

VOLUNTARY SECTOR COMPACT FOR KINGSTON

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 **What is a Compact?** The Compact is a central government initiative for improving relations with the voluntary sector, which was presented to Parliament by the Home Secretary in November 1998. The Compact is a statement of shared principles and undertakings to improve understanding and partnership between statutory authorities and the voluntary and community sectors. The government is encouraging the adoption of this model by other public bodies and a Local Compacts Steering Group has been set up to produce guidelines and codes of practice on specific issues, e.g. black and minority ethnic organisations.

1.2 **The position in Kingston** – In 1990 Kingston adopted a Voluntary Sector Strategy entitled 'Partnership in a Changing Environment', following a period of valuable collaborative work with the local voluntary sector. Some of the principles in the Strategy mirror those in the Compact but much of the detail has been overtaken by events and is no longer directly relevant. The policy context has also changed and the concept of partnerships has a high profile in new initiatives, including Best Value, Community Legal Services, Healthy Living strategies and the modernising local government agenda.

1.3 **Process for drawing up a Compact for Kingston** – The idea of developing a Compact for Kingston was floated at the Voluntary Sector Forum in April 1999 and a number of current issues were identified, including communication and working in partnership. Following discussions with the Director of Community Services, it was proposed that the Compact highlight the following three areas of common interest:

- Policy development and consultation between the sectors
- How to develop effective partnerships and improve communication
- Longer term funding arrangements; priorities and strategies for funding; accountability and good practice

Following discussions in the Council's Corporate Development Team, it was agreed to set up a small working group of officers and representatives from the voluntary sector, to draw up a draft Compact and consult widely with Elected Members, officers and the voluntary sector. This approach was endorsed by Policy and Resources Committee in November 1999.

THE COMPACT

2. SHARED VISION

2.1 The importance of the voluntary sector's contribution to a democratically, socially inclusive society is recognised. Voluntary organisations make a major contribution to the development of society, including involving users in the design and delivery of services, acting as providers of advice and information, acting as advocates for people who have no voice, helping to alleviate poverty, improve quality of life and involve those people at risk of being socially excluded.

3. SHARED PRINCIPLES

The shared principles underpinning the Compact are:

- Voluntary action is an essential component of democratic society.
- An independent and diverse voluntary and community sector is fundamental to the well-being of society.
- In the development and delivery of Council policy and services, the Council and the voluntary and community sectors have distinct but complementary roles.
- There is added value in working in partnership to common aims and objectives.
- The Council and the voluntary sector have different forms of accountability and are answerable to a range of stakeholders. Common to both is the need for integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.
- Voluntary and community organisations are able to campaign within the law in order to advance their aims.
- The Council plays a significant role as a funder of voluntary groups which is an important element in the relationship.
- Both the Council and the voluntary sector acknowledge the importance of promoting equality of opportunity for all people, regardless of race, age, disability, gender, sexual orientation or religion.

4. UNDERTAKINGS BY THE COUNCIL

4.1 Independence

To recognise and support the independence of the sector, including its right within the law, to campaign, to comment on Council policy and strategy and to challenge that policy or strategy, irrespective of any funding relationship that might exist, and to determine and manage its own affairs.

4.2 Funding and accountability

In funding the voluntary sector, the Council will endeavour to uphold the following principles:

- Allocate resources against clear and consistent criteria.
- Adopt funding policies which take account of the objectives of voluntary and community organisations and their need to operate efficiently and effectively.
- Have common, transparent arrangements for agreeing and evaluating objectives, performance indicators and associated targets.
- Make prompt payments of grants.
- Inform voluntary organisations of any changes to the funding position or future funding as early as possible.
- Value long term multi-year funding, where appropriate, to assist longer term planning and stability.

[It should be noted that, as well as grant-aid, the Council has a number of other routes for funding voluntary organisations including through block and spot contracts. Different monitoring and accountability arrangements will be in place in these areas and there will be different types of contracts and service agreements.]

4.3 Policy Development and Consultation

To consider new policies and procedures, particularly at the developmental stage, in the light of implications for the voluntary sector.

Subject to issues of urgency, sensitivity or confidentiality to consult the sector on issues that are likely to affect it. Such consultation should allow reasonable time scales for response, including, where possible, allowing sufficient time to arrange appropriate and meaningful consultation with stakeholders and users.

4.4 Effective partnerships and improved communication

To promote effective partnerships by considering ways to improve communication between the sectors, by:

- Use of special events – to share information about the work of particular organisations and the roles of elected members
- Better use of existing newsletters to disseminate information and promote mutual understanding
- Rationalising the pattern of meetings and the involvement of representatives from the voluntary sector in working groups, consultative groups etc. Making more effective use of meetings which bring together the statutory and voluntary sectors for discussion of specific topics, i.e. Kingston Alliance, Voluntary Sector Forum.
- Improving consultation and communication as part of the modernising local government agenda.

5. UNDERTAKINGS BY THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

5.1 Funding and accountability

The voluntary sector recognises that receipt of public funds carries with it responsibilities to the funding body and to the public that benefit from the services provided. The sector undertakes to pursue good practice in the use of public funds, including:

- Maintaining high standards of governance and conduct.
- Meeting reporting and accountability obligations to funders and users, including acknowledgement of public support.
- Maintaining effective systems for financial management and control.
- Where applicable, to observe guidance from the Charity Commission including that on political activities and campaigning and to observe the accounting framework for charities.
- Operating with good management practice and with a commitment to equal opportunities in relation to staff, volunteers and users.
- Developing systems for quality assurance and accountability to service users, including the involvement of users, wherever possible, in the development of activities and services.

5.2 Policy Development and Consultation

To respond to the Council's consultations, including attendance at relevant meetings, where possible.

To ensure that, where appropriate and where time allows, service users, volunteers and supporters are consulted when responding to the Council's consultations.

To develop a code of practice around issues of confidentiality.

5.3 Effective partnerships and improved communication

To promote effective partnerships and communication through improved use of newsletters and special events.

Commitment to keep updated information held on Council databases and websites.

Contribute to research to assess the economic value of the voluntary sector, including keeping records of volunteers' skills

6. GOOD PRACTICE BY BOTH PARTIES

6.1 The Council and the voluntary sector will seek to promote effective working relationships, consistency of approach and good practice. There is a commitment on both sides to promoting best practice and equality of opportunity in activities, employment, involvement of users and service provision.

There is a commitment to review the Compact together on an annual basis.

6.2 Taking the Compact forward

As part of central government's commitment to the development of Compacts, codes of good practice are being prepared in the area of funding, consultation and policy appraisal, volunteering, community groups and black and minority ethnic organisations.

6.3 Particular issues relating to black and minority ethnic organisations

There is a commitment to take account of the Government's code of good practice to develop the capacity of local black and minority ethnic organisations to be directly involved in partnerships, consultation and decision making.

E 5
ACTION PLAN

Timetable for Kingston's Compact

April 2000	Draft Compact and Action Plan to Council's Corporate Development Team
May/June 2000	Consultation with Elected Members, the voluntary sector and officers
June/July 2000	Consideration of final Compact and Action Plan by Cabinet and appropriate committees
August/ September 2000	Circulate the Compact

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMPACT

Funding and accountability: (see paras. 4.2/5.1 of Compact)

- Review Grant aid procedures and guidelines for applicants **by July/Aug 2000**
- Pilot with a number of key organisations a move towards in principle multi-year funding. Organisations must make a commitment to:
 - A three year planning cycle
 - Seeking external funding to add value to grant
 - Working towards meeting quality standards (e.g. Community Legal Services Quality Mark)
 - Adapting to changing local and national context
 - Working towards 'Investors in People (IIP)' status (with support of KVA)
 - Providing accessible services which target need

Council will undertake to:

- Take into account the impact of external events during the funding term
- Review funding after two years
- Offer training/support

Pilot involving 6 organisations to begin new arrangements **in 2001**

Consultation arrangements: (see paras. 4.4/5.3 of Compact)

Pattern of meetings agreed for the Voluntary Sector Forum, Kingston Alliance, Arts Council, Sports Council etc. (link into Council's new meetings' structure)

by October/November 2000

Improved use of new technology
(including e-mail, websites, Telecity etc.)
to improve consultation arrangements
and access to Council reports and policy
documents. To review current position
and plan for future improvements

by October/November 2000

Training:

Council officers' induction
(to include information about
the local voluntary sector).
To establish the process

During 2000/01 (ongoing)

Council members (new)

as above

Best Practice/quality standards/
Governance (voluntary sector)

as above (KVA)

IIP (Investors in People) for the
Voluntary Sector

as above (KVA)

Communication: (see paras. 4.4/5.3 of Compact)

Review of newsletters/updates etc.
(Council and Voluntary Sector)

by Dec. 2000

Special event(s) agreed
(To improve knowledge/understanding
of Council and Voluntary Sector)

by Dec. 2000

Future areas for development

- **Take account of Government's Codes of Good Practice on particular areas of activity as they appear**
- **Involve the emerging Primary Care Trust and Health Authority in the Compact, as significant local funders and partners of the voluntary sector**