A Compact for East Sussex

1. Introduction

This Compact is an agreement on relations between the local Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and Public Sector organisations in East Sussex. It was originally launched in October 2003 and it is a living document, revised and developed annually.

The Compact outlines a statement of principles which will serve as a solid foundation for effective and productive relationships between partners in the VCS and the Public Sector. The Compact is a means of strengthening and sustaining the VCS and supporting the aims and objectives of the Public Sector.

The East Sussex Compact and its Codes of Practice have been developed by a wide range of people, groups and organisations from across the county. All Voluntary, Community and Public Sector organisations in East Sussex are encouraged to sign up to this Compact and its Codes of Practice.

The Compact is not an end in itself but must be a living document that is part of a process, shaping and guiding the relationships of different partner agencies in East Sussex. Organisations will aim to work together to ensure that the Compact and the Codes of Practice will be implemented and promoted within a spirit of partnership working.

2. Aims

The aims of the East Sussex Compact are to establish a framework for partners to work together more effectively to achieve common goals, to develop and deliver services and to build strong, cohesive and self-determining communities. This includes:

- agreeing principles and an effective framework for partnership working;
- improving working relationships in order to provide more effective and co-ordinated services to communities;
- improving consultation, communication, collaboration, trust and respect; and
- assisting partner agencies in meeting common strategic aims.

3. Shared Principles

Partner organisations recognise the need for integrity and accountability, openness and objectivity, honesty and leadership in the process of working together for our community. This involves:

- Recognising Diversity and Promoting Equality
- Effective Community Engagement
- Mutual Respect and Respecting Independence
- Investment and Public Accountability

Recognising Diversity and Promoting Equality

Partners recognise that within East Sussex there is a diversity of communities, organisations and rural and urban areas.

Fairness, equality, accessibility and inclusion must underpin all aspects of partnership working, and should be reflected in policies and the way that everyone involved participates. All partners need to recognise their responsibility to actively promote equal opportunities and inclusion for all people, regardless of race, age, class, employment status, disability, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, ethnic background, religious, social and economic status, or political beliefs.

All partners will undertake positive action to promote equalities and take account of diverse needs, to use the qualities and skills that exist across sectors, to have an inclusive approach to enable opportunities for anybody to participate, and to ensure the safety and protection of those using or involved in public, voluntary and community services and activities.
Effective Community Engagement

The effective engagement of local communities is crucial in enabling partnerships to achieve real and sustained results. This will include having clear purposes and agreed methods of community engagement appropriate to the needs of participants, overcoming barriers to involvement, and ensuring that the results of engagement are fed back to the wider community and agencies affected.

There should be a commitment to continually improving the quality of community engagement by sharing skills and knowledge, learning from experience and building on good practice.

Mutual Respect and Respecting Independence

Mutual Respect means all partners’ views are equally important and valid, whilst recognising and respecting the distinct but complementary roles of each partner.

In particular partners recognise and support the independence and special contribution of the VCS. The VCS provides a range of vital services, works with those most at risk of social exclusion, responds innovatively to local needs and enables individuals to contribute to public life and the development of their communities. It also attracts funding not available to public agencies.

Partners also recognise the legitimate representative role of Elected Members, their decision making and democratic responsibility to set priorities for services within available resources and a context of sound and prudent stewardship of public money.

Investment and Public Accountability

The Public Sector should consider overall value, including economic, environmental and social value, when reviewing service provision. As a concept, social value is about seeking to maximise the additional benefit that can be created by procuring or commissioning goods and services, above and beyond the benefit of merely the goods and services themselves.

The Public Sector should seek to avoid passing on disproportionate reductions - by not passing on larger reductions to the Voluntary and Community Sector and small businesses as a whole, than they take on themselves - and in particular:

• A Public Sector organisation intending to reduce or end funding (where ‘funding’ means both grant funding and any fixed term contract) or other support to a Voluntary and Community Organisation or small business should give at least three months’ notice of the actual reductions to both the organisation involved and the public/service users.

• A Public Sector organisation should actively engage the organisation and service users as early as possible before making a decision on: the future of the service; any knock-on effect on assets used to provide this service; and the wider impact on the local community.

• A Public Sector organisation should make provision for the organisation, service users, and wider community to put forward options on how to reshape the service or project. The Public Sector should assist this by making available all appropriate information, in line with the government transparency guidance.

The Public Sector recognises the need to invest in the ongoing development of the Voluntary and Community Sector infrastructure to support front-line VCOs involved in delivering public services and to build strong, cohesive and self-determining communities.

All partners to this Compact will, wherever possible, adhere to the principles of sound public accountability and open government, and, when required, explain decisions which could affect the public or other stakeholders.

4. Implementation

Each partner organisation is responsible for complying with this Compact and promoting it within its own organisation. Each signatory to the Compact has at least one Compact Champion.

The Compact Champions have responsibility for promoting and assisting in the implementation of the East Sussex Compact within their own organisation/agency or network of organisations.
Champions also work alongside the Compact Steering Group.

The Compact Steering Group provides support, training, and guidance on implementing the Compact based on the needs and concerns of Compact signatories.

The Compact Steering Group is also responsible for developing the Annual Action Plan, monitoring of the activities listed in the plan, and reporting back to Compact signatories.

The scrutiny of the East Sussex Compact is undertaken by the East Sussex Strategic Partnership (ESSP). Compact Scrutiny is the process for ensuring that the East Sussex Compact Annual Action Plan activities are being achieved.

5. Codes of Practice

There are six Codes of Practice to underpin the East Sussex Compact, outlining the aim and commitments for both the VCS and Public Sector in East Sussex. The six Codes of Practice are on:

- Funding and Procurement;
- Consultation and Community Engagement;
- Volunteering;
- Community Groups;
- Partnerships; and
- Equality and Diversity

6. Resolution of Disagreements

As far as possible, partner organisations that believe other partners are not respecting the spirit of this agreement should seek to resolve the issue between themselves. Partners must agree to honour each other’s right to raise concerns, to give time to each other to hear them, and to respond positively to them.

If you have any questions e-mail compact@eastsussex.gov.uk,
East Sussex Compact Champions

What is a Compact Champion?

A Compact Champion is a person with responsibility for promoting and assisting in the implementation of the East Sussex Compact within their own organisation/agency or network of organisations.

What are the role and responsibilities of Compact Champions?

1. To promote the East Sussex Compact, assist in the implementation and review progress within their own organisation/agency or network of organisations by:
   - ensuring they are familiar with the content of the East Sussex Compact and its Codes of Practice;
   - being able to identify the implications and impact of the Compact for their organisation/agency or network of organisations;
   - effectively promoting the Compact within their own organisation/agency or network of organisations (including staff, councillors, volunteers, trustees and other stakeholders where applicable);
   - co-ordinating their organisation/agency sign up to the Compact; and
   - being the initial point of contact for advice and support regarding Compact implementation for their organisation/agency or network of organisations.

2. To contribute to the work of the East Sussex Compact Steering Group by:
   - taking part in discussions and modelling good partnership working;
   - reporting on good practice and identifying problem areas which can guide the work of the Steering Group; and
   - seeking the views of the organisation/agency they represent, in order to make those views known to the East Sussex Compact Steering Group.
East Sussex Compact Scrutiny

Compact Scrutiny is the process for ensuring that the East Sussex Compact Implementation Strategy 2007 - 2012 and Annual Action Plan are being achieved.

Who is involved?
Members of the East Sussex Compact Steering Group, Compact Champions and signatories to the East Sussex Compact.

Who does it?
East Sussex Strategic Partnership Executive Board.

How does it work?
The Compact Steering Group presents an Annual Review of the Compact to the East Sussex Strategic Partnership Executive Board for comment and will consider any recommendations made by the Board to improve the implementation and embedding of the Compact.

Why is it done?
To ensure that both the Public Sector and the Voluntary and Community Sector are up-to-date and aware of how the Compact is being implemented and how they can inform future developments and activities.

What has it covered?
All activities listed in the East Sussex Compact Annual Action Plan, and evidence of how the Compact commitments are being implemented and what Compact commitments look like in everyday working environment.

What outcomes are to be achieved?
Awareness raising among both the Public and Voluntary and Community Sector members of the East Sussex Strategic Partnership Executive Board on existing Compact working and how it will be developed over the coming years. In particular how the Compact relates to delivering the Integrated Community Strategy “Pride of Place”.

Why it better positions the County Council and District Councils?
With the Scrutiny role sitting with the East Sussex Strategic Partnership Executive Board (which includes Borough, District and County Councils), it enables all local authorities to work collectively in ensuring that the Compact is understood, developed, and implemented across the entire county. The overall result being that policies and activities can be developed to include Compact commitments, which leads to improved relationships between local authorities and the Voluntary and Community Sector.

How do Members and Officers feel about this approach?
Generally across all local authorities the Compact has been well received by Members and Officers. However a great deal of work still needs to be done to develop a working understanding of the Compact commitments reflected in the Annual Action Plans.
Resolution of Disagreements
Understanding the Process

The Compact Steering Group has developed this short guidance note to assist signatories in fully understanding the process for the resolution of disagreements.

The aim of this guidance is to provide reassurance and assistance to signatories on how the process should operate.

Section 6 (Resolution of Disagreements) of the East Sussex Compact states:
As far as possible, partner organisations that believe other partners are not respecting the spirit of this agreement should seek to resolve the issue between themselves.

Partners must agree to honour each other’s right to raise concerns, to give time to each other to hear them, and to respond positively to them.

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Regardless of the success of any cross sector and intra-sector relationship, concerns and disagreements will at times arise that we need to try to resolve.

Concerns and disagreements can help identify important issues, and by approaching them in a positive and non-confrontational way, they can help to improve the way we work together.

Unresolved concerns and disagreements can damage working relationships.

Therefore the purpose of this resolution of disagreements process is to:

- Encourage good practice
- Promote positive relationships
- Resolve any concerns as quickly and fairly as possible
- Learn from concerns and disagreements
- Improve the effectiveness of the East Sussex Compact

Ideally, outcomes from following the procedure will result in a review of, or change in, the issue concern or disagreement.

Who are the Partner organisations?
Organisations that are developing, undertaking or participating in an activity, service or project, that involves the Public and Voluntary & Community Sectors.

Concerns and disagreements are rarely deliberate and can occur for various reasons, such as:

- Organisations and individuals not being aware of the Compact commitments;
- Lack of communication between organisations;
- The concern or disagreement being unavoidable through a crisis or external causes overriding Compact compliance (but this should be explained); or
- A symptom of wider issues.

Raising and talking through an issue with the other organisation involved can settle many concerns and disagreements.

Any organisations raising concerns with another organisation or partnership who is a signatory to the Compact should feel confident that discussions will not be used against an organisation or negatively influence future relationships* between organisations.

* Future relationships refers to dealings organisations or partnerships may have regarding consultations on services, grant funding arrangements, the tendering of services, and representation on partnerships or collaborative working including boards and committees.
The Process
As far as possible, partner organisations that believe other partners are not respecting the spirit of this agreement should seek to resolve the issue between themselves. Partners must agree to honour each other’s right to raise concerns, to give time to each other to hear them, and to respond positively to them. The following process should be followed:

1. **Identify what part(s) of the Compact and Codes you believe have been breached.** Is the organisation a signatory to the Compact?
   - Yes
     - Arrange a face to face meeting to discuss your concerns and understand the other party’s position. Focus on interests and issues rather than demands.
   - Not Resolved
     - Meet again or involve other members of both organisations to try to find a resolution.
   - Not Resolved
     - Use external neutral mediation service
   - Not Resolved
     - Make a written complaint in line with the relevant organisation’s complaints procedure
   - Not Resolved
     - Follow the organisation’s complaints appeal process.
   - Not Resolved
     - Consider referral to a higher authority e.g. Ombudsman.

2. **To improve partnership working, please share lessons learnt with the Compact Working Group.**

   **Resolved**