



## **St Helena Government Consultation Policy**

### **1. Background**

During the election period, prospective Councillors reported that, amongst other things, constituents wanted better engagement from them, and also to seek to speed up the processes for bringing about changes. A workshop held with previous Councillors in 2016 also highlighted some of these issues. This new consultation policy sets out some ways in which better consultation with the public could be achieved.

Evidence shows that where a community is consulted meaningfully ahead of making significant changes to services or laws, the delivery of that service better meets their needs. An empowered community better holds its Elected Members to account and consultation is one means to foster a productive relationship between the state and the citizen.

Consultation and engagement has never been more important on St Helena. It not only underpins our vision for a Territory where people play an active role and influence services, but it is also needed to ensure that Government and its partners provide the right services and legal framework, at the right time, in the right places.

Everyone on St Helena deserves the best services we can offer, and Government and its partners are committed to delivering efficient and effective public services which are designed and delivered in a way that meets the needs of all of the community, including children and young people, NGOs and other groups that are often under-represented.

### **2. New Approach**

To meet the challenges ahead Government has developed **a new approach to consultation and engagement.**

We recognise the importance of improving customer satisfaction - listening to and engaging with all the community, including children and young people and those groups that are often under-represented, including older people, disabled people and other vulnerable members of our community- effectively using the intelligence we gather, and enabling residents to influence service delivery. We must also look to support people with sensory impairments so that they can also be included.

We have taken key steps to ensure a good understanding of the importance of consultation and engagement and how to do it well, and have developed methods of involving local people in settings and decision making. We have developed many examples of good practice in our efforts to ensure that our consultation and engagement is inclusive, but we recognise that we need to go further to make sure we do not over or under consult.

We acknowledge the need to coordinate our consultation and engagement activities more effectively, achieve greater efficiencies and value for money and ensure that we maintain

consistently high standards in what we do. It is also important that the information presented to the public is clear and accessible.

We also know that we must do more to ensure that we feedback the results of our consultation and engagement and do much more to ensure local people know what it is we did with the information we gathered from them and how this has changed the services we provide.

Corporate Services will compile a consultation register that will set out and manage consultations to avoid duplication and fatigue. This will be agreed by Elected Members and will be published on the SHG website as well as hard copies in key public buildings such as the Public Library and the Customer Service Centre. Before a consultation begins, a brief will be produced that will spell out that rationale for the policy/legislation, how it will impact on the community in terms of socially, economically and environmentally.

To achieve this we must also do more to evaluate the effectiveness of our consultation and engagement activities and, in an open and inclusive way, take steps to change and improve what we do.

We have therefore built our consultation policy around five key objectives, focusing on:

- (1) Ensuring that there is a clear understanding of, and commitment to consultation and engagement, by Elected Members and Officers
- (2) Ensuring that the views of local people are used to set priorities and influence policy and decision making
- (3) Ensuring consultation and engagement is inclusive, well-coordinated, achieves value for money and meets high quality standards
- (4) Providing clear and timely feedback following all consultation and engagement through a two way communication process; namely providing clear, customer friendly, information on what the consultation is about, how this will affect the Island
- (5) Achieving continuous improvement by learning from the evaluation of all significant consultation and engagement activity.

As part of our new approach to consultation and engagement, we will aim to develop stronger more effective relationships with all groups that can help us to reach a wider audience.

This is set out below in diagram 1:



### 3. Aims of the Policy

As a Government we are committed to a single vision for engagement and empowerment. Our aim is to build and support a strong, active and inclusive community on St Helena and to encourage people to take an active part in making decisions and influencing services across the Island.

The policy is designed to allow a range of consultation processes to take place, however, this must be balanced against the following:

1. ***Consultation fatigue***
2. ***Ensuring we do not over consult***
3. ***Being realistic about the influence groups will have on a particular decision***

The policy will allow for an appropriate consultation approach that will be determined by the changes or developments being proposed. Minor changes will require light touch consultation.

### 4. Purpose of the Policy

This policy has been developed to support the range of strategies and plans that Government, stakeholders and partners have and will produce to support our National 10 Year Plan and the Vision for St Helena. For Government, the policy will also play a key role in helping to achieve the priorities set out in the 10 Year Plan, Strategic Plans and Directorate Operational Plans.

We will:

Introduce ways of working which will enable the community to shape the Government's agenda, so that we have a shared understanding of what Government needs to do on the ground

- Engage with all communities, in a variety of ways, particularly under-represented groups, minority groups and Non-Government Organisations
- Make our community engagement and consultation more purposeful. Some issues, for example, domestic abuse, powers of arrest are not appropriate for consultation. We will make judgements about when and where to consult. And we will learn to link consultation and community engagement more effectively with strategic planning and decision making within Government
- Develop a more coordinated and consistent approach to consultation and community engagement across Government, and
- Improve the quality of our consultation and community engagement practice. We will consult on broad principles of, for example, changes to the law rather than line by line text

## **5. Policy Objectives**

- To ensure that we clearly understand the views of residents and other stakeholders about the services and activities of Government, that local residents are involved in, identifying local needs and that we understand the priorities of local residents
- To ensure that the result of our consultation and engagement is used effectively to help Government test options for service change and consider public views on conflicting priorities and resource decisions. We recognise that consultation and engagement can result in a wide range of views and that decision making involves hearing a wide range of opinions and making informed, and sometimes difficult, choices
- Through this approach we will therefore ensure that consultation and engagement is used to inform Government's legislative programme, policy planning and decision making. This will increase public participation in decision making and help Government to understand the impact of its strategies, policies, programmes and services on the wellbeing of the community. We will also improve the awareness within communities of opportunities to influence decisions

## **6. Policy Detail**

At the start of all Legislative and Policy making processes Elected Members, working with Officers, will consider the issue at hand and agree a consultation framework. As part of these discussions, a consultation plan must be agreed and recorded with support from the SHG press office.

Consideration should be made in regards to the following:

1. National or specific issue legislation/policy/strategy - for example the National 10 Year Plan would require further consultation than a specific policy aimed at a smaller group of people

2. If a policy has been satisfactorily consulted upon as determined by the relevant Council Committee, then enacting regulations and legislation may not require consultation
3. Proportionate and practicable consultation should take place rather than for the sake of consulting. Over-consulting simply causes apathy with the community

Failure to adhere to this will result in delays and undermine the commitment given by Elected Members to streamline decision making.

### **6.1 Consultation methods**

The consultation plan will include the following essential steps for major changes:

1. An agreed public consultation period with information available online, in hard copy at key public buildings such as the Public Library and the Customer Care Centre and available upon request in large print.
2. The lead Elected Member(s) will work with key Officers and Stakeholders
3. Notification of the consultation will be promoted seven days prior to the commencement of the consultation in the local newspapers.
4. Where issues involve children and young people all practicable measures should be taken to undertake meaningful consultation which can involve School Councils or the Youth Parliament

The following optional measures will be pertinent depending on the issue:

1. **Open community/constituency meetings**, to discuss the issue at hand. Where the issue is complex it is the responsibility of the appropriate Officer to provide an easy to read synopsis for discussion.<sup>1</sup> (Be aware of consultation fatigue)
2. **Posting on social media**, by describing the policy or suggested change and seeking views of the community
3. **Focus Group**, led by a facilitator, as a one-off discussion. Focus groups can be also be formed and used to allow groups to explore issues in greater depth
4. **Citizens' Panel**, will include a significant sample of citizens, representative of the population. Can act as a sounding board to test ideas, proposals and schemes. The Citizens Panel can be used to get a quick and high response from a targeted audience

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#### <sup>1</sup> **Consultation Fatigue**

This is where separate engagement activity is being carried out with the same section of the community by different services or agencies or even different parts of the same organisation. This can lead to the community feeling over consulted and disinterested in participating. Repeated consultation exercises within a short period of time can also contribute to consultation fatigue. Consultation under these circumstances is contributing to barriers between services, organisations and communities rather than breaking them down.

5. **Open Days / Roadshows / Exhibitions/Surgeries.** Good face-to-face contact with wider public to promote services
6. **Planning for Real.** Takes respondents through a physical planning process and enables them to visualise options. Uses 3D models and card games. Planning for Real can be used as a method to involve people of all ages
7. **User Satisfaction Survey.** User Satisfaction Surveys can be used for collating user's views and feedback on specific services. Information can then assist in developing and improving services, and in measuring performance
8. **Questionnaires.** The use of set questions to obtain statistical information. Questionnaires can be used to obtain information from specific groups of service users and employees. Care needs to be taken that the completion of questionnaires is controlled to avoid multiple entries by one individual
9. **Face to Face Unstructured Interviews.** Face to face unstructured interviews can be used to explore views, attitudes & motives
10. **User Panels.** Allows a small group of specific service users and Elected Members and appropriate Officers to discuss concerns. Usually would meet regularly over a period of time. User Panels can be used for informed satisfaction surveys and to test ideas, changes and user satisfaction
11. **Citizens' Juries.** Citizens' Juries can be 4-6 people who get evidence from specialists and draw up conclusions. Citizens Juries can be used to obtain detailed and considered views from local residents on specific issues

## 6.2 Feedback

1. Within 28 days of the completion of the consultation full details of the public's responses will be circulated to Corporate Services which will then be made available on the St Helena Government website.

This will include;

- Chronology of the consultation
  - Number of respondents
  - Views received
  - Next steps
2. Within 56 days following the completion of the consultation analysis of the feedback will be provided via a written response<sup>2</sup> to how the consultation was used and provide an explanation to the decision reached, this will then be circulated by Corporate Services. This will also be made public on the St Helena Government website. A statement explaining why a particular and major cause of action that was suggested during the consultation and not acted upon should also be published on the website.

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<sup>2</sup> To be completed by the relevant Officer and endorsed by the appropriate Council Committee

3. All information relating to consultations will be available to the public via the St Helena Government website and through the consultation register which will be updated quarterly and in hard copy at the Public library and the Customer Service Centre

### **6.3 Removing Barriers**

There are many barriers to effective consultation and engagement. To remove these barriers consideration should be given to the following:

1. **How to take consultation to the community**, for example using community venues or working within specific community groups
2. **How to distribute information about forthcoming consultation and engagement events**, for example using the website, putting an article in the local press
3. **Making written information accessible** for example using plain English or using alternative media opportunities (radio) to reach people who have literacy problems
4. **How to support people to engage**, for example considering those with caring responsibilities, helping with transport issues, consulting outside normal working hours, providing crèche facilities
5. **Setting realistic timescales** for when responses are required and where possible agreeing the timescales with consultees
6. **Making every effort to ensure that the consultation process is inclusive.**

### **7. Policy Support**

Corporate Services will support all forms of consultation and will provide facilitation skills and training when required.

### **8. Policy Review**

This policy will be reviewed 12 months from its commencement.

**Corporate Services**

**September 2017**