

Engagement and participation in service change and redesign in response to COVID-19

June 2020

This briefing note outlines how *Healthcare Improvement Scotland – Community Engagement* will provide advice, support and assurance on statutory duties for public involvement in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It also details suggested steps for NHS Boards and Health and Social Care Partnerships to inform and progress engagement activities during this time.

The COVID-19 pandemic has required NHS Boards and Health and Social Care Partnerships to rapidly reconfigure services and provide care in new and different ways. During the initial emergency response, quick decision making was needed to increase capacity and maintain essential services and the urgency of the situation did not allow organisations to involve or engage the public as they would normally be expected to.

However, the statutory duty to involve people is as important as ever. As we enter the next phase of the pandemic response and consideration is given to current and future service provision, there is an opportunity to understand and build on the benefits brought by changes during the initial phase. There is also a need to ensure these changes do not adversely impact on those that rely on the services over the longer term.

Healthcare Improvement Scotland – Community Engagement advice and support

Healthcare Improvement Scotland – Community Engagement will be working with NHS Boards and Health and Social Care Partnerships to understand the extent of service changes that have already occurred; what further changes are being planned; and whether these changes are being viewed as short term measures, or longer term configurations.

We will provide relevant advice, support and assurance for organisations in meeting the expectations set out in national guidance and statutory duties for public involvement. We will also be seeking to understand the support health and care staff require to effectively engage people going forward.

We recognise that the engagement NHS Boards and Health and Social Care Partnerships undertake, and the timing of this, will need to take account of the continually changing environment in which services are operating and may require different engagement approaches while social restriction measures are in place.

This is true for changes that have been implemented on an urgent basis as well as proposed and future changes to health and care services at local, regional and national levels.

Engagement activities will also need to reflect the scale of service change and the potential impact of the change to different population groups.

The information below details considerations to help inform the planning of this activity and support a proportionate approach to meaningful engagement.

National Guidance

National policy and guidance which sets out the expectations for NHS Boards and Health and Social Care Partnerships in relation to involvement with service users, the public and stakeholders on the delivery of local health and care services should be followed.

In accordance with equalities legislation, including the public sector duties¹, organisations are responsible for:

- ensuring that the informing, engaging, consulting process is fully accessible to all equality groups; and
- ensuring that any potential adverse impact of the proposed service change on equality groups has been taken into account by undertaking an equality impact assessment and that this informs the delivery of engagement activity

Establishing a new starting point for engagement activities

For urgent service changes introduced during the initial emergency response, organisations should identify the ‘new starting point’ for taking forward public involvement and engagement activities. Below are five points NHS boards and Health and Social Care Partnerships should consider to inform what engagement activities need to take place, and with who:

1. **Understanding impact:** Consider the potential impact interim and urgent changes may have and how adverse impacts might be mitigated. The Scottish Government’s COVID-19- Framework for Decision Making² notes “*the harms caused by the pandemic are not felt equally. Our response to this pandemic must recognise these unequal impacts*”
2. **Communicating clearly:** Ensure that communications are clear, transparent, accessible and include information on travel, how to access services and the support available to people remotely or in person
3. **Using feedback:** Seek feedback from patients, service users and communities on the interim and urgent changes and consider how this can be used to inform current practice and future service design
4. **Agree approach:** Discuss with *Healthcare Improvement Scotland – Community Engagement* the potential engagement requirements to inform and shape ongoing service provision should you wish to make interim/temporary changes more permanent, and;
5. **Engaging differently:** Understanding the skills and capacity for staff to undertake meaningful and inclusive engagement using different engagement approaches appropriate to the circumstances.

Healthcare Improvement Scotland - Community Engagement has developed starter guidance to support services move forward during this time, which covers the consideration of alternative methods of engagement and consultation can be found through this [link](#). We will be working in collaboration with NHS Boards and Health and Social Care Partnerships to help identify and support future engagement activity and would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further with you.

To discuss any information within this, or specific considerations regarding service change please contact the team at: hcis.hisengage.servicechange@nhs.net

To discuss any advice and support regarding ongoing engagement and involvement activity please contact the Engagement Office for your area. Details can be found [here](#).

Further information on *Healthcare Improvement Scotland – Community Engagement* can be found at: www.hisengage.scot

¹ Equalities and Human Rights Commission: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance>

² Coronavirus (COVID-19): framework for decision making, Scottish Government, (April 2020): <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-framework-decision-making/pages/4/>