



The voice of the voluntary and community sector

Report of Standing Conference

November 2007

Longhirst Hall

Compact Week 1-8 November

Introduction

This was the second standing conference held by Northumberland's VCS Consortium. The conference focused on two topics:

- The Northumberland Compact and the launch of two new codes
- Local Government Reform

Approximately 600 voluntary and community sector organisations and groups were invited covering a wide range of interests. We received acceptances from about 80 and, on the day, 68 people attended, see appendix 2.

The morning was divided into three sections: presentations followed by questions, discussions and a buffet meal. Interspersed between the main agenda were improvised interruptions by Raised Eyebrows, a drama duo who used the Magna Carta – A History of Compacts and The good Ship Northumberland - a view of Local Government Reform to relay key messages to the audience.

Feedback from the Conference has been positive. Two thirds of those attending completed an evaluation form and, overall the conference was very well received.

Programme

9.30	Registration and refreshments
10.0	Welcome and introductions Rodney James, Chair of VCS Consortium
10.05	Northumberland Compact Lynda Watson
10.10	Raised Eyebrow - Hikers
10.15	The Compact ~ What has it ever done for us? Paul Barasi, Compact Voice Questions from the floor
10.50	Raised Eyebrow - The Magna Carta ~ A history of Compacts
11.10	Local Government Reform, What's the role of the Community & Voluntary Sector? David Francis, Community Action Northumberland Questions from the floor
11.45	Discussion Groups
12.40	RAISED EYEBROW - The good ship Northumberland ~ an analogy of local government reform
1.00	Buffet Lunch

Each person received two folders. One containing the Northumberland Compact and the two new codes being launched; the Positive Dispute Resolution Procedure and the Funding and Procurement Code.

The second folder contained:

- Agenda
- List of attendees with their organisations
- Summary biographies of outside speakers
- Consortium leaflet
- Presentation notes Paul Barasi
- Presentation notes David Francis
- Questions for table discussions
- Compact Case Studies
- Compact Mini Guide
- Evaluation form

Presentations

Presentation notes were provided in delegate packs.

Raised Eyebrows

The improvised interruptions covered the Compact and Local Government Reform. Scripts available on request.

Discussion Groups

The conference then divided into twelve tables, with a facilitator on each, to discuss the Compact and Local Government Reform. Several questions had been provided in the conference pack and delegates were given the option to discuss one from each topic area or cover all questions. The contributions were summarised by the facilitators but, because many similar concerns and issues arose, these summaries have then been further condensed as follows.

Questions – Northumberland Compact

1. Think of ways that the compact might improve the way you work
 - a. Compact helping with communication - linking between procurement and the front line
 - b. Encourage good communication leading to better relationships and knowledge of each other
 - c. Gives the VCS organisations a common understanding to begin discussions with public sector officers
 - d. Give collective power so that councils won't force unfair terms on VCS organisations

2. Which undertakings in the compact do you think public bodies would have greatest difficulty with
 - a. Improvement in consultation that is meaningful and gives feedback
 - b. Public sector all very different – what level do you go in at to resolve a problem
 - c. Specifically mentioning commitment to the Compact in new NCC Chief Executives job description
 - d. Understanding concept
 - e. Outside budget cuts, means LA might be unable to fulfil compact commitments
 - f. Promoting understanding of the Compact to all staff
 - g. Sticking to the Compact during transition ~ LGR. The Compact is still seen as an ‘add on’ it has not been mainstreamed yet into the culture

3. Which undertakings in the compact do you think voluntary and community organisations would have greatest difficulty with
 - a. Understanding it all ~ how do we use it and turn it into a working document
 - b. Sufficient resource to adequately speak on behalf of the smaller organisations
 - c. Contracts might limit flexibility – only do what you are paid to do
 - d. It is important that the role of the VCS and the current relationships of VCS and district/county are not lost in the re-organisation to a unitary authority. Our voice needs to be heard
 - e. Who to turn to? Will LW be overwhelmed?

4. If you could select one single thing what would you like the compact to bring about
 - a. VCS have a say in how the new structure is designed ~ Compact proof LGR
 - b. Compact principles in place from the start
 - c. Improvement in consultations, that it is meaningful and feedback is given
 - d. There is an opportunity to refer to the Compact in the job description of the new Chief Exec to ensure that the culture changes and the Compact is embedded. Chief Exec will be measured by this
 - e. Mutual respect and trust
 - f. For best practice to be adopted by local authorities and VCS

Questions – local government reform

1. Will the proposed local government reform have any impact on the way you work
 - a. Difficult to say when we don't know what the boundaries are. Need clarity on this before we take the next step and identify the issues
 - b. Staff concern for job / priorities, cause difficulty in communication also change in staff
 - c. Flexibility and local delivery, and quick decisions are needed Concern that key people/contracts may disappear in LGR
 - d. County wide organisations probably well informed and local organisations can batten down hatches during transition but groups at district level are in middle ground but may not have enough or timely information to make their own plans/decisions
 - e. How will non-statutory funders react to filling the gap when there are cuts or gaps in funding from the public sector

2. From what you have heard will it make things easier or more difficult for your organisation
 - a. Rapid change will make it difficult to plan for the future
 - b. A lot will depend on the new senior management team
 - c. It will take time to rebuild relationships between VCS~public sector, which will be disrupted/broken by the transition
 - d. Timescales enforced on LGR have not allowed full and meaningful consultation. Could the influence be brought from the Compact to enforce timescales for consultation
 - e. How will disparity between 6 LA services be translated into new authority (eg issues of free provision of pest control in rural authorities)
 - f. Opportunity to ensure appropriate £ division between heavily populated SE corner and rural areas. Equity of provision/access to services
 - g. The most productive relations have always been with the district LA
 - h. Impact of changes on existing staff / loss of staff and problems in recruiting

3. The consortium believes it is vital that the sector is at the heart of the transition ~ transformation process. What is the most important issue you would like to see resolved
 - a. Embed Compact principles into new structure
 - b. VCS have a say in how structure is designed – including smaller groups
 - c. Need clarity about role of the VCS in the transition phase, we need to be involved using the compact frame work
 - d. Information to local communities, what does it mean
 - e. The consortium should be funded by County. Individuals in the community need to know that they can influence through the Compact

- f. clarity, good communication and involvement. Moving pace, everything not quite decided, emerging process and no decisions communicated
 - g. Clear and open system for disposal or transfer of assets
 - h. VCS to have 3 or 4 tenets, could all subscribe to that would have wider impact
 - i. To be truly responsive to local needs – create effective means of communication
 - j. Concern that not everyone will be consulted fully because of time pressures/deadlines to implement services
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The Consortium would like to thank Paul Barasi and David Francis for their valuable contributions and the facilitators of the discussions.
Thanks to Raised Eyebrows for the improvised interventions which captured well the items for discussion.

A copy of this report can be found on www.northumberlandvcs.org.uk

Evaluation

The Northumberland Voluntary and Community Sector Consortium hosted a conference, at Longhirst Hall, on 6 November 2007. The conference was attended by 68 delegates including speakers and the delegates were invited to complete an evaluation at the end of the conference. The evaluation form asked delegates to assess ten elements of the conference on a five point scale. 42 (63%) evaluation forms were returned and the analysis shows high levels of satisfaction throughout.

The table below shows the average score for each of the elements assessed whilst appendix 1 gives the numerical distribution of the evaluations.

Excellent ————— Poor

Pre conference information useful		●				Pre conference information not useful
Location of venue convenient	●					Location of venue not convenient
Venue good	●					Venue poor
Conference pack useful	●					Conference pack not useful
Presentations relevant to my work		●				Presentations not relevant to my work
Presentations of good quality		●				Presentations of poor quality
Discussion groups useful		●				Discussion groups not useful
Question and answer session useful		●				Question and answer session not useful
Catering good		●				Catering poor
Overall conference well organised	●					Overall conference poorly organised

As stated above the table clearly shows that overall the conference was very well received by those who attended. A review of the numerical distribution of the returns shows that there was a very small amount of dissatisfaction with regard to the pre conference information.

The names of the delegates who attended and their organisations are given in appendix 2.

The evaluation form also gave delegates the opportunity to make other comments and 20 chose to do so. The list of comments is given in appendix 1.

Whilst a lot of the comments confirmed how useful, interesting and informative the conference had been some useful pointers for future conference improvements were also given, in particular:

- Look closely at information provided before the conference
- Consider differing knowledge and awareness levels particularly for presentations
- Although 'power point' fatigue is recognised people appreciate slides to enable them to follow a presentation

Appendix 1 Other comments

- Enjoyed Raised Eyebrows – good way of tackling controversial issues
- Use of microphones assists
- Sooner provision of Conference pack would have helped
- The Actors were excellent it kept attention and simply put over appropriate messages. I found PB's session a bit garbled, it would have been helpful to be given an overview of the Compact how it could work in practice I think it was assumed everyone had same knowledge level
- Very good. Healthy food. Think tea and coffee were mixed together yuk
- It has made me aware of Northumberland Compact and what it can offer group
- Entertainment was different and brilliant. Would be useful if LW explained her brief and achievements. Would be interested to know how compact is working for Consortium.
- Compact not so well know about as we would have hoped (both sectors)
- Excellent drama group
- To few toilets. Air conditioning cold
- Actors coped well (accents could have been local) Compliments to script writers
- More explanation for those who have no knowledge of Compact
- Very interesting. PB very good
- Entertainment well intentioned but oh dear!
- Very enjoyable increased networking
- Would have been useful to have contact details on delegate list
- All presentations should have slides – easier to follow
- Need to have Northumberland focus for examples for Compact

Appendix 2 Delegate list

Andrew	Sue	Community Action Northumberland
Armstrong	Peter	Seaton Delaval and Holywell Community Forum
Aston	T	Development Trust
Barasi	Paul	Compact Voice
Bartlett	Kevin	Wansbeck District Council
Beck	Stephen	ENRgl
Bibby-Wilson	Kim	Morpeth Northumbrian Gathering/Language Society
Bland	Margaret	North'land Home Improvement Agency
Bone	Christine	Government Office for the North East
Bone	Graham	Castle Morpeth Borough Council
Bradley	Thom	Blyth CVS
Brown	Allison	Alzheimer's Society
Carnaby	Cath	Women's Health Advisory Centre
Chadwick	Liz	DAWN Advice Ltd
Clow	Rob	Head of Community Safety Academy
Courtice	George	North'land VCS Consortium
Davidson	Julie	Northumberland County Council
Dickson	Eric	Blyth Valley & Wansbeck Talking Newspaper
Downing	Sandi	Northumberland Voices Network
Elliott	Peter	Azure Charitable Enterprises
Errington	Sheila	St Cuthbert's Care
Fakir	Lynda	Wansbeck District Council
Francis	David	Community Action Northumberland
Futers	David	NSC
Gale	Bill	Wansbeck Community Empowerment Network
Gibson	Tony	Blyth Valley & Wansbeck Talking Newspaper
Gooding	Andrew	Lynemouth Community Trust
Goncu	Susie	Tynedale Council
Hall	Lynne	ENRgl
Hannam	Linda	Learning Choices Northumberland
Harbottle	Irene	Wansbeck District Council
Hart	Jane	Community Action Northumberland
Harvey	Stuart	BECON
Howe	Wendy	Northumberland Care Trust
Hutton	Sandra	North'land User and Carer Voice
James	Rodney	Northumberland VCS Consortium
Johnson	Marc	Community Action Northumberland
Knight	Anna	Wansbeck CAB
Letford	Wendy	Castle Morpeth CAB
Lyll	Anne	Wansbeck CVS
Macdonald	Fiona	Gateway into the Community
Mackison	Jim	Community Foundation serving Northumberland
Maude	John	North Country Leisure
McGuckin	Sheila	Wansbeck CVS
McQueen	John	CMDA
McVeigh	Julie	Barnardos North East
Mearns	Brenda	Corbridge Youth Initiative
Middlemiss	Maureen	Amble Youth Project
Murray	Joyce	Links Conservation Group

Moran	Christine	Barnardos Northumberland Housing Proj
Murray	Ray	Links Conservation Group
Paton	Anne	North of Tyne Patient's Voice
Patterson	Christine	Wansbeck District Council North Sunderland and Seahouses Development Trust
Phelan	Tina	Trust
Plinston	Julia	CAN
Prudhoe	Liz	ADAPT
Reed	Sue	VODA North Tyneside
Rickerby	Cyril	REACH
Robson	Jill	Jobcentre Plus
Shand	Helen	Wansbeck CVS
Stella	Maria	BECON
Templeton	Mrs J	Bedlington Townswomen's Guild
Thomas	Alison	Wansbeck Initiative
Urwin	Kathy	REACH
Warne	R H	Morpeth Civic Society
Watson	Lynda	CAN North'land Toy Library and Children's Resource Centre
Widdrington	Ann	Centre
Wright	Kevin	Wansbeck CVS