

Voluntary Sector Matters – Hounslow’s Local Compact feedback

This Information Sheet details below feedback from Hounslow’s local Voluntary and Community Sector as summarised from the Voluntary Sector Matters consultation on the 16th April ’09. Below are the findings with the current Local Compact for Hounslow, as published in 2003. We will use this to help firm up a refreshed Hounslow Local Compact.

Something good

- The level of support within the Council – i.e. the Leader and LSP
- Children’s services have developed a list of standards (based on the Compact) for use in all their contracts
- Make sure the VCS is aware of quality assurance systems QAS
- QAS show the VCS is well run (dispel the image of the sector being unprofessional)
- QAS help with funding bids by demonstrating robustness
- Clarity from Council over Monitoring and Evaluation is essential
- QAS is well intentioned and systems are structured well
- Consultation principles are good
- The phrase: ‘Recognise and value the independence of the VCS as one of its greatest strengths’ was well received

Something bad

- The support from the top (Leader, LSP) doesn’t permeate through the layers internally to action on the ground
- Very few people/groups/organisations know about the Compact – not enough championing to profile the compact
- Not seen as a ‘living’ document – needs a cultural change within the Council and within the Third Sector to implement it by actually using it.
- Currently, it doesn’t feel like an equal partnership when dealing with the Council (in funding/commissioning etc). Current projects feel like paid support
- Voluntary sector need to feed back to Council more – suggestions welcome as to what would be best practice
- No ‘teeth’, no powers to enforce and if VCS do try and enforce it, are they seen as trouble makers? VCS fear consequences such as retraction of funding following use of Compact to challenge Statutory bodies
- There needs to be a recognition at many levels that the voluntary sector are the experts and the Council values their input
- It is too general and assumes the VCS have the capacity to implement QAS. Small groups / organisations do not have the time or resources.
- Far too inflexible
- Over engineered – does not cover a wide range of orgs
- It is **woolly** because the following questions arose;
 - How are these things to be measured?
 - How would ‘structures for effective partnership’ be achieved?
 - In such an unequal partnership what does ‘fairly share the risk’ mean?
 - ‘Unrealistic burdens or expectations’ are measured in relation to what?
- Consultation is not rigorous/frequent enough
- Participation is not user/community focused enough

Something to include

- A way of enforcing it!
- A process for drawing it’s message/impact down through all the different layers of Council workings
- Agreed standards for payment of invoices/grants to the VCS (third sector)
- Clear communication lines
- Measure the number of bids & the amount of external funding coming into the borough as a result of the Compact partnership (prove it’s worth to others)

- Measure partnerships being developed on the Compact principles across the borough
- Add in processes/specifics (or maybe examples?) for how it could actually positively impact partnerships
- Currently too woolly, although it shouldn't be too prescriptive as everyone needs to be able to adapt it to own work
- Council Will...
 - Give support and funding to encourage and enable the VCS to implement QASs.
 - Have an understanding of appropriate QASs for the VCS and of the sort of groups/organisations for which they would be appropriate.
- A clear action plan
- More frequent consultations/feedback
- To support smaller groups to engage and participate in consultations through resources/funding
- The rights of VCS to be heard needs to be taken more seriously

Something to remove

- **Nothing**, because it's a good concept but insufficiently concrete in terms of achievement.
- No specific comments made on this except that although there was general agreement on the wording – people questioned how is the compact actually going to be implemented in partnership with the VCS.

General Comments

- People are still slightly unsure about the Compact; should it be sent out with funding applications?
- People have used the Compact and have been supported by it in the past; especially when associated with cuts in funding
- NCVO Compact advocacy support helped one group to investigate and raise a Compact breach
- A summary document of the Compact would be beneficial
- There is evidence that the Compact can work
- The Compact should be utilised and promoted more within the Council
- One group's SLA with the council was not up to date; the Compact should be used to deter activities such as this from happening
- Translated versions of the Compact should be available
- The Council approach to the Compact is extremely fragmented. This needs to be addressed. A cross unit Compact steering group would be really beneficial.
- General suspicion of the fact that it is not legally binding
- If QASs are to become a requirement, there needs to be funding to implement them.
- Is there a way of scaling the requirement of QASs for size/type of org?
- There was the concern that different funders require different QAS (some are prescribed for orgs like home start)
- Need to get away from the idea of "professionalising the VCS". Areas in the VCS are already operating in a very professional way already.
- None of the groups/organisation were currently using the Compact
- Most of the groups/organisation knew little about it
- This consultation will lead to a new draft Compact to be distributed by CVSH and LBH as soon as it is completed.

Glossary of Terms

VCS – Voluntary and Community Sector (also known as Third Sector)

LSP – Local Strategic Partnership: www.hounslow.gov.uk/index/council_and_democracy/lsp.htm

QAS – Quality Assurance System: www.ces-vol.org.uk/index.cfm?pg=132

NCVO – National Council for Voluntary Organisations: www.ncvo-vol.org.uk

SLA – Service Level Agreement: A negotiated agreement between the awarding body and the service provider

CVSH – Council for Voluntary Services: www.cvshounslow.org.uk

LBH – London Borough of Hounslow: www.hounslow.gov.uk