

COMPACT AT WORK



Thurrock: revitalising their local Compact ten years on

Thurrock's Compact has provided a useful framework for developing positive relationships between sectors for a number of years. Partners in Thurrock decided to refresh their Compact in 2012, after a period where it had 'fallen off the agenda' for a number of months.

The process of reviewing the local Compact laid the foundation for a stronger relationship between the sectors, and reiterated the importance of the voluntary sector in providing a voice and access to communities and service users locally.

As a result, the process of renewing the local Compact helped prevent significant funding cuts. Thurrock Council's most recent budget for 2014/15 continues to invest in the voluntary sector grants programme (Voluntary Sector Development Fund) at the same level.

Impact

In recent years, the voluntary and community sector (VCS) has become a key player in contributing to shaping policies and delivering services, whilst also advocating the voice of local communities.

The Thurrock Compact has supported this by allowing each sector to agree joint commitments to undertake, as part of their shared purpose to improve the quality of life of Thurrock residents.

Thurrock Council has approached funding reductions as an opportunity to work differently. As a result, it has increasingly turned to the voluntary and community sector to help with the delivery of key services.

Over the past 18 months, voluntary and community organisations have been involved in delivering drug and alcohol services, sexual violence, Learning Disability services, working with the long-term unemployed and many more.

By using the Compact as a foundation for cross-sector partnership working, Thurrock Council has strengthened its relationship with the VCS, and avoided passing on disproportionately large funding cuts.

Thurrock's Voluntary Sector Development Fund of more than £430,000 has not been affected by the budget setting process in 2014/15. This is due to the open, transparent relationship between statutory partners and local VCS organisations, alongside recognition by statutory partners for the need to invest in local voluntary organisations. Furthermore, 80% of grant funding in Thurrock through this programme is awarded on a 3 year cycle – allowing enough time for VCS organisations to plan ahead in line with market trends.

The Compact has support at senior level and from the cabinet within the Council, and both the Portfolio Holder and Shadow Portfolio Holders have responsibility for overseeing the

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implementation of the Compact. It is regularly used to help launch and design council consultations and develop new policies and programmes. In recent years, statutory partners have improved their consultations with the sector regarding funding.

Although some contracts have been lost due to council cuts, new opportunities are expanding opportunities for the sector to deliver services. For example, the council has worked with Thurrock CVS and community organisations to establish the Community Hubs scheme, providing spaces for the community and public services to work together for each other's benefit. The Hubs are co-designed and co-owned with their local communities, and create a new way of delivering services for Thurrock, that puts citizens in the driving seat.

Statutory partners have adhered to giving three months notice before reducing or reallocating funding. The Compact has also been used to inform Equality Impact Assessments when cuts have impacted on protected characteristics – for example, the impact of budget reductions to Voluntary Sector Development Fund. In the future, the team responsible for the Compact and Equality Impact Assessment Guidance will merge into the Strategy Team. This will result in a much stronger ability to join up advice services and ensure the Compact remains embedded in cross-sector partnerships.

The Compact was recently made a standing item on the Joint Strategic Forum meeting agenda. The forum provides a platform where Compact related issues or disputes can be raised and discussed at an early stage ensuring swift resolution.

The Joint Strategic Forum also has representation from the Clinical Commissioning Group and is co-chaired by the CEO of Thurrock Council for Voluntary Service and the Assistant CEO of the Local Authority. The Director of Commissioning and Adult services of Thurrock Council also attends and co-chairs a sub-group established to improve commissioning and procurement practice whilst developing a Social Value Framework.

Most importantly, with a rapidly changing commissioning landscape, the Forum provides the voluntary sector with an opportunity to speak as one voice.

Some of the positive impacts renewing the Thurrock Compact has had:

- A stronger Compact with a higher profile locally
- Thurrock Compact has become a key part of the Joint Strategic Forum
- There is an increased commitment to the VCS, and to joint working with voluntary organisations
- The VCS is stronger as a result
- New opportunities such as community hubs rethinking the way local people access services in Thurrock

Quote

“A strong sector is considered to be a good indicator of a strong community. The Compact needs to challenge behaviours that challenge this position.”

- Natalie Warren, Community Development and Equalities Manager, Thurrock Council

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Background

Thurrock is a Unitary Council that views itself as a 'can-do' place with a strong voluntary sector. With a history of partnership working – the first Voluntary Sector Strategy, 'Different Strengths', was produced by Thurrock CVS and Thurrock Residents Action Group (TRAG – now engage) in 1998, and sought to establish a firm partnership with the new unitary authority. This strategy also led to a shift away from year-on-year funding, moving to a three-year rolling programme for the voluntary and community sector.

The first draft Thurrock Compact, based on this original strategy, was published in March 2004. Further development of the Compact was put on hold due to staff changes and a new political administration.

The Compact returned to the agenda during the Council's transformation programme. The council and key partners wanted to work more closely with Thurrock CVS, and one area they focussed on was revitalising the Compact and guiding its implementation.

The new, refreshed Compact was launched in November 2012 following adoption by Thurrock's Cabinet and CVS.

The relationship between the council and voluntary and community sector has improved greatly in recent years. There is better awareness and understanding of what the voluntary and community sector, and of the Compact and the benefits it can bring to both sectors.

There is still more work to be done to reach all council departments, but there has been much success in gaining senior support across key statutory partners. The membership of the Joint Strategic Forum is currently being reviewed with a view to broadening it and making more links with new bodies such as Health and Wellbeing Board and GP consortia.

In addition, the council is committed to citizen-led regeneration, and finding local evidence-based solutions through programmes such as its Area Based Initiatives and Community Forums.

Together with a strong VCS, Thurrock is demonstrating the importance and relevance of the Compact in an environment that is increasingly being threatened due to economic factors and new funding landscapes.



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