



Compact
voice

Local Compacts at Work

A portfolio of short case studies demonstrating the practical application of Local Compacts.

March 2011

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Foreword



The importance of stronger partnerships between the voluntary and community and statutory sector has never been more important than at this critical time.

With new challenges, opportunities and policies affecting all aspects of the work that we do, ensuring that we continue to communicate the role that the sector has in building better communities is vital.

One of the key ways in which we can express this role and the value that the sector brings is through providing examples of effective partnership working which leads to better outcomes. While we know that the Compact has not been effective in every area in England, we also have some excellent examples of where the Compact has directly led to improvements across a range of issues.

The Compact has been at the heart of many of the positive benefits brought about because of stronger collaboration, from better engagement with community groups when designing services, to working in partnership to identify and deliver efficiency savings.

This document highlights some recent examples of where that collaboration has really delivered, despite the challenging times we find ourselves in. We hope that it inspires people to achieve similar results in their area, which can help us all to make our communities better.

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1. Using the Compact to manage cuts effectively

The cuts in the November 2010 Spending Review have provided a robust test for Local Compacts across England. Compacts are about much more than just a measure with which one sector can reprimand another if relationships break down. They are about setting out the foundations on which close and collaborative partnerships can be developed which put the community, not sectors, at the centre of service design and delivery.

However, these relationships are much easier to maintain when times are good, and the current economic climate will put relationships under considerable pressure. When the Compact is followed both in spirit as well as letter, the process of discussing and agreeing how to mitigate the impact of cuts could leave a legacy of closer, more trusting relationships between and within the sectors.

Merton

Good Local Compacts are all about close collaborative relationships between the sectors. If we take this idea to its natural conclusion then we might expect to see services and policies that are designed and funded based solely on the needs of the community and with the best placed organisation taking the lead regardless of sector. This is in essence what we are seeing in Merton and the benefits of this long and continuing relationship are tangible.

Conversations between the sectors about how to respond to the recession began in Merton as early as 2008 and in July 2010 the Council began consulting the sector on how to mitigate the impact of forthcoming cuts. This conversation, which has continued subsequently, has helped to identify actions for both parties. The voluntary and community sector has been able to get a head start on making efficiency savings through collaboration and mergers. This enabled them to mitigate the impact of a 10% cut in grant funding for 2009/2010. The Local Authority has since decided to maintain funding at these levels for 2010/2011 after recognising that grants can provide excellent value for money.

Despite making cuts to the sector the Council has not only maintained a good relationship with the sector but has actually improved relations by involving the voluntary and community sector and earning their trust.

Calderdale

Calderdale Council recognised the need to ensure the sector had maximum input into the funding process after the November 2010 Spending Review, and has been engaged in a long running open dialogue with them.

The council began consulting in September 2010 and has since invited responses to a draft budget. With over 1700 questionnaires returned and more than 3,000 people consulted, the council has had the benefit of a wealth

of understanding to help ensure that their budget settlement reflects local priorities.

Perhaps the most striking way in which this consultation has been informed by the spirit of the Compact is the transparency of the process. Details of the budgetary process and the consultation have been positioned at the top of the council's website and on clicking through you are presented with a key information. True transparency is giving people information in the right context and in a useful format. Supplying impact assessments and the results of previous consultations alongside the request for input helps to ensure that respondents are well informed.

For more information about using the Compact to help manage cuts, visit <http://www.compactvoice.org.uk/cuts>.

2. Utilizing the knowledge of the voluntary and community sector in designing better services

Engaging and involving the voluntary and community sector in designing services from the earliest possible point recognises that such groups often have significant understanding and connection with communities. This experience of using services can provide reach that the Council may not be able to access in any other way. Involving the sector means making better informed choices.

East Sussex

Recognising the need to engage the voluntary and community sector and hear the diverse views of the community, the Local Authority's Adult Social Care Department looked to the Compact as the obvious tool for engagement in its Putting People First initiative.

Terms of reference for engagement were based on principles from the East Sussex Compact. This ensured that the sector's experience and expertise influenced the development and delivery of Putting People First from an early stage, allowing the department and the sector to work together to understand impacts, challenges and opportunities.

This led to a further agreement to explore redesigning the commissioning process for voluntary and community organisations, enabling a more streamlined process to be used to tender for independent advocacy services.

Sunderland

Engagement with the sector should be seen as a constant conversation rather than something that should be done reactively. The Sunderland Community Network has been created with this in mind, and the sector is formally represented as equal partners in policy and service design and delivery. It is hosted by the Sunderland Centre for Voluntary Service and, in recognition of the value of a community empowerment network to Sunderland, has been given three year funding by the Council.

As a result, Sunderland is introducing Committees and VCS Networks for each local area to ensure sector involvement in the delivery of Local Area Plans. As well as facilitating constructive dialogue, these networks aim to support the role of small to medium sized groups in the development and delivery of local services.

3. Championing the Compact

Some have observed that the relative success or failure of a Local Compact comes down to individual personalities. However, in many situations this more accurately describes a symptom of an ineffective Compact than the cause. It can demonstrate that the lines of communication between the sectors are few enough in number that the whole relationship can be shaped by the personality of an individual. Where Compacts have champions throughout organisations in both the statutory and voluntary and community sectors they are - more often than not - very effective.

Lewisham

The Compact Steering Group (CSG) is well attended and enjoys representation from senior council officers. Indeed, every department has a named Compact representative (they don't use 'Champion' terminology) and policy decisions affecting the sector are referred to the CSG. When the council produced an initial financial plan in the summer of 2010 a senior officer attended the CSG to receive input. As a result of useful comments made by the sector that initial plan was entirely rewritten.

The creation of two posts which sit between the voluntary and community and statutory sectors has ensured that the gap which sometimes exists between them is bridged. These roles have responsibilities for bringing all partners together and agreeing direction on Children and Young People and Health and Social Care as well as for advocating the Compact way of working.

The Compact is further strengthened by the responsiveness of the council's Head of Strategy - who has attended the CSG twice in the last year - and Lewisham's Mayor who is a strong advocate for better partnership working between the sectors. Strong championing of the Compact has helped galvanise the relationship between the sectors in Lewisham at a time when it is more vital than ever.

Surrey

When considering Compact champions, numbers are often less important than level of engagement. Surrey is one area that has successfully delivered both. With over 300 Champions spanning organisations from both sectors and a dedicated independent support worker to facilitate engagement and training, Surrey is at the forefront of Compact championing.

Not surprisingly this has brought advantage to both sectors and the community. Late payment to funded groups was identified as a barrier for performance by the sector and this message was taken on board by the council. In 2008 just 58% of groups were paid on time, but by 2010 this had improved to 95%.

For more information about being a Compact Champion, visit www.compactvoice.org.uk/champions

4. Resourcing the Compact can provide value for money

Commitment might be more important than resources where the Compact is concerned but resources are still crucial. Providing support and a budget for the Compact ensures that sectors are facilitated in coming together, as well as providing local capacity to react to Compact-related opportunities.

Wolverhampton

Whilst providing adequate resources for the Compact does not guarantee good Compact working alone, funding can be an important part of the bigger picture. Wolverhampton has two Compact officers, one working within the voluntary and community sector and the other in the statutory sector, allowing better delivery of Compact activities.

An excellent example of this in practice is that group meetings are attended by a wide range of local partners including the PCT, local authority, fire services and the Police. In addition, work is currently underway to give Councillors training in community influence, which will emphasise the important role of the voluntary and community sector and the Compact. There are plans to make this training mandatory for new Members.

Islington

Recognising that the Compact occupies a unique position between the sectors it was agreed that a dedicated Compact worker would benefit their relationship. Local partners agreed such a dedicated Compact worker would have the advantage of being able to work without any conflicts of interest which might occur when the Compact is an aspect added to an existing role.

Having a dedicated worker has a number of other advantages. Having a recognisable face for the Compact ensures that people know who to contact and the lack of ambiguity in their role helps to instil trust amongst the voluntary and community sector. Thanks to the hard work of the dedicated Compact worker, Islington has been able to put on three events – including a Compact Awards ceremony - with a hundred attendees from both sectors celebrating local Compact successes.

5. Turning around relationships

In some cases the barriers to developing a close and productive relationship between the sectors can seem insurmountable. However, arguably these areas stand to gain the most from adopting the Compact way of working. When the sector comes together behind the Compact they can exert influence, particularly when they work effectively by infrastructure. This influence can often work in mysterious ways.

Thurrock

Just two years ago Thurrock would have seemed an unlikely area to hold up as an example of good Compact working. In May 2009 the Council indicated that it was likely to make a blanket cut to the voluntary and community sector of around 7%. In addition, the local CVS had been told that it would only receive funding for the next 6 months. However, by late 2010 the picture was significantly different; the CVS had been retained and no cuts had been made to funding of the voluntary and community sector. So how did this turn-around occur?

After hearing about the proposed cuts, Thurrock CVS began speaking to local voluntary sector organisations, and produced a report informed by the views of over a hundred organisations. The Council's decision to cut funding to the CVS was seen as breaching Compact principles on consultation and was called-in by a councillor – a process which scrutinises decisions.

Although the call-in ultimately failed to overturn the decision it succeeded in informing both Councillors and senior managers about both the Compact and the need for meaningful consultation.

Subsequently, the Council decided to undertake its own consultation of the sector, working closely with the CVS as well as undertaking a full impact assessment of the proposed cuts. This resulted in greater understanding of the sector and led the Council to protect funding to the sector despite having to find £4 million in savings.

6. The Compact and local accountability

The voluntary and community sector has reach and provides voice to community groups. Understanding that reach can help elected officials better engage with those who are likely to be constituents within the communities they represent.

It can also help provide greater accountability for what is happening within the community by strengthening the links between the voluntary sector and elected members. Better dialogue between elected members and representatives from the voluntary and community sector not only helps to positively influence local policies, but should also be seen as a democratic necessity.

Bristol

Recommendations made by the Third Sector Commissioning Select Committee at Bristol City Council to improve the commissioning process have been accepted and are being implemented. The review focussed primarily on commissioning and resulted in more appropriate use of grants and contracts, a training programme for elected members, service and commissioning managers on sector needs, mandatory involvement of sector throughout the commissioning cycle, early publishing of commissioning intention and the development of formal decommissioning guidance.

Not only has this resulted in a more Compact compliant commissioning process and the creation of a formal network of Compact Champions within the council but also a raised awareness of Compact throughout the councils members and officers. Now, the current Leader of the council is also the lead member in the cabinet for the voluntary and community sector.

Hertfordshire

An area wide understanding of the potential for the voluntary and community sector to deliver services has been influenced by, and has reinforced, the Local Compact. The spirit of cross sector working has spread to all levels of public service, and is evidenced by the way grants are issued to the voluntary and community sector.

Hertfordshire County Council, recognising the value of grants as opposed to contracts in funding the voluntary and community sector, has taken the decision to give local Councillors £10,000 in unrestricted grants to the sector within their ward. This has the double benefit of bringing democratic legitimacy to the grants process and more effectively linking elected members into the sector.

7. The Compact as a driver of innovation in partnership working

Where areas have had a more paternalistic relationship between the sectors, following the 'spirit' of the Compact may seem vague. However, when both sectors develop the shared understanding that the Compact is about creating opportunities to address problems together, to innovate and to deliver better services, the results can be impressive.

Warrington

Examples of the Compact way of working leading to local improvements are easy to identify in Warrington. One such example is the response to the Council's Budget consultation from the Third Sector Network Hub – a partnership group within the area and linked to both the council and the CVS. Rather than simply making the case for continued funding for their own organisations, the group made suggestions as to where savings could be made without affecting service delivery. A number of these suggestions were ultimately included in the Council's budget.

In dealing with budgetary shortfalls the Council and the voluntary and community sector realized that they had a shared interest in identifying joint efficiency savings, which led to practical measures such as sharing envelopes in combined mailings, and enabling local voluntary and community sector organisations to purchase stationary and office equipment under the Council's contract agreements.

Wishing to develop and improve the relationship between the sectors, the council has invited voluntary and community sector representatives to form part of the interview panels for Senior Officer positions.

Stronger together: sharing knowledge with Compact Voice

Who is Compact Voice?

We are the voice of the voluntary and community sector on the Compact. We provide advice and training on the Compact and represent the sector's interests on the Compact to Government. Our network of over 2,300 members ranges from community organisations to large national charities. Our Board members are from front line groups and umbrella bodies, in turn representing over 20,000 voluntary and community groups.

Reporting good, bad or interesting practice

In representing the needs and interests of the voluntary and community sector, much of our capacity to influence is determined by the information we receive about how the Compact is working at local level. We welcome your experiences of using the Compact to deliver more effective partnerships, and encourage you to send us your stories – both good and bad – to help us represent you more effectively.

Engagement programme

Compact Voice has a dedicated team comprising one Engagement Officer based in our London Offices and two newly appointed regional Engagement Development Officers (North / South). The Engagement Team exists to provide training, insightful talks, collect local knowledge and to be there for anyone who is trying to improve local partnerships by using the Compact.

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