

Sunderland Compact: Voluntary and Community Groups Code

Introduction

The Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) is very diverse and people come from very different kinds of community. A community of place may be the community on a particular housing estate; whilst a community of interest may be the Muslim community living in a particular neighbourhood or ward.

The Voluntary and Community Sector contributes greatly to civil society and to social inclusion and cohesion. The makeup of the sector ranges from informal community groups to large multi-purpose VCS organisations. The organisations of the Sunderland Partnership understand that these groups are often missed out in the process of local policy and service development, and delivery. This Code of Practice outlines ways of ensuring that the skills and experience of voluntary and community groups add value to policy and service development and delivery at a local level.

This Code of Practice should be read in conjunction with the Sunderland Compact document.

Key Principles

- Involvement and consultation with VCS organisations should follow the commitments outlined in the Involvement and Consultation Code of Practice;
- Voluntary and Community Groups should always be involved in the development of Local Compacts;
- Voluntary and Community Groups, through their work in supporting individuals and communities at neighbourhood level, help to build social capital and community cohesion;
- Voluntary and Community Groups should be encouraged and supported to play a key role in the planning and delivery of services commissioned by the public sector.

The organisations of the Sunderland Partnership and Voluntary and Community Sector organisations jointly commit to:

- Ensure that Sunderland Partnership funds local umbrella organisations supporting community groups;
- Work in partnership to promote good practice (including promoting this code) and celebrate success by utilising resources of all partners and being transparent when there is the potential for conflict of interest;

- Promote the development of voluntary and community organisations consistently across the Partnership/City;
- Take active steps to ensure a diverse range of voluntary and community groups are heard and felt supported;
- Encourage community group members to take on leadership roles.
- Support local decision making and involvement groups i.e Area Forums.

Organisations of the Sunderland Partnership commit to:

- Give community groups better access to information via umbrella organisations/forums;
- Put in place steps that enable the voluntary and community sector to be effectively involved in planning and policy development;
- Help voluntary and community groups to access funds and encourage community ownership of assets where appropriate;
- Involve local government in building the voluntary and community sector;
- Encourage the involvement of voluntary and community groups in developing local community strategies and local compacts;
- Consult within the voluntary and community sector through a jointly established code of practice;
- Take into account the impact of new regulations on voluntary and community groups;
- Encourage greater use of community facilities such as neighbourhood hubs.

Voluntary and Community Sector organisations commit to:

- Monitor and evaluate its own spending proportionate to the level of funding received and in relation to specific grant or contract conditions;
- Encourage partnership working through existing and emerging local networks involving the local community wherever possible in actively developing new ideas;
- Be open about the interests of the community they speak for and declare conflicts of interest;
- Ensure information reaches all sections of the community.
- Voluntary and Community Sector organizations will ensure that the views expressed are representative of the wider community

Further information on the Sunderland Compact is available at www.sunderlandcompact.org.uk