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About the Compact
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Compact Voice
www.compactvoice.org.uk

Compact Voice is an independent organisation with 2500 members (and rising) that supports the voluntary and community sector with taking forward the Compact. We offer practical help and advice on how to get the Compact working effectively for your organisation and in your area.

We:
- Provide training, resources, information and expert advice on how to get the most from your Compact
- Use our influence to ensure that any changes to the policy landscape, which might affect how the Compact is used, reflect the needs and interests of the sector
- Arrange and attend Compact relevant events and conferences
- Work with government departments to make sure they understand why involving the voluntary and community sector is so important

The Compact Voice Board is made up of representatives from leading voluntary sector organisations, with national, regional and local reach, as well as “front-line” workers. A full list of the Compact Voice board members is available at www.compactvoice.org.uk/board.

Compact Voice's staff consist of a head of team (who liaises with the board members), a manager, a communications officer, a team and communications assistant, a full-time engagement officer based in London (who also covers the South East), and two part-time engagement officers; one providing support in the North West, North East, and Yorkshire & Humber, and one in the South West, West Midlands, and East Midlands.

Compact Voice also works with regional leaders who are based in each of the regions in England. Regional leaders are Compact workers who also receive and share information with Compact Voice, provide and distribute resources and information to organisations within their region, and help Compact Voice better understand what is happening locally.

Compact Voice works alongside NCVO’s Compact Advocacy Programme, which helps support better outcomes for voluntary and community groups in their dealings with public sector bodies.

Further information about the Compact Advocacy Programme can be found at: www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/compactadvocacy.

Does Compact Voice also provide support to the statutory sector?

Compact Voice is the voice of the voluntary sector on the national Compact. Locally, Compact Voice aims to make the Compact work well. Local Compacts help local public sector bodies and voluntary and community sector organisations work together to provide seamless services for the benefit of local communities.

The focus of our services is primarily community groups and local support agencies such as Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS’), but our materials are available for all. By supporting statutory services to use the Compact, Compact Voice supports community groups too.

“We go where the Compact goes.”
Kelly Ventress
Communications Officer, Compact Voice

Compact Voice helps facilitate learning between local Compact areas. Please send us your Compact stories so other organisations can learn from what you’ve done.
Who is this guide for?

This guide is for everyone involved in partnerships across sectors in local areas in England, especially those implementing their local Compact agreement.

This includes:

- Voluntary and community sector organisations and social enterprises (also known as civil society organisations)
- Local health services and consortia
- Councils
- Police, fire and rescue, and ambulance services
- Social housing providers
- Further education bodies
- Any other organisations responsible for distributing public money locally, or supporting and resourcing the voluntary and community sector in other ways
- Some business/private sector organisations, especially small and medium enterprises who work within the community or have Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes

It can be used by:

- Those new to the Compact
- Those with experience of working with Compact principles
- Volunteers and staff at every level
What is a local Compact?

Voluntary and community sector organisations and local public sector bodies frequently work together for the benefit of local communities.

A local Compact is a mutually agreed document and approach to partnership working between sectors.

Local Compacts contain principles and commitments that are shared across sectors.

Central themes of local Compacts are:

- Funding arrangements, including procurement
- Consultation and involvement in policy and service development
- Promoting and advancing equality
- Supporting the independence of the voluntary and community sector
- Good volunteering practice
- Working together to continually improve the relationship between sectors

Key strengths of the Compact include:

- Giving a clear sense of how to work together, and what to expect of each other
- Recognition that sectors working together brings more benefit to communities than working alone
- Clear links between national policy and local policy, accompanied by the understanding that each area is different and has its own approach to meeting needs
- Working together to develop, implement and embed a local Compact, building stronger partnerships
- Enabling both sectors to better manage disputes or disagreements by clearly outlining expectations

“What has been achieved by working together on our Compact? There has been a lot more communication between the sectors, there’s a better relationship and they have had the chance to meet their parallel officers in the other sector.”

Tamsila Tauqir, Compact Action Advisor, Birmingham Voluntary Service Council

Local Compact structures

Local Compacts take the principles of the national Compact (which are outlined below) and interpret them to reflect local need.

Many local Compacts were developed by a ‘Compact Group’ of decision-makers from local organisations, such as the council, police, NHS, voluntary and community sector organisations and business representatives.

Compact Groups (sometimes known as Compact implementation or steering groups) take the lead on making their Compact relevant to local partnerships, community needs and circumstances. See the section on Compact Groups for more information.

A local Compact is usually supported by a mutually agreed action plan, which may link to other local policies and strategies. Refer to the section on Action Planning for more detailed information.
Areas may have a dedicated Compact Officer employed by a local statutory or infrastructure organisation, and/or people who have responsibility for their local Compact, ideally as part of their job description. Many areas have Compact Champions, who promote and implement Compact principles and commitments in their organisations and work. Refer to the section on Compact Officers and Champions for further details.

In some local areas, individual organisations formally sign-up to a local Compact. In others, lead organisations sign up on behalf of everyone, for example a Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) might sign the Compact on behalf of local community organisations. Everyone who signs up to the Compact is expected to follow Compact principles when working in partnership across sectors.

The Compact is designed to be responsive to changes in the environment, such as cuts in public sector funding, changes in funding opportunities from the EU, or different laws coming into effect. The important thing is that the principles in the Compact should be at the heart of partnership working.

**The national Compact**

The national Compact is the agreement between central government in England and voluntary and community organisations, who are referred to as Civil Society Organisations in the most recent version. This is defined as including charities, social enterprises and voluntary and community sector organisations.

The national Compact focuses on five key outcomes. These are:

- A strong, diverse and independent civil society
- Effective and transparent design and development of policies, programmes and public services
- Responsive and high-quality programmes and services
- Clear arrangements for managing changes to programmes and services
- An equal and fair society

Specific commitments and undertakings for government and the voluntary and community sector show how each of these outcomes will be delivered.

The principles of the national Compact apply to every public sector body including government departments, Non-Departmental Public Bodies, Arms Length Bodies and Executive Agencies. It is accompanied by an Accountability and Transparency Guide, which outlines steps to take at national and local level when relationships break down, including dispute resolution, internal complaints procedures and ombudsmen functions.
A brief history of the Compact

- The first national Compact was established in 1998 and was developed from recommendations in the Deakin Commission Report which concluded that government should recognise the legitimacy of the voluntary and community sector’s diverse roles, as well as its responsibility to promote a healthy sector.
- The first national Compact for England was produced in 1998 and was developed by the Home Office and a steering group following a postal consultation with 20,000 community groups.
- This was followed by a set of codes that helped clarify how the Compact applied. The codes covered Funding & Procurement, Volunteering, Consultation & Policy Appraisal, Community Groups, Black and Ethnic Minority organisations.
- Each local area was encouraged to develop a local Compact, using the national Compact as a basis.
- Many local Compact partnerships also developed their own codes.
- The national Compact was refreshed in 2009. The set of codes were adapted to a list of principles covering three areas of commitment: Involvement in Policy Development, Allocating Resources and Advancing Equality.
- The national Compact was renewed in 2010 following the establishment of the Coalition Government.
- The Office for Civil Society (OCS) is responsible for implementing the Compact across every government department. Compact Voice works closely alongside OCS to ensure that the views and needs of the voluntary and community sector are represented and understood.
- The Compact continues to enjoy support across the main political parties.

Geography - which areas do local Compacts cover?

To find out which Compact is in place in your area go to www.compactvoice.org.uk, or ask your local Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) or council. NAVCA has a list of local CVS’ available on their website: www.navca.org.uk.

- The national Compact discussed throughout this document covers England only.
- Local Compacts exist in all ‘top tier’ local authority areas. ‘Top tier’ authorities are County Councils, Unitary Authorities, Metropolitan Districts and London Boroughs.
- Compacts also exist in second tier local authorities which include District Councils and Borough Councils. The appropriateness of having a Compact at this level will naturally be determined by local circumstances.
- Although the participation of Town and Parish Councils in the Compact is important, they usually do not have specific Compacts.
- Some regions in England have also developed regional Compacts. Compact workers from across a region sometimes form a regional group, for example the West Midlands Compact Group.
- The other nations in the United Kingdom have their own engagement responsibilities and versions of a Compact, for example the Scottish Compact was set up in 1998.
- Our Compact is admired and has inspired other agreements. There are versions of the Compact in Sweden, Croatia, Estonia, Denmark, Hungary, France and Poland. There are also agreements between government and civil society organisations in the USA, Canada, the Philippines and Egypt.
- In the future there may be a Europe-wide Compact, drawing on the strengths of local and national agreements.
Example: Developing a local Compact

Martin Howie, Director, Voluntary Action Lewisham

Lewisham was one of the first areas to develop a local Compact in 2001. They began by consulting widely with voluntary sector groups and council departments, including 100 in-depth interviews with community groups and council officers.

The council funded a Compact Officer to work part time. A Compact steering group made up of people from the council and voluntary sector umbrella groups was revamped twice. The second time it was changed to include a nominated person from each council directorate. Lewisham did not use the term ‘Compact Champions’ but the expectation was that the nominated person would spread information throughout their directorate.

The strategic partnership endorsed Compact principles, and the Compact group now includes both the local NHS and mental health trust.

A recent refresh of their Compact took out things no longer relevant and developed a code of practice on commissioning. To inform the refresh Lewisham Compact group looked at similar work others had done around the country.

Martin Howie says: “We are fortunate that we have strong partnership relationships in the borough. A supportive mayor makes a huge difference – the person at the top sets the tone.”

How Compact Voice can help:

We can
- Run events and workshops to promote the Compact in your area
- Provide speakers or presentations for your local events
- Share good practice about what works elsewhere
- Provide resources to help you implement your local Compact.