

VOLUNTARY SECTOR COMPACT ANNUAL REPORT

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Summary

To present Cabinet with the Voluntary Sector Compact Annual Report.

Recommendations

- A. That Cabinet note this Annual Report and the progress which has been made over the past year.

REPORT

Background

1. The purpose of a local Compact is to help the further development of partnership between the Council and the voluntary and community sectors.
2. The Compact sets out a series of undertakings agreed between the Council and the voluntary and community sector in the form of 'Codes of Good Practice'.
3. It also sets out Funding Code of Good Practice with a set process for applying grant funding. As a result of this specific guidance on Grant Funding was subsequently included as section 1.3 of Contract Procedure Rules and approved by Council on 15 September 2006.
4. In doing so it recognises that the Council and the voluntary and community sector fulfil complementary roles in the development and delivery of services and activities in Shropshire.

5. The Compact helps to strengthen the relationship between the Council and the voluntary and community sector and is intended to be a practical and “living” working document.
6. The Compact is maintained and developed through the Compact Monitoring and Review Group made up of representatives from the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and Officers of the Council and the LSP.

Progress during 2007/8

7. Progress in 2007 -2008 has been built on the foundations of joint work in the previous year including the Joint Conference held in October 2006, the visit of John Stoker, Compact Commissioner in December 2006, the Development of the five District and Borough Compacts and early work to establish the Voluntary Sector Assembly.
8. A Compact Survey was sent out during the summer of 2007 to all Council Officers who may deal with Voluntary Sector funding to establish the level of awareness and understanding of the Compact.
9. The survey was sent to 53 Officers within the Council and 21 (40%) responded. The majority of respondents (19) knew of the Compact. 16 had a copy of the Compact in their office and had found it helpful in dealing with the voluntary sector. 15 followed the grant funding process set out in the Compact document and 14 used the set grant application form and paperwork agreed by the officer working group. All of the respondents who had carried out policy or procedural changes which involved the voluntary sector had allowed consultation periods of 12 weeks or above.
10. Whilst there is still some further work to be done on publicizing the Compact and Compact ways of working, Officers working on a day to day basis with the Voluntary Sector are in the main embedding good practices into their grant funding procedures.

Voluntary Sector Assembly

11. Following the appointment of Val Lewis as Voluntary Sector Assembly Co-ordinator in April 2007, there has been significant progress in establishing the Voluntary Sector Assembly with a budget provided (on an initial 3 year basis by the Council). The post is hosted by the Shropshire Partnership.
12. Following an open meeting with VCS representatives at the Lord Hill in Mid April a Steering Group has been established to drive forward the form and function of the Assembly and to ensure that it would not compete with either the Community Council or local Councils of Voluntary Service as infrastructure organisations.
13. Following consultation with the Sector the Steering Group has agreed that the functions of the VCS Assembly will be:
 - Communication and information
 - Representation and engagement

- Advocacy
 - Networking and support
 - Capacity building (to enable better engagement with the public sector)
 - Education and Awareness building between the public services and VCS
14. The Assembly will have a Board and the Chair or representative will sit on the new Leadership Board of the LSP that is being established for February 2008. It will work through a wide range of "Forums of interest" which are groupings of VCS bodies working on areas of work e.g. the Children's & Young Persons Summit and the Health and Care Forum. Members are kept regularly informed through a VCS Assembly Newsletter and website:
www.shropvcassembly.org.uk
15. A large database of up to 2,400 VCS bodies, small and large, is being established with details of roles to enable communication e.g. news of funding opportunities.
16. The Steering Group has established two task groups to enable representation on two key issues (1) the development of One Council (2) the development and delivery of the new Local Area Agreement. A joint workshop on the new Local Area Agreement is being held for VCS and Equality groups on the 11 December at SABC. Guildhall.
17. The VCS Assembly will be launched at the new Shrewsbury FC on Friday 22 February 2007.

'Contracting Can Be Rewarding' Friday 7 September 2007

18. The Compact Monitoring & Review Group has responded to the findings of the 2006 Perception Survey and Conference by seeking to provide more information for VCS organisations seeking information on grants and contract arrangements with SCC.
19. A highly successful and well attended event was organised by Pat Hockley and team members and included presentations by Gen Lewis and Vivian McKay (Contracts Officer), April Shwer (Meals Co-ordinator) and Nigel Denton (Corporate Procurement Officer) with Questions and Answers. This was the first of a planned series of events with the VCS to respond to needs.
20. The event focused on both the formal tendering and contracting process covered by Shropshire County Council Contract Procedure Rules and also the inclusion in Contract Procedure Rules of section 1.3 which covers Grant Funding.
21. A further wider event on Compact monitoring & working will be organised to capture full VCS engagement in early 2008.

West Midlands Compact Review

22. Four regional/national bodies including the new West Midlands Compact Forum, The Commissioner for the Compact, Government Office and Regional Action West Midlands have come together to instigate a review of the 14 Top Tier Compacts across the region. A forum of VCS and SCC officers met at the Lantern in November to answer the 3 qualitative question sets on the operation of the SCC Compact.
23. The forum resulted in an open and constructive dialogue. A full copy of the Response is available to Members which in summary covers the following issues (also indicated in the smaller scale 2006/2007 Perception surveys).
- With the arrival of the VCS Assembly and Steering Group that the Compact Monitoring & Review Group now focus on its primary role and review membership and terms of reference.
 - That monitoring and review becomes a more stringent process building on national experience now available and good practice e.g. from local compacts that have built on the SCC Compact.
 - Recognition that national policy is raising the importance both of the VCS and of Compacts and that real compact working and compliance must become a feature of improved Council and VCS relations, processes and grant and contracting relationships.
 - That there needs to be work both within the VCS and the New Council to raise awareness of the VCS and Compact working e.g. activity in National Compact Week.
 - That the Compact would be a living and iterative document, regularly reviewed and updated to reflect changing needs and circumstances.
24. A West Midlands Compact Conference was held on the 4 December in Wolverhampton with Shropshire representation. This discussed the findings of the review and next steps. Shropshire was congratulated for its detailed response to the Review.

Compact Monitoring & Review Group

25. The Group has met bi monthly through the year, supported by an Officer Group with Directorate representation. The Group needs to build membership but has included high level representation from the VCS together with SCC Directorates, the LSP and Districts (in relation to the finalisation in the year and operation of the five local compacts between CVS, Community Partnerships and Councils.)
26. The Group has recently formed a task and finish group to speed the review of the full group and its monitoring role a report (together with the Regional Survey findings above) will go to the 21 January 2008 meeting. The aim is to make the group and Compact procedures fit for purpose.

27. Agreed actions underway include review of the full Group and Terms of Reference, highlighting actions within the Compact for action e.g. champions, early organisation of Compact Week in Shropshire, action to value the VCS, engaging with One Council arrangements for a VCS Champion, Portfolio holders and VCS representation on the new LSP Leadership Board and better understanding of the role of volunteering in the VCS and SCC services.

Championing the Compact

28. Speaking at the West Midlands Compact Conference, 4 December, Phil Hope, Minister for the Third Sector drew attention to the need for Compacts to be permeated down through all tiers of an organisation and that at senior Member level and at Chief Officer and senior managers in all partnership organisations be recognised as Compact champions and charged with the implementation of achievable Compact goals.

The VCS and the Local Area Agreement

29. Government guidance for development of the new Local Area Agreement to start in June 2008 requires greater consultation with and engagement of the VCS including in the delivery of outcomes. This is particularly relevant as one of the four key areas of the new LAA will be 'vulnerable people' where the VCS has great experience and is engaged in service delivery. A second joint event with the VCS (and the Equality Forum) was held on the 11 December facilitated by Maggie Rust (WMLGA Learning to Deliver Programme) and with Chris Eade, Director of Places, GOWM. This event was highly successful and built on VCS knowledge on vulnerable communities and other LAA themes.
30. There is a clear commitment amongst all partners to ensure that VCS in Shropshire continues to build on its sound foundations. The future funding levels for voluntary sector organisations should not be affected by the implementation of a Unitary authority and no savings are expected from the voluntary sector to contribute towards Unitary savings targets.

Conclusion

31. There has been progress over the past twelve months to help take the Compact forward and we have been rapidly learning from national, regional and local good practice. This work (and that to develop the VCS Assembly and improve understanding of grant and contract opportunities) has resulted in closer working and a more mature relationship between the voluntary and community sector and the Council which has been co-ordinated by joint work by Community Service officers, the VCS Assembly Co-ordinator and the LSP Team.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

None

Human Rights Act Appraisal

The contents of this report are compatible with the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998

Environmental Appraisal

There are no environmental implications contained within this report

Risk Management Appraisal

The Compact is one of the key tools to help maintain and develop the voluntary and community sector. Its approval and the process of continuous update will help maintain this key sector.

Community / Consultations Appraisal

Consultation with voluntary sector representatives through an annual Compact review meeting and through a Compact monitoring group.

Cabinet Member

Barbara J Craig

Local Member

All

Appendices

None