

THE HOUNSLOW VOLUNTARY SECTOR COMPACT 2003

**An agreed Code of Practice for partnership working between
local voluntary sector organisations
and Hounslow Council and other bodies**

Hounslow Voluntary Sector Compact 2003

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1 - What is a local Voluntary Sector Compact?

A Voluntary Sector Compact is a document describing working relations between voluntary and community sector organisations, and the public and private sectors. It aims to create a new approach to partnership working between sectors and provide a framework to enable relations to be carried out differently, and better than before.

The original Compact was a national agreement made in November 1998 (with cross-party support) between the Government and the voluntary and community sector, in order to improve their relationship for mutual advantage. The principles outlined in this national Compact were then gradually turned into 5 specific codes of practice: Funding; Consultation; Black and Minority Ethnic Organisations; Volunteering; and, Community Groups. The National Compact is the first of its kind in the world, and has drawn interest from 25 countries around the world.

Local Compacts aim to improve relationships in their own area between the voluntary sector, local authority, and other local public and private bodies. After the National Compact was agreed, Paul Boateng, Home Office Minister responsible for the Voluntary Sector, made a call for Local Compacts to be implemented across England, and commented that "we intend to encourage other public bodies and local government to adopt or adapt the Compact to enhance their relationship with the sector".

2 - Why do we need a Voluntary Sector Compact?

A Compact is needed as an agreed Code of Practice to develop effective and agreed principles for joint working across the sectors, which ultimately is for the benefit of all local residents. A Compact provides a starting point, based on shared values and mutual respect, on how different groups, organisations, companies and individuals will work with the voluntary sector. This will help establish a solid foundation for partnership working in the future.

Local Compacts can help produce many benefits, including:

- Improvement of partnership relationships, including a framework of understanding on how the sectors' will work together
- More effective partnership working (especially given a climate of regular local government change), including better involvement of local groups in best value, community planning and a Local Strategic Partnership
- A better mutual understanding of each sectors' needs, aims, and objectives

Voluntary sector research carried out by the Compact Working Group Secretariat has shown that almost half of the areas that have a Compact or are developing one have recorded an improvement in relations with their Local Authorities. Only 6% of areas that are not active with a Local Compact recorded a similar improvement.

3 - Background to the Hounslow Voluntary Sector Compact

In the second half of 1999 a consultation process began between the Local Authority and voluntary sector organisations on the development of a voluntary sector compact. A special conference was organised in November 1999 in partnership with the Hounslow Voluntary Sector Forum (HVSF). Over 100 voluntary sector organisations contributed their ideas about ways of working together and their ideas about the content of a local compact.

The conference decided not to create too many meetings or a complicated process, and to support the formation of a representative compact steering group. It was also recommended not to rush the process. It is important that voluntary sector groups are encouraged to take part in areas that affect them.

The final Hounslow Voluntary Sector Compact was produced in July 2000 by a Compact Steering Group, which was a partnership of the HVSF, other key voluntary organisations, and each department of Hounslow Council. The Steering Group met throughout the first half of 2000 and acted on behalf of the whole voluntary sector in Hounslow, and the whole of Hounslow Council.

Several voluntary sector organisations and Hounslow Council adopted the Compact in 2000. It was amongst the first ten local Compacts developed anywhere in the England, and was the first in Greater London. Even now, in March 2003, only 118 Local Authority areas are covered by a local Compact, leaving 270 who are not.

The 2002 review process was begun; it was led by the Director of HVSF, and the Community Initiatives Officer of Hounslow Council (Community Development & Regeneration Unit – CDRU). At the start a short 'annual review' of the Compact 2000 was expected. In March 2002 around 750 organisations (mainly voluntary sector) working in the Borough were invited to write to the CDRU and have their say about reviewing and updating the Compact. However no replies were received.

Following the lack of written comments the CDRU and HVSF organised a consultation meeting on 10th July 2002 between the CDRU, HVSF, and interested voluntary organisations, to discuss and agree the steps towards the production of a new edition of the Hounslow Voluntary Sector Compact. Attendance at the meeting was poor, however the views and suggestions of the organisations present were very useful and were as equally valid as if the meeting had been better attended. It became clear that the Compact had not been adequately reviewed since it was released in June 2000 and that a 'fundamental review' was now preferred, rather than a short 'annual review'.

This 'Fundamental Review Meeting' was arranged for 24th October 2002 and despite a relatively low attendance, strong representation was achieved from most of the larger interested parties, including HVSF and key local voluntary sector groups; Hounslow Council (both Councillors and officers); Community Initiative Partnerships (CIP); the Hounslow Primary Care Trust; and the Metropolitan Police (Hounslow Borough). The views and suggestions of the organisations involved were very useful and gave us many ideas about what had to be done to develop a new Compact for 2003.

This was all fed into a 'Consultation Draft', which became a significantly improved new Compact document. This was distributed for comment to around 700 organisations (mainly voluntary sector) working in the Borough, via the April 2003 issue of the Council's specialist newsletter 'The Voluntary Times'. Individual copies were also sent to the main potential partners (e.g. Community Initiative Partnerships (CIP), Hounslow Homes and the Hounslow Primary Care Trust) and each separate department of Hounslow Council. Around five weeks was given for replies. Eight formal replies were received. The replies were discussed by Rory Gillert (Director of the Hounslow Voluntary Sector Forum) and Martin Bull (Community Initiatives Officer at Hounslow Council) and, where possible, comments and changes were incorporated in the Compact to form the final copy that you are now reading.

4 - What is the Voluntary Sector?

The Hounslow Voluntary Sector Forum describes the Voluntary Sector as follows: -

"The voluntary sector includes charities, community organisations, housing associations, campaigning organisations, faith based and religious organisations, sports, arts and environmental groups. These groups/organisations are independent, defining their own aims and objectives and choosing methods by which they work to achieve them. They often have a small group of people known as a management committee who take responsibility for the running of the project. Sometimes the management committee employ staff to assist in this. The groups usually have a constitution, which guides the activities and development of future work".

The Local Government Management Board has defined the Voluntary Sector as: -

"Independent, voluntary or community groups that are not for profit organisations formed by people who have come together of their own free will to respond to issues regarding the quality of life for fellow citizens".

The terms 'Voluntary Sector' and 'Community Sector' are often used to describe two distinct areas; one increasingly professional and regulated, the other more grass roots and local. The reality, particularly in a borough like Hounslow, is that attempting to rigidly divide the 'sectors' is not always very helpful. For the purposes of this Compact, where the term Voluntary Sector is used, it is intended to cover a range of organisations doing charitable work, from small volunteer led community groups, through to organisations who are registered as charities and companies limited with guarantee often employing several staff to carry out their services. There are usually numerous divisions and specialisations between these extremes. The important principle for the Compact is that there is an inclusive approach. If an appropriate group wishes to be included within the term 'Voluntary Sector' then every effort will be made to do so.

5 - What Are The Main Local Priorities for the Voluntary Sector?

From the 1999 consultation conference and the 2002 consultations, local voluntary organisations thought that the main local priorities the Compact could help address were:

- Clear funding policies & clear guidance for securing funding
- A mechanism for effective involvement between sectors

They also felt that it was important for the Compact to:

- Have increased representation from other sectors
- Have realistic ideas for compact development
- Have an effective review process, with timescales

6 - Who is the Compact relevant for, and who are its partners?

This Compact represents a mutual working agreement between all three sectors – i.e. the public, private and voluntary sectors. Any group, organisation, company or individual who wishes to work with the voluntary sector (regardless of whether they are receiving monetary funding from them or not) on a one off project, a longer term development, or a partnership, can be aided by the Compact and its 'Key Principles For Joint Work' and its 'Rights and Responsibilities'.

The original Compact was drawn up by a partnership steering group led by the Hounslow Voluntary Sector Forum, made up representatives from the local Voluntary Sector and officers from each department of Hounslow Council. The Director of HVSF and the Community Initiatives Officer of Hounslow Council led the 2002 review process, and one important part of this process was the increase of partners from all sectors.

The final partners will ultimately be the organisations who officially adopt the Compact 2003. This will hopefully include HVSF and a range of local voluntary organisations, Community Initiative Partnerships (CIP), Hounslow Council, Hounslow Primary Care Trust, Hounslow Homes, the Metropolitan Police (Hounslow Borough), Connexions, and businesses (individually and as represented by the Chambers of Commerce) as well as any other organisation wanting to work in partnership with the Voluntary Sector.

7 - Key Principles for Joint Work

This compact lays down several key principles for joint work:

- An **independent** and diverse voluntary sector is fundamental to the well being of a democratic society;
- Successful partnership can only be established on the basis of **equal rights and responsibilities**, mutual respect, recognition of difference, as well as, similarity of purpose – specific agreements should be clearly spelled out, reviewed regularly and agreed;
- All partners must be committed to **equality of opportunity** for all people, regardless of race, age, disability, gender, sexual orientation or faith / religion;
- Voluntary groups have a right to **campaign** and to act as advocates within the law;
- All partners will be **accountable** for their actions, and common throughout is the need for integrity, objectivity, openness, honesty and leadership. This will be achieved through appropriate management within all groups/organisations;
- That there are **varied roles** for groups and they may act as campaigners, service providers and advocates. Groups will be clear at all times which role they are taking;
- An approach recognising that the **diversity of funding** sources is one of the best guarantees of continued independence of the voluntary sector;
- Effective partnership requires **communication, consultation, collaboration, honesty and openness** at all levels of the voluntary, public and private sectors.
- All **funding relationships** between the statutory or private organisations and voluntary groups should be underpinned by clear written agreements (whether contracts or service level agreements) in accessible language, which spell out required outcomes and say how these will be monitored.

8 - Rights and responsibilities

a) Commitments from Voluntary Sector partners

The Voluntary Sector recognises the responsibility it has to the residents of the London Borough of Hounslow and others who may come into contact with it. The Voluntary Sector will:

- Maintain high standards of governance, conduct and openness;
- Meet legal, reporting and accountability obligations to funders and service users;
- Observe the appropriate guidance from the Charity Commission including those guidelines relating to political activities and campaigning;
- Develop quality standards that are relevant and appropriate to each group;
- Endeavour to consult service users, carers, volunteers and members;
- Be committed to listen to users and aim to adapt to meet their changing needs;
- Accurately communicate the views proposed to them in the course of a consultation carried out on behalf of the public or private sector or when presenting a case to the public or private sector;
- Promote mutual support and effective partnership working within the voluntary sector and between the voluntary sector, public and private sectors;

- Implement policies that promote best practice and equal rights in activities, employment, involvement of volunteers and service provision;
- Campaign to improve practice, policy and services;
- Help to review the impact of the Hounslow Compact.

b) Commitments from Statutory Sector and other partners

The Statutory Sector and other partners (i.e. any organisation not from the voluntary sector) recognise and value the contribution that the voluntary sector makes to society, including the expert knowledge that workers and volunteers often have. These partners want this to continue and will:

- Actively encourage the participation of the voluntary sector in the development of policy and strategic documents;
- Develop a regular dialogue with the voluntary sector on issues that are likely to affect it, particularly when new roles and responsibilities for the sector are being proposed, the impact of statutory services, needs and gaps;
- Develop clear funding guidelines and appropriate written funding agreements, explained through future policy documents (for example, Hounslow Council's 'Corporate Grants Strategy' and via the 'Voluntary Sector Strategy') and publications
- Establish a more co-ordinated approach to funding and monitoring the voluntary sector within the London Borough of Hounslow, whilst recognising legal requirements for individual funders;
- Actively encourage the involvement of the voluntary sector in the planning of service provision;
- Respect and value the campaigning role of the voluntary sector, acknowledging that this may conflict with partners' plans and decisions;
- Actively encourage the involvement of service users and carers, doing everything possible to facilitate their involvement (e.g. meetings in appropriate places and at appropriate times, incentives to participate)
- Help to review the impact of the Hounslow Voluntary Sector Compact;
- recognise that this equality must reflect the fact that some groups may have little resources when compared to larger public sector bodies. All groups and organisations should respond flexibly and sensitively towards each other.

9 - How will the Compact 2003 be communicated to the partners & other potential partners?

The dissemination of information about the Compact 2000 was weak. For the Compact 2003 a stronger communications strategy will be adopted. This includes:

For Councillors (of Hounslow Council)

- All Councillors will be given a copy of the Compact, and an Executive Summary explaining what the Compact is, its implementation and its importance.
- A report will be presented to the Council of the Committee, via the Executive, to endorse the Compact and to explain its importance.
- The CDRU will provide regular reports on the Compact to Hounslow Council's Community Investment Advisory Panel (CIAP). This is a cross party specialist panel for voluntary sector issues. It meets four times a year and is currently made up of 9 councillors.

For Hounslow Council based employees

- The CDRU will arrange for a 'global email' to be sent to inform Hounslow Council employees about the Compact 2003
- A copy of the Compact 2003 will be individually sent to all Heads of Departments and decision makers, e.g. people who work with the voluntary sector, and joint commissioners.
- The CDRU will ensure that there is information and news about the Compact 2003 (including an electronic copy) on the Hounslow Council Intranet (i.e. for Council staff).
- The CDRU and HVSF will organise a one-hour briefing session for council staff, aimed at decision makers, e.g. people who work with the voluntary sector and joint commissioners.

Wider Dissemination

- The Compact 2003 document will be published and distributed (as inexpensively as possible, yet still professional looking) to interested bodies.
- The CDRU and HVSF will offer a similar one hour briefing session to any other large organisation who adopts the compact (e.g. Hounslow Primary Care Trust, Connexions), and will also organise a similar session aimed at the general voluntary sector.
- Information and feedback on the Compact 2003 will be included in Hounslow Council's Voluntary Sector Strategy.
- The CDRU and HVSF will encourage voluntary organisations, statutory sector and other bodies to formally adopted the compact and to record their adoption in all appropriate forms (e.g. management committee / board meeting minutes, annual report, Compact adoption register)
- The Joint Annual Review Meetings will be widely advertised, including through the HVSF mailing list / newsletter and the CDRU 'Voluntary Times' newsletter
- Press coverage for the new Compact 2003 will be sought.
- An inexpensive official launch of the Compact 2003 will take place in July 2003.
- This Compact 2003 will also be endorsed at the Council organised 'Hounslow Voluntary Sector Information and Consultation Event' in September 2003.
- The CDRU & CIP will arrange for a 'global email' to be sent to inform CIP employees about the Compact 2003
- The CDRU & Hounslow Homes will arrange for a 'global email' to be sent to inform Hounslow Homes employees about the Compact 2003
- The CDRU will ensure that there is information and news about the Compact (including an electronic copy) on the Hounslow Council website.
- The CDRU will offer to supply this information to others (e.g. HVSF, Hounslow Primary Care Trust, CIP, Connexions, individual voluntary groups) and encourage them to use it for inclusion on their website and in any of their documents (e.g. business plan)
- The CDRU will liaise with the NCVO run 'Compact Working Group' and offer to supply relevant information to them, for example – e.g. provide the Compact 2003 to them for inclusion in their 'register of local compacts', and offer information about our local compact and compact processes for possible inclusion on their website / newsletter

10 - How will the Compact 2003 be adopted?

It is important to stress that this is a voluntary Code of Practice intended to help the promotion of best practice and to help facilitate better relationships.

Any voluntary sector organisation working in the Borough of Hounslow, or any organisation or individual working with the voluntary sector in Hounslow, may choose to adopt this Compact, which involves formally completing an adoption form on page 9 and returning it to the Community Development & Regeneration Unit of Hounslow Council, who will keep an open register of all the organisations who have adopted the Compact 2003. Formal adoption of the Compact 2003 automatically means that the organisation / individual agrees to work within its principles.

11 - Future Compact development & review processes

A work programme will be drawn up by the CDRU and HVSF to continue the work laid down in the Compact 2003, and to review it once a year.

Given the limited resources available for the Compact process it is unlikely that separate codes / policies will be produced on the individual areas of the compact, such as: Funding; Consultation; Black and Minority Ethnic Organisations; Volunteering; and, Community Groups. However, this Compact does generally cover all these areas (although not in detail) and the National Codes of Practices are benchmarks that can be used for local partnership working. The National Codes of Practices can be received by calling the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) on 0800 2798 798 or downloaded from the national Compact website at www.thecompact.org.uk

Research will be undertaken to investigate the possible use of a dispute resolution process.

This document represents a mutual working agreement between all three sectors – i.e. the public, private and voluntary sectors. However it is clear that more work needs to be done in relation to the private / business sector.

Joint Annual Review Meetings will be held in 2004 and 2005 between all interested bodies, to feedback news on implementation of the compact, to raise issues and to encourage more organisations to adopt the compact. They are expected to result in a short report that will publish and distributed to partners and other interested bodies. These reports are expected to act as additions to the Compact 2003, rather than replace it.

In 2006 the Compact 2003 will be due for a more in-depth 'fundamental review'. There is currently no recommended way of doing this. By 2006 there may be guidance on fundamental reviews. If not, it may follow the principles of the 2002/3 fundamental review, plus learning experiences from other local fundamental reviews.

If you have an questions or comments about the 'Hounslow Voluntary Sector Compact 2003' please feel free to contact either:

Rory Gillert, Director, Hounslow Voluntary Sector Forum (HVSF), Unit 9, Hounslow Business Park, Alice Way, Hounslow, TW3 3UD

Tel - 020 8572 5929 / Fax - 020 8572 9027 / Email - hvsf@yahoo.co.uk

Martin Bull, Community Initiatives Officer, Community Development & Regeneration Unit, Hounslow Council, Lampton Rd, Hounslow, TW3 4DN

**Tel – 020 8583 2454 / Fax - 020 8583 2466
Email - communitydevelopment@hounslow.gov.uk**

ADOPTING THE HOUNSLOW VOLUNTARY SECTOR COMPACT 2003

If your organisation wishes to adopt the Hounslow Voluntary Sector Compact 2003 please agree its adoption at your appropriate decision making body (e.g. an official decision at a board meeting or a management committee), fill in this form and send it to the contact at the bottom.

We have read and understood the principles for partnership working between local voluntary sector organisations and Hounslow Council and other bodies working in the London Borough of Hounslow, as outlined in this document.

We agree with these principles, and hereby commit ourselves to these working practices by signing below, and becoming an equal partner in this agreement.

Organisation name: _____

Organisation address & post code: _____

Contact details: Main Contact (name) _____

Main Contact (position) _____ Telephone _____

Fax _____ email _____

Signed _____ **Dated** _____

We consider our organisation to be part of the: (please tick)

Voluntary / community / not-for profit sector

Statutory / government / public sector

Private / business sector

Please complete this form and return to:

**Martin Bull, Community Initiatives Officer, Community Development & Regeneration
Unit, Hounslow Council, Lampton Rd, Hounslow, TW3 4DN**

Tel – 020 8583 2454 / Fax - 020 8583 2466

Email - communitydevelopment@hounslow.gov.uk