



South Staffordshire COMPACT

Introduction

The District of South Staffordshire has many examples of effective joint working between voluntary community and statutory organisations. This Compact aims to build on these good relationships. It is a statement of partnership between various organisations. It is a commitment to work together more closely and effectively and to respect each other's rights and responsibilities. It offers a new approach to partnership and a framework to develop more detailed agreements in specific areas in future.

This Compact has been drawn up by the South Staffordshire Local Strategic Partnership in consultation with the community and voluntary sector* in South Staffordshire.

This Compact represents a commitment by its signatories (the Partners) – it is not intended to be a legally binding formal contract but derives its authority from the endorsement of the Partners through the consultation process and through formal adoption by Partners. It sets out a shared vision for the Partners, establishing the principles for the relationship between them and clarifying the expectations that the Partners have of each other.

The Government has recognised that the work of voluntary and community organisations is central to its mission and has therefore produced a National Compact to provide a general framework and act as an enabling mechanism to enhance relationships between Government and the community and voluntary sector. The South Staffordshire Compact draws on the structure and content of the National Compact.

The aim has been to draft a statement that will be applicable across a whole range of relationships between the community and voluntary sector and the public and private sectors. Each Partner will be expected to take the Compact into account when revising existing policies, strategies and action plans and when devising new ones where they affect or are within the constituency of the voluntary and community sector.

The Compact will complement and support the strategies and plans of all Partners.

In addition, mechanisms will be established to monitor adherence by all Partners to the principles set out in the Compact and it will be subject to joint review. The Compact will be reviewed one year after commencement.

The LSP Executive will be asked to endorse this Compact and will recommend it to all partners who will be given 12 weeks to comment upon it with a view to adoption on the 1 April 2006.

* The voluntary sector is often referred to as the "third sector" alongside the public sector and the private sector. It is generally understood to include community groups, voluntary organisations and charities. It is important to recognise the difference between community groups and voluntary organisations. In general terms, community groups are run by volunteers without necessarily any formal structure whilst voluntary organisations have a board of management comprising mainly volunteers and employing paid staff to manage and operate the organisation.

Key Principles and Values

The following key principles and values are a foundation for the South Staffordshire Compact and the relationship between the Partners:

- The relationship between the community and voluntary sector and the public and private sector must be one of mutual respect, trust and equality.
- All Partners are accountable for their actions and, common throughout, is the need for integrity, objectivity, openness, honesty and leadership.
- An independent and diverse community and voluntary sector is fundamental to the well-being of a sustainable community.
- All partners recognise and support the independence of the voluntary and community sector. An approach recognising that diversity of funding sources is one of the best guarantees of continued independence of the community and voluntary sector.
- All Partners are committed to equality of opportunity for all people regardless of ethnicity, religion, age, disability, gender or sexual orientation.
- There are varied roles for the community and voluntary sector and the sector has a responsibility and entitlement to campaign and act as advocates within the law.
- Effective partnerships require communication and collaboration between all levels of the community and voluntary sector and other Partners.

Shared Vision

The shared vision of the Local Strategic Partnership is to strive to make South Staffordshire a safe and healthy place to live, with prosperous villages and thriving communities, where everyone can develop their abilities to the full and pass on to future generations a better environment.

The Partners recognise their interdependence and reliance on each other to achieve this vision and shared goals of:

- Involving and engaging the community to work in partnership to identify, develop and promote the social, economic, cultural and physical well-being of the community of South Staffordshire in the most efficient, effective and economic manner, consistent with the rural nature of the area.
- Working together with people in rural communities to overcome rural isolation.
- Working together with the people and communities to combat social exclusion.
- Enabling the people of South Staffordshire to achieve independence, dignity and self-respect.
- Encouraging self-development and enhancing the capacity of communities to participate in decisions affecting their lives.
- Being responsive to the needs, ideas and decisions of the people of South Staffordshire.
- Promoting and implementing equal opportunities and equal access to services.
- Ensuring a diversity of service provision and, wherever possible, choice for clients.
- Helping to determine and then to meet the priorities and strategic objectives of plans to improve the quality of life for all residents of South Staffordshire.

Mutual Commitments

The Partners will:

- Continue to maintain high standards of governance, conduct and openness.
- Annually review the impact of the South Staffordshire Compact. This will be done by analysis by the LSP of programmes/activities carried out by the LSP during the relevant period where the community and voluntary sector were involved.
- Promote positive and effective working relationships between the community and voluntary sector and other Partners.
- Continue to maintain good practice in meeting legal, reporting and accountability obligations to stakeholders, including local residents, funders and service users.

The Partners' Commitments to the Community and Voluntary Sector

The Partners recognise and value the contribution that the community and voluntary sector makes to the community and wish to ensure that this contribution continues. Throughout their work, they will:

- Support partnership working with the voluntary and community sector to maximise access to financial resources not normally available to statutory bodies but which the community and voluntary sector can access.
- Respect and value the community and voluntary sector and recognise that people choose to volunteer freely and not through coercion or pressure or for financial gain.
- Actively encourage through the implementation of the Compact the involvement of the community and voluntary sector and its influence and participation in the development of strategies, policies and service planning where they affect or are within the constituency of or sphere of interest of the voluntary and community sector.
- Recognise that, whilst groups may have few fiscal or physical resources, the true economic value of the community and voluntary sector will always be acknowledged.
- Actively encourage the involvement of service users who have an interest in the Partners and their relationship with the community and voluntary sector.
- Recognise that improved communication with, and involvement of, all Partners is key to the successful delivery of the Compact.

The Community and Voluntary Sector's Commitment to Partners.

The community and voluntary sector recognises that it has a responsibility to all Partners and the residents of South Staffordshire and others whom it may serve and with whom it may interact. The community and voluntary sector will:

- Observe guidance from the Charity Commission to ensure best practice in running community and voluntary groups and in service provision.
- Develop quality standards to measure standards of service delivery that are relevant and appropriate to the different sizes and structures of community and voluntary groups, and the activities in which they engage.
- Consult with service users, carers, volunteers and members on policy development activities and planning and development of local services.
- Acknowledge that the community and voluntary sector can have a key role to play by actively promoting and participating in consultation processes initiated by the Partners.
- Actively, accurately and constructively communicate the views put to them in the course of consultation carried out on behalf of the Partners or when presenting a case to the Partners.
- Implement policies that promote best practices and equal rights in activities, employment, involvement of volunteers and fair service provision.
- Observe Charity Commission guidance on political activities and campaigning whilst making effective use of that campaigning role to improve practice, policy and services.

Implementation and Review

In order to implement this Compact and make it effective the following Code of Practice should be followed. It is important to recognise that all sections of this Code of Practice are inter-related and should be read in conjunction with one another and not acted upon in isolation.

- Policy and Consultation
- Volunteering
- Funding
- Community Participation
- Disadvantaged, hard to reach, minority, and excluded groups
- Implementation, operation and review

Policy and Consultation

The Partners recognise that they will, when appropriate, need to consult with the voluntary and community sector including disadvantaged, hard to reach, minority and excluded groups on the development of strategy, policy and other matters which may affect the voluntary and community sector or its constituency.

- Whilst recognising that different organisations may have different priorities and operate under different constraints the Partners will develop policy in open and accessible ways.
- The Partners will build consultation with the community and voluntary sector into their policy development process and their regular planning cycles.
- Consultation will take place at an early stage of policy development, allowing sufficient time for the voluntary and community sector to respond to and influence decisions on all issues which may affect the voluntary and community sector or its constituency.
- Consultation processes will be clear, open and accessible and ensure that all sections of the voluntary and community sector have the opportunity to participate.
- Wherever possible all consultation documents will be concisely written, in plain language, without the use of jargon.
- Wherever possible a clear indication/explanation of the outcomes expected from the voluntary and community sector will be provided. .
- Consultation methods should take account of the diverse nature of the voluntary and community sector and be sensitive and flexible to the needs of groups and individuals by, where appropriate, using a variety of consultation techniques including holding events at accessible venues and at appropriate times.
- Consultation methods should encourage honest views by assuring confidentiality when required.
- The partners and the voluntary and community sector will monitor and evaluate all consultation methods to ensure that, wherever possible, good practice is maintained.
- Lobby at local, regional and national levels to highlight the need for appropriate timescales in policy development and consultation where they affect the constituency or are within the sphere of interest of the voluntary and community sector.

Volunteering

Partners recognise that volunteering makes an essential contribution to the community of South Staffordshire and that Volunteers fulfil a number of diverse roles, which complement services provided by paid staff and statutory bodies.

The Partners recognise the four core principles of volunteering:

- Choice:* Volunteers give their time freely and by choice without concern or monetary reward. Any encouragement to become involved in volunteering should not involve any form of penalty or pressure. Freedom to volunteer is also balanced by the freedom not to become involved.
- Diversity:* Volunteering should be open to all, regardless of background, age, race, ethnic heritage, gender, sexual orientation, geographical location, faith, etc. Social exclusion barriers can be overcome by increasing skills, experience, confidence and contacts gained while helping others. Equal opportunities principles are basic to supporting diversity.
- Reciprocity:* Volunteers offer their contribution freely and benefit in other ways in return for their contribution to wider social objectives. Benefits that volunteers gain include a sense of worthwhile achievement, useful skills, experience and contacts, sociability and fun. Organisations involving volunteers should offer to reimburse their expenses. Volunteers should not be out of pocket.
- Recognition:* The Partners recognise the value of volunteers' contribution to organisations, service users, the local community and the wider economy.

Voluntary activity is integral to the survival of voluntary and community groups and needs to be resourced to enable volunteers to be managed and supported effectively.

Voluntary and community organisations should adopt principles of good practice in the recruitment, management, support and recognition of volunteers. The Partners recognise that to follow good practice may require provision of resources.

The Partners recognise the importance of a volunteering infrastructure locally, which is an essential resource to recruit and match volunteers, promote good practice and support volunteers through training and information.

The Partners recognise the potential value to local employers in the private and statutory sectors of supporting volunteering through promoting employee involvement in community activity.

Funding

The Partners recognise the importance of funding in the relationships between the statutory and voluntary and community sectors and the need for good practice guidance when funding.

Partners who offer funding will:

- Develop open and accessible funding conditions with clear and consistent eligibility criteria, outlining the responsibilities of both the funder and the funded, whether this is through grant aid or through service level agreements or contracts.
- Where possible, aim to simplify the application process by making administration, including forms and paperwork, less complex and more consistent.
- Ensure that funding policies do not unduly compromise the independence of the voluntary and community sector but reserve the right to target funding to such areas of activity undertaken by the sector and to hypothecate the basis on which such assistance is given as they so wish.
- Partners will seek to work in partnership with other funders where work is being jointly funded.
- Partners will seek to develop common and transparent arrangements for evaluating funded activities against agreed objectives.
- Recognise the benefit of longer term planning and, where appropriate, multi-year funding, to maintain a sustainable and vibrant voluntary and community sector and the necessary infrastructure to support it.
- Indicate timescales for deciding funding applications to ensure the voluntary and community sector receive decisions in a timely manner.
- Co-operate with the voluntary and community sector in accessing external funding opportunities and recognise the importance local public agency funding may have in attracting external funding.

Additionally the partners will consider the provision of resources and support in kind, including the use of premises, equipment, staff time, and training.

- Partners who offer funding to voluntary and community groups through small grants schemes should ensure that their processes are open, with simple application methods, appropriate monitoring and reporting systems and take into account that groups may not have formal constitutions.

Voluntary and community organisations:

- Will continue to acknowledge that the receipt of public funds carries a responsibility to the funding body and to the public that benefit from the services provided.
- Will maintain high standards of governance and conduct, meet appropriate reporting and accountability obligations and, where applicable, observe the accounting framework for charities.
- Will develop systems for quality assurance and accountability as appropriate.
- Will aim to develop core-funding forecasts and forward planning to assist funders to assess the longer-term needs of the sector.

Community Participation

Community groups, as associations of people who come together to pursue a common cause or interest, often on a mutual basis, are usually run entirely by volunteers. They tend to be made up of groups that are smaller and may be less formal than voluntary organisations. They may well be affected, directly or indirectly, by legislation, regulation and changes in social policy.

It is important that the distinctive needs and interests of community groups throughout South Staffordshire are taken into account as their perspective and concerns may differ from those of other voluntary organisations.

The Partners agree that:

- Because of their unique role in engaging and representing local people, their limited resources and their more informal structures, community groups may have particular needs that need to be taken into account.
- Community groups should have the opportunity to engage fully in partnership initiatives but partners recognise that lack of resources may make their involvement more difficult, and that meetings and events may need to be planned in advance and at accessible venues and times.
- The Partners recognise the value and independence of community groups and will strive to ensure that community groups, as grass roots organisations, retain ownership of the issues they raise and the solutions they offer.

Disadvantaged, hard to reach, minority, and excluded groups (including religious and faith groups)

The partners recognise that disadvantaged, hard to reach, minority and excluded groups within the voluntary and community sector have an important role to play in helping them achieve their objectives.

They agree that, although the principles and undertakings contained in this Compact apply across the voluntary and community sector, particular consideration needs to be given to the specific needs and interests of and difficulties experienced by disadvantaged, hard to reach, minority, and excluded groups.

The following principles seek to improve the well-being of disadvantaged, hard to reach, minority, and excluded groups and their overall contribution to the community.

- Disadvantaged, hard to reach, minority, and excluded groups should endeavour and be encouraged to play a full and active part within the wider voluntary and community sector and to work in partnership to promote equality and community well-being and to tackle social exclusion.
- Disadvantaged, hard to reach, minority, and excluded groups operating in isolation should not be disadvantaged or prevented, by reason of their circumstances, from taking a full and active part in partnership working or accessing. Partners will be mindful that steps need to be taken to ensure that community groups do not miss out on networking, training and other opportunities.
- The Partners will seek to ensure that all disadvantaged, hard to reach, minority, and excluded groups have the opportunity to be directly involved in partnerships and consultation and decision-making in respect of matters within their constituency or spheres of interest.

Implementation, Operation and Review

The Partners are committed to making the Compact work in practice as a means of strengthening relations between them in South Staffordshire. They recognise that to achieve its goals an action plan will need to be developed for the implementation of, the Compact to ensure that it is built on involvement, widespread support through a public launch and sustained, monitored and managed through a process of on-going review.

The Compact will be reviewed formally at each Annual General Meeting of the South Staffordshire Local Strategic Partnership. A sub-group will meet at least 3 months prior to the Annual General Meeting to consider the working of the Compact. Progress reports on the operation of Compact will be considered at other meetings of the Local Strategic Partnership.

Any person or organisation wishing to comment on the implementation of this Compact and its operation should contact either the Clerk to the South Staffordshire Local Strategic Partnership, Council Offices, Wolverhampton Road, Codsall, South Staffordshire, WV8 1 PX (telephone: 01902 696512/696229 or email: t.flanagan@sstaffs.gov.uk/e.showell@sstaffs.gov.uk) or South Staffordshire Council for Voluntary Service, 1 Stafford Street, Brewood, ST19 9DX