

The Compact: Helping you work with the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector



What is the Compact?

The Compact is the agreement between government and the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (or the voluntary sector for short), which sets out key principles for both to follow and establishes a way of working that improves their relationship for mutual advantage.

The Compact is a voluntary agreement which is designed to be helpful to both parties in a commissioning or procurement relationship. It has been successfully used across the country as a framework to support partnerships to ensure undertakings and responsibilities are clear from the outset.

Some of the key areas the Compact covers includes managing changes to programmes and services, involving organisations and service users in policy design and consultation, and supporting equality and diversity.

The national Compact was first introduced in 1998, and was renewed by the coalition government in 2010. The Compact has cross-party support both locally and nationally. Every government department is signed up to the principles of the Compact, and its implementation across government is overseen by the Office for Civil Society which is based within the Cabinet Office.

Local Compacts: What they are and how they can help

As well as the national Compact, most areas in England also have a local Compact, which interprets the principles set out in the Compact to reflect local need. Local Compacts may cover different local government areas, and might be established in district, county and regional areas. Different partners from across a range of public bodies can use the local Compact to support their work with the voluntary sector.

Some local areas will have a formal 'sign up' process, whereby various bodies like police fire and rescue, social care organisations, the council and the local voluntary sector support organisation will sign up, and commit to working to the principles contained in the local Compact.

Increasingly, local commissioning bodies such as Clinical Commissioning Groups, Police and Crime Commissioners and Local Enterprise Partnerships are using local Compacts as a way of connecting with local voluntary sector organisations in their area. These organisations usually have direct contact with a diverse range of groups and individuals. Local Compacts have proven to be a valuable tool for providing a tangible, joined-up route to support commissioning bodies to engage with voluntary sector organisations and the groups they support.

Local Compacts help commissioners to understand the needs of their community, and to be confident that the services they are commissioning are meeting these needs.

The principles established in local Compacts enable communities to benefit from greater involvement in policy design, improved reach and understanding, better commissioning and procurement, and better support for the vital role of voluntary sector organisations. Local Compacts have become an established feature of local partnership working in most parts of England - as of October 2013, there were 165 local Compacts. In most cases these local Compacts provide tangible benefits for all

partners - and most importantly – for the local community. Local Compacts can work anywhere and where they do, they are highly valued by all.

About Compact Voice

Compact Voice works to support cross-sector partnership working. We do this by supporting the Compact and its implementation across England. We aim to ensure that strong, effective partnerships are at the heart of all relationships between the voluntary sector and government – locally and nationally. We share good practice, provide training and work with government to ensure that the unique contribution of voluntary sector is understood and is embedded in service delivery.

Why should new commissioning bodies use a local Compact?

Commissioners are strongly encouraged to support, find out more about, and use their local Compact. Using the Compact as a tool to support partnership working is beneficial for both commissioning bodies and for the local voluntary sector. Not only can local Compacts support commissioners to reach voluntary sector organisations, it positions them as a trusted partner who is committed to working well in partnership. Local Compacts can act as a meaningful way for commissioners to show other partners that they will take a collaborative approach to working together. Local Compacts have a clearly defined purpose, and are supported across the country and by central Government.

Local Compacts go beyond being merely a list of activities for each partner to undertake – they signify a spirit of collaboration and an approach which people can understand and respond to without ever needing to read a case study or action plan. Commissioners shouldn't be fearful of using or signing up to their local Compact – if they provide a space for good partnership working, why not use it?

In addition, local partnerships in your area might be working well now, but how can you be sure they will always be this good? A Compact way of working is about not only doing things the right way, but committing to continue doing so.

How can commissioners find out more about their local Compact?

Compact Voice has a Local Engagement team who work to support local partnership working, and who have detailed knowledge of how local Compacts are working. Commissioners can contact a member of the team to find out more about how local Compacts are working in the area/s they cover. Contact details for the Local Engagement team can be found at www.compactvoice.org.uk/support/engagement-team.

Compact Voice maintains a list of every local Compact on our website, alongside contact details for the lead person in each sector. This can be found at www.compactvoice.org.uk/compacts-map.