

**LONDON BOROUGH OF HAMMERSMITH AND FULHAM**

**Involving Residents Policy**

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## Section One - Our Vision for Involvement

The London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham is committed to involving the general public and service users in the design, development and delivery of council services. Our aspiration is to embed public and service user involvement throughout the council – at all levels of decision-making. We will work to ensure that the way we go about involving people is consistent, robust and above all meaningful. We want involvement to become part of our culture, part of *'the way we do things'*.

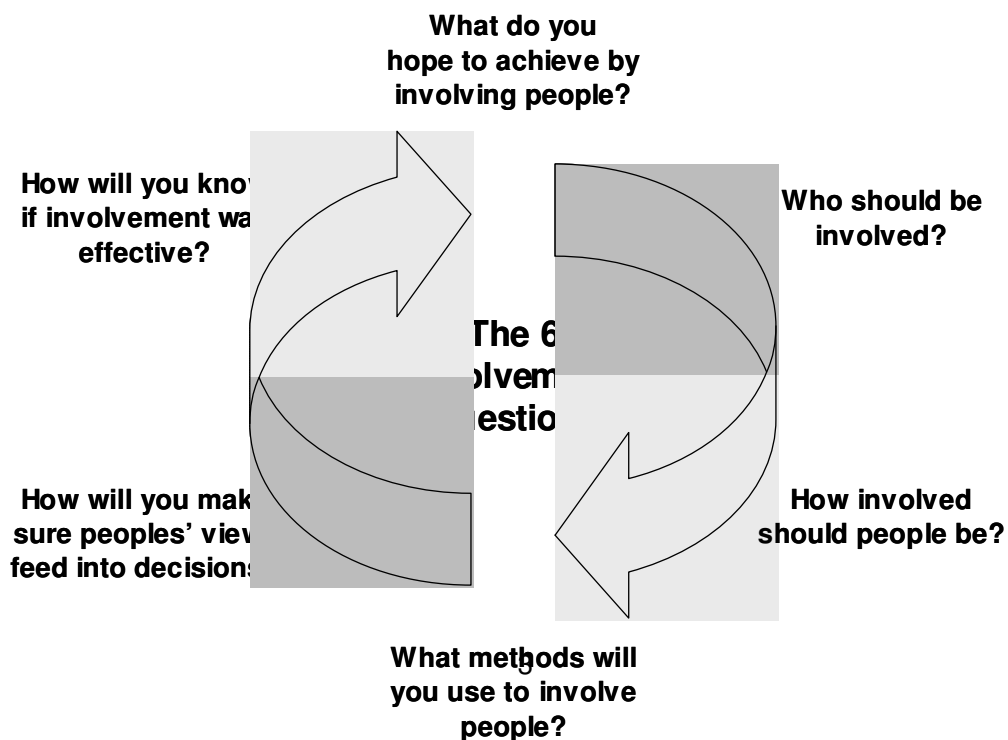
## Section 2 – Our Principles of Involvement

There are many excellent examples of good practice in public and service user involvement within the council. We must build on our successes in order to achieve our vision and ensure that involvement becomes the watchword for us all.

Public and user involvement should be routinely incorporated into our planning and decision-making processes. Whether we are disseminating information, establishing a user group, or conducting a large scale public consultation, if we are intending to ask the public to participate, we must fully consider and plan how we intend to do this.

This policy relates to collective public and user involvement as separate and distinct from the process and concept of person centred planning which is the process by which an individual's particular services are determined, agreed and provided (for example home care etc.) and service delivery. The term 'involvement' is used here to mean the public and service users' collective influence over the design, development and delivery of council services.

Any involvement activity should be informed by the basic principles of good involvement practice. Good involvement practice is underpinned by some fundamental questions – what do we hope to achieve by involving people; who should we involve; how involved should they be; what methods will we use to involve them; how will we ensure that decision-makers are aware of what people say and, finally, how will we know whether involvement has been effective?



We expect staff to be able to provide answers to these questions before embarking on any involvement activity so as to ensure that the council is, indeed, involving people in a consistent, robust and meaningful fashion. This policy guidance will now consider these principles in greater depth, setting out standards to guide staff in carrying out any involvement activity.

## **2.1 What Do You Hope to Achieve by Involving People?**

It is essential to have a clear and agreed understanding of what you hope to achieve by involving people. There are four broad objectives for involving people, as set out below. You might be seeking to meet any one or more of these objectives.

- 2.1.1 **Building public trust and confidence** - Firstly, involvement can be a means of enabling people to have a greater say. By giving people the opportunity to question and challenge the decisions that the council is making, we can ensure that we are open and accountable to the public and that our services are shaped by the public view. In this way, we can build public trust and confidence in the council.
- 2.1.2 **Getting services right** - Secondly, involvement can be a means of gathering information about people's preferences. By understanding what current and future service users want and need, we are better able to provide services that reflect those needs more precisely. We are then able to use our resources more efficiently and effectively, providing the right services at the right time and in the right way.
- 2.1.3 **Meeting statutory duties** - Thirdly, government policy dictates that the council has a statutory duty to carry out and demonstrate the impact of ongoing consultation with service users, and with the wider public. This is explicitly stated in the 'duty to involve', introduced by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. Other statutory requirements include Section 11 of the Health and Social Care Act which places a duty on health and social care providers to engage with the public and service users, and the development of the Statement of Community Involvement requirement on environmental/planning departments.
- 2.1.4 **Delivering individual benefits** - Finally, being involved in shaping services and influencing decisions can deliver certain intrinsic benefits for the individual, aside from the obvious advantage of ensuring that services are really person-centred. There is good evidence to suggest that it improves self-confidence and self-esteem, enables people to regain a sense of control, and increases peoples' ability to make constructive choices about services and judgements about service quality. Involvement can be an important means of redressing the power imbalance that service users often feel when dealing with council officers. Group forms of involvement can be an important social contact for people who are more isolated. The simple act of sharing experiences in a safe environment can in itself be an uplifting experience for people who come to feel that they are not alone in their problems.

So, when planning any involvement activity, you must first be clear about why you are doing so. Are you hoping to ensure that a decision is acceptable to the public; to 'get people on board' with a decision; to understand what people want from a service; to meet statutory requirements, or to improve peoples' confidence and self-esteem? If it is not clear why you are involving people, you won't get it right.

## 2.2 Who Should You Involve?

### 2.2.1 Participant Groups

It is important to be clear about who you should actually be involving. This is not as obvious a question as it may seem. Sometimes it can be difficult to be clear about who the service user actually is – to community services, the customers might be both service users and carers; to education services, the customer might be the child or student, the parent and even future employers; and to environment services, the customer might be householders, neighbours and local businesses. You must ensure that you talk to the right people. And that you are clear about why they are using services and their relationship with the council. Participants may fall into one or more of the categories outlined below.

**Voluntary or involuntary users** – Most people use council services, such as adult education and leisure facilities, voluntarily and are pleased to be able to do so. However, some people may be glad to receive council services, but would prefer to be in a position where they did not have to do so – pest control, housing benefits and advice, or home care services, for example. And some people may even be involuntary users of council services – social work input may be a compulsory requirement, for instance. Whether people are voluntary or involuntary users of council services may affect how willing people are to be involved.

**Short-term or long-term users** – People may or may not use services on an ongoing basis and this is likely to influence whether they wish to be involved over an indefinite period of time, or for a specific time period only.

**Individual or group users** – Services may be received individually or collectively and this can influence whether you should involve people on a one-to-one basis or in groups, e.g. specialist services for different community groups, or generic services available to all.

**Current or prospective users** – Of course, it is important to talk to people who are actually using council services, as they are best placed to tell us what it is that we are or are not doing right. But it is all too easy to focus too much on the views of current service users, who are far more accessible and typically fairly satisfied. You must also talk to those who are not using council services, even though they could do so, as well as previous service users and those who may need to use the service in the future. Whether or not people use services is not only related to whether or not they need them. People may fulfil eligibility criteria, but still not access services for a variety of reasons unrelated to need. They may simply not know about services, they may not like the particular services on offer or they may prefer not to use services at all. Understanding why people choose not to use council services is key in helping us to develop services that meet the needs of as many people as possible.

**Current or future users** – We know that what people want from the council has changed over time. People have come to expect more from public services – services which are better able to accommodate their individual needs and which can be accessed at a convenient time and in a convenient place. So it is also important to talk to people who are likely to become service users at some point in the near future. It is important that the council develop services that are fit for the future and this means that you must also talk to future customers.

**Service users or citizens** – All Hammersmith and Fulham residents use council services of some kind – roads, pavements, street lighting and street cleansing are all good examples of services most people need in their day-to-day life. However, when you involve people you may be asking them for their views as citizens rather than as users of particular services. On the other hand, some service users may be excluded from the usual rights of citizenship (those in the prison system or those under compulsory detention under the Mental Health Act 1983, for instance). It is important to be clear whether you are involving people as service users or as citizens, because their interests cannot be assumed to be identical. Service users tend to focus on a narrower range of issues often directly related to services and citizens are

typically more interested in achieving a balance between providing a broad range of services and the need to pay a reasonable level of council tax.

### 2.2.2 The Question of 'Representativeness'

'Representativeness' is a major issue in managing effective involvement. You may at some point have heard people commenting that involvement processes have not been properly representative. This is often used to undermine the involvement process and outcomes. You need to have in mind two concepts of representativeness:-

**Statistical representativeness** – the number of people you must speak to in order to be able to extrapolate what is said to the whole population group with a reasonable degree of confidence.

**Democratic representativeness** – the ability or legitimacy of an individual participant to reflect the views of a wider group of people.

Most people contribute their views and experience based on their own perspective and the motivation to do so often originates from the individual. Therefore, as an individual they are not a statistically representative sample, neither are they elected representatives of a wider group or community. Such participants are representative only in that they are typical of the general public or of other service users. But this does not mean that their views are not important. You can be clear, if faced with this sort of criticism, that the council holds the view that the opinions of 'typical' members of the public or service users are in themselves valuable and legitimate.

### 2.2.3 The 'Professional' Participant

Time and again, we see the same people getting involved. Regular participants develop a firm understanding of the structures, processes and issues they are involved in. At this point, participants are often considered no longer typical of the ordinary service user or member of the general public, and to have become 'professionalised'. Their opinions are criticised for being too similar to the views of staff members and council officers. The concept of the 'professional' participant is often a negative one, used to invalidate the contribution of service users and members of the public.

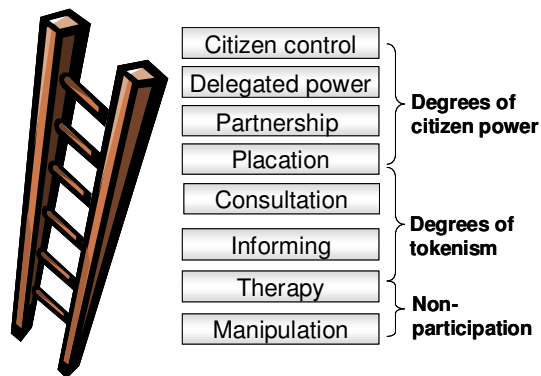
It is important to try and avoid this problem by regularly trying to involve as broad a range of people as possible and by refreshing participant membership. However, it can be difficult to stimulate public and user interest in involvement and so those who are willing to keep on giving up their time and energy should be appreciated. We should also remember that the development of relevant skills and knowledge can support useful and meaningful involvement. Ongoing involvement will inevitably lead to skills and knowledge being developed by the participant, and this in itself can be hugely beneficial where in-depth knowledge and understanding of a service/issue, combined with the user perspective can be a valuable and creative resource.

## 2.3 What Do You Mean By Involvement?

As well as understanding what you hope to achieve by involvement and who it is you wish to involve, you must also be clear about how involved you intend people to be. Do you wish to simply impart information? Or do you envisage the full participation of users, on an equal basis with officers and members?

Involvement can mean many different things. Shelley Arnstein is usually credited with developing one of the first typologies of user involvement in 1969. Arnstein suggests that involvement can afford the participant varying degrees of power and influence. This may range from a fairly non-participative position where the participant has little if any influence over final decisions, to a consultative position where the participant has a voice but only some power over final decisions, to a participative position, where staff or officers and participants work in partnership and share decision-making responsibility for which they are duly accountable. Arnstein suggests that the full benefits of involvement can only be realised when participants are afforded as much power and influence over decisions as possible. Although this model is nearly forty years old, it continues to inform public and user involvement today.

**Arnstein's Ladder of Participation, 1969**



Involvement can best be thought of in terms of three broad categories:-

**2.3.1 Information giving** – It is important that the council disseminates information about its services and proposed service developments so as to ensure that people are aware and informed, and that we are accountable and transparent. Involvement at the level of information giving offers the participant little if any influence over final decisions.

An information-giving approach should be taken where there is no option for change or where there is a statutory duty to fulfil which is not open to influence. An information giving approach is often associated with guidance, legislation or informing the public of a change in service.

**2.3.2 Consultation** – Consultation is the most common form of involvement. Consultation offers residents opportunities to express opinions on a particular issue or service, which are then formally fed into the decision-making process. Participants' views and opinions influence final decisions, but other factors are also important.

A consultative approach should be taken where public and service user views are sought for a specific purpose, often on a range of pre-agreed proposals but where there is some room for new ideas and where a decision on the outcome has not been reached/determined/agreed.

**2.3.4 Participation** – Participation offers service users and the general public opportunities to be involved on a more equal footing with staff or council officers. Participants and officers are jointly involved right from the beginning and on a longer term basis, developing a shared understanding of the problem or issue at hand, generating possible solutions and contributing/shaping/making final decisions.

A participative approach should be taken where there is room for more in-depth, ongoing involvement and where those responsible for steering the involvement process have a reasonable degree of experience in involving people.

The council aspires to the highest possible degree of participation in all its involvement activity. We want people to have as much influence as possible over final decisions. Only when people participate as much as possible will we really see the full benefits of public and user involvement. However, it is important to note that each of these three

levels of involvement are more or less appropriate and legitimate in different circumstances. You must take account of these circumstances, as described above, when deciding upon the appropriate degree of involvement.

Many involvement efforts come unstuck because it has been assumed that everyone has a shared view of the level of involvement being offered. Often it is not until the process is underway or completed that discrepancies come to light. Therefore, you must make sure you are clear as to how involved you intend people to be, and that this understanding is shared and agreed with all those involved – participants, officers and any other involved organisation.

## **2.4 What Methods Will You Use to Involve People?**

There are many ways in which people can be involved. You should be able to design and implement involvement activities that make the best use of the wide range of methods and take into account the advantages and disadvantages of each approach. You should choose methods that suit both the objectives of the involvement activity, together with what will best suit your intended participants and the level of involvement you are offering. No one method is 'right' - in fact, successfully involving people often requires more than one approach.

Below are some of the most common methods of involving people and their advantages and disadvantages. We have tried to categorise approaches according to whether they are best suited for information-giving, consultative or participative levels of involvement. However, many methodologies are appropriate for more than one level of involvement. Please note that this is by no means an exhaustive list – further references are included at the end of this document.

### **2.4.1 Information Giving**

**Public meetings** – Public meetings with 'question and answer' sessions that can be attended by any one are one of the most traditional approaches. Meetings are often one-off, usually held to introduce a plan, strategy or report, or when there is a specific issue of public interest such as a change in service.

Public meetings are high profile and can often offer good public relations opportunities and a way of meeting and listening to the public.

However, the key disadvantage of public meetings is that they are often presented as consultation exercises, when really they are simply opportunities for disseminating information or for generating support for decisions. There is also a possibility that people may wish to discuss a range of issues other than the one in hand – such issues may not be on the agenda or within your remit, but excluding contributions that seem off the point can give the impression that you, or the council, are not listening. Furthermore, a public meeting can create a setting for conflict between audience members as well as between audience and presenters, which you may have little control over. Lastly, issues raised may not be a reliable indicator of public perception, but distorted by the presence of interest groups with particular agendas.

When involving people in a public meeting, you must set clear parameters as to the degree to which the agenda is or is not open for comment. Public meetings are often most productive when used in conjunction with a range of other approaches.

**Letters and other written information** – this is one of the most common ways that the council lets the public and its service users know about changes to services. They are cost effective and can reach the widest audience with targeted mailing. However, often information is produced that is ambiguous and lacks clarity.

The council has a wealth of information to help you in preparing letters and other written information – including the Wrioting Wrongs campaign, report writing guidelines and support is also available from key staff – e.g. Hammerprint, the Better Government Reading Group and the press office.

#### 2.4.2 Consultation

**Surveys and questionnaires** – Questionnaires are a good way to obtain quantitative, factual information and to identify priorities for more detailed research, especially where their development has been informed by more qualitative approaches. Large numbers of people can be reached and responses are confidential. Surveys can, however, discriminate against participants with literacy difficulties, physical or sensory disabilities or a first language other than English, and rely on shared cultural concepts.

**Interviews** – Interviews can elicit rich, descriptive information, which can support quantitative information gained through surveys and questionnaires. Interviews are perhaps most useful when they are ‘semi-structured’. This means that you decide on a broad agenda for the interview, but leaving scope to explore opinions, feelings and perceptions as they arise. Also called ‘discovery’ interviews, this is an approach that seems to be gaining popularity.

**Focus groups** – Focus groups are in-depth facilitated discussion groups, usually of 6-10 people and focused around a pre-determined set of issues or topics. Focus groups can be very useful for identifying issues for consideration by a larger sample, or for further exploration of unexpected findings.

You should be aware, though, that focus groups, like interviews, can be a very labour intensive way of collecting and understanding information. Being in a group situation can also cause people to react slightly differently – groups tends to react more extremely than individuals, for example, or can be inclined to try and reach a consensus where there is no need for one.

**Panels and advisory groups** – A citizens’ panel can be defined as a pool of people who comprise, at best, a broad cross section of the population and is, therefore, likely to provide a perspective others will relate to. Membership normally ranges from 500 to 2500 people. Large citizens’ panels are useful for consulting with people over time, for generating statistically representative information which can be extrapolated to the population as a whole, and for recruiting smaller samples for in-depth interviews. It is good practice to establish a rolling recruitment programme to refresh panel membership. Consulting with the same members for any length of time is counter-productive as they can become ‘experts’ and cannot then be seen to be representative of the general population.

Advisory groups are becoming an increasingly popular consultation method. They are usually smaller than citizens’ panels and are recruited so that service users can share their experiences as ‘typical’ users but not as a representative sample.

Supporting the group or panel can be labour and resource intensive. Independent facilitation can overcome some of the issues associated with being asked questions by service providers and so this can become expensive, although there are definite benefits in terms of a less bureaucratic feel and participants feeling they really have freedom of expression. If you are facilitating the group yourself, you should clearly state your interests and the parameters of your role as facilitator.

**Working with other organisations** – Working with specialist voluntary organisations and user/carer/support groups can be a useful approach for accessing ‘hard-to-reach’ groups and the views of particular groups of people. It is important to remember, though, that many voluntary organisations may have vested interests and specific agendas, e.g. they may be reliant on public sector funding. Furthermore, not everyone is involved in formalised umbrella groups – it is still important to access the views of those who choose not to involve themselves in statutory or voluntary groups at all.

#### 2.4.3 **Participation**

**Management body representation** – public participation in the management of organisations clearly offers a very definite step toward the control end of the involvement spectrum. We are seeing, more and more, the involvement of public and service users in governing arrangements – the Mental Health Partnership Board, for example, is attended by users of mental health services. Representation can be very useful where appropriate and ongoing training and support is given.

Unfortunately, however, committees are often alien to many service users and members of the public. Committee language and pace, citizens’ and users’ lack of confidence and an established power imbalance are just some of the factors that can inhibit real equality in this form of participation.

**User groups/bodies** – User groups can have a major role to play in ensuring involvement in decision-making processes and can help mitigate for the potentially adverse conditions of involvement in governing arrangements.

A well-functioning user group which has the full commitment of the organisation (including senior managers) with an established and valued role in decision-making can be a very effective way of enhancing real user control and provide an excellent avenue for establishing ongoing communication with users. A user group or panel can run at a pace to suit the users, be highly empowering and present a collective voice while offering anonymity to the individual. A full committee of users and citizens can even have a more powerful influence than a solitary representative who may be listened to respectfully, but actually have little impact on service development.

**Recruitment and selection** – Involving service users in staff recruitment and selection can be a very powerful involvement tool, demonstrating to potential staff the value we place on the contribution of our service users. The experience can also be empowering for service users. You should be aware, however, of the dangers of tokenism, which can be particularly persistent in this area of involvement. Service users tend to be involved in the recruitment of front line staff, but not managers. They may even be asked to participate only in the selection panel itself and not the whole recruitment process (identification of employment needs, job design and specification, short listing, interview and selection), having very little real say in the final choice of candidate – *“service users have reported never actually being told who was appointed”* (Beresford, 2002). You should avoid putting service users in the position of simply testing out candidate attitudes toward the user group, an uncomfortable situation for practitioners and users alike.

Lack of training, lack of managerial commitment, concerns (opposition may offend some staff) of trade union and personnel departments, lack of procedural flexibility, and staff and management doubts that users will be able to maintain objectivity, confidentiality and equality are some of the common reasons cited for failing to effectively involve people in recruitment and selection. A readiness to invest time and resources are crucial in ensuring that users can play a full part in the recruitment process and not just be present as token panel members.

**Contracting** - The principle of involving users in appointments is also one that can be applied to the contracting process. Simply having an independent person on a selection panel makes it clear to potential contractors that the department takes users' views seriously; is likely to improve the quality of decision-making; places quality of care issues firmly at the forefront and, lastly, offers an opportunity to test the contractors' experience of work with users by evaluating their response to the panel process.

**Training and development** – Involving service users in designing and delivering training and development opportunities can be a very powerful way of improving service delivery. In particular, users can have a key role to play in staff induction programmes and equality, disability and service quality training, as well as an invaluable role in delivering training and support to other service users. Again, appropriate training and support for the user trainer is essential.

**Monitoring and evaluating services** – Monitoring services compares actual practice with an agreed standard of best practice, whereas evaluating services compares service delivery with stated aims and objectives. In both instances, the views of service users are critical. Service users should be involved in setting standards that reflect the impact of services on quality of life and defining what a quality service looks like.

## **2.5 How Will You Ensure That Participants' Views Influence Decisions?**

Understanding what you hope to achieve by involvement, who it is you wish to involve and the level of involvement you are offering are fundamental to effective involvement practice. By using a range of suitable methods you can make sure that participants' views are channelled appropriately and that they are also clear where their input has been heard and acted upon.

Effective involvement is ultimately about the public actually having an impact on how services are designed, developed and delivered and being transparent about how their input has been built into the planning and decision making process. Therefore, you must also be clear about how public and user views will be able to influence final decisions, and how decisions will be fed back to participants.

**2.5.1 Decisions and actions** - To ensure that involvement activity influences final decision-making, you must decide what form involvement outputs will take, and how these might be converted into useable information for decision-making? Put more simply, what will you do with the information you get from participants?

Our planning processes need to include processes for ensuring that decisions are informed by public and user views. The process by which participants' views will inform decisions should be agreed at the outset, should be familiar to all those involved and, crucially, should be owned by senior managers and decision-makers. The process might be as simple as a report presented to the decision-making body, representation at the decision-making forum by either a participant or staff member charged with conveying key messages arising from the involvement activity, or, ultimately, inclusion of participants in the decision making forum.

Failure to establish effective mechanisms for translating messages into action will result in the loss of valuable opinions, perceptions and concerns. Whatever the purpose of involvement, if participants don't see action as a result of their efforts, they will not easily be persuaded to donate their valuable time and energy again, their view of the council will be diminished and the council risks appearing as though it has only a superficial interest in establishing a dialogue with the public and service users.

**2.5.2 Feedback** - Whatever the outcome of involvement, feedback is crucial in sustaining a relationship with users and the general public. If people have taken the trouble to give us their views, knowledge and experience, they must also know what has happened as a result. It may not always be possible to implement suggestions made by the public, but you should offer explanations and appropriate responses in order to prevent the danger of looking as though you're listening but not acting.

When planning involvement you should ensure that you have clear processes for feedback. Depending on the scale and degree of involvement, you may wish to write to participants, to hold a further meeting or post information on the intranet or council website.

## **2.6 How Will You Know Whether Involvement Has Been Effective?**

An evaluation of the effectiveness of any resident involvement should focus on two areas – the degree to which involvement benefited the individual and the council.

In terms of the individual, you should focus on what intrinsic benefits the public have gained as a result of being involved. Did you see service users grow in self-confidence, develop a better understanding of services available or make good social contacts, for instance?

In terms of the council, you should relate your evaluation to the purpose of the involvement. If you intended to build public trust and confidence in the council by making services more open and accountable, shaped by the public view, then you should be asking the following sort of questions:-

- have service users and the general public had a real impact on decisions?
- have opportunities for involvement across the council increased?
- has there been a change in the number or nature of complaints? (Greater levels of involvement might stimulate an increase in complaints as people become more confident in their rights and expect a response.)
- has user and public trust and confidence in the department and the council increased?

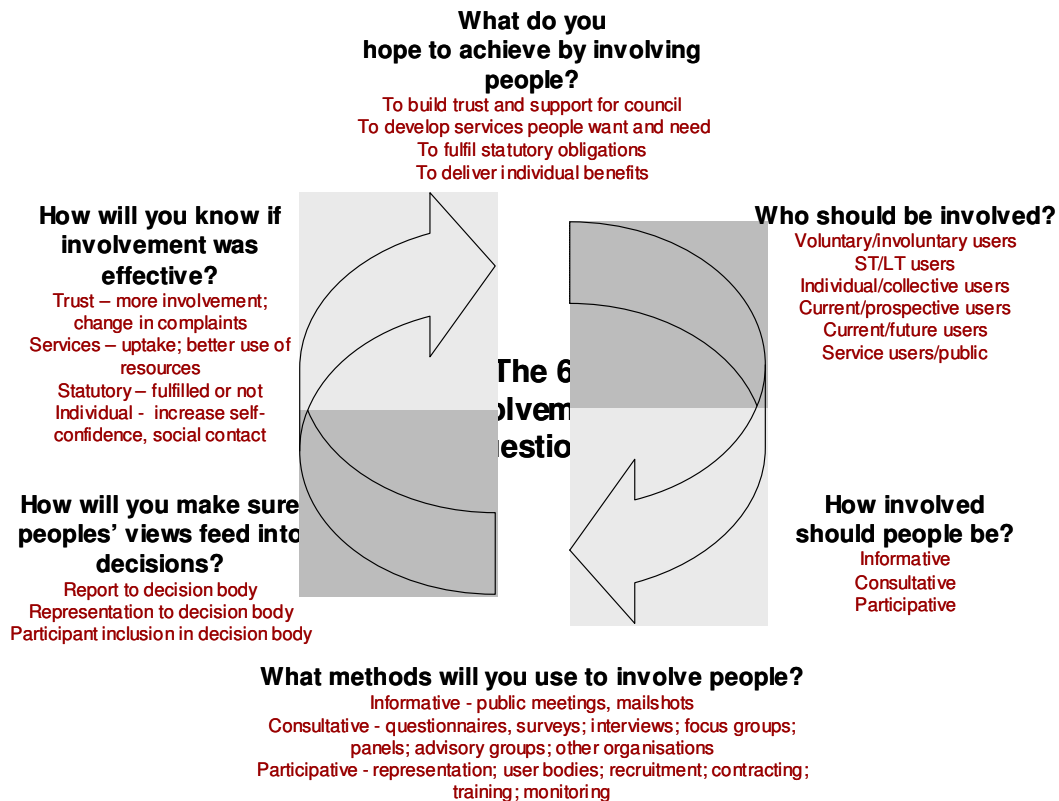
If you intended to develop a better understanding of what people want from services, then you should be asking the following sort of questions:-

- are you clearer about service needs?
- have resources been used more effectively?
- have services been influenced by the public and user view?
- are more people using services?
- has there been a change in the number or nature of complaints? (Greater involvement might influence a reduction in complaints as services become more responsive.)

As well as involving the public in the issue at hand, they should also be involved in evaluating the involvement activity itself. This can help to make sure the process and outcomes are assessed on factors that are important to the participants.

Evaluation of involvement effectiveness enables the council to build on continuous improvement in listening and responding to the views of the public. When planning involvement you should set out how you will evaluate whether it has been useful both to the council and to those participating. Many people concentrate on evaluating whether the process itself was appropriate – whether the right methodology was used and so forth. Do not fall into this trap. It is just as important, if not more so, to find out whether involvement has really had an impact on the council or your service – what actually changed as a result of involving people?

## 2.7 The Six Involvement Questions – A Summary



## Section Three – Involving People with Particular Needs – Valuing Equalities and Diversity

Public and service user involvement strategies need to acknowledge the different groups and communities in the borough. The council is committed to addressing equal opportunities and ensuring that both employees and the people it serves are not discriminated against – both in terms of service provision and opportunities for involvement.

Planning user involvement, therefore, needs to take into consideration the impact or barriers to involvement for different members of the local population. Different groups will require specific or targeted involvement support to enable their involvement, and capacity building where necessary. As a general rule of thumb, all involvement activity should actively seek to ensure that the process is inclusive and automatically addresses particular barriers that may discourage or prevent individuals from participating. A number of overarching issues need to be addressed for all public/service user participants.

### 3.1 Accessible information

We have a tendency to produce lengthy and somewhat professionally worded documents, that in themselves can be a barrier to participation. The council is committed to producing documents and letters that are accessible, not only in terms of appearance, but also in terms of content. In order to elicit interest and encourage participation, documents for public consumption should be produced in plain English, without jargon, acronyms and other “professional” language that requires knowledge of the service/issue in order for people to understand fully what the document says. Font and size of text is also important – the council recommends Arial font in size 12 text for

most items, with larger font for older people and those with visual impairments as standard.

### **3.2 Time factors**

it is important to remember that members of the public volunteer to give up their time to participate. Whilst officers are paid to attend meetings and to read through lengthy documents, volunteer members of the public are not. We need to therefore consider the time that people need to participate – whether in terms of time to read documentation before a meeting, times of day when we ask people to participate etc.

### **3.3 Transport**

For many people, transport is required to enable their participation – and provision of transport or reimbursement of transport costs is good practice.

### **3.4 Carer support**

Many local residents have a caring role, and this can be a barrier to participation if this role is a full time one. Consideration needs to be given to the resourcing and provision of support for child care and respite care in order to enable and support wide participation.

### **3.5 Language/translation**

Hammersmith & Fulham has a diverse community of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups. In order to fully understand the needs of our customers, it is necessary to ensure that we specifically target the inclusion of different communities in the borough. Often, we rely on particular community organisations that support or provide a service to a particular client group, but we also need to acknowledge that there will also be different views and opinions within those communities themselves. For example, when considering how you will include BAME communities, we need to consider reaching groups within communities – e.g. different Asian communities and the wide range of refugee/asylum seeker communities in the borough.

### **3.6 Pace**

Many of those participating may not be used to the processes and language used by local authorities and may need longer to digest and understand the issues and information being presented to them. At times, public participants may need to slow down the pace of discussion at a meeting, building in the time to explain items that officers have an existing knowledge of, in order to ensure that equal participation is supported.

### **3.7 Accessible venue**

The venue should be wheelchair accessible, close to good public transport links, with good acoustics, a loop system and audio equipment if necessary. Provision of refreshments (tea, coffee, water) is also important.

### **3.8 Older people**

The Better Government programme has a wealth of experience of reaching and engaging with older people in the borough. This has included specific inclusion of older people from BAME communities and those with mental health needs. All the above overarching factors need to be considered when planning involvement of older people, with particular emphasis on:

- timeliness, older people cannot use their Freedom Pass until 9am, so meetings should not be scheduled to start before 10am, unless taxi transport can be funded.
- Accessible information – size 14point Arial recommended, with summary documents produced where possible

- Transport – near good accessible transport provision (note that proximity to an underground station is only appropriate if the station is fully accessible)

### **3.9 Disabled people**

The local Disability Forum provides a good example of supporting the involvement of disabled people. Involvement in the council's Best Value Review of Services to Disabled People paid particular attention to supporting the involvement of disabled people, and learning from this has identified the need to focus on:

- Accessible venues: fully wheelchair accessible, including provision of disabled toilets
- Accessible meetings: interpreters and palantypists and loop systems for those with hearing of vision impairments
- Accessible paperwork: in alternative formats such as Braille, audio tape, electronic and large print. Also needs to be succinct and in plain English.
- Transport: near accessible transport links, also with resources for accessible transport where required
- Timeliness: need to consider the involvement of disabled people both employed and unemployed. Involvement activities that only take place during the day will exclude those in employment who would otherwise wish to participate.

### **3.10 People with mental health needs**

This section of the community are an often overlooked group who are not offered the opportunity to participate outside of involvement in mental health service provision and development. Specialist user groups, such as the User Advisory Group of Older People with Mental Health Needs and the user forum at Hammersmith & Fulham MIND, demonstrate good practice in terms of supporting participation. Specific attention should be paid to:

- Accessible information
- Accessible meetings: a mental health need does not mean a lesser level of intelligence, understanding or ability to participate. As with other groups, people with mental health needs do however require information in accessible formats, language and to have the information in good time.
- Timeliness: as with older people and disabled people, we need to remember that some people with mental health needs may be in employment, or have other appointments/services/activities that they also need to find the time for. Inviting service users to attend meetings/events that coincide with other calls on their time can be addressed through talking to participants in advance to identify what days/times are suitable.
- Ongoing participation: some people with mental health needs (and those with physical health needs) may have periods of time when they are not able or in a position to continue participating, but would like to re-engage in the process at a later date.

### **3.11 People with learning disabilities**

Having a learning disability affects the way someone learns, communicates or does other everyday things. Learning disabilities can be present from birth or can develop later in life, for example, due to a brain injury. There are many different types of learning disability. It can be mild, moderate or severe and some people with a learning disability also have a mobility impairment.

- A learning disability need not stop someone from participating in local processes, as long as they get the right support. This includes having information and advice in ways that they can understand. Sometimes this will be clearly presented plain English. Sometimes it will be large print, audio or the

- easyread format. It is vital that information, processes and support procedures are created in a way that is flexible and simple to understand.
- Some people prefer to get information graphically. This does not necessarily mean they cannot read text. Publications and websites with simple text and images can help people to understand information.
  - Clear and simple technical systems will help reduce anxiety. Disability equality training can support helpline staff to help people confidently and appropriately.
  - Some people using the internet may be confused when asked to respond to instructions quickly. You should ensure that time-linked technologies have appropriate time-out settings.
  - Community Services Department has a Communication with People with Learning Disabilities policy.

## Section Four – What Can Make Involvement Difficult?

There are some reasons why effective involvement may not always be that straightforward. It is important that you are aware of some of the common barriers to involvement and how you can best manage these.

**Staff defensiveness** – Public and user involvement can feel threatening. Staff may feel that their professional status will be undermined or that services they provide will be criticised if people are allowed to say what they really think. One way in which you can begin to overcome staff resistance is to emphasise how effective involvement can lead to improved outcomes for service users. Of course, all staff should be made aware of the council's expectation that this policy of public and user involvement will be embedded throughout its work.

**Low expectations** – Very often, the public have a fairly low expectation of public services and is also pretty easily satisfied. In this context, involvement has only limited meaning, as people will, by and large, simply state that they are happy with services and perhaps make a few minor suggestions as to how services might be improved. In order for involvement to be really meaningful, you can encourage people not to accept poor services and to develop higher expectations.

**Personal demands** – An assumption is often made that people will be glad of an invitation to voice their opinions about public services. This may often be the case. However, the time and energy that the public donate to maintain an ongoing dialogue with the council should not be underestimated. Demands on personal resources can exacerbate the physical and mental condition of some users.

Appropriate reward and recognition may to some degree compensate for these demands, as well as demonstrating that the views of users and citizens are valued. Formal structures, such as involvement contracts clarifying roles and responsibilities, can be important in safeguarding the well-being of users.

**Inappropriate methodologies** – Involvement initiatives often fail to take into account the public's communication preferences. Firstly, there is a tendency to convey information in writing. However, we know that the public would generally prefer to be spoken to directly. Also, the written word can exclude people with a low level of literacy, people with physical, learning or sensory disabilities and people whose first language is not English. Secondly, we tend to communicate with people on a relatively formal basis, but service users and the public usually prefer a more informal and sociable approach. Thirdly, anonymity is a fundamental prerequisite for vulnerable users who are fearful of losing essential services if they express

negative opinions. The opportunity to speak to someone relatively independent can be critical in freeing up users to express their underlying feelings about services, although it is worth noting that some user groups (older people, for example) prefer to talk to a senior manager who they feel has the authority to respond to their comments. Methodologies should be tailored to address the specific needs of different groups of people. This was explored in detail in Section Three.

**Lack of resources** – Lack of money and time are often cited as the main reasons for a lack of public and user involvement. Some methods of involvement can be relatively inexpensive, however, involvement can also be very labour intensive, incurring considerable cost. It may not be possible to resource all involvement initiatives, so we should prioritise the areas in which we would most benefit from public input, and target resources for this activity appropriately. You must weight up the costs and benefits of involvement in order to prioritise involvement activity. This is explored in more detail in Section Five.

**Lack of public interest** – It is a mistake to think that people wish to be involved in decision-making just because you have decided to allow them to be! In fact, very often the general public in particular, but often service users as well, are just not that interested. People may even feel that, as taxpayers, they pay your salary to be able to make decisions on their behalf. Your job, in this instance, is to stimulate demand for involvement activity – people should be clamouring to get involved, expecting the right to influence decisions. This will only happen when you involve people in decision-making as a matter of course, thereby raising people's expectations.

## Section Five - When Involvement May Not be Appropriate

The council's aspiration is to embed public and service user involvement throughout the organisation – at all levels of decision-making, and to the highest possible degree of involvement.

We are striving toward a culture that embraces the public and user view and has established mechanisms to ensure that the way in which we go about our business really is influenced by what people think. The council intends involvement to become *“part of the way we do things around here”*.

That is not to say, though, that we expect that public and users to be asked what they think of each and every decision we take. To make the best use of council resources, involvement activity should be prioritised.

You must therefore consider which issues are critically in need of involvement and which would see only limited benefit. You should be able to demonstrate in each instance that you have given due consideration to the appropriateness of involvement activity and that instances of non-involvement are justifiable. Where you make a decision that involvement is inappropriate, you should have clear, robust and meaningful grounds for deciding that this is the case. It will help you to consider some of the factors that can indicate whether involvement is more or less appropriate.

### 5.1 When to Involve People...

**High benefit indicators** – Involvement is a priority where it is likely to deliver significant benefits. For example, getting people involved can help to break a grid-lock situation. Support from the local community can be crucial where public hostility toward a decision is high or where the issue is of high interest and at crisis stage. Involvement can also be of

particular benefit where those willing to be involved are key individuals with a strong influence within the community.

**Low cost indicators** - Involvement can be prioritised where costs incurred are likely to be low. Where the issue in question is likely to generate lots of willing participants, often the case where projects that benefit the community are concerned, there is likely to be little outlay on recruiting and selecting volunteers. Where participants are all fairly local, it will be easier for them to travel to involvement events, costing the council less in expenses. Lastly, there are fewer resource implications where the topic does not require people to rapidly master very technical information.

## 5.2 And When Not To...

**Low benefit indicators** - Involvement is less of a priority where it is likely to deliver relatively few benefits. For example, where decisions of the public, service users and staff are likely to be the same, where the council has a statutory obligation regardless of public opinion, or where people don't recognise the issue as a problem and there are no viable alternatives anyway, the benefits of involvement are relatively low. In these circumstances, it might be better to use valuable resources to provide services.

**High cost indicators** - In some circumstances, the costs of involvement may far outweigh any benefits. For example, if the public is reluctant to get involved, perhaps because they are fairly supportive of proposals or because they don't wish to be involved in what they perceive to be the job of council officers, the costs of recruiting participants may simply be too high.

-END-  
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