

The Buckinghamshire Compact

Between local public bodies and the voluntary and community sector

This document sets out a framework for the future working relationship between the 'statutory sector' (Buckinghamshire County Council, District Councils, Primary Care Trusts and Thames Valley Police) and the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) in Buckinghamshire.

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BENEFITS

What will the Compact do for the residents of Buckinghamshire?

- Develop a framework which will aim to improve the quality of life of people through access to quality services, to increase clarity in terms of the support and funding available to the VCS, and to achieve the shared aims and objectives of all organisations within the sector.
- Improve communication, understanding, collaboration, trust and respect between the **Statutory Sector** and the VCS, in the true spirit of **partnership**, to the benefit of the people of Buckinghamshire;

What's in it for the partners who sign up to the Compact?

Voluntary and Community Organisations

- Partners will build strong relationships based on mutual respect and understanding
- Recognition of the value of the VCS and the importance of infrastructure in order to develop services
- A definition of partnership which goes beyond funding and includes a whole range of voluntary organisations – large and small – and not just those funded by public bodies
- Open arrangements for agreeing and evaluating objectives
- **Consultation** on changes to funding positions
- Open and transparent arrangements for the allocation of resources
- Consultation, within reasonable timescales, on issues that are likely to affect you

Statutory Authorities

- Partners will build strong relationships based on mutual respect and understanding
- Effective partnerships to deliver high quality, reliable statutory services and improve services in local communities in line with **Best Value**
- A definition of partnership which goes beyond funding and includes a whole range of voluntary organisations – large and small – and not just those funded by public bodies
- Help in policy development, planning and delivery
- Partners will develop recognised standards that are appropriate to the role and resources of the organisation

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1 Introduction

Background

- a In November 1998, the Government published the 'Compact on Relations between Government and the VCS' to provide a framework for the relationship between the statutory and **Voluntary and Community Sector**. It was seen as a starting point for us to produce and adopt our own Compact.
- b In early 2000, the Bucks Infrastructure Group (BIG) started work on a Buckinghamshire Compact . It is made up of representatives from voluntary and community **infrastructure organisations** in Buckinghamshire. The Buckinghamshire County and District Chief Executive (CADEX) group, who supported the development of a Compact involving County Council, District Councils, the Primary Care Trusts (PCT's), Thames Valley Police (the statutory sector) and the VCS, welcomed this start. The aim of the Compact is to create a new approach to working together.
- c The statutory sector and the VCS already work together to meet the needs of local communities at neighbourhood, district and countywide levels. The Bucks Strategic Partnership leads community planning for the county. It brings together local agencies to serve the whole community of Buckinghamshire. The concept of a Compact reflects this commitment to co-ordinate planning and action to continuously improve services and meet local needs. This way of working brings its own challenges and opportunities.
- d The **Compact Steering Group** will be guided by the Government's National Compact document, and its codes of good practice, when developing a framework for Buckinghamshire.

Aims

- e The Compact aims to:
 - improve communication, understanding, collaboration, trust and respect between the statutory sector and the VCS to the benefit of the people of Buckinghamshire;
 - develop a framework which will improve people's quality of life by giving them access to quality services
 - increase awareness of the support and funding available to the VCS
 - meet the shared aims of both sectors.

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- f The Compact is an agreement between local public bodies and the VCS. It is intended to be both a practical document and a statement showing a commitment to promote good-quality working relationships between public organisations, local communities and other voluntary and **community groups** in Buckinghamshire. All parties to the Compact are committed to turning the words into actions. However, the Compact is not a legally binding document or a contract.

Common principles

- g Both the statutory sector and the VCS share a common goal – to work for the benefit of the communities of Buckinghamshire and to provide high-quality, accessible services, thereby promoting equality of opportunity and social inclusion.
- h Both sectors complement each other. The statutory sector supports the VCS, which contributes significantly to the effectiveness of the statutory sector. So both sides can achieve more together than separately.
- i The **diversity** and independence of the VCS in terms of size, membership, resources and working practices is seen as a strength. Both sectors recognise the need to be flexible and sensitive when setting up structures and procedures which are appropriate for everyone, which have previously found it difficult to engage.
- j **Partnership**, where all partners are of equal value, is central to the success of the relationship between the sectors. This involves everyone understanding:
- o each others' roles and aims; and
 - o restrictions facing both the statutory sector and the VCS.
- k Both sectors recognise the need to increase community participation and the diversity, knowledge and experience that it brings to the County. The VCS makes a substantial contribution to local communities and to the environmental, social, cultural, economic and political life of Buckinghamshire. Both sectors accept the responsibility to develop appropriate policies when working with volunteers and to improve the profile, status and range of volunteer activity.
- l The statutory sector recognises and supports the independence of voluntary and community organisations. This includes their right to **campaign** within the law to further their aims, to comment on public sector policy, to challenge that policy, no matter what funding they receive, and to manage their own affairs.
- m The VCS acknowledges the responsibilities of those in the statutory sector (for example, to provide '**best value**' and the restrictions placed on them by the law and the Government).

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- n The VCS also recognises the decision-making role of those in the statutory sector (including councillors where appropriate) and their responsibility to work in the interest of everyone in their area, with the resources available.
- o Both sectors agree to encourage co-ordinated activities between voluntary and community groups.

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2 Communicating and sharing information

- a The statutory sector and the VCS are committed to setting up open and effective channels of communication so they can discuss matters and share information.
- b The statutory sector and the VCS recognise that relevant and regular communication (based on respect and openness) is a key to their **partnership**.
- c Communication between the sectors should make sure that each other's aims are fully understood and moved forward in the most effective way. Although the sectors may have different priorities, both recognise that focusing on a shared agenda can help them to successfully meet their priorities.
- d Both the statutory sector and the VCS **infrastructure** groups recognise their responsibility to communicate.
- e The statutory sector and the VCS will be open and respect confidentiality. However, this must be balanced with the legal requirements the organisations must meet.

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3 Accountability and resources

- a The VCS is a diverse one in terms of the size of the organisations, the nature of the activities and the roles they play. This results in organisations in that sector playing a variety of roles including:
- partner in planning services;
 - service provider;
 - campaigner;
 - people's representative;
 - opinion giver;
 - capacity builder.

Accountability

- b When agreeing individual working relationships, both sectors will do the following.
- Clearly set out any capacity issues that need to be agreed to have an effective working relationship, including capacity building, sharing of knowledge and expertise, and providing 'support in kind'.
 - Agree to provide **monitoring** information and statistics that are relevant and proportionate to the level of funding supplied.
 - Agree any further information each organisation needs and the level of support needed to provide that information.
 - Agree how and when the monitoring information will be used and the arrangements for giving feedback to the individual organisation, including timescales and the level of confidentiality.
 - Agree how changes to the agreement will be proposed and approved during the course of the relationship.
- c The statutory sector and the VCS will work together to do the following.
- Reduce unnecessary administration by making the monitoring and reporting requirements the same, where appropriate, in line with any national standards.
 - Use the Compact Steering Group to help make both sectors improve their accountability by highlighting and promoting examples of good practice.

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- Continue to review and refine working arrangements to avoid duplication and overlaps and improve accountability.
 - Recognise and respect the need to be accountable to those who provide funding and those who receive funded services.
 - Accept that organisations in the statutory sector are accountable for public funds, that they must put them to best use, that they have other funding priorities, and they depend on funding from the Government.
 - Work towards developing recognised and appropriate quality standards for delivering services while respecting the contribution and involvement of volunteers.
- d Both sectors expect high standards of management and conduct and will aim to achieve them.

Funding

- e When distributing the resources available, the statutory sector will do the following:
- Recognise the role the VCS plays in Buckinghamshire and acknowledge its need to secure appropriate funding and resources.
 - Develop a framework for coordination of funding processes and information sharing by statutory authorities to ensure equality.
 - Recognise the need for fairness, equal access, consistency and clear information.
 - Recognise that support for infrastructure organisations in the VCS is needed to help them have the ability to respond to the needs and priorities of the community.
 - Recognise that both core and project funding is essential for the VCS to be effective.
- f Both sectors will work together to make the most of external funding opportunities whilst recognising the importance of local public agency funding in attracting external funding.

Support in kind

- g The statutory sector is committed to developing good practice for providing support in kind (including the use of premises and equipment, staff time and training, and sharing the knowledge, expertise and experience available in both sectors).

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Code of good practice

- h Both sectors will work together through the Compact Steering Group to develop a code of good practice for funding. This will promote the following.
- Funding policies which take account of the aims of voluntary and community organisations and their need to work independently, efficiently and effectively.
 - Recognising the weak financial position of some **voluntary organisations** and their need to be paid quickly.
 - Clear arrangements for reviewing financial support, consulting on changes to funding and letting voluntary and community organisations know about future funding as early as possible (normally at least 6 weeks before the end of the current grant period). These arrangements should recognise the importance of early discussions between co-funders on any significant change to funding.
 - The value of appropriate funding to help long-term plans and stability.
 - A clear funding timetable and decision-making procedure.
 - Using clear and consistent criteria, including the principles of best value, when allocating resources.
 - Open arrangements for agreeing and evaluating aims, **performance indicators** and their associated targets, and streamlined reporting and monitoring arrangements.

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4 Communication and consultation

Communication

- a The Compact Steering Group will review methods of communication to make sure the best use is made of face-to-face contact, meetings, newsletters and the internet.
- b The Compact Steering Group will have a network of contacts to provide quick access to information. Organisations in the statutory sector will identify named contacts in service areas. The Compact Steering Group will be responsible for publishing details of a network of contacts within both sectors and for making sure that the details are reviewed each year and kept up to date.
- c For enquiries about the Compact, the Compact Steering Group will always be the first point of contact.

Consultation

- d Both sectors recognise that consultation is a two-way process which, in many cases, is influenced by the Government. Both sectors agree to do the following.
 - Build on, co-ordinate, develop and improve existing consultation methods to make sure they include everyone.
 - Assess relevant new initiatives, consultation papers, policies and procedures, particularly at the developmental stage, to identify implications for both sectors.
 - Recognise the importance of involving the same representatives in consultation and partnership work, and that the representatives have the appropriate authority.

A good practice guide will be jointly developed by both sectors to support this work.

Consultation timescales

- e As most management committees in the voluntary sector will only meet every two to three months, the statutory sector will aim to follow Government recommendations of allowing 12 weeks for written consultations. However, both sectors recognise the time restrictions they work in and, if shorter timescales are necessary, they will consider alternative methods and approaches to make sure good quality, effective consultations are held.
- f Both sectors will aim to co-ordinate the timing of consultations and, where appropriate, share resources to help prevent too many consultations.

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Government consultation

- g Both sectors agree to do the following.
- Give each other notice of possible future consultations from central Government and other agencies where possible.
 - Share views and co-ordinate responses where it is helpful to provide a 'Buckinghamshire' view or opinion.
 - Work together to encourage the Government to provide early notice of consultation timetables and realistic timescales.

Consultation information

- h Both sectors agree to do the following.
- Explain what the consultation is about and whose views are being sought.
 - Explain why they have chosen the particular consultation method being used.
 - Wherever possible, provide a summary of the consultation and say where the full version is available.
 - Use simple language without any unnecessary jargon or, if this is not possible, with specialised terms explained.
 - Explain how and when information gathered during the consultation will be used.
 - Provide information on those who took part in the consultation and the result of it.
 - Make consultation documents available in a variety of formats, where appropriate.
 - Make a joint response where appropriate.
- i The statutory sector will do the following.
- Make clear where a consultation exercise can result in change.
 - State how many stages of consultation there are going to be and who is being consulted.
 - Make clear why a particular voluntary or community group is being consulted on a particular issue (for example, as a service provider, as a representative of the community or volunteers, as a representative of the VCS, as a campaigning organisation and so on).

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- j The VCS will do the following.
- Provide and publicise information about consultations where appropriate.
 - Use its network of organisations to encourage and support appropriate participation in consultation.
 - Make clear whether it is responding as a service provider, a representative of the community or volunteers, a service user or a campaigning organisation.
 - Make clear whether their responses are based on consultation with members or their own experience and knowledge.

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5 Monitoring, reviewing and developing the Compact

- a The statutory sector and the VCS are jointly committed to monitoring and reviewing the Compact to make sure it continues to be effective.
- b The Compact Steering Group, working under the umbrella of the Bucks Strategic Partnership, will continue to meet at regular intervals to do the following.
- Get regular feedback.
 - Monitor feedback against agreed action points.
 - Evaluate both sectors' achievements and progress of work and set criteria for evaluating their success each year.
 - Develop and agree detailed codes of good practice on the various sections in the Compact, including in relation to funding and groups that have previously found it difficult to engage.
 - Identify any new tasks that need to be carried out and decide the work programme for future years.
 - Review the members of the Compact Steering Group and look at setting up any other groups that are needed.
 - Identify and publicise examples of good practice.
- c The Compact Steering Group will also review the Compact every year.
- d The Compact Steering Group will keep a record of any disputes and complaints as part of its monitoring process, but any disagreements between the statutory sector and the VCS should be settled between the organisations involved. If this is not possible, they should use a mediation service. The Compact Steering Group may be able to give details of agencies providing mediation services.
- e Progress on the Compact will be reported to the appropriate meetings of the statutory sector and the VCS, and both sectors will report to their members and communities each year. All the organisations involved in preparing the Compact and those that sign up after the launch will report on the progress of the Compact to their staff and members.

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6 Glossary

Best Value is a statutory responsibility for local authorities to achieve continuous improvement in services through a combination of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness. The Best Value principles are:

- Challenge
- Compare
- Consult
- Compete

All of an authority's services must be reviewed by *challenging* how and why they are provided, *comparing* them with the performance of others, *consulting* with stakeholders and testing their *competitiveness* against external providers.

Campaign or **Lobby** is to try to influence decision-makers to introduce specific, and/or change existing, policies and programmes.

Community Groups are integral to the Voluntary and Community Sector. Whilst it is not usually helpful to try to distinguish or categorise organisations within the sector, the term community groups tends to be used for those which are: local community and self-help groups; more informal; often made up entirely of volunteers; any staff are likely to be part-time; independent; without regular income or funding.

Compact Steering Group is a representative group of the Statutory Sector and the VCS, tasked with developing and reviewing the compact.

Consultation is the process of seeking and listening to views within defined parameters. This includes seeking information and advice about future decisions, and testing the impact of decisions which have already been taken.

Diversity acknowledges that society is made up of people who are different from one another in many ways, i.e. sex, ethnicity, culture, language, food, dress and life styles. But we acknowledge these differences and pay attention to their individual needs, concerns, hopes and ambitions in a framework of mutual respect. Acceptance of diversity holds out the promise of uniting communities while demarcating and preserving individual traditions, perspectives and cultures.

Faith Groups form an important part of the Voluntary and Community Sector. Each faith group provides services to its own members who share a common faith but they also often provide services to the wider community. Many faith communities are involved in running community services, promoting community development and representing community interests.

Infrastructure organisations provide capacity building support to Voluntary and Community Organisations (VCO). They represent VCO interests and provide a voice for VCOs in policy making. They also facilitate joint working between VCOs and across the sector.

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organisations exist at national, regional and local levels and may also be known as "umbrella" or "second tier" organisations. This is because they provide support to "first tier" or "front-line" VCOs. There are generic infrastructure organisations which provide support to all VCOs within a particular geographic area, and specialist or sub-sectoral infrastructure organisations which provide support to VCOs working with specific communities/client groups or within specific service areas. Examples of local organisations and networks providing infrastructure services include:

- * local development agencies such as Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS)
- * Race Equality Councils (REC)
- * Community Empowerment Networks (CEN)
- * local volunteer development agencies such as Volunteer Bureaux

Monitoring is the routine collection and recording of information, sometimes against statutory performance indicators, on the activities of an organisation. It provides information on what an organisation is doing, but makes no judgement about the value of the outcome or results of those activities.

Partnership is when one or more organisations work together to achieve a shared and clear set of objectives. There is a clear understanding of the contribution of each organisation, which takes into account their differences, and there is equal respect for the role and experience of all partners. A successful partnership depends on the sharing of information and decision-making.

Performance Indicators are tools that measure, simplify and communicate important issues, trends and standards of performance. They provide a benchmark against which progress can be measured year on year and provide comparisons between organisations. They usually measure cost, economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

Statutory Sector is the name given to organisations created through Acts of Parliament whose functions are determined by the law. Local authorities, including parish and town councils, are democratically elected and are accountable to the voters and central government. They have legal responsibilities for the social well-being, economic development, environment and health of the people it serves. Other statutory agencies, such as health authorities and the probation, police, fire & rescue and ambulance services, are not directly elected and are accountable to the appropriate Secretary of State. For the purposes of this Compact, the Statutory Sector includes the County and District Councils, Thames Valley Police and the Primary Care Trusts in Buckinghamshire.

Trustees are the group of people responsible for the control and management of a charity, which includes members of a charitable association's management committee and directors of charitable companies. Certain specific statutory duties arise from being a trustee.

Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)

This sector is taken to include organisations and groups, both formal and informal.

The distinction between whether a group is a **Voluntary** or a **Community** organisation is fairly arbitrary and in reality there is one sector that embraces groups across a wide spectrum.

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Primary characteristics of the sector are that the organisations/groups are not-for-profit, are independent of government, and their primary purpose is of benefit to society. Attempts to define organisations into different categories (i.e. voluntary or community) is largely unhelpful to the organisations themselves and in almost all the literature arising from the Sector, the term “Voluntary and Community Sector” is used to emphasise that all are included.

It is important to note that **Faith** communities, which bring together people with particular beliefs, often also provide services to their own members and members of the community in which they exist. Many faith communities are involved in running community services, promoting community development and representing community interests. Faith communities are thus a key part of the Voluntary and Community Sector.

Voluntary Organisations

These are integral to the Voluntary and Community Sector. Whilst it is not usually helpful to try to distinguish or categorise organisations within the sector, the term voluntary organisations tends to be used for organisations which are: formally structured; not-for-profit (although they may make surpluses); independent and not part of government; managed by unpaid, voluntary management committees or boards of **trustees**; may have paid employees and volunteers; may be registered charities and/or companies limited by guarantee.

Volunteering is an activity that a person (**a volunteer**) chooses to undertake, whereby they do something to benefit either an individual or a group (not relatives) or to benefit the environment, and for which they receive no payment.

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7 Organisations involved in preparing the Compact

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We will encourage other public organisations and VCS groups in Buckinghamshire to adopt the Compact and sign up to its principles.

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