

Ethical Guidelines for Community Engagement

Our core principles:

- Research should aim to maximise benefit for individuals and society;
- Research should be conducted with integrity and transparency;
- The wellbeing and privacy of individuals and groups should be respected.

Protection from harm:

Council staff have a responsibility to make sure that the physical, social and psychological wellbeing of participants is not negatively affected by the community engagement activity.

- **Physical:** This involves keeping participants safe from physical harm. Community engagement activities should be carried out in safe locations. When using non-Council venues, staff should ensure there are unobstructed fire exits and should familiarise participants with the locations of fire exits and fire assembly points.
- **Social:** This requires staff to ensure that the community engagement activity will not have a harmful affect on participants' sense of belonging to their community. Staff should avoid any activity that risks causing conflict between neighbours or which singles out a particular thematic group, such as Gypsies and Travellers, migrants, religious groups, and young people.
- **Psychological:** Some community engagement activities may involve discussing potentially upsetting issues, such as income and employment, physical and mental wellbeing, looked after children, and racism and discrimination etc. Staff should be mindful that community engagement activities, which explore sensitive subjects, may cause significant distress, particularly when the activity is perceived as an unnecessary intrusion into the participants' private life. Staff should attempt, where possible, to find ways to minimise any distress caused to participants and signpost participants to relevant support agencies if needed.

Informed consent:

Participation in community engagement activities should be based on freely given informed consent. This requires staff to explain in appropriate detail, and in a language that participants understand: what the activity is about; why it is being carried out; and how the results will be used.

Extra care should be taken where participants are particular vulnerable because of factors such as age, disability, and physical or mental health. Staff should make sure

they are providing information that can be understood by vulnerable participants and ensure participants have the capacity to understand and consent to the activity.

Anonymity and Confidentiality:

Participants should be told to what extent anonymity and confidentiality can be guaranteed and should be able to object to the use of data gathering devices such as audio recorders, video cameras and photography.

Staff should ensure that data is not published or shared (both internally and externally) in a form that can directly or indirectly identify participants without their prior consent. Where appropriate and practicable, processes for upholding anonymity should be used, including the removal of identifiers such as, name, address, work place, etc. and the use of pseudonyms. Readily identifiable participants, such as community groups and high profile individuals, should be advised that it may be difficult to disguise their identity.

Any guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity given to participants must be kept, unless there are clear reasons to do otherwise – for example, the prevention of serious harm to the participant or to others.

Data should be stored in accordance to the Council's Data Protection Policy.

Managing expectations:

Staff should carefully and transparently manage the participants' expectations of the community engagement activity. The results of community engagement activities have the potential to inform Council policy and strategy, improve services and find solutions to community problems. It is important, however, to keep in mind that not all community engagement activities will bring a direct change or improvement to the lives of the participants or to the communities to which they belong. It is important for staff to be open and realistic about their expected outcomes and influence of the activity. This is especially important when engaging with socially excluded groups as if there is a misguided belief that the activity will bring about an improvement to their lives, and this improvement does not materialise, it is likely that it will cause mistrust of the Council and disillusionment with community engagement.