



## Response to Compact consultation

### Refreshing the Compact: A framework for partnership working and personalization

Submitted: 12<sup>th</sup> October 2009

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**This is COVER's response to the Compact refresh consultation.** COVER is a representative body for the Voluntary and Community Sector in the East of England. Our Vision is of a just and inclusive society for the region that recognises and supports the value, and values, of the community and voluntary sector. Our Mission is to increase voluntary and community sector regional influence, activity and recognition.

On 24<sup>th</sup> September 2009 we held a workshop for members, associate members and partners to present the refreshed Compact and discuss the elements of our response. Unfortunately only five organisations were able to attend the workshop. Regardless some important issues were highlighted, as set out below.

Some of our member organisations and networks may be responding separately.

#### General comments

COVER agrees that the Compact is due for a refresh, as the eleven years since it was first introduced have seen considerable change in the environment of the relationship between the public and third sectors. We think that this relationship continues to be crucial to achieving social, economic and environmental goals. Refreshing the Compact is an opportunity to improve general awareness of the rights and responsibilities of both parties, and to encourage more partners to begin to use Compact principles. We would also be interested in the possibility of changing the title of the document: 'Compact' is not sufficiently descriptive and contributes to the general lack of awareness and understanding of the document.

We are concerned that the debate about the future of the Compact last year resolved to continue with a non statutory document. We feel that current arrangements lack teeth – there appear to be no real repercussions for non compliance. For the Compact to be a tool to achieve real change it needs more definite commitment, and proactive action against breaches. We would welcome further consideration of this issue.

We would like to see more buy-in from local government offices in supporting and encouraging Compact compliance, and feel that it is important that the criteria Local Authorities are measured against (currently LAA indicators) chime with the intentions and practicalities of the Compact document.

Any queries about this consultation response can be directed to:

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## Responses to consultation questions

### **Is the Compact relevant and applicable to the wide range of organisations that make up the third sector? If not, who is excluded and what would need to change in the refreshed Compact to secure their engagement?**

We feel that the refreshed Compact is generally applicable to most of the sector, but there is a huge issue around awareness of the Compact. Many third sector organisations and public sector employees appear to remain unaware of the Compact and their associated rights and responsibilities. This may partly be due to a lack of dedicated support to publicize the Compact; organisations in areas not covered adequately by Compact Officers may particularly suffer in this way.

Small community organisations may not find the proposed document very relevant – for example small youth or sports groups which don't seek any kind of relationship with the public sector will not be that concerned with it. It has been suggested that faith groups are less likely to be engaged than others.

### **Does the Compact go far enough in safeguarding the independence of the third sector? If not, what changes would be required?**

This language and approach seems patronizing – the third sector doesn't need the public sector to safeguard it. The third sector wants a relationship of respect with the public sector – with respect there will be no need to be concerned about the independence of the third sector being compromised.

### **Do you think the national Compact provides an effective framework for Local Compact negotiations? If not, what changes would be required?**

Development of local Compacts lags behind considerably – some areas are still developing local versions of the codes associated with the original Compact. For some the refresh of the Compact comes just as they are completing their work on these! Perhaps more support needs to be given to local roll out.

There does need to be clarity about the different roles of national and local Compacts, and how they should interrelate. For example, it wouldn't be appropriate for a local Compact to contradict the national Compact. Further guidance about the development of local and regional Compacts would be welcome.

### **How can the subcontracting commitment (Allocating resources and commissioning, reference 7.1) be strengthened to ensure that the Compact applies to the entire supply chain?**

In view of the fact that clauses have been cut out of the current Compact which relate to intra-sectoral relationships, in support of streamlining the document to represent only the relationship between the third sector and the public sector, we wonder whether there is a need to include any reference to subcontracting.

**What are the circumstances in which a 12-week consultation would be unnecessary or undesirable? In these circumstances, what action should the Compact require to ensure consultation is meaningful and effective?**

The group felt that there are very few circumstances in which less than 12 weeks would be acceptable. This level should be the baseline, and wherever possible consultations should be longer, considering the barriers small third sector organisations can face in compiling responses. The only possible exception to this would be if the third sector has already had meaningful input to the issue to be consulted on, and the third sector itself agrees that a shorter period would be acceptable.

It is important that adequate allowance is made for holiday periods – 12 weeks over the summer months for instance can be particularly difficult. The wording in the refreshed document around this should be strengthened.

It would be useful to have prior warning before consultations start that they are impending so that organisations can gear up to putting together a response once the consultation is issued.

**How and where might a refreshed Compact make reference to the relationships between holders of personal budgets and those from who they buy services or facilities?**

There was some question mark about whether the Compact needed to refer to this at all as it is more about the relationship between a third sector organisation and its service users, than about the public sector / third sector relationship.

One scenario discussed was that where public sector organisations issue consultations third sector organisations may need to consult / consider their service users who have choice and ownership over the service that they receive before submitting a response. This may take longer than otherwise.

**Does the Compact provide enough focus on the individual equalities strands and the needs of these groups? If not, how should this be addressed?**

The group felt that with the huge amount of separate work that has been done on equalities, it makes sense to streamline the content within the Compact. However, the equalities section should signpost to the legislation and good practice information available elsewhere.

The Compact does need to make better reference to volunteering as this is a crucial part of the third sector.

## Comments on specific undertakings

The workshop attendees spent some time analysing individual sections of the refreshed Compact, considering whether they were clear enough, concise and comprehensive enough, had enough emphasis to reflect their importance, and whether they were realistic. Key points are reflected below.

Section	Comment
1. When to involve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is some concern that although this undertaking seems like a good idea it may be unlikely that organisations will comply with it.</li> <li>• There needs to be more emphasis on the length of advance notice, and it would be helpful for specific timings to be mentioned here.</li> </ul>
2. Who to involve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There should be clear information about what support is on offer.</li> <li>• Effective involvement has cost implications, and budgets should be attached to allow for this.</li> </ul>
4. Effective engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This section could be clearer and use easier language. It needs to lay out clearly what the expectation is and how the information should be fed back.</li> </ul>
6. Selecting finance and funding options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full cost recovery should be included</li> <li>• Consideration of the added value voluntary and community groups bring to delivery is fundamental</li> </ul>
9. Understanding costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Previous experience would say that this section is not very realistic!</li> <li>• Match costings of volunteering should be at a meaningful comparable rate, not simply the minimum wage.</li> </ul>
12. Making payments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This section needs more emphasis; it is a crucial issue for many third sector organisations</li> </ul>
18. Monitoring and reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More attention is needed to explain value for money concepts and outcomes</li> <li>• Could include examples to illustrate points</li> </ul>



## COVER Workshop

# *Refreshing the Compact*

An opportunity to discuss the proposals for a refreshed Compact and contribute to COVER's response to the national consultation.

**2 - 4pm on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2009**  
at the COVER office, Little Chesterford

### *Have your say!*

Does the public sector respect and value the VCS?  
Is the VCS playing an active role in shaping policy?  
Is there a level playing field for VCS organisations when it comes to commissioning and procurement?

The workshop is for anyone in the Voluntary and Community Sector in the East of England who is interested in relations between organisations in the public sector and organisations in the 'third sector'.

### *Why?*

The national Compact is currently being reviewed. Since the Compact was launched in 1998, the size, scope and dynamics of the 'third sector' have evolved rapidly, and relationships with the public sector have become more complex. A genuine partnership, allowing each partner to do what they do best is important to achieve improvements in quality and effectiveness.

The refresh of the Compact retains the key commitments of the original, but updates the language and accessibility of the document. Where appropriate, new commitments have been introduced.

### *Details*

COVER is holding this workshop to discuss the proposed changes to the Compact. We are planning to submit a response to the consultation, and will use this workshop to establish the key elements of our response. There will be a presentation summarising the content of the new compact, followed by breakout groups to discuss the main issues and begin to formulate a response to the consultation.

There is no charge for the seminar, but places are limited. Please email [abigail.patience@cover-east.org](mailto:abigail.patience@cover-east.org) or phone **07751 809 611** to book your place.

