

Building relations between the sectors

A LOCAL COMPACT FOR NORTHUMBERLAND



The voice of the voluntary and community sector



Northumberland
Strategic Partnership

Background

This Compact expresses the mutual commitment of the statutory* sector and the Voluntary & Community Sector (VCS) within Northumberland to work in partnership for the betterment of society, to nurture and support voluntary and community activity, and to jointly influence regional/national policy where appropriate. This is on the basis that both sectors share similar values and have a number of complementary functions.

The success of the agreement depends on the commitment of all those who “sign up” to it, and the extent to which they adopt the principles that underpin it. It represents the foundation of an ongoing process to make a real and positive difference to joint working and partnership.

There are a number of associated codes of good practice which should be used in conjunction with this Compact.

- Positive Dispute Resolution Procedure - November 2007
- Funding and Procurement Code - November 2007
- Consultation Code - March 2008

* Throughout this document the term Statutory Sector is used. People often refer to this as the Public Sector.

Shared principles

The undersigned collectively recognise that:

- voluntary action and community involvement are essential components of a democratic and socially inclusive society;
- an independent and diverse voluntary & community sector is fundamental to the well-being of society;
- the statutory sector and the VCS have distinct but complementary roles in the development and delivery of public policy and services;
- working in partnership towards common aims and objectives maximises the value and effectiveness of services to the community;
- both sectors have different forms of accountability and are answerable to a diverse range of stakeholders but are equally committed to operating with integrity, sensitivity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership;
- meaningful consultation improves policy development, builds relationships and enhances the design and delivery of services and programmes;
- voluntary & community organisations are entitled, regardless of their funding sources, to act as advocates in challenging and seeking changes to public policy;
- equality of opportunity should be afforded to all people, regardless of race, age, disability, gender, sexual orientation, religion, social and economic status, or political beliefs; and
- resources should be deployed as efficiently and effectively as possible through the promotion of best value principles.

Undertakings of the statutory sector

Policy development and consultation

The statutory sector is committed to dialogue with the VCS. It therefore undertakes to consult with and involve the sector about:

- the development of public policies, programmes and procedures which are likely to affect the VCS;
- proposals or policy changes which are likely to mean that the voluntary sector has new or different roles and responsibilities;
- changes to statutory services which may have significant impacts on the VCS; and
- issues which the VCS is well-placed to comment upon, bearing in mind the sector's grass roots knowledge, experience and skills.

In fulfilling this undertaking, the statutory sector will:

- allow timely and reasonable consultation timescales, which take into account the need of the VCS to meaningfully consult their users, beneficiaries and stakeholders;
- use plain language and avoid jargon in consultation documents intended for VCS scrutiny, and provide concise summaries of extended documents wherever possible;
- give due consideration to any feedback received from the VCS, and provide an appropriate response within a reasonable timescale;
- ensure that the VCS is provided with the opportunity to be appropriately represented on public boards, agencies and working groups; and
- respect, within the constraints of the law, the confidentiality of information provided by the VCS.

Support and Funding

The statutory sector is committed to supporting the development and continuity of a vibrant VCS. It therefore undertakes to:

- assist in the promotion and development of infrastructure and networks which support voluntary & community organisations, and volunteering;
- advocate funding and other support resources against clear, relevant and consistent criteria;
- establish clear and transparent arrangements for agreeing and evaluating objectives, performance indicators, and other targets;
- ensure prompt payment of any agreed funding;
- inform voluntary & community organisations about their future funding (or other support) as early as possible, normally before the end of the existing support provided;
- seek to provide or facilitate access to long term, multi-year funding, where possible and appropriate; and
- encourage and promote the principles of full cost recovery in the procurement of public services.

Better local governance

The statutory sector is committed to developing and achieving effective working relationships with the VCS. It therefore undertakes to:

- adhere to the principles of good regulation and open government with decisions and findings made public and explained, subject to issues of
- ensure that their members and staff are fully informed about the Compact, adhere to the principles and undertakings, and are regularly updated on its development and progress;
- promote the principles set out in this Compact to public bodies and encourage them to subscribe to its undertakings; and
- review the operation of this Compact annually in conjunction with the VCS.

Undertakings of the voluntary & community sector

Accountability and Standards

The VCS is committed to maintaining high standards of good practice. It therefore undertakes to:

- respect and be accountable to the law, and in the case of charities, observe the appropriate guidance from the Charity Commission for England and Wales;
- adopt appropriate arrangements to govern the conduct of their organisations;
- meet their obligations to report, and be accountable to, its members, service users, carers and volunteers;
- meet agreed monitoring and evaluation obligations to funders;
- develop and use quality standards which are appropriate and relevant to them; and
- explore ways in which the resources within the sector can be shared and maximised.

Policy development and consultation

The VCS is committed to influencing and shaping the development of public policies, programmes and procedures. It therefore undertakes to:

- maintain an independent and constructively critical perspective with regard to providing feedback to the statutory sector;
- respond fully and meaningfully to statutory sector consultation, including representation at meetings where possible;
- respect the confidentiality of statutory sector information, when offered on such a basis; and
- advise the statutory sector of VCS plans and activity that may have a significant impact on the development of public policies, programmes and procedures.

In fulfilling this undertaking, the VCS will ensure that:

- service users, carers, volunteers, members and supporters are informed and consulted on statutory sector policy development issues;
- when making representations to the statutory sector on behalf of the VCS, those representations accurately reflect the views of the sector; and
- appropriate reporting back procedures to organisations in the sector are put in place.

Good practice

The VCS is committed to promoting good practice in developing effective working relationships both within the sector and with the statutory sector. It therefore undertakes to:

- fully involve service users, carers, volunteers, members and supporters in the development and management of their activities;
- develop and put in place policies for promoting best practice and equality of opportunity in their activities, employment, involvement of volunteers, and service provision;
- respect the right of the statutory sector to comment on the policies, plans and activity of the VCS;
- ensure that their members and staff are fully informed about the Compact, adhere to the principles and undertakings, and are regularly updated on its development and progress;
- promote the principles set out in this Compact to voluntary & community organisations and encourage them to subscribe to its undertakings; and
- review the operation of this Compact annually in conjunction with the statutory sector.

To find out how to sign up contact:

NORTHUMBERLAND COMPACT

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