

**Bracknell Forest –
Supporting People
Service User Consultation and Engagement Strategy**

Background to Service User Involvement

1. The case for service user involvement

Service Users are ultimately the experts in their services. They know what services they need; they know what works, and they know what does not work. We have a limited Supporting People budget and we need to make sure that it is responsive to service users' needs.

Service User involvement can inform the practice of Supporting People and providers at different levels:

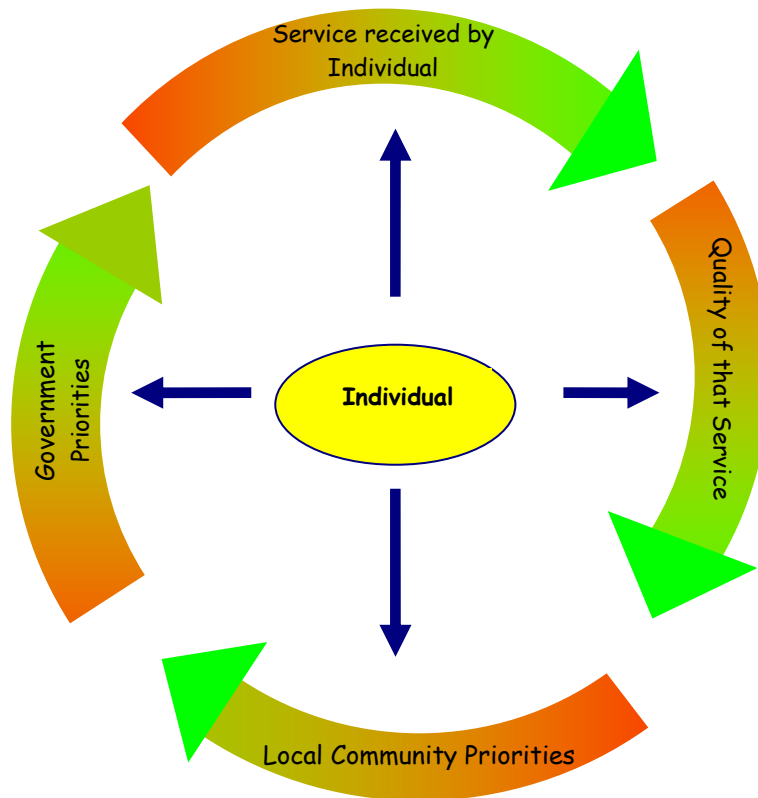
- Individual level
 - Ensure information is provided to service users and potential service users that is accessible and relevant
 - Inform support plans

- Service provision level
 - Inform changes and improvements to individual services
 - The quality of services is reviewed by Supporting People using the Quality Assessment Framework (QAF). Extensive service user involvement is a pre-requisite for any provider wishing their service to achieve a level A on any of the core or supplementary service objectives
 - Service users' views can contribute to the verification of service performance at the service review
 - Involving service users in running the service
 - Re-modelling services

- Meeting Local priorities
 - Ensuring that current services meet local priorities
 - Identifying gaps in service provision
 - Designing new services to fill identified gaps in local need

- Meeting government priorities
 - Ensuring that services are developed that meet government priorities in such diverse areas as homelessness, substance abuse reduction and care and support for the elderly

The relationship can be illustrated thus:



Ultimately service user involvement is a cornerstone to the improvement of outcomes for the service user and through their empowerment for the community, and it is for this reason that both local and central government emphasise the importance of citizen and service user involvement.

Bracknell Forest borough council recognises the central importance of community engagement in achieving its goals:

The Council's Vision is:

"To make Bracknell Forest a place where all people can thrive, living, learning and working in a clean, safe and healthy environment."

All of Us Strategy for Promoting Community Cohesion

The council includes in its goals:

"The promotion of community cohesion through participative community and public involvement in shaping action."

All of Us Strategy for Promoting Community Cohesion

To achieve this vision the council has established the Bracknell Forest Partnership, which has brought together a wide range of stakeholders to produce the Bracknell

forest sustainable Community Plan, in which consultation is seen as being of prime importance:

Bracknell Forest Partnership “aspires to have an open dialogue with people that live, work and study in Bracknell forest, along with visitors, so that it can understand what really matters to local people.”
Living Together Working Together
(Bracknell forest Partnership - October 2005)

At a central government level there is an expectation that the experiences, opinions and expectations of service users should be taken into account in the design and delivery of public services.

So far as Supporting People is concerned the ODPM is keen that there should be Service User /involvement both vertically and horizontally through the programme.

“We expect authorities and providers to maintain and take forward the focus on users within the design of services. There is already a clear expectation across all areas of public service that services should be designed and delivered in ways that are inclusive and sensitive to the needs and expectations of service users.”

“For such people” those for whom Supporting People provides “there is a particular need to consider how to give them a real chance to contribute to service design.”

Creating Sustainable Communities: Supporting Independence
ODPM November 2005

2. Levels of Service User Involvement

We can involve service users at various levels in service delivery and planning. Four main types of engagement have been identified that come under the umbrella of consultation:

- Information sharing
- Consultation
- Involvement
- Community Development

Information Sharing

This is the simplest form of engagement. We need to be able to tell service users about our services what our plans are for the future, even if we do not have the option of providing further choice.

Service providers also need to be able to tell service users and potential service users about their services and about their plans for the future. Supporting People QAF asks for this to happen under the supplementary service objectives of S1.1 (Informing Service Users) and S3.1 (Service Description)

CHANGE has produced a pack and CD Rom of line drawings in consultation with people with Learning Disabilities that can be used in written communication designed for service users.

Consultation

At this level we are seeking to obtain the views of service users regarding the services they use or proposals that we have for remodelling existing services and or developing new services. It is important that consultation is not confused with providing information. Many service users feel either that they have been consulted to death or that the authority or provider will just do what they had originally planned regardless of people's views. The parameters and limits of any consultation must therefore be defined at the outset; service users need to know how their problems will be addressed and what the time scales involved are. There must a real willingness to consider the views put forward and service users need to know at the outset how and when they will receive feed back if they are to remain engaged in consultation.

Service users' views about the service they receive have been sought at review. At Blythe House in Bracknell this has resulted in significant improvements to the physical environment and the instigation of regular tenants meetings.

Involvement

This is more form of engagement includes seeking ideas and suggestions for moving forward. At an individual service level this could also include participation in running activities, involvement in staff recruitment and selection and taking a place on the board of the organisation. At a strategic Supporting People level this would include ideas for new services, or for re-modelling services. It would also include looking at ways in which partner organisations and services could work with Supporting People Services to achieve better outcomes for service users.

PACT developed a replacement service for teenage mothers and babies in Bracknell. The young women living in the original scheme were asked for their opinions on the suggested internal layout of the new building, and as consequence alterations were made to the internal layout of the building.

Holly House residents in Bracknell run ethnic cookery evenings for other residents.

Community Development

Here Service Users are supported to develop their own activities to meet identified needs. At a national level indeed an international level the People First organisations which advocate for the needs of People with Learning Difficulties, are run by People

with Learning Difficulties and have impacted on local and central government policy towards this group of people. At the other end of the scale individual play-groups have often been started by groups of mothers wanting to provide opportunities for their own and other people's young children.

The Elfrida Society enabled service users to compile a guide to local services such as restaurants that were accessible to people with learning disabilities.

Grove Housing provided training to young homeless people so that they could go into local schools to talk to students about the realities of homelessness, ways to avoid it and what to do if it did happen

Improving Service User Involvement in Bracknell Forest

A range of service user initiatives are evident in Bracknell Forest. Service users have contributed to service reviews; they have been invited to an Inclusive Forum and were consulted in the development of the 5-year strategy. Providers have various ways of involving service users. However initiatives have been patchy and have often been ad-hoc and there is a need to ensure that service users are more firmly and consistently at the centre of the Supporting People programme in Bracknell Forest.

Successful service user involvement is not easy to achieve and we recognise that improving the level and usefulness of service user involvement requires a long term commitment both from Supporting People and from providers. Whether the object is to share information, consult with service users or involve them in service development or community projects that service users must be comfortable with the methods employed. One size does not fit all. We recognise that vulnerable people may lack the confidence to take part in large meetings, may be cautious of expressing their views about services they find unsatisfactory, may be cynical and therefore unenthusiastic about involvement.

Aims of Service User Involvement

We will ensure that service user involvement becomes a cornerstone of the Supporting People Programme in Bracknell Forest and that it contributes to the development of high quality housing related support services that ensure the successful development of maintenance of independence for vulnerable people in the community. We will achieve this by developing a comprehensive service user involvement activities both by Supporting People and by the providers

Objectives of Service User Involvement

1. Clarity of the objectives of service user involvement initiatives

We will be clear about the objectives of any service user consultation or involvement exercise and we will be clear to service users as to the extent of any influence they may have on decisions.

2. Developing good practice amongst providers

We will support the development of good practice amongst providers at all levels of involvement and consultation.

- We will expect all providers to be able specify current service user involvement activities and to specify how they intend to develop service user involvement.

- We will expect all providers to be able to show that they are achieving a level B on the Quality Assessment Framework (QAF) Supplementary Objective S1.2 “Consulting and Involving Service Users” by the end of the contract period and to be able to show how they are moving towards achieving a level A. Note that informing, consulting with and involving service users is a common QAF requirement across all QAF objectives at levels C, B and A respectively. (See appendix B for QAF extracts)
- We will support good practice through the Bracknell Forest Supporting People Provider Group:
 - Encourage the sharing of ideas and good practice
 - Facilitating training for service providers.
- We will monitor the impact of service user involvement on the provision of services in terms of the impact of service user involvement on service outcomes.
 - We will work with providers to develop ways in which the impact of service user involvement can be mapped. We expect this to be qualitative in the first instance but would wish to move towards quantitative measures in the longer term.

3. Informing service users

We will provide information for service users about Supporting People services in Bracknell Forest that is comprehensive, up to date, accessible and widely available. *(See also Access and Move on Strategy)*

- Posters about Supporting People to be distributed across the borough
- Adverts to be placed in local publications.
- General service user leaflets about Supporting People to be widely distributed and made available in other languages / formats if requested.
- Specific leaflet about Supporting People for service users with a learning disability.
- Information about Supporting People to be placed on the Supporting People section of the website.
- Directory of local services to be placed on the Supporting People website
- Supporting People Newsletters
- Information updates at existing service user fora such as the Sheltered Tenants and Leaseholders panel

4. Consulting with service users

We will consult with service users to obtain their views about existing services and provide feedback

- We will continue to consult with service users during service reviews and incorporate their views into our service review findings.

- We will incorporate structured interviews with individual service users into our review programme where this is acceptable to the service users
 - We will develop additional ways of consulting with hard to reach service users during service reviews.
- We will ensure that all service users receive feedback from our service reviews in an appropriate and timely fashion.
- We will consult with service users across all groups throughout the year to ascertain their views about the services they receive. We will do this through:
 - Existing service user fora that may be held by service providers or for specific service user groups such as URU (Adult mental health)
 - General service user groups such as the Tenants and Leaseholders Panel
 - General needs questionnaires circulated by or on behalf of the authority to which we add SP related questions
 - Existing general community consultation such as Bracknell Forest 1500 and the Housing Sounding Board.

5. Involving service users

We will ensure that service users are involved in the development of any new services and the re-modelling of existing services.

- We will ensure that the limits of any involvement are clear to service users at the outset of any service user involvement exercise.
- We will expect service providers to fully consult with service users prior to the development of new services or the re-configuration of existing services.
- We will involve service users in any discussions surrounding the re-modelling of services and the development of new services.

6. Community development

We will support initiatives to involve service users in community projects that are aimed at benefiting existing or potentially vulnerable people.

7. Ensuring Our Policy is Up to Date

We expect our service user involvement strategy to continue to develop across the whole period of our Supporting People Strategy, and to reflect the achievement of best practice. To this end we will review the strategy on an annual basis in April of each year.