1. Appendix 1: The National Context

The NHS Plan (July 2000)* set out the Government’s intention that patients should be ‘at the heart of the NHS’. Patient and public involvement should be central to service planning and provision and a major driver for service improvement. Section 11 of the Health and Social Care Act 2001* further strengthened this commitment by placing a duty on NHS organisations to involve and consult patients and the public. In section 242 of the 2006 NHS Act this duty was strengthened again requiring public engagement and involvement in:

- planning of the provision of services;
- the development and consideration of proposals for changes in the way those services are provided,
- and decisions to be made by the NHS organisation affecting the operation of services

In addition the ‘Duty to Report on Consultation’ - from the NHS Act 2006 (sections 17A and 24A, and section 8), triggers the duty on primary care trusts and strategic health authorities to produce reports each year on consultation in relation to commissioning decisions, with effect from April 2010. The first reports will cover the period April 2009 to March 2010 and will be produced before the end of September 2010.

For both SHAs and PCTs the duty is to report, when directed by the Secretary of State to do so, on consultations that:

- have been carried out;
- will be carried out; and
- are being carried out;
- As well as the influence that the results of the consultation have on commissioning decisions and, in the case of PCTs, relevant decisions.

Section 7 of the Health and Social Care Act also requires NHS organisations to consult the local Overview and Scrutiny Committee on any proposal for a substantial development or variation of the health services. Oxfordshire PCT and other local health organisations have worked with the Oxfordshire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee to define what constitutes ‘substantial’ in this context and will continue to review this opinion.

National World Class Commissioning (WCC) guidance has highlighted and given weight to the need for a strong communications and public involvement function within PCTs. It is clearly recognised within NHS Oxfordshire that we need a Communications and Engagement Strategy and action plan in place to support the delivery of the PCT’s Strategic Plan. A successful Communications and Engagement Strategy means we are continually seeking feedback on how to develop the quality of services we commission; improve patient experience and achieve better health outcomes for people in Oxfordshire.