



Dumfries & Galloway Compact

Feedback from Local Awareness Raising Events

Background

Four local Compact events were held across Dumfries & Galloway during February and March 2009 to:

- Raise awareness of the Compact, its aims and aspirations;
- Encourage voluntary and community organisations to sign up to the Compact;
- Increase understanding of the Compact by public agency staff, including the need to adhere to Compact commitments;
- Gain feedback on the Compact information pack, particularly the Compact Record Form;
- Raise awareness of Third Sector Forum development;
- Inform the Compact work programme for 2009/10.

Each of the events provided the chance for public and voluntary/community sector colleagues to feed back their views on the Compact and its implementation over the coming year.

This report highlights key comments and recommendations from all four events. The report will be circulated to workshop attendees, Local Rural Partnerships, CVS members, Community Councils and each local Third Sector Forum, with each relevant area workshop notes appended. The summarised report will go to the Community Planning Partnership and Joint Management Team.

Key Comments and Recommendations

The morning session gave participants the opportunity to consider four key elements of the Compact, and their comments and recommendations are outlined below.

Partnership Working & Joint Undertakings

We need to understand partnership working better, including the aims and expectations of both sectors and agree a process for evaluating partnerships.

This has resource implications for both sectors including training and support to allow effective engagement and feedback.

Each sector needs to understand the other better; as such there needs to be a mapping exercise of voluntary/community groups and also of existing partnerships/forums.

There needs to be a communication strategy for public agency staff to ensure awareness of the Compact.

Elected and Board Members need to be more aware of the Compact and the need for their decisions to adhere to Compact principles.

Consultation

Consultations need to be accessible and jargon-free with as long a response timescale as possible. Participants hoped that implementation of the Compact would help increase the quality and effectiveness of future consultations.

A reasonable explanation must be given when consultation timescales are short.

Feedback from consultation responses to those being consulted is crucial to encourage confidence and continued engagement by the voluntary/community sector.

There was lack of awareness of the National Standards for Community Engagement - participants felt there should be increased awareness raising/training around this.

There were some comments on the possible lack of transparency of previous consultations where voluntary groups felt they were being asked to consult on issues that had already been decided. Again responses were positive that Compact implementation and adherence could prevent this happening in future.

Recognition

All participants felt there was need to gain more knowledge and understanding of the voluntary/community sector and, for public agencies, how voluntary organisations work.

This includes recognising the diverseness of the voluntary/community sector, its need to have a better understanding of the public sector policy framework and acknowledging this means time and resource implications for voluntary/community organisations.

It was also felt that there was a need to promote a better understanding of public sector statutory responsibilities and constraints. This included developing a more business like relationship between each sector, increasing understanding of how each sector can benefit from the other and recognising voluntary sector organisations as community planning partners who can take a challenging/lobbying role if appropriate. Participants agreed there was a need to understand the difference between larger regional and national voluntary organisations and smaller local groups (who sometimes feel excluded) and the constraints faced by more marginalized groups.

Work to take forward in this area includes:

- developing a clear process for voluntary/community sector representation on partnerships/working groups;
- improving communication within the voluntary/community sector, including regionally and locally;
- encouraging groups to work collectively re representation/sharing views;
- considering how access can be improved for the voluntary/community sector to fully participate (meeting locations; language and other barriers; accessible venues and formats; travel expenses);
- considering how organisations and their existing/new volunteers can be supported to engage/participate;
- clarifying the role of Community Councils and how they would like to engage with the Compact.

Resources

The issue of funding the voluntary/community sector was debated in depth at each event.

There was a perception that the voluntary sector can be seen as cheap option for service delivery. There was a need to understand and recognise the value of services delivered by voluntary organisations, whether these are funded/contracted locally by statutory agencies or delivered through external funding. The desire to consider further, understand and promote full cost recovery for services; be realistic about services being delivered for funding received; support voluntary organisations to access procurement opportunities and provide clarity on core/priority funding was acknowledged, as was the Best Value role that voluntary organisations could fulfil.

The constraints and challenges of short term funding were recognised, including transition management and succession planning; loss of experienced skilled project staff; and potential effect on client groups.

There were some discussions on current funding streams available from public agencies and comments included the need for longer term funding (up to 5 years or more); the potential to integrate funding streams for complementary services; and the desire to simplify some application processes. In particular the need to clarify how voluntary/community groups across the region can have a “level playing field” when the four council area committees have different funding criteria was highlighted.

“In Kind” support to voluntary/community organisations was also fully considered, including the need to clarify current ad hoc arrangements and agree a consistency of approach across public sector agencies. This included debate around office premises and room hire costs; area committee decisions on gifting buildings/premises to voluntary groups; and standardised expenses e.g. travel costs.

Taking the Compact Forward

In the afternoon sessions participants had the chance to consider the Compact Record Form, the role of the Compact Champion and shared ideas on Compact implementation and monitoring. It was noted that a number of voluntary groups present had already signed up to the Compact.

The Compact Record Form

It was agreed that there should be a Record Form for both the voluntary/community and public sectors, and that the form should be used to demonstrate good practice as well as raise concerns. Suggestions for additional public agency departments to be included were agreed, as was the proposal to prepare a Guidance Note for form completion and wording to focus on specific areas of the Compact. The note would also clarify the process for addressing Compact issues once the form was submitted and a flowchart was suggested.

Compact Champions

Participants welcomed the proposal for Compact Champions and the role they could play in promoting the Compact. This included cascading Compact information within their own organisation/department and raising Compact awareness at partnerships and committee meetings. Walking the talk was essential and not just paying lip service to the Agreement.

It was noted at one event that members of the Community Planning Joint Management Team, which included senior Directors from NHS D&G, Council, Police, Fire and Rescue Service and Scottish Enterprise, were the first set of public sector Champions.

There was a suggestion to build Compact performance into Appraisal Schemes to check that people were fulfilling the commitments made by their organisations in signing up to the Compact principles and commitments.

Suggestions for publicising the Compact included highlighting the Compact at AGMs, quarterly meetings of Champions to report back on their use of the Compact and establishing a network of Champions e.g. local Federation of Village Halls or a sub group of third sector forums. It was felt that Champions would need to be committed to the Compact, have a level of understanding of partnership working and be realistic about the appropriateness of the role.

Some concerns were expressed that the Champion role implied additional work and responsibility and would be seen as an “add on” to existing commitments. Training for

Champions was recommended to enable common understanding of the role and consistent promotion of the Compact.

It was acknowledged that nominating a Champion could be a capacity issue for smaller organisations; one suggestion was for a “district” champion who would liaise with smaller groups, or for Council Lead Officers to promote this role.

Third Sector Forums

Voluntary/community organisation participants welcomed the proposal for third sector forums, which were at different stages of development across the region. The opportunity for networking and sharing information through the forums was acknowledged.

Taking the Compact Forward

There were a number of suggestions for taking the Compact forward, including:

- a template committee paper for use by voluntary/community groups;
- a short summary sheet to promote the advantages of the Compact, i.e.
 - better use of resources
 - access to information
 - sharing/promoting best practice
 - improved joint working
 - better communication
- publicising groups who have endorsed the Compact and finding out how can they help;
- having a Question and Answer section on a website
- revising the Compact information pack - revise the “why sign up to the Compact” info – need to sell the whole Compact benefit to vol & stat agencies – “the gain”;
- sending out the revised flyer to promote the Compact;
- raising awareness by taking copies of Compact to meetings attended; devising a logo to use if groups are signed up to the Compact;
- seeking best practice examples from other local authority Compact areas.

Compact Evaluation and Monitoring

It was agreed at all events that evaluating the Compact and how key targets would be achieved was a priority but that Compact understanding and implementation would take time. Suggestions for Compact evaluation included using Record Form feedback to develop future versions of the Compact; using the form to sample both statutory and voluntary/community sector Compact experiences and refreshing the Compact on an annual basis.

A key consideration for further clarification is how the voluntary/community sector would be held accountable to Compact principles, and the potential consequences for either sector of breaking the Compact. It was agreed that an audit process/system needed to be developed to address this, and it was suggested that other local authority areas could be approached to share their experiences.

Compact Implementation Working Group August 2009