Section 2
Compact groups, officers and champions
Steps taken to implement a local Compact frequently include:

- Creating a cross-sector Compact group who meet regularly to discuss Compact issues.
- Recruiting and empowering advocates to spread Compact knowledge in their organisation and act as the eyes and ears of the Compact in the field. See the section on Compact Champions for further details.
- Officers from the Council and from local infrastructure organisations having formal responsibility for implementing the Compact as part of their job description. Some areas fund full-time Compact Officers.

Not all areas find this structure works for them. Adapting to meet local need is the essence of the Compact.

An effective Compact group

Local Compacts recognise that many different agencies are responsible for meeting local need. By coming together and developing mutual understanding, partners can improve the quality and efficiency of the services on which local people rely. At the core of most local Compacts is an agreement between the council and the voluntary and community sector. However, for a local Compact to work most effectively, the full spectrum of agencies should be engaged.

The ideal Compact group would be made up of the following members:

- Representatives from each voluntary and community sector infrastructure organisation including Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS) and other local community networks or forums. These may include local black and minority ethnic, refugee, faith, advice or creative networks and forums.

- Representatives from each council directorate and relevant district/borough councils.
- Local politicians including both executive and non-executive councillors.
- Council-owned arms length management organisations.
- Local housing associations, or a representative from the local housing association group.
- Local health trusts and consortia.
- Police, fire and rescue services.
- Further education providers.
- Job Centre Plus.
- Some local areas find it helpful to have a business representative, which may include a representative from the local chamber of commerce.

Members of the group should be excellent at passing information to those they represent. It is also vital that representatives are key decision makers. For example the chief executive of the CVS, the assistant director of each council directorate, or the head of the community engagement team. Some areas have an application process and a role description for positions on the Compact group.

Compact group meetings

Because the strength of the Compact group lies in the seniority and decision-making capacity of its members, who expect to meet others at the same senior level as themselves at the Compact meeting, it is important to invest time and effort in ensuring people attend. The Compact group meeting should not be a ‘talking shop.’ Some ways to help ensure attendance include:

- Establishing what representatives expect from the group and formally agree terms of reference, which should outline the shared mission of the group and which organisations are expected to be represented.
- Long and short-term aims for the group.
- An interesting, relevant agenda, with good and accurate minutes maintained.
- Regular meetings – for example six times a year.
- Guest speakers – for example the police explaining how they work with community groups.
- A venue that all will feel comfortable attending.
- One-to-one meetings with new members before they join.
- A clear process for dealing with any issues between members.
- Recognition and celebration of achievements.
Acknowledgement that smaller voluntary and community organisations may find it harder than statutory sector officers to take time away from service delivery and fundraising, with efforts made to address any imbalance between sectors.

Giving attendees a clear understanding of the benefits of attending for their organisation and their users.

“Without the Compact and the work of the group there would have been real problems for organisations delivering family and children’s services under new contracts. The Compact helped us to ensure fairness and treatment of groups as equal partners in the contracting process.”

Mary Gardiner, Chief Executive of Kensington and Chelsea Social Council

See also:

The section on communicating the benefits of Compact working to different audiences
The section on Compact Impact: Action planning, monitoring and evaluating
The publication Local Compacts at Work which is available in the resources section of www.compactvoice.org.uk.

Compact officers

Local Compact officers have the Compact as part of their job description or as an explicit aspect of their role. A handful of local areas fund a dedicated Compact officer. Compact officers are usually located in either the council or the local CVS, or share their time between the two.

One main task of a Compact officer is to share information about the Compact. An officer’s ability to work comfortably in the statutory and the community and voluntary sector is an asset.

The Compact officer role may be simply to facilitate the work of local Compact champions, or it may focus more on publicity and delivery.

The role may include:

Servicing the Compact group by arranging meetings and taking minutes
Managing the Compact budget (if there is one)
Publicising the Compact through:
  - organising and delivering training and events;
  - tailored presentations and workshops at different organisations’ meetings;
  - web and print publicity and promotion
Communicating opportunities for engagement or responding to consultations, ensuring that awareness of the Compact is high and that stakeholders are aware of the relevance of the Compact
Developing an action plan, with clear steps for monitoring, evaluating and reporting on the Compact
Developing tools that help embed Compact principles and commitments, such as a commissioning framework, which sets out good practice for commissioners working with community and voluntary groups.
• Co-ordinating a Compact renewal process or review, for example developing a consultation questionnaire, facilitating discussion groups, co-ordinating a writers group, drafting text to ensure the best possible Compact document
• Advising on compliance and addressing non-compliance
• Staying aware of the Compact nationally and the wider policy and funding landscape.

Difficulties for officers may include having to squeeze the Compact in with competing work commitments, particularly when the role is not full time, or Compact responsibilities form just part of a job description.

Relating the Compact to other policies, strategies and targets can help by showing others that the Compact is integral to good practice and not an additional bureaucratic exercise.

Compact Champions

The role of Compact Champions was devised to address a common barrier to establishing an effective Compact – that it can be difficult to spread understanding of the Compact. By helping people from organisations locally - from front line staff to directors - to understand the Compact, it is possible to generate greater understanding of and support for the Compact, and encourage more people to advocate for its use and inclusion in policy and service design.

It should be recognised that not every Compact refers to or has Compact Champions. Local areas have their own approaches to delivering a local Compact. However, there are a number of examples of local Compacts which have benefited greatly from building up a group of well informed, well connected Compact Champions.

Who can be a Compact Champion?

There are no set requirements for being a Compact Champion. Ideally every public body and larger voluntary and community sector organisation should have at least one named Champion, while councils should have Champions who represent different departments and differing levels of seniority. Elected members are a natural fit, and the mayor is particularly well placed to be a champion as they frequently visit community organisations.

What should Champions do?

• Promote the Compact as a way of working together during the course of their work
• Advise organisations on Compact compliance
• Report non-compliance
• Represent their organisation at Compact relevant meetings
• Report and share good practice
• Signpost people to further resources.

Find further information and examples of Compact Champions in the resources section at www.compactvoice.org.uk.

Example: Surrey Compact Champions

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. This message was taken on board by the council, thanks to Compact Champions promoting the importance of more prompt payments. In 2008 just 58% of groups were paid on time, but by 2010 this had improved to 95%.

How Compact Voice can help:

We can
• Help you review your Compact group’s effectiveness
• Support you to engage new members
• Provide support and resources for Compact officers
• Provide training and support for Compact Champions
• Share good practice about what’s working elsewhere
• Provide resources to help you implement your local Compact.