



The Harlow Compact

A Compact is an agreement between local government, other local public bodies and the voluntary and community sector. The Harlow Compact aims to establish a framework for sound and effective working relationships based on shared aims and values. It formally acknowledges the respect that each sector has for their own specific roles and responsibilities, and sets out to improve our working relationships for mutual advantage. This Compact marks the beginning of a new and better way of working together to deliver good quality services to the people of Harlow and to build and sustain a thriving community.

The Compact identifies the ways that the statutory agencies will work together with the voluntary and community sector to improve the life of the town and the quality of life for everyone who lives in it. The success of the Compact will depend on the commitment of ALL parties and the extent to which they adopt and implement the practices contained within the document.

The Harlow approach

The voluntary and community sector already works together very well with its statutory colleagues.

- This Compact will help us to strengthen that working relationship by negotiating together to resolve any potential problems.
- All agencies will jointly put best practice into a written formal agreement to enable us to be both consistent and transparent in our approach to partnership, and common areas of work.
- Work being developed around consultation and involvement will help us to engage effectively with our community and especially with people who are sometimes classed as difficult to reach.

Joint undertakings, shared principles, and vision

Agencies from all sectors share a determination to make Harlow a place where:

- Voluntary action and community involvement are essential aspects of an inclusive society.
- There is an independent and diverse voluntary and community sector which is fundamental to the well being of local residents and which will enable them to shape future service provision.
- Volunteers play a fully appreciated crucial role in the quality of life and well being of the local community.
- By working together we will achieve more and provide greater benefits not only to people living in the town now, but to future residents.
- Partnership working will enhance the abilities and capabilities of both statutory and voluntary sector agencies to achieve their own objectives and to enable both parties to develop common aims and a sense of joint purpose.
- There is a recognition that genuine partnership requires a commitment to recognise the equal value of each partner as well as a determination to collaborate with openness, honesty and understanding.
- We acknowledge the need to consult people in a meaningful and productive way, to genuinely listen to what is fed back, and to build on people's comments and choice regarding policy development and local service delivery.
- Local groups are entitled to campaign individually to further their own aims and objectives. Also to comment and challenge if necessary statutory policy which has a bearing on their remit or business.
- It is acknowledged that each organisation will have its own targets and priorities supported by funding streams to enable them to deliver services appropriate to achieve these aims. Statutory bodies have responsibility and sometimes a legal requirement to fund activities which support their declared priorities or mandatory responsibilities.
- A full and total commitment is given to promote equality of opportunity in every aspect of policy development and full social inclusion within social delivery.
- There is a genuine recognition of the importance of continuity and sustainability in the planning and provision of locally appropriate services.
- All parties must determine and manage their own affairs as governed by their individual legal status.
- We will set up a jointly constituted Compact group to oversee the ongoing "sign up" and commitment to the principles of the compact relationship.

Undertakings by Statutory and other Partner Organisations

- To recognise the independence of voluntary and community groups and the wider voluntary sector.
- To appreciate the necessity for each organisation to determine and manage its own business irrespective of any funding arrangements.
- To build in mechanisms for openness, transparency and consistency in all funding arrangements, and to take on board the need for longer term strategic funding plans which improve the continued capacity of the voluntary sector.
- Develop a Code of Best Practice to ensure that all processes relating to funding are open, transparent, fair and accessible.
- Recognise and appreciate the need and importance of infrastructure and core support to voluntary and community groups and communicate to potential funders both locally and regionally.
- Involve the voluntary and community sector in all policy and procedural development at the earliest stage in order to assess impact and implications for the sector.
- Where confidentiality and sensitivity are not determining factors, consult as widely as possible with the sector on issues that are likely to have an effect. All consultation should take into account the ongoing requirement for voluntary and community groups to further consult their users and stakeholders prior to giving their responses.
- To positively take account of the specific needs of the voluntary and community bodies who represent minority groups and people who are socially excluded.
- Treat appropriately and respect the confidentiality and sensitivity of information provided by the voluntary and community sector, and to request access to such information on a need to know basis only, or where the information is required to ensure the proper performance of public duties.
- Promote good practice to support effective working relationships and consistency of approach towards the voluntary and community sector.
- To have suitably accessible mechanisms for dealing with complaints, and actual or perceived shortfalls in service, and to be open and honest in dealing with these issues.
- Develop, support and promote the Codes of Practice that will come from future Compact working.

Commitments and undertakings by the Voluntary and Community Sector

- To maintain organisationally appropriate high standards of governance and accountability to beneficiaries, users, funders and wider stakeholders.
- Observe Charity law, and be particularly aware of the guidance regarding political campaigning and activities.
- Develop mechanisms to demonstrate a commitment to issues of quality.
- Enable and ensure that all stakeholders from beneficiaries, service users, volunteers and supporters are consulted and informed regarding current activities, policy determination and future plans.
- Represent and communicate the views of their stakeholders to a wider appropriately determined audience.
- Respect all aspects of confidentiality particularly when privileged with potentially sensitive information in the course of their organisational service delivery.
- Foster and promote effective working relationships whenever possible across all sectors.
- Involve service users and potential users in the development and delivery of activities and services.
- Have in place policies for promoting best practice within equality of opportunity and issues of social inclusion within service delivery.
- To have a suitably accessible mechanism for dealing with complaints and actual or perceived shortfalls in service, and to be open and honest in dealing with these issues.

Making it work

The Compact document in itself will not change anything. Positive and lasting change will be dependant on a number of essential and critical factors agreed on and committed to by all statutory and voluntary/community bodies ie:

- To work in the spirit of the Compact
- To adopt the Compact's Codes of Practice once developed.
- To review the operation and implementation of the Compact, in partnership, on an annual basis
- To publish a report detailing achievements, aspirations, and amendments annually
- To embrace the principles of the Compact and promote its adoption to all other public bodies.

Next steps

The Compact document itself is the first step in a longer term collaboration which will involve:

- Establishing a Compact Steering Group to continue to develop the ideas and principles
- Development of Codes of Practice covering:-
- Communication, Consultation and Participation
- BME and Faith Communities
- Finance and Funding
- Valuing Volunteers
- Developing a mechanism to deal with the resolution of disagreements and complaints between the statutory and Voluntary/Community sector which compromises the stated commitments, or undermines the spirit of the Compact itself.

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