



Cyngor Bwrdeisdref Sirol

**Blaenau Gwent**

County Borough Council

**Service User And Carer  
Consultation Strategy**

**SOCIAL  
SERVICES**

COMMUNITY SERVICES DIRECTORATE

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# 1. Purpose

- 1.1 This strategy is intended to cover the whole spectrum of service user and carer groups who come into contact with Social Services. It has been written for service users, carers and staff to set out what we want to do and how we want to do it. It includes an action plan with a number of tasks and activities. **(Appendix 1 & 2).**
- 1.2 This strategy is about improving how we involve service users and carers in the design and delivery of social services. It's not about being seen to do 'the right thing' but is about helping us to improve services through an open and transparent dialogue with those who use our services.
- 1.3 The strategy aims to bring about change for the better by enabling the department to listen, learn, and improve, increasing the influence that service users and carers have.
- 1.4 It is accepted and recognised that there are often diverse needs and interests among service user groups and between service users and carers. The current strategy has sought to reflect this by incorporating considerations for some groups/needs in the appendices.
- 1.5 As the strategy is implemented it will regularly reviewed and may require changes/additions to make it more accessible to particular groups. Service specific forums and planning groups will be critical in identifying where changes are required.
- 1.6 Service users and carers are already engaged in their individual care assessments and care plans. This strategy is intended to support engagement on wider basis covering broader issues than those covered in individual basis. There is much that is already done and the strategy seeks to draw all the strands together to help improve the engagement framework.
- 1.7 The principles and standards in the strategy draw heavily on work carried out elsewhere, particularly by 'Communities Scotland' who developed a framework for Community Engagement.
- 1.8 The effectiveness of the strategy will be monitored over time and changes will be implemented based on experiences gained, demonstrating a commitment 'to learning for continuous improvement' by all involved.
- 1.9 In the development of the strategy important points have been made about the need for the roles of those involved in engagement and consultation to be clearly defined. These need to set out and clarify whether people participate as individuals in their own right or as representatives of others and what would be expected of them, including how much time is likely to be required. In each consultation and engagement process these roles will have to be clear.

- 1.10 The strategy is intended to complement and support other arrangements in place that help Partners, the Council and Social Services to engage with service users and carers, including:
- Blaenau Gwent Voluntary Sector Compact
  - Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's Corporate Consultation Strategy
  - The Social Services Department's Public Information Strategy
  - The Social Services Department's Guide To handling Complaints and Representations
  - The Healthier Future Joint Planning Framework.
  - The Children and Young Persons Framework for Partnership
  - The Community Plan
  - Making The Connections
  - Communities First
  - Key Strategic Partnerships
- 1.11 The Blaenau Gwent Partnership Agreement for Joint Consultation, Participation and Involvement in Health, Social Care and Well Being issues and service development' has already been jointly agreed by key partners. It provides guidance on the type of methods that can be adopted when undertaking consultation. This strategy complements the agreement, established overarching principles and provides a practical framework for activity.
- 1.12 The strategy will provide a framework and structure that can be adapted to complement developments in the areas outlined above. Initially it is a social services document but it is intended that it is further developed to incorporate the wider social and health care agenda.

## 2. Principles

2.1 In order to provide service users and carers with confidence and influence over the consultation strategy some principles have been established against which the department can be held to account.

- Fairness, equality and inclusion must underpin all aspects of engagement and should be reflected in policies and the way that everyone involved participates.
- Engagement should have clear and agreed purposes, and methods that achieve those purposes.
- Improving the quality of engagement requires commitment to learning from experience.
- Skill must be exercised in order to ensure practice of equalities principles, to share ownership of the agenda, and to enable all viewpoints to be reflected.
- As all parties to engagement possess knowledge based on study, experience, observation and reflection, effective engagement processes will share and use that knowledge.
- All participants should be given the opportunity to build on their knowledge and skills.
- Accurate, timely information is crucial for effective engagement, including agenda setting.

In summary, these principles highlight:

- the importance of equality
- the diversity of people
- a clear sense of purpose
- effective methods for achieving change
- building on the skills and knowledge of all those involved
- commitment to learning for continuous improvement

### 3. Standards & Performance

- 3.1 The following standards support our principles and guide the way in which we will undertake our consultative and engagement processes. Their intention is to help develop and support positive working relationships between service users / carers and the Social Services Department, across the range of services delivered.
- 3.2 They are supported by performance indicators that tell us about the evidence we can collect in order to see how well we have done. The indicators can be used to plan, monitor and evaluate our engagement activities as a whole or particular stages and aspects of it. The indicators are for all to use to ensure best practice and hold one another to account. By regularly assessing how we are doing against the indicators helps all involved in achieving continuous improvement.
- 3.3 The standards and indicators:

#### **INVOLVEMENT**

**Standard** - We will identify and involve people and organisations that have an interest in the focus of the engagement and actively seek the views of service users and carers with a range of backgrounds and experiences.

#### **Indicators**

- Inclusion of all groups / people whose interests are affected by the issues that the engagement will address.
- In partnership with other agencies – promotion of the involvement of people who experience barriers to participation / not yet organised to participate, etc.
- We will increase our knowledge of the issues facing under represented groups and develop specific strategies to engage with them.
- The people who are involved:
  - want to be involved
  - have knowledge of the issues or prepared to gain an understanding
  - have skills or a commitment to developing skills to play their role
  - show commitment to taking part in discussions, decisions and actions
  - attend consistently
  - have the authority of those they represent to take decisions and actions
  - have legitimacy in the eyes of those they represent
  - maintain a continuing dialogue with those they represent

- We will provide clear information in appropriate formats for service users and carers to make a choice about participating.
- We will be consistent in asking people how they want to participate in the future and log this information on our database systems.
- We will review the accessibilities of our information and produce documents in easy read versions or other formats as and where appropriate.
- We will develop a consistent but flexible approach to service user / carer participation, ensuring that participative areas are prioritised within operational / service delivery plans.

## **SUPPORT**

**Standard** - We will identify and aim to overcome any barriers to involvement.

### **Indicators**

- The participants identify what support is needed to enable effective participation.
- That practical barriers to participation are overcome and that where appropriate / as needed arrangements take account of:
  - suitable transport
  - care of dependents
  - suitable premises
  - communication devices (loop systems, etc)
  - interpretation / advocacy requirements
  - meetings organised at appropriate times
- That financial barriers to participation be considered to overcome difficulties arising from the above and to include:
  - out of pocket expense
  - loss of earnings
- Other participating organisations have access to equipment they need (e.g. computers, telephones, photocopying, etc.)
- A departmental budget is established to fund engagement/ involvement activities.

## **PLANNING**

**Standard** - We will gather evidence of the needs and available resources and use this evidence to agree the purpose, scope and timescale of the engagement and the actions to be taken.

## **Indicators**

- All participants are involved from the start in:
  - identifying and defining the issues that the engagement should address, and the options for how to tackle them
  - choosing the methods of engagement that will be used (see Methods standards)
- Participants express views openly and honestly.
- Participants agree on the amount of time to be allocated to the process of agreeing the purpose(s) of the engagement.
- The purpose of the engagement is identified and stated, there is evidence that it is needed, and the purpose is agreed by all participants and communicated to the wider community and agencies that may be affected.
- Public policies that affect the engagement are explained to the satisfaction of participants and the wider community.
- Participants identify existing and potential resources which are available to the engagement process and which may help achieve its purpose(s) (e.g. money, people, equipment).
- Intended results, that are specific, measurable and realistic, are agreed and recorded.
- The participants assess the constraints, challenges and opportunities that will be involved in implementing the plan.
- The participants agree the timescales for the achievement of the purpose(s).
- The participants agree and clarify their respective roles and responsibilities in achieving the purpose(s).
- Plans are reviewed and adjusted in the light of evaluation of performance (see Monitoring and Evaluation standard).

## **METHODS**

**Standard** - We will agree and use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose.

## **Indicators**

- The range of methods used is:
  - acceptable to the participants
  - suitable for all their needs and their circumstances
  - appropriate for the purposes of the engagement
- Methods used identify, involve and support excluded groups.

- Methods are chosen to enable diverse views to be expressed, and to help resolve any conflicts of interest.
- Methods are fully explained and applied with the understanding and agreement of all participants.
- Methods are evaluated and adapted in response to feedback.

## **WORKING TOGETHER**

**Standard** - We will agree and use clear procedures that enable the participants to work with one another effectively and efficiently.

### **Indicators**

The participants:

- Behave openly and honestly – there are no hidden agendas, but participants also respect confidentiality and agree information that can or cannot be shared.
- Behave towards one another in a positive, respectful and non-discriminatory manner.
- Recognise participants' time is valuable and that they have other commitments.
- Recognise existing agency and community obligations, including statutory requirements.
- Encourage openness and the ability for everyone to take part by:
  - communicating with one another using plain language
  - ensuring that all participants are given equal opportunity to engage and have their knowledge and views taken into account when taking decisions.
  - seeking, listening to and reflecting on the views of different individuals and organisations, taking account of minority views.
  - removing barriers to participation.
- Take decisions on the basis of agreed procedures and shared knowledge.
- Identify and discuss opportunities and strategies for achieving change, ensuring that:
  - key points are summarised, agreed and progressed
  - conflicts are recognised and addressed
- Manage change effectively by:
  - focusing on agreed purpose
  - clarifying roles and who is responsible for agreed actions
  - delegating actions to those best equipped to carry them out

- ensuring participants are clear about the decisions that need to be made
  - ensuring that, where necessary, all parties have time to consult with those they represent
  - co-ordinating skills
  - enhancing skills where necessary
  - agreeing schedules
  - assessing risks
  - addressing conflicts
  - monitoring and evaluating progress
  - learning from one another
  - seeking continuous improvement in how things are done
- Use resources efficiently, effectively and fairly.
  - Support the process with administrative arrangements that enable it to work.
  - Utilise the suggested ground rules for meeting that involve service users and carers. (**Appendix 3**)
  - Ensure appropriate methods are developed to support engagement from people with learning disabilities. (**Appendix 4**)

### **SHARING INFORMATION**

**Standard** - We will ensure that necessary information is communicated between the participants.

#### **Indicators**

- Information relevant to the engagement is shared between all participants.
- Information is accessible, clear, understandable and relevant, with key points summarised.
- Information is made available in time to enable people to fully take part and consult others.
- Information is made available in time to enable people to fully take part and consult others.
- All participants identify and explain when they are bound by confidentiality and why access to such information is restricted.
- Within limited of confidentiality, all participants have equal access to all information that is relevant to the engagement.

### **WORKING WITH OTHERS**

**Standard** - We will work effectively with others with an interest in the engagement.

## **Indicators**

The participants in the engagement:

- Identify other structures, organisations and activities that are relevant to their work.
- Establish and maintain effective links with such other structures, activities and organisations.
- Learn about these structures, activities and organisations, to avoid duplication of their work and complement it wherever possible.
- Learn from others and seek improvement in practice.
- Encourage effective community engagement as normal practice.

## **IMPROVEMENT**

**Standard-** We will actively develop the skills, knowledge and confidence of all the participants.

## **Indicators**

- All those involved in the engagement process are committed to making the most of the understanding and competence of both community and agency participants.
- All participants have access to support and to opportunities for training or reflection on their experiences, to enable them and others to take part in an effective, fair and inclusive way.
- Each part identifies its own learning and development needs and together the participants regularly review their capacity to play their roles.
- Where needs are identified, the potential of participants is developed and promoted.
- The participants regularly evaluate the competence and understanding of the engagement system as a whole as it develops.
- Resources, including independent professional support, are available to make the most of the competence and understanding of individual participants and the engagement system as a whole.
- There is adequate time for competence and understanding to be developed.
- Methods used to improve competence and understanding reflect diverse needs and are fit for purpose.
- Participants share their skills, experience and knowledge with community and agency colleagues.

## **FEEDBACK**

**Standard** - We will feedback the results of the engagement to the wider community and agencies affected.

## **Indicators**

- Organisers of the engagement process regularly feedback, to all those affected, the options that have been considered and the decisions and actions that have been agreed. This is done within an agreed time, to an agreed format and from an identified source.
- Feedback on the outcomes and impact of these decisions and actions is provided regularly within an agreed time, to an agreed format and from an identified source.
- Explanations about why decisions and actions have been taken are shared along with details of any future activity.
- The characteristics of the audience are identified to ensure that:
  - relevant information is provided in understandable languages
  - relevant information is provided in appropriate languages
  - a suitable range of media and communication channels is used constructively
- Information includes details about opportunities for involvement in engagement and encourages positive contributions from groups and individuals in the community.
- Information promotes positive images of all population groups in the community and avoids stereotypes.

## **MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

**Standard** - We will monitor and evaluate whether the engagement activities achieves its purposes and overall meets the standards outlined.

## **Indicators**

- The engagement process and its effects are continually evaluated to measure progress, develop skills and refine practices.
- Progress is evaluated against the intended results and other changes identified by the participants (see Planning standard indicator 7).
- The participants agree what information needs to be collected, how, when and by whom, to understand the situation both at the start of the engagement and as it progresses.
- Appropriate participants collect and record this information.
- The information is presented accurately and in a way that is easy to use.
- The participants agree on the lessons to be drawn from the evidence of the results and the changes that occurred.
- The participants act on the lessons learned.
- Progress is celebrated.
- The results of the evaluation are fed back to the participants and the wider community.
- Evidence of good practice is recorded and shared with other agencies and communities.

## **4. Implementation**

- a. The implementation of the strategy will be co-ordinated by the Customer Relations and Management Support Team (CR&MS Team) in the Department's Business Management Division.
- b. Whilst the above Team will undertake this role it will be for all managers and staff to apply the strategy in all service delivery and development circumstances.

## **5. Priorities for Action**

- a. The attached action plan (Appendix 1) sets out what we would like to achieve by March 2008. More detailed action plans for each year will be developed in consultation with service users, carers and staff at the beginning of each year.

## **6. Measuring progress**

- a. The strategy will be reviewed and updated as necessary at six monthly intervals by the 'Engagement Group'.
- b. Annually the findings from the engagement process will be will be reported to the Social Service Department's Senior Management Team, the relevant scrutiny committee and to service users and carers who have expressed an interest in being updated on progress.

**Appendix 1**

No.	Action Plan 2007/08	Who
	<b>Partnership Actions</b>	
1.	Circulate and communicate the strategy to service users and carers, making them aware of the standards and indicators	All/ BH
2.	Establish the User & Carer Engagement Group as an on-going coordinating group for user and carer engagement and feedback. The group referring key findings to the Social Services Department's Senior Management Team on a quarterly basis and other appropriate management teams and partnerships, as necessary.	All/SJG/RB
3.	With GAVO establish links with existing forum's or develop new ones to ensure all I service users including those from Black and Minority Ethnic communities and other disadvantaged groups have access. This will be linked to the Health Social care and Well-Being Strategy framework.	SJG/RB/KT
4.	With GAVO undertake a 'mapping' exercise of user and carer forums that can contribute towards on-going engagement and be linked to the forum mentioned above.	SJG/RB/KT
5.	Suggest additional/rationalized forums to support the planning framework for Health and Social Care, working with GAVO to facilitate appropriate nominees for user, carer and voluntary sector participation.	SJG/RB/KT
6.	Ensure that for each service development consideration is given to the guidance in the Blaenau Gwent Partnership Agreement for Joint Consultation, Participation and Involvement in Health, Social Care and Well Being and that engagement and consultation plans are developed as appropriate.	SJG/RB
7.	Co-ordination of the service user and carer consultation strategy with the Carers Strategy to ensure carers consultative processes are adequately provided for.	LM
8.	Co-ordination of the service user and carer strategy with the Children and Young People's framework Partnership to ensure children and young people's consultative processes are adequately provided for.	DJ
9.	Develop the strategy as a model for the wider social care and health framework	SJG/RB
	<b><u>Social Services Specific Actions (May be undertaken within partnerships)</u></b>	
	<b><i>General</i></b>	
10.	Seek creation of a budget in social services to support the implementation of the social services elements of the strategy.	SJG
11.	Designate the CR&MS Team in social services as having lead responsibility in social service to implement the strategy.	SJG/BH
12.	Development of a training programme for users and carers to support them in their consultative roles.	SJG
13.	A commitment that for each proposed departmental service review/development a consultation plan is developed and is submitted to the 'Consultation Group' for consideration/advice.	SJG

14.	The development of a database in the CR&MS Team to record details of those users and carers who are involved/have shown an interest in consultative processes.	BH
15.	The establishment of a six monthly cycle of consultation and feedback sessions between the Director Of Social Services and key representative groups and voluntary sector organisations.	BH
16.	We will collate information on unmet need derived from individual assessment processes.	SJG
17.	We will report the issues and findings from the departmental complaints process to the Senior Management team on a six monthly basis.	BH
18.	Annually the findings from the engagement process will be reported to the Directorate's Senior Management Team, the relevant scrutiny committee and circulated to service users and carers who have expressed an interest in being updated on progress.	SJG/BH
19.	We will undertake an annual questionnaire survey of 10% of service users, using the format utilised by the Social Services Inspectorate, to gather views.	SJG
20.	Develop contract compliance measures to ensure service users and carer views support service monitoring.	SJG
	<b>Children</b>	
21.	Undertake a formal consultation process with Looked After Children and Care Leavers at least once in each financial year.	DJ
22.	We will hold quarterly consultation meetings with parents of children supported by the Children with Disabilities Team.	DJ
23.	Engage with Children & Young people who are looked after outside Blaenau Gwent to consider their views on the quality of their services	DJ
24.	Involve carers in the design of a retained carer scheme for children with complex disabilities	DJ
25.	Support participation events involving service users and carers in conjunction with the Framework Partnership.	DJ
26.	Seek to involve young people as a matter of routine in recruitment of staff	DJ
27.		
28.		
	<b>Adults</b>	
29.	We will hold quarterly meetings of the 50+ forum	RI
30.	We will hold an annual conference of the 50+ forum	RI
31.	We will hold quarterly focus group meetings in Augusta House	AP
32.	We will undertake a minimum of an annual satisfaction survey with Home Care and Residential Care Users.	AP
33.	We will support the 'Client Committees' in each adult services day care setting, with at least quarterly meetings.	LM
34.	We will support Mental Health carer and user engagement	LM
35.	We will support the learning disability User and Carer engagement Group	
36.	We will support the Physical disability Group when established.	

**Appendix 2**

<b>Who's Who?</b>	<b>Name/Title/Organisation</b>
<b>All</b>	All members of the User and Carer Engagement Group
<b>SJG</b>	<b>Stephen Gillingham</b> - Assistant Director Business Management
<b>LM</b>	<b>Liz Majer</b> -Assistant Director Adult Services
<b>DJ</b>	<b>David Johnston</b> - Assistant Director Children's Services
<b>BH</b>	<b>Brenda Hulbert</b> - Team Manager Customer Relations and Management Support Team in Social Services
<b>AP</b>	<b>Angela Penwill</b> - Service Manager Provider Services
<b>RB</b>	<b>Richard Bevan</b> - Director of Corporate Development and Partnerships, Blaenau Gwent Local Health Board
<b>KT</b>	<b>Kate Thomas</b> – Gwent Association Of Voluntary Organisations
<b>DR</b>	<b>David Rees</b> - Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations
<b>RS</b>	<b>Ruth Sinfield</b> - BGCBC Service Manager Children's Services
<b>RS</b>	<b>Rhiannon Seaward</b> - BGCBC Social Worker
<b>HT</b>	<b>Heather Tyrrell</b> - Service Manager Adult Services
<b>CP</b>	<b>Clive Phillips</b> - BGCBC Strategy Co-ordinator - Services to Older People
<b>RI</b>	<b>Ruth Isles</b> – Older people strategy Public/Participation Involvement Officer
<b>AP</b>	<b>Andrew Parker</b> - BGCBC Research Officer
<b>RJ</b>	<b>Roy Jones</b> - User Representative
<b>SH</b>	<b>Sharon Harford</b> - Communication Manager BGLHB



**Suggested Group Rules for Meetings**

- ❑ Switch off they're mobile telephones or put on silent.
- ❑ Respect each member at the meeting.
- ❑ Respect the value that each member, will bring to the meeting.
- ❑ Accept that everyone is different and will think differently about different things.
- ❑ Listen to each other and do not try to talk over the person who is speaking.
- ❑ Try not to interrupt the speaker, if you want to say something try to get the chair's attention.
- ❑ Only one person speak at a time (only one meeting being held at a TIME).
- ❑ Say your name before speaking.
- ❑ Use plain and simple English.
- ❑ If you do not understand what someone is saying, please ask them to repeat it or explain it. You are probably not the only person who does not understand.
- ❑ Be aware that covering your mouth when speaking might make it difficult for people to read your lips or hear what you are saying.
- ❑ Avoid jargon and say words in full, like Shaping Our Lives instead of SOL.
- ❑ Respect confidentiality.
- ❑ Be polite and do not be rude to each other. If you disagree about something concentrate on the issue and not the person involved.
- ❑ Make sure there are suitable breaks.

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*Suggested by a member of the User & Carer Consultation Strategy Engagement Group.*

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**Learning Disabilities Engagement/Consultation Guidance**

Suggested elements to consider that would demonstrate a commitment to enabling adults with a learning disability to contribute to consultation and policy development.

- Appropriate length of meetings
- Sight of agenda in good time to contribute to meetings
- Restriction of agenda to 1-2 specific items relevant to service user
- No jargon
- Short sentences
- Large print
- Use of symbols/pictures
- Concrete/relevant examples
- Option to opt in and out when relevant
- Option to involve a wide range of service users who have a particular interest in a topic
- Information needs to be in Braille
- At meetings there needs to be a signer

Suggested elements to consider that would demonstrate a commitment to enabling carers of adults with a learning disability to contribute to consultation and policy development.

- Meetings during the day
- Recognition of what is being given up to support their family member
- Recognition of the diversity of backgrounds that carers come from in Blaenau Gwent.
- Understand that some may not be able to express themselves in a meeting but have much to contribute in other ways.
- Recognition that they need an open forum away from service user to express their own needs.

*Suggested following discussions between a carer, a caseworker Advocacy Action Wales and the facilitator for Blaenau Gwent People First, December 2006.*

**GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

Service User	Someone who gets help from, or receives a service from Blaenau Gwent Social Services Department. It is recognised that some people who use social services prefer the term 'client'.
Carer	Someone who provides a substantial amount of care on an unpaid and regular basis to a relative, neighbour or friend who, for reasons of disability. Frailty of illness is unable to look after themselves independently.
Staff Member	An employee of the social services department.
Consultation	To maximise opportunities for the public to be informed, and to have their views heard and taken into account, before a decision is made
Engagement	Again there are many definitions for engagement, for the purposes of this strategy we have used this definition. Continuous dialogue about services based on the development and maintenance of relationships between social services and service users and carers built on shared understanding.
User & Carer Engagement Group	A group supported by social services to help implement the strategy.
Advocacy	Either you or somebody acting on your behalf taking action to help people say what they want, secure their rights, represent their interests and obtain the services they need.

*NB: The glossary will be added to as necessary based on feedback.*

## We Want Your Help!

Social Services in Blaenau Gwent needs service users and carers to help monitor and develop services. A 'User and Carer Engagement Strategy' has been developed for service users, carers and staff setting out what we want to do and how we want to do it.

Its aims to bring about change for the better by enabling the department to listen, learn, and improve, increasing the influence that service users and carers have.

We have some guiding principles that highlight:

- the importance of equality
- the diversity of people
- a clear sense of purpose
- effective methods for achieving change
- building on the skills and knowledge of all those involved
- commitment to learning for continuous improvement

Standards have been developed to guide how we meet the principles:

- Involvement of those who have an interest
- Support for those involved
- Planning how best to engage
- Methods that are most useful
- Working Together in the best way
- Sharing Information that is useful
- Working With Others who have an interest
- Improvement opportunities for those involved
- Feedback on the results
- Monitoring and Evaluation to see if we've met the standards

Each standard is supported by performance indicators that tell us about the evidence we can collect in order to see how well we have done.

If you would like to find out more, or get a full copy of the strategy, please contact:

Team Manager - Customer Relations and Management Support  
Social Services, Anvil Court, Church Street, Abertillery, NP13 1DB  
Tel. (01495) 355264

Or

Kate Thomas  
Health Social Care and Well Being Co-ordinator, GAVO,  
Education Centre, Festival Park Factory Shopping Village, Victoria, Ebbw Vale, NP23 8FP  
Tel: (01495) 306602