their families.

This guide was produced by members of ENABLE Scotland's local branches as part of a pilot Community Planning project funded by Communities Scotland. Community Planning aims to develop and provide services that best meet the needs of local people. The aim of this project was to assist some of our local members to take part in community planning and to capture and share what we learned from this experience.

The project decided to focus on the consultation process for the Partnership in Practice Agreements (PIPs). These agreements set out the plans that local authorities and health boards have for Learning Disability services in local areas and are part of the recommendations from *The same as you?* published by the Scottish Executive in 2000.

The project ran from April 2004 to March 2005. During 2004, local authorities and health boards were preparing a new set of PIP plans for 2005 – 2007. The planning guidance issued by the Scottish Executive in March 2004 to local authorities and health boards states:

Involving people with learning disabilities and family carers

The same as you? is underpinned by the principle that people with learning disabilities should be involved in the planning and delivery of services and support provided for them. ...PIPs should detail the extent to which people with learning disabilities are involved in writing the PIP and implementation of The same you? They should give details of support arrangements, e.g. partnership arrangements with advocacy services.

Family carers are full partners in implementation of The same you? and should be represented on all implementation groups, with support to attend meetings as required. Consultation is not a substitute for involvement. PIPs should articulate how family carers are involved and supported in all aspects of writing the PIP and in the implementation of The same as you?

This guide contains information about the challenges and successes of getting involved in community planning, what worked and what else might have helped people to take part in community planning more fully. We hope our findings are of value to local authorities and health boards in future consultation with community members and groups but they can also be used by any agency wishing to develop good consultation mechanisms with all their customer groups.

We also outline some of the lessons learned by ENABLE Scotland in trying to assist members to get more involved in local processes.

What do we mean by consultation with people with learning disabilities, parents and carers?

There are different ways to involve and consult people with learning disabilities, parents and carers.

- People can be consulted about the direct services that they receive and whether they meet their individual needs.
- People can be consulted about how services in their local areas are run.
- People can be consulted about plans and policies.
- People can be consulted about local community planning issues.

The project focused on the consultation for the Partnership in Practice (PIP) plans – which outline plans for learning disability services in local areas. However, we were also aware of the need to keep in mind the wider community planning agenda as people with learning disabilities and their families are part of the local community and are equally affected by broader planning issues. We were therefore interested in the links between the PIP plans and any wider community planning.

Why the project was needed

ENABLE Scotland has a strong membership base with over 500 national members and another 3500 people attached to local branches across Scotland. Our local branches are run on a voluntary basis with local people coming together on a self-help or mutual help basis to share information and campaign locally for change and improvement. Many of our local branches have strong links with local authorities and health boards and have access to information and are asked their views. But many others do not feel engaged or consulted by local planners and were less sure about how to go about gathering and putting forward local views.

We were keen to engage a cross-section of our local groups in the project and see what lessons could be learned about:

- How to gather and represent local views to planners
- What makes good consultation by local planners
- What assistance individuals or local groups might need in order to take part in community planning
- How to develop our local networks
- How to link into the wider planning agenda

Members from seven ENABLE Scotland branches agreed to lead the project and to share what they learned with our other 56 branches.

What the project did

The aim of the project was to build the capacity of individual branch members and help them develop skills and knowledge about Community Planning with particular reference to the Partnership in Practice agreements. It was envisaged that these members would become local leaders who in turn would be able to support local branches and communities of people with learning disabilities and carers.

There were a number of key methods used to provide this support. The initial funding from the Communities Scotland allowed us to provide a part-time co-ordinator whose role was:

- To deliver training on the Community Planning process
- To respond to requests for help and support
- To act as a mentor for local leaders
- To ensure that knowledge was shared across the project through sharing of information and hosting opportunities for people to meet.
- To encourage communication with other agencies involved in community planning.



The initial scope of the project was geographically wide from the Western Isles to Dumfries and Galloway but it was difficult to provide equal support across the country. As a national organisation, we wanted to involve a broad section of our membership so it would have been difficult to change the scope.

Activities during the project included:

Capacity-building for individuals

- 4 training sessions during the year for the 10 local leaders involved in the project.
- giving ongoing support to local members to enable them to hold their own consultation events locally to seek views

Consulting with other individuals and carers locally

- holding events and meetings locally to let other carers and individuals know about the consultation and gather their views so these could be represented.

Developing shared resources & tools

- developing a series of Position Papers for voluntary members on key issues so that they felt more confident about putting forward an organisational rather than an individual view

Developing stronger networks

- enabling voluntary members within ENABLE Scotland Branches and people with learning disabilities to develop contacts and relationships with local authorities and Local Health Boards

Responding to consultation by local authorities

- producing written responses to Partnership in Practice consultation by voluntary members

Identifying and sharing what we learned

- project members shared ideas, methods and information with each other as the project progressed including how local consultation worked in their area
- asking all our local branches and groups via a questionnaire to tell us about their knowledge of the local PIP and the consultation process by local authorities in their area – so we could see if our project had made a difference in enabling people to participate. A report was generated that was sent to all of our local branches. This exercise alerted some of our members and branches to the PIP planning process for the first time.
- producing recommendations from the project which will be distributed to all local Authorities/Local Health Boards/ all volunteers involved in the Community Planning process.

What we found

Our local leaders responded very much to what people wanted when they were engaging with parents and carers and people with learning disabilities. For example, one member held a meeting in his own home. He provided the tea and coffee; the group produced a written response on the Partnership in Practice draft. The informality of the setting meant that people were happy to express their views.

ENABLE Scotland Glasgow branch had developed a good framework for holding consultation meetings and shared this with their colleagues in ENABLE Scotland Edinburgh branch. This not only cut down time in the planning stage but also resulted in over thirty parents and carers attending a meeting in Edinburgh.

In another area, one branch member worked closely with the local authority to involve people with learning disabilities. This ground work resulted in a planning day specifically for people with learning disabilities. A report was produced and the information was fed into the Partnership in Practice draft.

Other Branch members supported each other by sharing their written responses to local consultations. A majority of the local leaders held meetings and fed local responses to local Authorities and Health Board.



Outcomes

The project led to increased communication between branch members and their local “community of interest” (people with learning disabilities and carers) plus wider community planning partnerships, in particular those other projects being funded under the Community Planning Grant Scheme.

Our members reported increased influence and contribution to the planning of services for people with learning disabilities and their carers within own community of interest.

Lessons for the individual local leaders

Our local leaders have learned:

- to raise their expectations and not to be seen as passive recipients where consultation is something which is a one-way process. As one volunteer said, *“We will not be involved in consultation which does not have an outcome.”*
- to have confidence in their rights not only to make requests for information but have these requests responded to by local authorities and health boards and not to give up if information is not available immediately.

- the importance of grass roots contributions and also the importance of ensuring that what you have to say does not become misinterpreted or diluted. This can mean challenging the status quo but, if change is to happen for the better, we often have to do this.

Lessons for ENABLE Scotland branches

ENABLE Scotland local branches learned:

- there was a value in being proactive. By taking the initiative to call meetings and invite Local Authority officers to the meetings, branches felt they had more control of the situation.
- the importance of sharing knowledge and learning from other branches. The community-planning project has begun to create a culture of sharing, in particular amongst those branches directly involved.
- that consultation and involvement needs to be an ongoing process and not just something to be regarded as a one-off initiative. Members and branches have learned that it takes time to develop confidence, knowledge and networks.

Lessons for ENABLE Scotland

As a national organisation supporting local branches and members, ENABLE Scotland has learned:

- that our branch members want to become involved when the topic under discussion is important. The Partnership in Practice agreements are plans which will affect people with learning disabilities and carers over the coming 3 years. People, therefore, were committed to taking action.
- it was important to involve the membership from an early stage. Members valued being equal partners having the same opportunities to receive information as professionals.
- that by responding to our volunteers' ideas, we were able to add value to the project. For example, the production of a series of position papers has been widely welcomed and used within the organisation, not just by project members.

Lessons for strategic planners

Involvement in planning and consultation is extremely variable across Scotland. The results of our questionnaire to all our ENABLE Scotland branches show that some members have been closely involved in the PIP planning process; others have received little or no information at all from local authorities and health boards.

“Good contact mechanisms. Statutory Authorities seemed to genuinely want to listen.”

“The only consultation was one meeting about the draft prepared by the social work.”

Consultation works for everyone. Our experience shows that if agencies listen effectively to people with learning disabilities, parents and carers they can learn a great deal which can be of help to all community groups. The final section highlights the 10 top tips for effective consultation with people with learning disabilities and family carers.

10 Top Tips for Good Practice

1. Identify who to consult

Try and ensure that your consultation reaches as many people and individuals as possible. This will mean finding different ways of reaching people.

Review your databases and mailing lists regularly. This may reveal gaps about who your consultation is reaching.

Establish links with other agencies that could help you. Existing carers groups and groups of people with learning disabilities can be a good source of support and advice. These groups could hold meetings on your behalf but they might need some funding and resources to do so.

There are a number of umbrella organisations that could signpost you in the right direction.

2. Publicise the consultation in different ways

Ways to reach your target audience include local newspapers, using local groups and a mailshot from your mailing list.



While more and more people use the internet to access information, it should be regarded as an additional and not the main source for publicising your event.

Ask for a slot to talk at an existing forum or group.

Provide a contact name and telephone number on your publicity. This should be someone who can talk knowledgeably about what will take place.

3. Provide good information in good time

Provide information early to allow people to prepare for any meeting.

Make the aims of the consultation clear beforehand. Our experience has shown that often consultation happens but there is no clarity on the purpose of and this can result in misunderstandings and ineffective meetings.

Pre and post meetings should be integral to the process - this is vital for people with learning disabilities but often parents and carers also value the opportunity to be briefed before and after an event.

4. Provide accessible information

Remember to ensure information is in plain English as a minimum. Think about easy-read or other formats such as audiotapes for people with learning disabilities. People with learning disabilities may also value information in pictures or symbols. Guidance on accessible information is available from The Scottish Accessible Information Forum (www.saifscotland.org.uk) or from ENABLE Scotland.



Avoid jargon. Working in a particular fields mean we can use professional jargon without being aware of it. It is often worth showing your planned information to lay people to get their advice. There are many groups of people with learning disabilities in Scotland who will help with this.

5. Make it easy for people to attend meetings and events

Try to ensure that people have a number of opportunities to attend meetings and events. Some carers may value meetings during the day (e.g. 10 am- 1.00pm) to tie in with their caring responsibilities. Others may find it easier to attend evening meetings.

Many people depend on public transport so meeting venues must be held near accessible routes with frequent transport links.

Ensure meeting rooms are on the ground floor. While stair lifts can make buildings accessible not all people who use wheelchairs are comfortable using them. Stair lifts are often dependent on the staff members being available at the right time to operate the equipment and often it is difficult to plan this in advance.

6. Make your meetings welcoming and inclusive

Large formal meetings are not always the best way to listen to people and small focus groups can be very effective.

“I organised for a group of carers to come to my house. We had coffee and drew up our response to the PIP.”

Some local authorities have organised “listening lunches” that have proved valuable ways to find out what people think.

If people with learning disabilities are attending make sure that they have enough support to fully be included in discussions. This could mean having a support worker

to help them speak up. It is worth setting some ground rules at the start of a meeting to ensure that people get their voice heard.

Sample Ground Rules

Many people with learning disabilities who attend meetings use a card system to indicate that they want to contribute or want an explanation or a pause. If you are consulting with an existing group you may want to check out how they normally conduct their meetings and follow existing processes.

Make sure that you provide a comfortable environment and remember to provide refreshments and comfort breaks.

7. Make your meetings relevant and focused

Not everyone will be interested in every level of planning or every topic up for discussion and you may want to organise topic-specific consultations.

This could involve having separate meetings for people with learning disabilities and carer groups as an option.

“I was involved 2 years ago when they made recommendation about older carers and plans for the future.”

Power point presentations can be useful (especially if they incorporate pictures/graphics) but they can create a formal atmosphere which you may not want. If making a presentation, ensure that it is accessible to people with learning disabilities and others (see tips for accessible information above).

8. Have the right people there

There needs to be a balance between professionals and people with learning disabilities and carers attending meetings. At the same time professionals need to commit to turning up if they agreed to do so.

9. Acknowledge people’s contributions

Provide feedback through written follow up e.g. minutes of meeting points. If action points come out of the meeting remember to ensure that these are followed through on.

“The ideas were supported by PIP but were never funded. It has now died a death”

10. Consultation is not involvement

Consultation alone is not enough. There should be commitment to keep people involved for real partnership. This requires mechanisms for ongoing contact backed by adequate resources. In particular, people with learning disabilities will need

support and time to take part fully in consultation. This will require commitment from decision-makers in local authorities.

As the guidance stated:

The same as you? is underpinned by the principle that people with learning disabilities should be involved in the planning and delivery of services and support provided for them. ...PIPs should detail the extent to which people with learning disabilities are involved in writing the PIP and implementation of The same you? They should give details of support arrangements, e.g. partnership arrangements with advocacy services.

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