



Wandsworth Voluntary Sector Development Agency

enabling voluntary action

WVSDA response to the national Compact review, October 2010

What commitments in the renewed Compact do you most support?

Section 1 – we support the introduction of a separate section on independence.

Commitment 2.7 - a focus on solutions. We need positive provisions to remind all parties that working in a Compact way is about trying to make things better.

Are there any additional commitments you would like to see?

There needs to be a clear commitment to transparent, timely and regular Communications. We recently ran a consultation exercise with our members about refreshing the Compact and one of the top issues raised by groups (in addition to respecting their independence) was for improved communications to be a top priority for local public bodies (about what is going to happen, how things are changing and whether there is any way to influence outcomes etc).

Section 2 should mention the need for an inclusive approach to involvement - committing the public sector to using a range of consultation methods to ensure inclusiveness and outreach to people who do not respond to written consultations. This requires some resources and collaboration with local networks.

In the same section, the commitment to supporting infrastructure organisations should be retained as they enable local organisations to help people and communities more effectively. I see firsthand every day the difference this makes. Sadly, it has had very little impact on commissioning (which excludes the majority of groups for a number of reasons to do with capacity and process), but very big in terms of delivering great outcomes using charitable funds.

Section 3 would benefit from a commitment to expanding the 'provider base' in terms of making it more diverse and opening commissioning up to equality groups and ultra local providers (requires a commitment to market development with such groups to actually enable the social value that they represent to be utilised in service delivery).

In the same section, there is a need to specify what the relationship should be between social value and value for money. If this is not done, social value will continue to be a meaningless concept on the local level as contracts are always awarded to the lowest bidder.

If social value is considered a genuine factor in the Compact and if it is to have any weight in tender processes, it needs to be quantified and reflected in procurement codes and contract award procedures.

What accountability mechanisms should be in place - nationally and/or locally - to ensure that the Compact is followed?

We would like to see a strong, independent Compact advocacy function/panel that enables organisations to get an opinion from a third party regarding a particular situation or scenario. Voluntary arbitration could also be a useful service to settle disputes and suggest alternatives for moving forward.

The practice adopted by the Audit Commission in connection with the Comprehensive Area Assessment process was to visit CSOs in person to discuss how partnership working was going in the local area. It would be extremely useful to continue the practice of direct, qualitative assessment of partnerships and accountability in some other way now that the CAA and the Audit Commission are going.

What other measures - local and/or national - are needed to ensure that the Compact is followed?

Local public bodies needs to be working to the same standards as national government. I would like to see the national Compact principles adopted at the local level across the country to ensure that we are all working towards similar standards. This would be in addition to any locally specified Compact provisions.

It would be useful to offer tools/straightforward methods of benchmarking some aspects of Compact working in order to measure progress. This should not be compulsory, but would be useful as a resource.

As far as the current draft text goes, we are unsure of the value of listing the Outcomes in the preamble and repeating them as headings – should we be attempting to measure them via the commitments? We suggest keeping Involvement, Funding and Equality as the overriding themes of the Compact and introducing Independence as a fourth theme.

The outcome we are really after is partnership – making this happen is a question of choosing to adopt a constructive approach (which is in turn an attitude issue - a personal decision). We think better relationships could be forged by sensitizing public sector staff to what civil society is all about - creating direct links and contacts between the sectors, perhaps as part of staff inductions? Community immersion? Volunteering?

What types of organisations do you think should be covered by the Compact?

Voluntary and community organisations, social enterprises, national and local government and public bodies, quangos, private sector government contractors and sub-contractors.

Do you have any other comments?

Sections 3 and 4 both deal predominantly with funding arrangements and could be merged.

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