Code of Practice on Community Groups

1. Definition

Community organisations are usually active on a local or community level, small, modestly funded and largely dependent on voluntary, rather than paid, effort. They can be seen as distinct from the larger, professionally staffed agencies which are most visible in Voluntary Sector profiles. Hence the phrase ‘Voluntary and Community Sector’ to encompass the full range. The range of community groups includes neighbourhood-based groups and groups based on common interests or experience, such as faith, ethnic origin and disability through to arts and leisure interests.

2. Aims

Sometimes, smaller community groups are overlooked by both Public Sector and Voluntary Organisations, and find it difficult to get involved. This Code of Practice aims to address these shortcomings and promote better understanding and awareness of the diversity and contribution of community groups.

3. Commitments

1. Recognise that community groups enable local people to contribute to the development of their communities, enable groups of people to work together to find solutions to common problems, promote active citizenship and community leadership.

2. Recognise that a community voice can enable communities to participate in decision-making and increase the accountability of service providers.

3. Work to increase the confidence and capacity of individuals and small groups to get involved in activities and build mutually supportive networks that hold communities together (Social Capital).

4. Ensure that local communities are in a position to influence service delivery and, where appropriate, participate in their own forms of service delivery.

5. Encourage communities in building a common vision, sense of belonging and positive identity where diversity is valued.

6. Promote community development as a means of building active and sustainable communities based on social justice and mutual respect.

7. Adhere to the principles of fairness, equality, accessibility and inclusion as central to the effective development and engagement of community groups.

8. Share skills, knowledge, experience and good practice and recognise that learning is key to the success of sustainable community development.

9. Ensure that community groups have access to appropriate support and resources to enable them to develop.

10. Involve groups with first hand experience of particular problems in developing and delivering solutions and give the process resources as appropriate.

11. Remember that community groups may have limited capacity, and respect their other commitments and the needs of their volunteers.

12. Encourage active community members to carry out leadership roles in Voluntary and Community Sector networks.
Code of Practice Checklist: Community Groups

The Community Sector contributes greatly to improving social inclusion and cohesion. Community groups help local people to contribute to the development of their communities, promote community leadership and have a voice in local decision-making.

It is essential to make sure that service development and delivery can benefit from the skills and experience found in community groups.

This Code of Practice aims to promote a better understanding of the contribution of voluntary and community groups.

**Ensuring a voice for the community**

- Fairness, equality and inclusion are central to methods of engagement with, and development of policy for, community groups
- Methods of engagement are clear in purpose, accessible and appropriate for the needs of the community group involved. Innovative methods of engagement, which are more suitable for the target audience, should be looked into and adopted if appropriate
- Appropriate support is provided to enable community groups have their say, and any barriers to involvement are identified and attempts are made to overcome them
- The differences in working with paid workers and volunteers in a group need to be taken into account; this may include capacity and knowledge of the issue
- Community groups with first-hand experience of particular issues are invited to be involved in the development and delivery of solutions at an early stage
- Local infrastructure organisations ensure that they will represent the interests of the community inclusively, fairly and honestly when asked to speak on its behalf

**Enabling positive community identity**

- The diversity, needs and independence of individual community groups are recognised and respected
- It is clear whether a specific community group or the sector as a whole is being represented when participating in any activities
- Community members are encouraged to carry out leadership roles in community networks
- Both sectors raise awareness of the contribution and diversity of community groups within the wider community

**Supporting community networks**

- Local infrastructure organisations and community networks are used as a means of contact, information sharing, training and advice for community groups
- Community groups are given support in accessing resources – for example, meeting spaces, workers with community development skills, small grants or appropriate learning opportunities – to help them take ownership of assets
- Both sectors work together to share and develop best practice and learn from experience to further benefit community groups