

The Bexley Voluntary Sector Compact



An agreement between Bexley Council, Bexley Care Trust and voluntary and community organisations in membership of Bexley Voluntary Forum



Foreword

Bexley Voluntary Forum, Bexley Council and Bexley Care Trust are proud to be the founding partners for this first Bexley Voluntary Sector Compact. We see this as another important step to ensure that our history of effective partnership working not only continues but also becomes stronger over time.

Bexley voluntary and community groups contribute an enormous amount to the lives of the people who live, work and visit the Borough. They range from the large groups with staff providing services under contract to small groups run by and for local people. The voluntary and community sector in Bexley has a crucial part to play in ensuring that all members of our community have a voice.

We are keen to maintain and build on the commitment of groups representing people of all ages and abilities, including those working with older people, people with disabilities, refugees and asylum seekers, people from black and minority ethnic communities, homeless people, those with mental health problems, young people, lesbians and gay men and many others who may experience barriers to participation. All play their part and give generously.

The Bexley Voluntary Sector Compact will clearly set out our jointly agreed expectations and provide us with a pathway to continue to work together in the future.



Kathy Balcombe, Bexley Care Trust, Harry Smith, Bexley Voluntary Forum, Cllr Donna Briant and Cllr Chris Ball, Bexley Council, welcoming the Bexley Voluntary Sector Compact.

We would like to thank all those who make up Bexley's voluntary and community groups, including the paid staff but above all those who give their time and energy without financial reward – the volunteers. We do not underestimate the work that Management Committee members and volunteers take on and the value they add to the work of the voluntary and community groups that they support. Particular thanks must go to the voluntary sector members of the Compact Steering Group, without whom the Bexley Voluntary Sector Compact could not have been written.

Handwritten signature of Chris Ball in blue ink.

Cllr Chris Ball, Bexley Council

Handwritten signature of Kathy Balcombe in blue ink.

Kathy Balcombe, Bexley Care Trust

Handwritten signature of Donna Briant in blue ink.

Cllr Donna Briant, Bexley Council

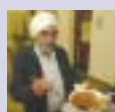
Handwritten signature of Harry Smith in blue ink.

Harry Smith, Bexley Voluntary Forum

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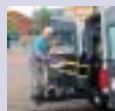
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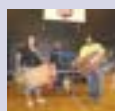


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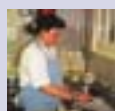
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Executive Summary: The Bexley Voluntary Sector Compact

“An agreement to improve relationships for mutual advantage and the benefit of the community”

The Bexley Voluntary Sector Compact is an agreement, initially between Bexley Council, Bexley Care Trust and Bexley voluntary and community groups, to improve their relationship for mutual advantage and the benefit of the community. It is hoped that over time other partners will feel able to join. Each of the founding partners has nominated a Bexley Voluntary Sector Compact Champion. The role of the Champion is to encourage ownership of the Compact and demonstrate the full commitment of the partners.

The Bexley Voluntary Sector Compact is divided into four main sections: Values and Principles, Consultation and Communication, Resources (funding and premises) and Measuring Effectiveness. Each section consists of a number of core principles to guide the relationships between partner agencies. A separate Action Plan has been developed linked to the Compact.



Bexley Mencap Children's Party

The **Values and Principles** section provides guidelines such as the commitment that those signed up to the Compact will endeavour to build and maintain mutual respect and trust and understand each other's roles. There is also a commitment to promote equality of opportunity and to value diversity.

Consultation and Communication

covers issues such as the need to define the purpose for any consultation exercise, who should be consulted and the amount of influence that those being consulted may have, the importance of clarity, the timing of consultations, the feedback that can be expected and the need to build in appropriate resources. There is a commitment to improve communication between those signed up to the Bexley Voluntary Sector Compact. The Compact states that consultation should be undertaken:

- When something is of relevance or importance and/or,
- Will have a significant impact on the voluntary sector or its users, and/or,
- When funding is affected or new funding is available.

There is also a commitment to have a minimum 12-week consultation period (this follows the recommendation of the Government's National Compact), except where external deadlines have been imposed or other factors make it impossible. It is acknowledged that this may be a challenge, but if consultation is to be inclusive and valued then sufficient time needs to be given.

***“A living document
which improves the
way in which the
partners work together”***

The **Resources** section considers funding and premises. Funding issues covered include the need for sustainable funding with core costs being met including appropriate increases, the importance of capacity building and providing co-ordinated accessible information on funding opportunities, the importance of maximising resources and making realistic bids. There is a commitment to work together with clear and realistic expectations.

The premises element includes a desire to develop better mutual understanding of accommodation needs and constraints. A commitment is given to work towards having licence or lease arrangements with voluntary or community groups occupying Council premises, clearly setting out the respective rights, duties and obligations of the parties thereby minimising the potential for misunderstandings.

The section **on Measuring Effectiveness** endorses the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness when considering services provided by the voluntary and community sector and notes that evaluation and monitoring should be proportionate to the level of funding contributed.



Volunteer with Age Concern Bexley Day Centre clients

The Bexley Compact Steering Group, made up of representatives from each of the partners, will monitor the Bexley Voluntary Sector Compact on a regular basis. An annual report will be prepared by this Group and discussed at an expanded BVSC Liaison Meeting and then presented to the Partnership for Bexley, the Local Strategic Partnership.

Inserted into the document is an Action Plan, which provides a list of specific tasks to be undertaken, led by identified individuals with a timescale. The purpose of this is to ensure that the Bexley Voluntary Sector Compact remains a living document which improves the way in which the partners work together.

Introduction

In this document the term voluntary sector has been used to mean voluntary and community sector and refers to any voluntary or community group that would be eligible to join the Bexley Voluntary Forum.

Background to Compacts

The national Compact is an agreement between the voluntary and community sector and the Government to improve their relationship for mutual advantage and the benefit of the community. Local Compacts aim to do this locally between the sector, councils and other local public bodies.

Aims of the Bexley Voluntary Sector Compact

The reasons for developing the Bexley Voluntary Sector Compact are:

- That local people benefit most if all agencies are working well together with mutual respect for each other's strengths.
- The Vision for Bexley, our Community Strategy contains many aims that can only be achieved by working effectively in partnership with a range of other agencies, including voluntary and community groups. In particular we aim to be a community that is strong, sustainable and cohesive, in which local people participate, local neighbourhoods are supported, diversity is valued and citizenship is promoted. The Bexley Voluntary Sector Compact is one way in which we can work together to achieve this aim.
- It is beneficial to consider what we are doing and how we are doing it to avoid complacency and develop a culture of continual improvement. The development of the Bexley Voluntary Sector Compact provided that impetus for our partnership work with local voluntary and community groups.

- Having a local Compact has been strongly encouraged by the Government and is rapidly becoming an expectation in order to obtain external funding.

Status of the Bexley Voluntary Sector Compact

The Bexley Voluntary Sector Compact has been drawn up in partnership following extensive consultation with the voluntary and community sector, the Council and the Care Trust. The Bexley Voluntary Sector Compact is deliberately not exhaustive but, recognising the diversity of the voluntary and community sector and its activities, should be seen as a general framework and an enabling mechanism to enhance the relationship between the partners.

The Bexley Voluntary Sector Compact is a memorandum concerning relations between the Council, the Care Trust and the voluntary and community sector. It is not a legally binding document. Its authority is derived from its endorsement by the Council and the Care Trust and by the voluntary and community sector itself through its consultation process.

The Development of the Bexley Voluntary Sector Compact

In 2001 a review was initiated to examine the relationship between the Council and the voluntary sector. Bexley Primary Care Trust (as was then) joined the Review as they were also seeking to develop more effective working partnerships with the voluntary sector.

A Review Steering Group was established, involving five voluntary sector representatives, Bexley Primary Care Trust and representatives from each Council Directorate. Others were consulted as appropriate to support the work on particular topics.



Volunteer building path

The Review was completed in March 2003. It considered a wide range of topics identified jointly by those involved. Each topic was addressed in a robust manner and resulted in a protocol and action points being drawn up to guide future relations and address issues of mutual concern.

The conclusion of the Review was followed by a Social Services, Health, Housing and Neighbourhood Renewal Policy Consultation and a decision made by Councillor Donna Briant, Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care and Deputy Leader of the Council to build on the work carried out by the Review and develop a Bexley Voluntary Sector Compact. Bexley Primary Care Trust also agreed that they would want to be one of the founding partners to a Bexley Voluntary Sector Compact.

A draft Compact was developed for further consultation, culminating in the approval of the Bexley Voluntary Forum and the agreement of Bexley Council and Bexley Care Trust. It is hoped that the founding partners will be joined by other key agencies in the future.

The Bexley Voluntary Sector Compact is divided into four main sections, each covering a different topic. Each section consists of a number of core principles to guide the relationships between partner agencies.

The Compact is in many ways the start of a new phase in our partnership work with the voluntary sector. It is an opportunity to consider past experiences, both positive and negative, learn from them and build for the future with a positive and forward looking spirit.

Founding Bexley Voluntary Sector Compact Champions

Each of the founding partners has nominated a Bexley Voluntary Sector Compact Champion. The role of the Champion is to encourage ownership of

the Compact and demonstrate the full commitment of the partners.

The Bexley Council Joint Founding Champions are Councillor Chris Ball, the Leader of the Council and Councillor Donna Briant, Deputy Leader of the Council.

The Bexley Care Trust Champion is their Chairman, Kathy Balcombe.

The voluntary and community sector Founding Champion is the Chair of the Voluntary Forum, Harry Smith.

Commitment to the Black and Minority Ethnic Voluntary and Community Sector

In Bexley we recognise the importance of working with all those who live, work or visit the Borough. Diversity is valued in the voluntary sector as in other areas. It is expected that voluntary and community groups will work in partnership with government and other organisations in promoting race equality, tackling social exclusion and promoting civic society.

This document uses the term black and minority ethnic voluntary sector. This is to remain in line with other documents including the National Code of Practice and current common terminology.

In the development of this Compact special consideration was given to ensuring that the needs and experiences of the black and minority ethnic voluntary and community sector were addressed. It is recognised that not all voluntary and community groups start from the same place and that the black and minority ethnic sector faces particular challenges that must be addressed to ensure a stronger and fully representative voluntary sector. A decision was taken to include issues of importance to the black and minority ethnic sector in the topic area that was relevant rather than have a separate heading that applied solely to these groups.

“An opportunity to build for the future with a positive and forward looking spirit”



Community Cohesion Event

Values and Principles



BVSC minibus in action

Values and Principles

The following values and principles will guide the relationship between the statutory sector and the voluntary sector in Bexley:

- Recognise that we achieve more for the community by working together.
- Build and maintain mutual respect and trust and an understanding of each other's roles.
- Value each other as equal partners recognising our different, but equal, contributions, constraints, responsibilities and accountabilities. This includes giving credit where it is due and acknowledging the independence and constraints placed upon the statutory sector as well as the voluntary sector.

- Promote equality of opportunity and value diversity.
- Ensure effective levels of communication.
- Be accountable, open and have clear and transparent processes.
- Recognise the independence of the voluntary sector and its right to campaign and advocate.
- Recognise that the statutory sector has a role in providing advocacy on behalf of Bexley residents.
- Recognise the need for effective and sustained capacity building to build an empowered voluntary sector and that the statutory sector has a role in providing capacity building to promote a strong, diverse and healthy voluntary sector.

“We achieve more for the community by working together”

Consultation and Communication

The following is agreed as best practice for consultation and communication.

Consultation

Purpose of consultation

- State clearly whether the consultation requires an opinion, or is just for information. In some cases for example it may be part of the process of developing a joint bid for funds.
- Consultation documents should include, as appropriate, information about the purpose and remit of the consultation, the process, the amount of influence the consultees have, the feedback that can be expected and who is ultimately going to make the decision.

Circumstances when advised to consult

Consultation should be undertaken in the following circumstances:

- when something is of relevance or importance and/or,
- will have a significant impact on the voluntary sector or its users, and/or,
- when funding is affected or new funding is available.

Who to consult

- Consultation should be as inclusive as possible; to ensure this it is recommended that contact be made with Bexley Voluntary Service Council and any other relevant bodies. Every effort should be made to include groups of people regarded as "hard to reach", such as young people, refugees and asylum seekers, homeless people,

people with disabilities or black and minority ethnic communities. The method of consulting groups regarded as "hard to reach" needs to be appropriate and tailored to the issue and group that the consultation is aiming to reach.

Clarity

- Consultation processes should be clear, jargon-free, open and accessible.
- People should be told about the results of the consultation in ways that are user-friendly.
- Where possible a summary should be provided for larger consultation documents.



Bexleyheath Pop in Parlour



Carers Network Members

“Consultation should be as inclusive as possible”

Timing

- Timing is important and the method to be used for considering results should be planned in advance.
- Recognise the time constraints that each sector has to operate within, and the effect this may have on their ability to undertake or respond to consultation.
- Recognise that prior notification of consultations should be given to the relevant agencies if possible.
- Except where external deadlines have been imposed, or other factors make it impossible, allow sufficient time for voluntary and community organisations to involve members and users in agreeing responses to consultations. The minimum 12 week period recommended in the National Compact will be used whenever possible. Contact must be made even if less time is available.

- In cases where the outcome is likely to have a major impact early discussion with the voluntary sector is essential.

Evaluation

- Consideration should be given to including a basic proforma on each consultation, to gain information about respondents for evaluation purposes.
- Bexley Voluntary Service Council will be noted as a point of contact for voluntary organisations to give feedback on consultation exercises. If this is not appropriate because the feedback is about Bexley Voluntary Service Council, an alternative will be provided.

Resources

- Acknowledge that appropriate resources are needed to complete consultations.

Communication

There is a joint commitment to improve communication between the Voluntary Sector, the Council and the Care Trust. The following points are intended to support this:

- Agencies to acknowledge this good practice statement in communication strategies.
- Reports that are directly relevant are sent in advance, in paper form to the agency concerned.
- Coordinate consultations as far as possible, and publicise them in an appropriate way.

Resources

“Work together with clear and realistic expectations”

Funding

The following is agreed as best practice for funding.

The Council, Care Trust and the voluntary sector will:

- Work together with clear and realistic expectations.
- Recognise the importance of Council funding in contributing to the core costs of voluntary and community organisations. The voluntary sector will make realistic bids when adding non-salary on-costs.
- Wherever appropriate, work in partnership when submitting bids.
- There should be openness in discussions about funding opportunities, with advice coming from partnership representatives.
- Where possible recognise issues of sustainability.

The Council and Care Trust will:

- Where possible reflect increases in the cost of living in funding.
- Recognise the need for capacity funding for groups that do not have the strength / stability to take on developments – e.g. new groups and some black and ethnic minority groups.
- Acknowledge the need to confirm in writing offers of funding.

The Council will:

- Co-ordinate the provision of information about the funding that is available from the Council for the voluntary and community sector.
- Provide information, upon request, explaining why a bid for Council funding was unsuccessful.
- Ensure that ideas from the voluntary sector get fed into the budget setting process, to find different ways of doing things.

The voluntary sector will:

- Ensure that public funds are used efficiently, properly managed and accounted for.
- Seek to maximise resources from a variety of sources.
- Devise realistic exit strategies when funding is time limited.
- Make realistic bids for funding bearing in mind all costs associated with a proposed project.



Bexley Mencap accept donation



Volunteer at Age Concern Day Centre

Premises

The following is agreed as best practice for premises issues.

- The Council will work towards developing a greater understanding of the accommodation needs of the voluntary and community sector and considering the impact of internal changes on the voluntary and community sector. The voluntary and community sector will work towards developing an understanding of the constraints on the ability of the Council to meet the property needs of the voluntary and community sector.

The Council will:

- Provide information to the voluntary sector, via Bexley Voluntary Service Council, on Council owned premises that become available.

- Work towards having proper lease/licence arrangements with voluntary and community groups occupying Council premises clearly setting out the respective rights, duties and obligations of the parties thereby minimising the potential for misunderstandings.

It is hoped that Council initiatives such as contact centres (locations where staff deal with enquires) and hot desking (staff sharing desks) arrangements will provide further opportunities for working with the voluntary sector.

Many black and minority ethnic community and voluntary organisations based in Bexley are small and relatively new. The funding accessed by these groups may be limited and temporary, with premises often being volunteers own homes and no paid staff support, with considerable volunteer input. These constraining factors impact on the services that black and minority ethnic groups are able to provide in Bexley.

It is noted that some black and minority ethnic groups would like access to shared office accommodation, with each organisation having separate desk space, as well as space for community activities and drop-ins. This issue will be taken forward as consideration is given to the development of the Council's Accommodation Strategy.

Measuring Effectiveness

Measuring the effectiveness of services includes monitoring and evaluation.

The following key principles were agreed with reference to measuring the effectiveness of services provided by the voluntary sector:

- Best Value principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness should be followed.
- The monitoring and evaluation undertaken should be proportionate to the level of funding allocated.
- Only necessary information should be requested. Where a project has more than one funder every effort should be made to use the same monitoring information.
- If a funding programme is used for both statutory and voluntary projects (such as the Bexley Partnership Fund) equal requirements and standards must be requested regardless of provider.



Young people at Belvedere Community Centre

- Funding agreements are considered a useful tool when larger amounts of funding are involved, for example when staff posts are funded. The Council is committed to extending its funding agreement programme to the other six organisations in the Social Services grants programme where staff are funded.

“Monitoring and evaluation should be proportionate to the level of funding”

Monitoring the Bexley Voluntary Sector Compact



River Cray clean up

Individual complaints will be resolved as soon as possible

The Bexley Voluntary Sector Compact Steering Group, which developed the Compact, will continue to meet to monitor progress on the action plan and consider any areas of concern raised by the founding partners.

Bexley Voluntary Service Council will receive and monitor any complaints from the voluntary sector that arise about the operation of the Compact and bring these to the attention of the Bexley Voluntary Sector Compact Steering Group. It is intended that individual complaints will be resolved as soon as possible without waiting for the Bexley Compact Steering Group. Those on the Steering Group will act as leads to facilitate resolution.

On an annual basis there will be a formal review, with a more fundamental review being undertaken at least every five years. The annual report will be prepared by the Bexley Voluntary Sector Compact Steering Group and considered at a Bexley Voluntary Service Council Liaison Meeting. Those invited to attend this Bexley Voluntary Service Council Liaison Meeting for discussion on the annual report will include Bexley Voluntary Sector Compact partners, the Compact Champions and others as appropriate. The annual report will then be presented to the Local Strategic Partnership, the Partnership for Bexley.

Compact Steering Group

(previously Steering Group for the Review of the Relationship between the Council and the Voluntary Sector)

Voluntary Sector

Janet Smith	Bexley Voluntary Service Council
Lorna Smith	Bexley Women's Aid
Alison Baker	Carers' Support (Bexley)
Charon Gill	Pakistan Christian Forum (from April 2002)
Phill Watson	Age Concern (Bexley) (up to Nov. 2003)
Lynne Tragheim	Administrative Support (up to June 2002)
John Bell	Both Parents Forever (up to Feb. 2002)

Bexley Council

Maria Burton	Head of Health and Independent Sector Partnerships
Bola Ojo	Community Education Officer
Nicola Howe	Corporate Projects Officer
Martin Gilby	Regeneration Programmes Manager
Shaheen Westcombe	Voluntary Sector Projects Officer (from Nov.2002)
Sarah Devonport	Administrative Support (from Sept. 2002)
Elaine Green	Joint Planning Manager (up to Nov. 2002)
Mollie Pepper	Communication and Consultation Officer (up to Sept. 2002)
Kristian Tomblin	Voluntary Sector Projects Officer (up to May 2002)

Bexley Primary Care Trust/Bexley Care Trust

John Harris	Associate Director of Service Development
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Voluntary Sector Review Steering Group

Harry Smith	Chair of Voluntary Forum
Janet Smith	Bexley Voluntary Service Council
Alison Baker	Carers' Support (Bexley)
Phill Watson	Age Concern (Bexley)
Doug Anderson	Age Concern (Welling)
Faozia Rashid	Bangladesh Welfare Association
Ellen Ewen	Bexley Centre for the Unemployed
Lorna Smith	Bexley Women's Aid
Brenda Clayton	Bexley Crossroads Care and BVSC
John Bell	Both Parents Forever
Mr R C Desai/Mr A C Patel	Gujarati Samaj (Bexley)
Mr C J Gill	Pakistan Christian Forum
Mr Kirpal Singh Heer	Indian Workers Association
Ted Welsh	Thamesmead Family Service Unit
Roselle Potts	Thamesmead Law Centre

