

ABERDEENSHIRE EDUCATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

ENGAGEMENT - A COMMUNICATION AND CONSULTATION STRATEGY

A partnership approach to communication and consultation within Aberdeenshire Education and Recreation Service

- 1 RATIONALE - Why do we need this strategy?
 - 1.1 **The purpose of this engagement strategy is to ensure that the right information is given to the right people, in the right way, at the right time and through the right channels.**
 - 1.2 This strategy incorporates the key values embedded within the ***Aberdeenshire Education and Recreation Commitment Statement (Appendix 1)***. Effective engagement with all partners will contribute to the overall Service aim of achievement of excellence.
 - 1.3 The Education and Recreation Service is committed to effective engagement at whole service and at local level. The prime purpose of this strategy is to provide a clear and supportive structure within which all service staff, service users and partner agencies can understand their role in effective communication and consultation.
 - 1.4 Positive engagement with all stakeholders within the service and with a wide range of partner agencies is essential in order to fully achieve our potential and to ensure that our core aims and values are maintained across Aberdeenshire.
 - 1.5 Active engagement is like an iceberg with only the top 20% visible and the other 80% helping to support the infrastructure on which a positive and participative information sharing culture can be built and sustained over time.
 - 1.6 Effective engagement depends on quality information management, the appropriate choice of communications channels and the willingness of all stakeholders to accept a shared responsibility for making communication work. In practical terms this strategy takes account of the guidance and methodologies outlined in the ***Aberdeenshire Council Consultation Strategy*** and the ***Aberdeenshire policy document on Comments, Compliments and Complaints***.
 - 1.7 Advances made in information technology provide many new ways of communicating but they also create new challenges. Traditional methods of communication still have an important part to play and this strategy is intended to facilitate a blend of established good practices in harmony with recent developments in electronic communications.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Aberdeenshire E&R Service acknowledges the value of constructive engagement with all stakeholders and partners in order to ensure that their voices are heard and that they have a real opportunity to influence the way in which the Education and Recreation Service is developed and delivered.
- 2.2 To be successful, engagement must become embedded firmly and routinely into all activities, driven by a service-wide commitment to best value and improvement. This commitment holds relevance at all levels within the service
- 2.3 Aberdeenshire E&R Service will engage with all partners and stakeholders, not only because we are required to do so in terms of best value, but because it values the opinions of all involved across the wide spectrum of service provision.
- 2.4 As highlighted in the Aberdeenshire E&R Service Commitment Statement – *‘We shall challenge ourselves to secure continuous improvement. We shall support each other in striving for the addition of further value in all that we do’.*
- 2.5 Although effective engagement with stakeholders and partners is an improvement strategy in its own right, it also contributes to wider aspects of strategic improvement within Aberdeenshire E&R Service and, at corporate level, to strategic improvements driven by Aberdeenshire Council.
- 2.6 The Aberdeenshire E&R Service Plan does not stand-alone. It contributes to a wide range of other strategic and operational plans including:
- *other council service plans*
 - *community plan*
 - *area plans*
 - *health improvement plans*
 - *integrated children’s services plan*
- 2.7 Effective engagement with stakeholders and partners is thus a key component of the development planning and quality improvement cycle. Effective engagement also contributes to the ongoing evaluation of all that we do as an individual service and in partnership with other services and agencies.
- 2.8 As with engagement, evaluation is a blend of internal and external aspects. The HMle inspection of the E&R Service in 2005 is an example of a wide-ranging external evaluation process and the Employee Attitude Survey, conducted in the same year is an example of a more focused, internal evaluation. However, both evaluation processes highlighted the importance of effective and systematic communication and consultation at all levels within the service and with all stakeholders and partner agencies involved in the complex development-planning matrix in Aberdeenshire.
- 2.9 Following on from the Employee Attitude Survey a Communications Kaizen Team was established to consider practical ways of improving ‘in-house’ communication within the service. More detailed information about the outcomes of the Kaizen event is provided in **Appendix 2**.

- 2.10 Although this document outlines the Aberdeenshire E&R Service strategic approach to effective engagement it is vital to acknowledge that engagement reaches out beyond the service into many inter-related aspects of partnership and inter-agency working, much of which has been driven by the emerging integrated children's services agenda. As the pace and extent of partnership working increases so does the importance of establishing and maintaining robust and effective lines of engagement with all of our partner agencies.

3 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES – What do we want to achieve via this strategy?

- 3.1 This strategy aims to maximise the effectiveness of engagement between all levels within Aberdeenshire Education and Recreation Service and with a wide range of **Key Stakeholders** (as outlined in **Appendix 3**)
- 3.2 The overall aim of the strategy is to ensure that across all aspects of the Education and Recreation Service there are clearly defined approaches to communication and consultation in all establishments and services.
- 3.3 This strategy is intended to promote a positive, organisational culture of openness and honesty based on a shared acceptance of responsibility for embedding effective engagement principles into normal day-to-day working practices.

4 ENGAGEMENT BUILT ON EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND CONSULTATION

- 4.1 Communication and consultation are two different, but closely linked processes. At this early stage in the document it is important to examine the relationship between them.

4.2 A definition of 'Communication'

Communication is the process of listening to, involving, advising and informing employees, children and young people, parents and a wide variety of other partners and stakeholders in the local community on matters of relevance to them

4.3 A definition of 'Consultation'

Consultation is the process of actively providing stakeholders with an opportunity to contribute to the decision-making process. Having canvassed opinion, consultation also provides an opportunity for all participants to receive meaningful feedback.

4.4 The inter-relationship between communication and consultation

Communication is about the transmission of information. As such it is a distinct and separate process to 'consultation' which is more about the sharing and exchange of ideas in order to shape policy development. In practice, the relationship between the two processes is very close. **Effective consultation is built upon effective communication.**

- 4.5 Effective communication and consultation is a collective responsibility involving all who work in and alongside the Education and Recreation Service. **It is vital that each is regarded as a two-way process.** They are also multi-dimensional in that there is a need for staff to inform and consult each other, parents, pupils, the local community and other services and agencies as appropriate.
- 4.6 Everyone therefore has a responsibility to communicate effectively and a right to participate in consultation – **it is not solely a 'top-down' process.** There is a need for senior management of the Education and Recreation Service to receive information from all stakeholders in order to inform decision-making. Local stakeholders will be uniquely aware of the circumstances and views which exist within their own areas of operation and without effective communication much of this valuable information and opinion may be lost.

5 INTERNAL & EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The communication improvement plan agreed by the Communication Kaizen team relates mainly to internal communication issues. This strategy, however, is targeted more widely to address many aspects of communications and consultation, both internally and externally.
- 5.2 Many of the issues highlighted in this strategic approach relate primarily to aspects of internal communication and consultation. Many of the issues on which communication and consultation take place will, by necessity, relate to factors linked to our 'core business' of the education and personal development of children and young people. This emphasis does not diminish the value of work being carried out by the Education and Recreation Service with adults
- 5.3 However, in recent years there has been a strong drive towards a more integrated approach to the planning and provision of services for children, young people and their families. This has led to a high level of joint working between the Education and Recreation Service and a wide variety of partner services and agencies including Housing and Social Work, NHS Grampian, Grampian Police and a range of Voluntary Organisations.
- 5.4 At the heart of the integration agenda is the belief that all children and young people will learn and develop and have their needs met more effectively within a local community which can address their needs holistically. Schools have an important role to play at local level in working with other local service providers to plan for an integrated approach to meeting the needs of all children and young people within individual Community School Network areas.
- 5.5 At whole-authority level, the Education and Recreation Service has a key strategic role in working with other services and agencies to build and sustain effective partnership agreements which will facilitate effective and consistent joint working practices to flourish across Aberdeenshire.
- 5.6 Effective engagement underpins effective partnership working. Two-way communication and consultation between partner agencies is the cement which makes working partnerships stronger. Mutual understanding of the views, priorities and needs of other partners is a pre-requisite of working towards a shared vision of how to provide high quality services for all children, young people and their families. Substantial partnership working currently takes place around issues such as:

- *Integrated Children's Services Planning*
- *Integrated Assessment Framework*
- *Additional Support for Learning*
- *Child Protection*
- *Health Improvement and Health Promotion*
- *Community Schools Networks*
- *Children's Executive strategy groups*
- *Development of protocols for a Joint Children's Services Management Group*
- *Community Planning*
- *Joint School/College provision*
- *Curriculum for Excellence development*
- *Enterprise Education*
- *Community Learning Partnership*
- *Community Development Groups*
- *Aberdeenshire Sports Council Initiatives*
- *Arts Forum activities*
- *Grampian Information collaboration*
- *Adult Literacies*
- *Childcare*
- *Community Safety*
- *Youth Justice*

5.7 This strategy thus sets engagement within the context of:

- *Internal and external issues*
- *Local and central approaches*
- *Two-way flow of information*
- *Partnership working with other service providers*

6 THE 3 'R's – Relationships, Recognition and Resources

Within the Education and Recreation Service all engagement activity will be driven by the following concepts:

6.1 IMPROVED RELATIONSHIPS

We will build effective relationships with all stakeholders through targeted communication messages and tools which enable stakeholders to better understand, and contribute to, our role, activities, priorities, progress and future plans. This will:

- *Enable better informed decision-making*
- *Make education and recreation services more responsive to local need*
- *Increase stakeholder satisfaction*
- *Drive internal organisational culture change related to communication*
- *Manage expectations and lead to positive perceptions of the service*
- *Make our services more accessible and accountable*
- *Lead to more effective partnership working*

6.2 INCREASED RECOGNITION

We will establish firmly in stakeholders minds an Aberdeenshire Education and Recreation Service 'brand' by clearly and confidently setting out our vision and values, translating them into stakeholder experiences and celebrating our successes. This will:

- *Act as a driving force for quality service delivery and improved all-round performance.*
- *Provide accessible, high quality and stakeholder-friendly information*
- *Create a positive, high profile for Aberdeenshire Education and Recreation Service as an effective communicator and a successful, high performing service.*
- *Create a clear identity for the service based on its vision and values*
- *Enable central leadership and local delivery to flourish*

6.3 EFFECTIVE USE OF RESOURCES

We will develop and expand our engagement capacity through better management of all aspects of communication and consultation and focused use of specialist expertise. This will:

- *Improve central management and co-ordination of communications*
- *Strengthen communications capability*
- *Ensure time and money spent on communications represents best value*
- *Improve communications performance and consistency of standards*
- *Facilitate local decision-making within the context of central policies*
- *Make best use of corporate media services*
- *Support the Service's efforts to be an excellent employer*

7 OUR COMMUNICATIONS FRAMEWORK

7.1 Taking account of the geographic complexity of Aberdeenshire, the range of functions provided by the Education and Recreation Service and the wide range of issues around which partnership working with other services takes place, it would be a difficult task to map all of the communication links together with the nature of the information that they should carry and the purposes they serve.

7.2 **The Communications Framework (Appendix 4)** gives an overview of how various component parts of the communication network interlink enabling an effective flow of information and ideas between all relevant partners. The Communications Framework is based upon the following principles:

- Effective communication enables individuals to play a **meaningful role** in the service .
- *Communication is a **shared responsibility** requiring all who work with and within the service to communicate effectively.*
- Information at all times should be **relevant, accurate, consistent**, understandable and delivered at the appropriate time.
- *To be accessible, relevant and meaningful to the needs of different groups of stakeholders, attention should be given to the **choice of format** or medium used to report information as well as to the style of written documents, including the use of Plain English and / or ethnic / community languages.*
- To ensure key messages are clearly understood and points of doubt clarified, opportunities for **two-way communication** and personalised discussion should be optimised.
- *While **formal** meetings may have many advantages (immediate transmission of information to large audiences, face-to-face communication, the facility to convey large complex information, to clarify and to receive feedback), they are an expensive medium of communication and it is a collective responsibility to ensure that meeting time is used as effectively as possible.*

- A great deal of information is shared within every organisation at the **informal** level, (the main advantages being that it is direct, immediate and efficient). It is important that a balance is struck between formal and informal communication.
- *In finding the **balance between formal and informal communication** it is vital to recognise situations where formal communication is essential (eg where there is an issue of child, young person or adult welfare, where there is a legal dimension, where several parties are involved and need the same information at their disposal, where issues relating to staff working conditions are involved). In such situations it follows that formal communication should be supported by a minute or note of a meeting and the use of letters, memos or newsletters as appropriate.*

8 COMMUNICATION WILL WORK MORE EFFECTIVELY WHEN:

- Information is communicated to appropriate key stakeholders at a time and in a way that is welcomed and seen as being complementary to day-to-day work and not as an unexpected 'add-on'.
- Feedback is encouraged from stakeholders and can be demonstrated to have helped to inform decision-making and improved service delivery.
- All stakeholders respond to written communications within agreed timescales.
- All stakeholders are aware who to contact (and how to make contact) when making formal and informal enquiries or complaints.
- Stakeholders are enabled, and motivated to share and discuss with each other, information and issues at both strategic and operational levels.
- All stakeholders accept an element of personal responsibility for helping to promote the Education and Recreation Service as a 'good communicator'

9 CONSULTATION WILL WORK MORE EFFECTIVELY WHEN:

- The service is clear about why it consulting and why it is targeting specific stakeholders – ie consultation is set within an appropriate context
- The consultation mechanisms used are differentiated to cater for the specific needs of stakeholder groups
- Stakeholders feel that their views will make a difference at all levels of service operation
- The agreed Council protocol and Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers (LNCT) agreements for consultation with Trade Unions is observed
- Every effort is made to consult with 'hard to reach' groups
- A balance is maintained between formal and informal consultation
- Staff in management positions are considered to be approachable and accessible to staff and other stakeholders to maximise opportunities for informal consultation
- Consultation exercises are run efficiently, encourage maximum participation and provide best value for money
- Consultation exercises result in clear recommendations for actions that are implemented or provide clear feedback explaining why recommendations were not implemented.
- Consultation is built into ongoing service planning and best value review cycles of the service.

10 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR MAKING COMMUNICATION AND CONSULTATION WORK EFFECTIVELY

This section outlines the key roles and responsibilities of specific stakeholder groups

10.1 Councillors and other Committee Members

Elected Members of the Council and other Members of the Education and Recreation Committee and Sub-Committees have final responsibility for all Policy decisions. They are consulted to ensure that such decisions are reached based on full consideration of all relevant information including the outcomes of consultation. They will be advised in their decision-making by the Director of Education and Recreation and other Chief Officers of the Council

10.2 Education and Recreation Service Directorate Management Team

The Directorate Management Team will ensure:

- That they create an ethos which promotes consultation and communication which encourages stakeholders to share their views about specific aspects of service provision
- That Elected Members are provided with essential and appropriate information to inform their decision-making and to support them in the discharge of their community responsibilities
- That there are opportunities for stakeholders to contribute to shaping policy and practice
- That the agreed Council protocol for consultation with Trade Unions and LNCT agreements is observed
- Mechanisms are in place to provide feedback on the outcomes of consultation
- A strategic overview of consultation activity is maintained
- That effective communication and consultation procedures and practices are in place and are used appropriately and consistently across the service and that their effectiveness is reviewed regularly
- That strategic decisions are communicated appropriately to stakeholder groups
- Plans for the continuous improvement of the service are regularly and widely consulted upon and distributed in a range of paper and electronic formats.
- Reports on service performance are prepared and shared on time and made as widely available as possible

10.3 Heads of Establishment and Service Managers

While responsibility for decisions within educational establishments rests with the Head Teacher and within other services with Service Managers, there is an expectation that appropriate consultation will have taken place. In deciding the level and means of consultation, the following principles will be considered:

- *That an ethos is created which promotes consultation and communication and encourages stakeholders to share their views on service issues*
- *The opportunity is available for all relevant stakeholder groups to be involved*
- *That the time commitment required by stakeholders is acknowledged*
- *That the timescale required for responses has been planned and is realistic*
- *That the number of other consultation exercises being undertaken has been considered*

Communication and consultation mechanisms used should be varied, flexible and appropriate to the circumstances and needs of specific stakeholder groups. In schools, for example, a wide variety of mechanisms for communication and consultation exist and these are detailed in **Appendix 5**.

10.4 All Staff

All staff have a responsibility to participate, within the available time, in consultation and communication processes in line with Council Policy; to make themselves familiar with Policy and procedures and to participate in appropriate related staff development activity. All staff should work towards improvements in their own communication activities and maintain good communication practices in their own areas of responsibility.

All staff should ensure that they give and receive accurate and up-to-date information in relation to their own job and for any staff for whom they are responsible.

All staff should promote the use of Plain English in their work.

10.5 Parents

Parents have a key role to play in terms of engagement, not only with individual schools, but with wider aspects of the Education and Recreation Service. Depending on the age structure of their families, many parents will need to engage with more than one school – primary and secondary - at a given time. Many parents may also have children simultaneously at different stages within the same school.

Over time, parents build up vast knowledge and experience of schools and school systems and it is vital that formal and informal lines of engagement exist in order to encourage and facilitate parents in sharing their views and experiences, not only with schools but with other parents. Parents have an interest in and a responsibility for individual pupils but collectively they can also contribute a valid wider community viewpoint. Individual parents can:

- *Make direct contact with the school in relation to any issue impacting on their child*
- *Read all information booklets, leaflets and newsletters provided by the school*
- *Contact the school if they have any views they wish to share as a result of reading the above materials*
- *Respond to specific questionnaires and surveys issued by the school*
- *Attend events such as parents' evening and open evenings*
- *Support events eg school productions which form an important part of the wider school curriculum*
- *Reinforce to their children that, as a parent, they do take a direct interest in the wider educational process and thus maximise the chances of the child sharing that interest.*
- *Participate in a range of School Bodies, such as Parent-Teacher Association, School board, Parent Forum*

10.6 Children and Young People

The rights of children and young people to be consulted on matters which affect them have been set in legislation (Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000). This requires schools and other service providers to take account of the views of children on a range of matters such as school improvement planning, curriculum changes.

Many children and young people have a strong sense of social responsibility and have great enthusiasm and willingness to participate in consultation. A range of forums already exists for information sharing, feedback and more formal consultation. These include:

- *Pupil Councils in Schools*
- *Local Youth Forums*
- *Aberdeenshire Youth Forum*
- *'Planning For Real' Events*
- *Surveys and questionnaires*
- *Local Youth and Community Groups*
- *Various on-line and interactive sites*

10.7 Other stakeholders

As outlined in **Appendix 3 (Key Stakeholders)** a wide range of external agencies and professionals contribute significantly to the life and work of our schools and communities. Similarly, many within the Education and Recreation Service contribute to developments initiated by other partner agencies. Taking account of the extent to which partnership working has developed it would not be practical to involve all other agencies in all aspects of E&R communication and consultation, nor would we expect them to include E&R in this way.

However, all partners, including the E&R Service, have a shared responsibility to recognise when, and on which issues, effective engagement should take place. This may involve discussion of and agreement about:

- *Issues and developments around which partnership engagement should take place*
- *Which partners have an interest in specific issues*
- *Who will take the lead in initiating engagement*
- *What form of engagement will be most effective*
- *When will specific aspects of engagement be scheduled*
- *How will the outcomes of engagement be used to help inform future development planning and improvement*

11 RESOURCES

- 11.1 There are real costs and resource implications for all consultation and communication activities, the most significant being time. Activities require to be managed to ensure efficient and effective use is made of people's time and effort. In particular, Head Teachers and Service Managers must ensure that proper consideration is given to staff conditions of service when organising communication or consultation activities. All staff have only limited hours in which to undertake their respective duties and communication and consultation activities should take place within agreed working time arrangements or on INSET days.
- 11.2 Production, distribution and analysis of questionnaires have measurable costs and these should be evaluated carefully at the planning stage.

12 CONSULTATION IN ACTION

- 12.1 There is a legal requirement to consult in areas identified in the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000. It is thus essential to establish a clear strategy on consultation that recognises the already well-established good practice that exists on effective consultation with Aberdeenshire Education and Recreation Service.
- 12.2 The 21st Century education system is built on collegiate approaches that fully recognise the role of all stakeholders. Consultation is the key process that facilitates this through drawing on the knowledge, expertise and experience of all involved. In addition, it is a practical demonstration of how recognition of local factors and the expertise of practitioners can help to shape policy development.
- 12.3 **At Service level consultation will take place on:**
- *Identification of local improvement objectives and measures of performance*
 - *Strategic Health and Safety issues*
 - *The content of Standard Circulars*
 - *Specific processes, approaches and strategies*
 - *Matters that may result in a change in provision, such as school rationalisation*
 - *Issues relating to promoted post structures, including those in establishments*
- 12.4 **At Establishment level consultation will take place on matters such as:**
- *School development plans*
 - *Production of Standards and Quality Reports*
 - *School Policies*
- 12.5 A decision on the form of consultation exercises lies with senior managers, including Head Teachers. Such decisions should at all times be taken within agreed policy on these matters. Critical amongst these decisions must be the identification of the key stakeholders and this, in turn, will depend on the topic on which consultation is to take place. Similar decisions will have to be taken in relation to the most appropriate method of consultation.

13 EXTERNAL CONSULTATION

- 13.1 External consultations are generated from sources such as the Scottish Executive, COSLA, Learning and Teaching Scotland and various other national and local bodies. As a result significant burdens can be placed on Service staff when multiple consultation requests, often uncoordinated, arrive within the same timeframe.
- 13.2 The E&R Directorate Management Team aims to minimise the impact on establishments and services by offering groups (eg Head Teachers, Community School Networks, Senior Officer Groups) and a range of other representative groups the opportunity to prepare joint responses on behalf of the Service. This will not infringe on the right of individuals or establishments to make their own responses, should they so wish.

14 CONSULTATION AT AUTHORITY LEVEL

- 14.1 For the Authority, section 5 of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000 identifies the following stakeholder groups in relation to the annual statement of Improvement Objectives:
- *Local bodies representative of teachers*
 - *Local bodies representative of parents*
 - *Local bodies representative of ancillary staff*
 - *Children and young people*
 - *Other persons 'with an interest' in educational improvement*

15 AUTHORITY CONSULTATION WITH STAFF

- 15.1 Authority consultation with local bodies representative of staff at informal and formal levels:
- *Informal contacts in relation to issues of shared concern*
 - *The Education and Recreation Joint Consultative Committee*
 - *The Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers*
 - *The Education and Recreation Health and Safety Consultative Group*
 - *The Education and Recreation Committee (includes Teacher Representation)*
- 15.2 These forums represent a considerable commitment to consulting staff and complement the more general involvement of staff in working groups and seminars which involve the exchange of views on a very wide range of working practice issues. They are also integral to a structured Council approach to consultation which recognises the importance and value of timeous and effective consultation arrangements. **Appendix 8(a) and 8(b)**

16 AUTHORITY CONSULTATION WITH PARENTS

- 16.1 The main mechanisms through which the Authority consults with parents are:
- *Parents' representative on the Education and Recreation Committee*
 - *Parent representatives on development groups*
 - *Direct communication between individual schools and parents in relation to specific issues*
 - *Website for parents developed in partnership with NHS Grampian.*

- *Ongoing discussion regarding an appropriate structure and role for future parent councils*

17 AUTHORITY CONSULTATION WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

17.1 These are some examples of the many ways in which the views of children and young people can be expressed and taken into account across the Authority:

- *Aberdeenshire Youth Forum*
- *Youth Conferences and events led by Community Learning and Development*
- *Planning For Real events*
- *Input to specific sections of the Integrated Children's Services Plan*
- *Questionnaires and surveys*
- *Internet/Text Messaging*

18 AUTHORITY CONSULTATION WITH OTHER PERSONS 'WITH AN INTEREST'

18.1 The Authority consults on an ongoing basis with a wide variety of organisations which have an interest in education and children and young people. The specific form of consultation depends on the special interest of individual organisations / agencies / services and the nature of the issue on which consultation takes place.

18.2 At a time of substantial development within the context of Integrated Children's Services Planning and joint service provision there are many existing forums through which consultation takes place. These include Aberdeenshire Children's Executive (and its eight Strategy Groups) and the emerging Aberdeenshire Community Health Partnership. A more detailed list of key external stakeholders is given in **Appendix 3**.

19 CONSULTATION INVOLVING HEADS OF ESTABLISHMENT

19.1 Head Teachers have a major role to play in terms of contributing experience during planning and development phases and in actually implementing change. They therefore deserve to be fully consulted in most areas of educational change and development. The Authority will consult Head Teachers in the following ways:

- *Head Teachers' meetings*
- *Cluster Group meetings*
- *Membership of working groups*
- *Surveys and questionnaires*
- *Email and web technology*

19.2 Head Teachers' meetings are scheduled on a two-monthly basis and cover a range of business, educational development and quality issues. They are thus the principal mechanism by which heads of establishment may be consulted as a group.

19.3 Cluster Group meetings are an intermediate stage between the Authority and establishment-based consultations. Membership may typically include Head Teachers from all schools (Primary, Special and Secondary) within an individual Community School Network. The meetings may also include, as appropriate, the Education Network Manager and Educational Psychologists with responsibility for that specific cluster of schools. Cluster Group meetings provide an effective means of consultation and topics for discussion may include:

- *Local applications of strategic decisions made at Authority level*
- *Matters of shared concern, such as community-based issues*
- *Matters related to transfer of relevant information between establishments*
- *Issues where a decision made in one school may affect others in the cluster*
- *Joint development issues eg shared curricular development*

20 CONSULTATION AT ESTABLISHMENT LEVEL

20.1 For establishments the following stakeholders are identified in Section 6 of the Act in relation to school development planning:

- *The School Board*
- *Teaching staff employed in the school*
- *Ancillary staff employed in the school*
- *Volunteers working in the school on an unpaid basis*
- *Local bodies representing teachers*
- *Local bodies representing ancillary staff*
- *Local bodies representing parents of pupils attending the school*

20.2 The 2000 Act requires that schools produce plans on how they intend to consult pupils and involve them in the everyday running of the school. It is already well-established practice that schools consult pupils on a wide range of issues using some form of Pupil Council or equivalent, the specific nature of which will be age / stage and school specific. It is thus an establishment-based decision on how pupils will be consulted.

20.3 The statutory requirement to consult for the groups considered within this section only extends to the area of development planning. However, there is a statutory requirement to consult children on the decisions that affect them, so it would be good practice to consult other groups on a similar basis.

20.4 All staff should be appropriately consulted on issues that influence their immediate working lives. The main focus for this is the development planning process whereby staff can expect to be consulted on all aspects of the development, implementation and review of the School Plan. Within the ethos of this strategy however, consultation could be extended to other key management issues which will affect the immediate working lives of staff eg discussion on how outcomes and targets will be achieved. Such consultation should include any visiting staff, support for learning, instrumental instructors or peripatetic teachers.

20.5 The statutory nature of consultation implies that consultation at establishment level requires to have a degree of formality. LNCT agreements in relation to consultation and agreement with teaching staff on the school development plan should be adhered to. Although it is appropriate that establishments determine at local level how in-house consultation should be structured, broad guidelines are outlined in **Appendix 6 (Guidelines for Consultation and Communication in Schools)**

21 ENGAGEMENT AS A BY-PRODUCT OF DAY-TO-DAY WORKING

- 21.1 Sections 14 – 22 of this document outline the way in which consultation will take place at different levels within the E&R Service and with different groups each with their own responsibilities for children and young people. The section which follows focuses on various simple, low-cost and low-maintenance ways by which staff throughout the service can be genuinely engaged in two-way information sharing and should complement the formal agreements for consultation with teaching staff.
- 21.2 **Agendas and minutes** for planned meetings are a simple yet effective vehicle for sharing information. Individual participants (stakeholders) are more likely to accept an element of personal responsibility and commitment for the outcomes of the meeting if they are provided with the opportunity to contribute to the agenda.
- 21.2.1 It is the responsibility of the person chairing the meeting to ensure that all participants are given appropriate notice of the meeting and a reasonable time within which to suggest agenda items. All participants should have the agenda and all relevant associated documents prior to the meeting. At the outset of the meeting there should be clarification of who will take the minutes of the meeting. Following the meeting the minute should be issued to all who were invited to attend. Appropriate timescales and deadlines for all of the above stages should be agreed by all involved.
- 21.2.2 Electronic communication has enabled agendas and minutes to be exchanged quickly and simply between groups who have a shared interest in issues discussed. However, it is important to safeguard the interest of colleagues who do not have direct access to ICT resources. On an agreed basis, agendas and minutes could be exchanged between:
- *Senior management teams and departmental / section managers*
 - *Faculty / departmental / section groups within the same establishment*
 - *Appropriate combinations of working and strategic planning and development groups*
- 21.2.3 Within establishments with a large number of departments it may not be practical to circulate copies of all minutes exchanged with all other departments to all members of staff. In such circumstances, the minimum requirement would be for all members of the department / section to know where the exchanged minutes are stored and how to access them. It would be the responsibility of the departmental / section head to recognise issues included in exchanged minutes which should be brought to the attention of the team and for these issues to be highlighted at team meetings.
- 21.3 **Roles and responsibilities of representatives on committees / working groups** – all members of staff who serve as representative members on such groups have a personal responsibility to feedback appropriate levels of information on the activities of these groups to the stakeholder group they represent.
- 21.3.1 There is no set format for this and the level of feedback and the mechanism of feedback will depend on factors such as the issue being developed, frequency of meetings, number and location of stakeholders being represented.

21.3.2 Feedback may be given by circulation of minutes or by a brief summary of the main issues agreed. As with exchange of agendas and minutes, every effort should be made to simplify this task via use of electronic communication.

21.4 **Team activities** provide a natural opportunity for effective communication and consultation. Engagement and interaction between team members is an important team building activity in its own right. Team development activities focused on improving communication within the team will clearly have a beneficial 'knock-on' effect on all other aspects of teamwork.

21.4.1 Whilst collective responsibility is acknowledged as an important aspect of team development, team working also facilitates individual team members taking lead responsibility for summarising the collective view of the team in terms of consultative issues and for taking responsibility for being a two-way conduit of information for that team in relation to specific agreed issues.

21.4.2 Within establishment's individual members of staff may be members of various different teams thus increasing the number and range of stakeholders being represented. As an example, a secondary Head Teacher may attend the following team meetings, each with its own range of agenda items, priorities for development and frequency of meetings:

- *Senior management team meetings*
- *Departmental Heads meetings*
- *Support for Learners team meetings*
- *Cluster group meetings*
- *Community School Network meetings*
- *Head Teachers' meetings*
- *Authority working group*

Cross-membership of teams and working groups provides many valuable opportunities for exchange of information and cross-fertilisation of ideas and opinions.

22 FORMAL CONSULTATION EXERCISES CARRIED OUT BY THE E&R SERVICE

22.1 The Aberdeenshire Council Consultation Strategy (Appendix B) sets out clear guidelines for all council services in relation to the practicalities of formal consultation.

22.2 The E&R service will identify a designated individual – a consultation co-ordinator – with responsibility to co-ordinate and audit consultation exercises carried out by the service.

22.3 The E&R Service will also identify a lead officer for each consultation exercise who will be responsible for ensuring adherence to the principles set out in the Aberdeenshire Council Consultation Strategy. Personnel Service representation is required for consultations relating to staffing matters.

- 22.4 Prior to the planning of a consultation exercise, the consultation co-ordinator in corporate communications will check with the MS Access Corporate Communications consultations database and the consultation databases in Lotus Notes to ensure there is no overlap, duplication or scheduling conflict with other planned consultation exercises.
- 22.5 The consultation co-ordinator will also establish whether the planned consultation may generate a better quality and quantity response and be more cost-effective if run in tandem with an existing consultation.
- 22.6 The lead officer for the consultation in question should draw up a consultation brief / terms of reference clearly setting out the objectives of the consultation exercise, how it is to be carried out, who is to be consulted, how the exercise is to be resourced, timescales and mechanisms for feeding back the results to the various participants. This brief is to be produced in accordance with the Best Practice guidelines as established and promoted by the consultation co-ordinator.
- 22.7 The consultation co-ordinator will then work with the lead officer for the consultation exercise and colleagues in the Corporate Communications Unit to prepare the necessary pre-consultation publicity programme.
- 22.8 The consultation co-ordinator will advise on the design and format of the consultation process in accordance with communications and consultation best practice.
- 22.9 Post-consultation feedback to the various target audiences is to be scheduled by the consultation co-ordinator with the agreement of the consultation lead officer. The Corporate Communications Unit will advise and lead on preparation of appropriate publicity for the consultation results.
- 22.10 The feedback of results, findings and subsequent actions the consultees and wider audiences is to form an integral part of Aberdeenshire Council's Corporate Communications Strategy. The consultation database in Lotus Notes must be used for recording the outcomes of the consultation exercise. This allows the consultation exercise to be shared across all council services.
- 22.11 When planning consultation, equality issues must be considered. Advice on equalities can be obtained from the Policy Officer (equalities) or the E&R Service representative on the corporate equalities group. Helpful documentation includes Aberdeenshire Council Personnel Policy: Equalities and Aberdeenshire Council Personnel Briefing: Access to Work
- 22.12 To assist lead officers with the planning and evaluation of consultations, a checklist (**Consultation Project Evaluation Sheet**) has been produced and is attached as **Appendix 7** of this document.