

REPORT TO: EPPING FOREST LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

DATE: 26 FEBRUARY 2009



SUBJECT: ADOPTION OF THE ESSEX COMPACT

AUTHOR: LSP MANAGER

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To apprise LSP Board Members of the contents of the new 'Essex Compact', which is designed to support partnership working across the county.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That LSP Board members agree to:
- (i) Note the contents and obligations of the new 'Essex Compact' (see appendix 1)
 - (ii) Sign up to the provisions of the Compact
 - (iii) Identify a Board Member to act as a 'Compact Champion', to take a lead role in promoting and supporting the use of the Compact, or to leave this as a general responsibility of all Board members.
 - (iv) Review the local Compact over the next year to ensure that the various compacts are closely aligned.

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In 1997 the Government published a report on its vision for the future of the voluntary sector entitled 'Building the Future Together'. Following extensive consultation with the voluntary and community sector, the Government issued a joint national Compact in November 1998 entitled 'Compact: Getting it Right Together'. Local Compacts follow from the national initiative, the concept being for the development of agreements between local statutory and voluntary sector representatives setting out what each can expect of the other.
- 3.2 The Epping Forest District Compact was drawn up and finalised in 2004 following lengthy and thorough consultations between representatives of the voluntary sector and VAEF and the District Council. The Compact was formally agreed and adopted by the LSP, and its partners, including the District Council, the County Council, and the Primary Care Trust. The local Compact and the principles contained within the associated codes of practice, covering community groups, consultation and policy appraisal, diversity and equality, funding and volunteering, have contributed to ensuring an effective working relationship between the voluntary sector and all the partner organisations in the District.

4.0 THE ESSEX COMPACT

- 4.1 The Essex Compact was originally produced in 2004. It was updated and extended during 2007-08 to reflect the changing and developing relationship between the voluntary and public sectors, with the new Essex Compact being adopted by the County in April 2008, following an extensive consultation exercise. In writing the new 'Essex Compact', the County paid close attention to the district compacts which were up and running in nearly all the other Essex districts/boroughs, and to the National Compact.
- 4.2 The County sees district compacts as guiding district-level activity, the 'Essex Compact' looking at the countywide perspective and the National Compact as applying to national processes. It should be noted that the Essex Compact states very clearly that there is no hierarchy of compacts. The Essex Compact does not overrule or supersede the district compacts in any way and cannot be overruled by the National Compact. All three operate in their own sphere of influence, namely national, county and district level relationships. Accordingly, the County Council has asked the various Local Strategic Partnerships and District/Boroughs to sign up to the new Essex Compact. Members of the LSP Board are recommended to support the ongoing development of partnership working across the county by formally signing up to the document. A copy of the updated 'Essex Compact' is appended to this report (see Appendix 1). The Board may also wish to update the Epping Forest District Compact within the next year so that the various Compacts are even more aligned.
- 4.3 The Essex Compact also makes provision for the identification of a 'Compact Champion' to promote and help support the effective operation of the 'Essex Compact'. The role of the champion is set out in Appendix 2, members of the LSP Board may wish to nominate someone to fulfil this role, and also Champion the local Compact, or leave this as a shared responsibility across all Board members.

5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 A Compact is a written agreement between the statutory and voluntary/community sector aimed at improving their relationship to joint advantage. It recognises the complementary roles of each sector in the development of citizenship, a sense of community and the creation of a just and inclusive society. The updated 'Essex Compact' takes account of new developments to ensure that aims of the Compact can be achieved in a changing environment.
- 5.2 Essex County Council formally adopted the current County Compact in April 2008 and is seeking the support of partner organisations to the Compact through formal signing up to the document.

Appendix 1 – Essex Compact



THE ESSEX COMPACT

1. Vision

Voluntary and community organisations make a major and literally incalculable contribution to the social, cultural and economic life of Essex. They act as pathfinders for the involvement of users in the design and delivery of services and often act as advocates for those who otherwise have no voice. In doing so they promote both equality and diversity. They help to alleviate poverty, improve the quality of life and empower socially excluded people. The voluntary and community sector also makes an important direct economic contribution to the County. The Voluntary and Community sector in Essex can operate most effectively if it has the understanding and support of the statutory sector, and vice versa.

2. Purpose of the Essex Compact

A 'Local Compact' is a written understanding between the Statutory, Voluntary and Community Sectors and other partners within any given locality about how they will co-operate. It should recognise the contribution Voluntary and Community groups make and acknowledge their independence, and also the moves in central government and wider society towards empowering the voluntary sector and communities.

We recognise that the voluntary and community sector has a vital role in society as the nation's 'third sector', working alongside the state and the market. It is crucial to the governance and wellbeing of communities in Essex as elsewhere, working through engagement of volunteers; promotion of active citizenship; promotion of debate, questioning and new ideas; and providing services. If the Compact is effective, it will support the development of voluntary and community sector capacity, to increase and improve the impact of the sector and benefit Essex people. This is what we are setting out to do.

The voluntary and community sector in Essex is wide-ranging and richly diverse. Despite this, statutory organisations and the voluntary and community sector share many aspirations. These include the pursuit of inclusiveness, dedication to public life, and support for the development of healthy and safe communities. If the two sectors work well together, the people of Essex will benefit: they will be empowered, and will receive better services.

The diversity of the sector in Essex means that while the principles by which statutory organisations should engage with voluntary and community bodies

will remain the same, the levels and methods of engagement will often quite rightly differ.

All local public bodies need to have an effective relationship with the sector, including small community groups. We intend the Essex Compact to provide a countywide framework which will complement the existing District and Borough wide Compacts as well as the National Compact and any regional compact, assisting in making roles and responsibilities clearer for Essex-wide and cross-district organisations. We see the district compacts as governing co-operation at district level, the Essex Compact as applying to wider Essex matters, and the National Compact as governing national compact matters as well as guiding the development of local compacts. Partners should make reference to the most local compact relevant, and move to the next “level up” only if the local compact does not cover the matter in question. Where national programmes are applied locally with some devolved decision-making, first reference should be to the National Compact if rule or principle applied uniformly across the country is at stake, but to the appropriate local compact if the issue concerns local decision-making on devolved matters. The competence of a regional compact should be interpreted in the same way. We recommend that district compacts refer to the Essex Compact just as this compact refers to the national one, and that all levels learn from one another.

3. Shared Principles

We assert that these principles are fundamental to the relationship between statutory sector organisations and the voluntary and community sector:

- voluntary action is an essential component of a democratic society.
- an independent and diverse voluntary and community sector enriches society and is fundamental to its well being.
- all members of the Compact will respect and recognise the independence and values of other members.
- in the development and delivery of public policy and services, statutory organisations and the voluntary and community sector have distinct but complementary roles.
- all members will strive to work with partners to make services excellent.
- all members accept the need to communicate with and listen to other partners
- partnership is effective if it works towards common goals and achieves benefits for service users and communities.
- statutory organisations and the voluntary and community sector have different forms of accountability and are answerable to different stakeholders. But common to both is the need for integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, leadership and inclusivity.
- voluntary and community organisations are entitled to campaign within the law to advance their aims.
- promoting equality of opportunity for all people regardless of race, age, disability, gender, sexual orientation, religion or any other

discriminatory or oppressive criteria, and eliminating discriminatory or oppressive practice, is essential.

- Parish and town councils are recognised as an important part of the statutory sector, but with unique roots in local communities.

4. Undertakings by both Statutory Sector and Voluntary and Community Sector

- All partner organisations will appoint a Compact Champion and spread knowledge of the Compact through their organization
- Reach out to and empower underrepresented and disadvantaged communities
- Work to avoid conflict and spread best practice between the different Essex compacts
- Respect the confidentiality of information provided by partners from other sectors, within the constraints of the law and the proper performance of public duties, when given access to it on that basis
- Check all activities and structures involving co-operation with Compact partners, including the Local Area Agreement, against Compact principles
- Implement mutually agreed monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for the Compact
- Establish and implement accessible mechanisms for dealing with complaints
- Support as appropriate training on compact issues, learning from one another
- Recognise training needs of volunteers, people with governance responsibilities in and for relations with the VCS and for volunteers
- Recognise the added value volunteers bring to organisations and ensure they are all valued and thanked for the unique contribution they make.

5. Undertakings by Statutory Sector

To advance a positive relationship with voluntary and community bodies, statutory organisations signing up to the Essex Compact adopt these undertakings:

- recognise and support the independence of voluntary and community bodies, including their right within the law to campaign, to comment on and to challenge policy within the law, irrespective of any funding relationship that might exist, and to determine and manage their own affairs.
- take account of the need for greater proportionality, targeting, consistency and transparency in funding frameworks and to promote strategic funding, enhancing the capacity of voluntary and community organisations.

- recognise the importance of infrastructure to the voluntary sector and volunteering and, where appropriate, to support its development at a county and local level.
- seek to appraise new policies and procedures, particularly at the developmental stage, to identify as far as possible implications for the sector.
- consult the voluntary sector, subject to considerations of urgency, sensitivity or confidentiality, on issues that are likely to affect it. Such consultation should be timely and allow reasonable timescales for response, taking into account the need of organisations to consult their users, beneficiaries and stakeholders.
- take account positively of the specific needs, interests and contributions of those voluntary and community bodies which represent women, minority groups and socially excluded people.
- ensure that statutory sector staff are trained and otherwise informed on the nature and importance of the Third Sector
- undertake regular mapping exercises with the VCS to identify gaps and overlaps in service provision and areas of support needed.
- promote effective working relationships, consistency of approach and good practice between itself and the voluntary sector.
- support and actively develop policies and promote opportunities for volunteering.

6. Undertakings by voluntary and community sector

In developing their relationship with the statutory sector, voluntary and community voluntary sector organisations agree the following undertakings:

Voluntary and community organisations: -

- will maintain high standards of governance and conduct and meet reporting and accountability obligations to funding bodies and users.
- respect and be accountable to the law, and in the case of charities observe the appropriate guidance from the Charity Commission, including that on political activities and campaigning.
- Acknowledge responsibilities and constraints placed on the statutory sector, including the democratic responsibility and legitimacy of elected representatives.
- develop quality standards appropriate to the organisation.
- ensure that service users, volunteers, members and supporters are informed and consulted, where appropriate, about activities and policy positions
- promote effective working relationships with other agencies and across the voluntary and community sector.
- involve users, wherever possible, in the development and management of activities and services.
- put in place policies for promoting best practice and equality of opportunity in all activities, including employment, involvement of volunteers and users, and service provision.

6. Making it Work/Next Steps

The publication of the Essex Compact in itself will not change anything. Positive and lasting change will depend on a number of essential and critical factors agreed on and committed to by all partners, namely:

- maintaining close links with District and Borough Compacts and with the National Compact, to aid cross-boundary working and avoid duplication of effort.
- to review in partnership the operation and implementation of the Essex Compact annually and publish a report detailing achievements, aspirations, issues and amendments
- to embrace the principles of the Essex Compact and promote its adoption by all other partners
- to develop a mechanism to resolve disagreements and complaints between the voluntary and community sectors and the statutory sector which compromise the stated commitments or undermine the spirit of the Essex Compact itself. A policy and mechanism for this will be attached to the Compact as soon as it is completed.

This document is available on request in alternative formats, including other languages.

Appendix 2 – Compact Champion

What is an Essex Compact Champion?

An Essex Compact Champion promotes the Essex Compact within his or her organisation. Such a Champion:

- Acts as a contact point for colleagues with queries about the Compact
- Keeps the Compact on the agenda and raises it when it seems to have been forgotten
- Liaises with colleagues with particular responsibilities on Compact matters – for example, with a training manager about covering the Compact in staff training and induction
- Raises concerns if necessary with senior managers able to take action, including the chief officer
- Liaises with other Essex Compact Champions through the Steering Group, Essex Compact Forum and staff with Essex-wide Compact responsibilities (that means reporting significant issues of interest and if possible attending a few meetings, not a big time commitment).

We advise that the Compact Champion should not normally be the chief officer or head of department (to avoid conflicts of interest) but should have access to that senior person. In big organisations it will generally be helpful to have a Compact Champion in each division, with one “Champion of Champions” or central champion as a single point of contact for that organisation. The central champion will have some additional duties keeping communication going between the other champions in that organisation and trying to make sure gaps are filled.

How Champions are appointed is up to the organisation concerned, but at the very least senior management and the person’s line management should be aware.

Champions do not have to be experts. They will have the backing of the Essex Compact Steering Group and staff attached to that, and we hope it will be possible to arrange training for those who wish to take it up.