

Compact Q&A:

Frequent questions, answers from Compact Voice and practical examples.



supporting partnership working

Topic/Question	Compact Voice advice/answer	Practical examples and further information
<p>‘The Compact isn’t legally binding. Does that mean it has no teeth?’</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Compact is about much more than protecting the voluntary sector against funding cuts. Whilst it has been used successfully to challenge poor funding decisions, the Compact works best when used at the beginning of relationships, providing a foundation for open and transparent dialogue between the sectors. • The Compact is sometimes perceived as being a tool for the VCS to use to reprimand the public sector, but this is not true - engaging in Compact working has benefits for both sectors. It can help the public sector to develop policies and services that are responsive to the needs of the communities, for example. • Local Compacts can help ensure open conversations about funding reductions, so organisations are able to talk more freely about issues relating to funding when/if they arise. • The national Compact is accompanied by an Accountability and Transparency Guide, which outlines steps to take at a national level if the Compact isn’t being followed. 	<p>Compact Voice’s case study library shows practical examples of how the Compact has been used to influence or change funding decisions, as well as how local Compacts have helped both sectors develop the best possible policies and services: http://www.compactvoice.org.uk/resources/case-studies</p> <p>In particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North Lincolnshire: Compact-Proofed Funding Cuts • Watford Borough Council: building VCS resilience in the context of cuts • Sunderland: Encouraging partnership working in funding applications
<p>‘What is Compact Voice doing to help commissioners follow Compact principles?’</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compact Voice works with commissioners and produces resources to help them understand the value and importance of working with the voluntary sector, what the Compact is, and what the benefits of working in partnership are. • Compact Voice works to encourage voluntary organisations to become more involved in and engaged with the whole commissioning process. • We have produced resources detailing how voluntary organisations can be proactive in approaching commissioners, as well as why and how they should do 	<p>Compact Voice’s guide to Understanding Commissioning and Procurement: See page 34 in particular: http://www.compactvoice.org.uk/sites/default/files/understanding_commissioning_and_procurement_guide.pdf</p>

	<p>so.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A key point is the need to communicate that the Compact can help commissioners to do their job even better: it is a tool for describing good practice, not an extra hurdle to be cleared. By following Compact principles in commissioning, the process becomes clearer, with shared expectations and less ambiguity. • The Compact is also underpinned by other guidance and legislation which make explicit links to it – such as Best Value Statutory Guidance and the Social Value Act 	<p>Best Value Guidance and the Compact: http://www.compactvoice.org.uk/sites/default/files/bv_and_the_compact.pdf</p>
<p>‘The Compact has been around for a long time. Do you think the time for the Compact has passed?’</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Compact is in many respects more relevant now than ever. In light of an increasing reliance on VCS organisations to deliver public services, the Compact can help to ensure a level playing field, encourage open and honest dialogue across sectors and establish a foundation for these relationships that ensures both sectors are treated fairly. • The Compact is an important tool for helping new commissioning bodies to engage with the voluntary sector and in establishing new and productive partnerships. Police and Crime Commissioners and Clinical Commissioning Groups are increasingly signing up to local Compacts, as they provide a key point of access to engage with the voluntary sector and signing up sends a strong message that they are willing to engage with the VCS. • The Compact has a higher level of support from national government now than it has previously – it is included in every government department’s business plan, and the Prime Minister has stated his support in the renewed national Compact. • In Compact Voice’s annual survey of local Compacts, 89% of the 327 respondents believed that ‘the Compact is important and effort needs to be made to implement it in full’. • The Compact was established in 1998 but was refreshed in 2009 and renewed in 2010. It has cross-party support. 	<p>See Compact Voice’s Annual Survey of Local Compacts: http://www.compactvoice.org.uk/sites/default/files/annual_local_compacts_survey_2013.pdf</p> <p>The Compact in government department business plans: http://www.compactvoice.org.uk/page/compact-departmental-business-plans</p> <p>Compact Voice and Office for Civil Society Joint Action Plan: http://www.compactvoice.org.uk/page/compact-voice-and-ocs-201314-joint-action-plan</p>
<p>‘What evidence do you have of the impact of the Compact locally and nationally?’</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compact Voice publishes case studies regularly which explore all aspects of local Compact working in a practical way. All of these explore the impact of local Compacts and also of how government are implementing the Compact to improve their partnership working. • We have published examples of how local Compacts have been used to involve the VCS in policy design, tackle anti-social behaviour and help the VCS and public sector to engage with the private sector - all of which have had a tangible, positive impact on local communities. • Government departments have shared good practice with us on topics of Social Impact Bonds and Open Policy Making. • Nationally, the Compact is used ‘behind-the-scenes’ on a regular basis to inform 	<p>See our case study library at www.compactvoice.org.uk/resources/case-studies.</p> <p>See also:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Departmental business plans • Best Value Statutory Guidance • Open Government Partnership National Action Plan • Consultation Guidance

	<p>and influence policy development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Compact is embedded in every government department's business plan, and every department has a Senior Responsible Officer with the responsibility for ensuring implementation and raising awareness of the Compact. • The Compact is referenced in, and underpinned by, a number of government policies such as Best Value Statutory Guidance, the Open Government Partnership's National Action Plan and the Cabinet Office's Consultation guidance – amongst many others. • We meet with and talk to our contacts in central government regularly, most notable with the Office for Civil Society and the cross-departmental Compact Forum. • Our Engagement Development Officers also meet regularly with their regional contacts from the OCS Local Intelligence Team. 	See above
<p>'Does the NAO have plans to review National Implementation again?'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The NAO published a report into national government's implementation of the national Compact in 2012. • A follow up report, examining how the recommendations in the initial report have been taken forward, is due to be published in early 2014. 	<p>Read the NAO Report into central government's implementation of the Compact: http://www.compactvoice.org.uk/news/2012/01/05/compact-voice-welcomes-nao-report-central-government%E2%80%99s-implementation-national-compa</p>
<p>'What sanctions are used or put in place when a public body breaches the Compact?'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Compact is not legally binding and is intended to function as a foundation for partnership working between the sectors. • It outlines a number of commitments for both sectors to follow, for mutual benefit. • If a public body breaches the Compact, there are steps to take to raise the issue. • The Compact Accountability and Transparency Guide outlines the steps to take at a national level. This includes information on how to access the Parliamentary and Health Services Ombudsman and Local Government Ombudsman. • Most local Compacts contain a dispute resolution procedure and we would advise this this is followed. Contacting your local CVS or Compact Voice can also help, as we can mediate on your behalf in some instances, depending on capacity within the team. 	<p>See also the Compact Accountability and Transparency Guide for information on contacting Ombudsman services: http://www.compactvoice.org.uk/sites/default/files/the_compact_accountability_guide.pdf.</p>

<p>‘Can members of a Dispute Resolution Panel be taken to court by a VCS organisation if the issue they are dealing with has not been dealt with to their satisfaction?’</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No. Breaching the Compact is bad practice, but it is not a criminal offence and as such, decisions relating to Dispute Resolution Panels cannot be referred to court. • There have been instances where voluntary organisations have successfully challenged a breach of the Compact by a local authority via Judicial Review, but this is not terribly common. • We would advise local areas to try to reach a resolution that is satisfactory for both parties, but understand this is not always possible. We would suggest a more productive approach would be contacting either your Local Government Ombudsman or Parliamentary and Health Services Ombudsman as appropriate. 	<p>See Compact Accountability and Transparency Guide for information on contacting Ombudsman services: www.compactvoice.org.uk/sites/default/files/the_compact_accountability_guide.pdf.</p>
<p>‘How does arbitration work in other areas?’</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dispute resolution and arbitration relating to Compact breaches varies from area to area, depending on local circumstances. • Most local Compacts have a Dispute Resolution Procedure incorporated into the text which outlines steps to take if things go wrong. • Searching the internet for ‘Compact dispute resolution procedures’ will bring up a number of documents used by areas. 	<p>For more detailed advice on how local Compacts work across England, and to learn how others areas are doing things, contact your local Compact Voice Engagement Development Officer: www.compactvoice.org.uk/support/engagement-team</p>
<p>‘How can safe-guarding measures be put in place to protect those who have written the Compact or are responsible for the overseeing of its implementation?’</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most local Compacts are produced following an extensive consultation period and there is not usually a single author cited. • Compact Voice suggests making it clear in the Compact document itself that the Compact group and author are not to be held responsible for breaches of the principles contained within. • As far as Compact Voice is aware, no author or overseer of a Compact has ever been held responsible for any issues regarding it being breached. 	
<p>Do we have a logo that can be used as an endorsement on their new Compact, once it has been agreed?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We encourage organisations to enter the Compact Awards (held every year in November), as being shortlisted can be a strong endorsement of the value of the local Compact involved. Winners may use the Compact Award Winner logo on their materials. • Similarly, we encourage any areas who are working well in partnership to get in touch so we can share the good practice via case studies, again this can be a good way of promoting/raising the profile of your local Compact. • Compact Voice do not at present endorse individual local Compacts. 	<p>Is there a project involving good partnership working happening in your area? Contact us at compact@compactvoice.org.uk</p> <p>Find out about the Compact Awards at: www.compactvoice.org.uk/compactawards2013</p>

<p>‘Do we have evidence that Compact Voice’s responses to national issues have had any impact? Did Compact Voice get a response to our consultation response/letter?’</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compact Voice usually receives responses to the queries, complaints or consultation responses we submit to government. Whenever we receive a response, it will be published on our website. • We often raise issues with individual departments, and with our contacts at the Office for Civil Society, as soon as they arise. We will often write to Ministers raising issues around consultation timeframes or to suggest amendments or improvements to policies. The responses we receive vary, but again these are published on our website whenever appropriate. • In terms of the impact our responses have had: the Compact is now embedded in a number of relevant policies produced by government. The Compact is also included in every government department’s business plans and each department has a Senior Responsible Officer who oversees Compact implementation within the department. • Compact Voice undertakes work to influence policy at a national level, and this sometimes takes place behind the scenes, as government will often contact us to raise issues or check that a policy is in line with Compact principles before it is made public. 	<p>Some policies where we have worked with the Government to ensure the Compact is embedded:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DCLG’s Best Value Guidance: http://www.compactvoice.org.uk/resources/briefings-and-responses/briefing-best-value-guidance-and-compact • Open Government Partnership’s National Action Plan: http://www.compactvoice.org.uk/news/OGP • Government departmental business plans: http://www.compactvoice.org.uk/page/compact-departmental-business-plans • Compact Voice and the Office for Civil Society’s Joint Action Plan: http://www.compactvoice.org.uk/page/compact-voice-and-ocs-201314-joint-action-plan
<p>Advice about Commissioning and Decommissioning 2014 - 2015</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compact Voice has published detailed guidance on the commissioning process. • Voluntary organisations should be proactive about seeking out and working with commissioners, and the guidance details how they can do this. See the table ‘Actions local Compact groups can take to improve the commissioning process’ towards the end of the guidance. • The good practice guidelines contained within a local Compact may not prevent a contract ending, but the need for a proper notice period and clear communication about transition arrangements are paramount. • Principle 4 of the Compact outlines the need to ‘Assess the impact on beneficiaries, service users and volunteers before deciding to reduce or end funding. Assess the need to re-allocate funds to another organisation serving the same group.’ • Compact Voice would advise ensuring that an equality impact assessment is carried out before decommissioning a service. • It is also vital that commissioners consider a range of options – such as a gradual 	<p>Compact Voice Guidance: Understanding Commissioning and Procurement - http://www.compactvoice.org.uk/sites/default/files/understanding_commissioning_and_procurement_guide.pdf</p> <p>NAO Decommissioning Toolkit: http://www.nao.org.uk/decommissioning/</p> <p>NAVCA Decommissioning Guide: http://www.navca.org.uk/localvs/lcp/briefings/decommissioning</p>

	<p>reduction in funding before decommissioning entirely – to allow service delivery organisations time to look for alternative funding sources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The NAO and NAVCA have more detailed information on managing decommissioning. 	<p>Good practice: Case study exploring using the Compact to assess impact when negotiating contacts: http://www.compactvoice.org.uk/resources/case-studies/cumbria-using-compact-when-negotiating-contracts</p>
<p>‘Which Government Departments do we have contact with or work with on a regular basis?’</p> <p>How do we monitor their implementation of the Compact Principles in their work?’</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each government department has a Senior Responsible Officer who oversees implementation of the Compact within the department, and who is responsible for ensuring that the Compact commitments in their business plans are carried forward. This person also works to ensure the recommendations of the National Audit Office’s report into government’s implementation of the Compact are carried forward. Compact Voice has regular contact with all government departments, but works especially closely with the Cabinet Office and Office for Civil Society. Compact Voice attends a cross-departmental Compact meeting on a quarterly basis and meets with individual departments regularly. 	<p>Compact Voice offers training, awareness raising and information sessions for all government departments on working with the voluntary sector.</p> <p>To find out more, please email us: compact@compactvoice.org.uk.</p>
<p>‘How can the Compact benefit small voluntary and community groups?’</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Compact is a useful tool for any size of organisation working in partnership with any other sector. If you have any sort of contact with local public bodies, you can use the Compact. The Compact can help community groups connect with local public bodies for their advantage, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using and renting space: Local public bodies tend to own buildings and outdoor facilities that you may be able to use or hire for meetings and events. Grant funding: You may be able to apply to local public bodies for small grants that you can use to buy equipment or run activities. Having a say and influencing: If you want to be involved in local decisions that will affect you, being in touch with local public bodies means you can tell them what you think about new proposals for your neighbourhood. Even if you are working in a VCS organisation not currently in receipt of funding from a statutory partner, joining your local Compact group is a great way of networking with other groups in your area, learning from their experience and gaining an understanding of partnership working and the local commissioning landscape. 	<p>See the ‘Compact Implementation Guide for Community Groups and Local Public Bodies’ (this guide is fairly old, but still relevant): http://www.compactvoice.org.uk/sites/default/files/community_groups_implementation_guide.pdf</p> <p>Example: See the Compact Award nomination submitted by Bridgnorth West and Tasley Partnership on page 25: http://www.compactvoice.org.uk/sites/default/files/shortlisted_nominations_booklet_0.pdf</p>
<p>‘Does the Compact</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes, and Compact Voice work to encourage Town and Parish Councils to get involved with their local Compact, as it can help them to connect better with 	<p>Compact Voice and NALC have produced Guidance for Local (Parish</p>

<p>apply to Town and Parish Councils?’</p>	<p>community groups and small organisations in their area.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town and Parish Councils are the most local level of government and have an important role in promoting community engagement and partnership working. Read about how partners in Gloucestershire worked to raise awareness of the Compact with Town and Parish Councils and the resulting benefits of doing so: http://www.compactvoice.org.uk/sites/default/files/compact_at_work_-_glos_tpc.pdf 	<p>and Town) Councils on the Compact: http://www.compactvoice.org.uk/sites/default/files/nalc_guidance.pdf</p> <p>Case study about how partners in Gloucestershire have worked with their Town and Parish Council: http://www.compactvoice.org.uk/sites/default/files/compact_at_work_-_glos_tpc.pdf</p>
<p>‘What advice can you give to small local organisations who are increasingly competing with large national organisations to deliver services?’</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The advice we would give would depend on the situation. In some instances, smaller organisations need to demonstrate the unique impact they can have – for example, by having access to hard to reach groups and having a unique understanding of local service users. • A collaborative spirit underpinned by the Compact can be advantageous – it allows organisations to be a trusted partner to form relationships within the voluntary sector. • Smaller organisations need to ‘up their game’ and not back away from competition. Remember – whenever you apply for a grant or contract you’re competing. 	<p>NCVO run a Public Service Delivery Network who meet regularly, and there is also a monthly newsletter. Find out more at http://www.ncvo.org.uk/practical-support/public-services</p>
<p>Who is the Compact for?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Compact is relevant to any cross-sector relationships involving the voluntary and community sector. • The Compact is for local authorities, national government departments and other public bodies who work with the voluntary sector. • The Compact applies to any organisations distributing public funds on behalf of the Government. • The Compact explicitly states that it applies right along supply chains as well as in direct funder-deliverer relationships. • Police Authorities, PCCs, CCGs and Health and Wellbeing Boards can sign up to their local Compact (and are encouraged to do so). Local Jobcentres and Housing Associations also often sign up to their local Compact. • The Compact can help large national charities who are working with government to influence policies and processes, and is equally valuable to small local charities who may receive funding from, for example, a local authority. • Increasingly, local Compacts are also including the private sector. We would encourage local Compacts to get their local Chamber of Commerce or business partnership to sign up. 	<p>Our guides for PCCs and CCGs outline how the Compact can help them in their roles:</p> <p>PCCs: www.compactvoice.org.uk/resources/briefings-and-responses/briefing-compact-and-police-and-crime-commissioners</p> <p>CCGs: www.compactvoice.org.uk/resources/briefings-and-responses/briefing-compact-and-clinical-commissioning-groups</p> <p>Related good practice: Herefordshire - A three sector Compact: www.compactvoice.org.uk/resources</p>

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<p>Why are groups not coming forward to raise issues and how can the Compact help?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are many different issues that a local VCS organisation may wish to raise with a public body in their area and a variety of ways to deal with any problems that arise. • Groups may not come forward because they are afraid of repercussions. Protecting the independence of the voluntary sector is at the core of the Compact. We would encourage voluntary organisations to raise issues at the earliest possible opportunity – before an issue can escalate into a dispute. • The Compact promotes good engagement practices, open and transparent dialogue and a level playing field from the beginning of relationships. Establishing this early on can prevent issues arising later. • Local Compacts work best when they are at the heart of partnership working across the sectors, and can form a framework for trusting relationships where all news is shared – even bad news. • If an issue does arise, then most local Compacts have a dispute resolution process in place to help resolve any problems. • Compact Voice’s Engagement Team may also be able to help in some cases, depending on the issue and capacity, so please get in touch. 	<p>Compact Voice’s Engagement Development Team can offer advice and support in some cases: http://www.compactvoice.org.uk/support/engagement-team</p>
<p>How does the Compact relate to the Merlin Standard?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Merlin Standard complements and supports the Compact • The Compact principles apply all along a supply chain: The Compact states: “Ensure all bodies distributing funds on the Government’s behalf adhere to the commitments in this Compact. This includes the relationship between prime contractors and their supply chains. Demonstrate how funding arrangements and financial support can allow smaller and specialist providers to play a greater part.” • The Compact encompasses more than funding relationships: it also covers the need to consult voluntary organisations when developing policies and services, the need to respect the independence of the voluntary sector and its right to campaign, and protect and consider disadvantaged groups. • Many aspects of Merlin can be delivered or strengthened through adherence to the principles of the national Compact, which further benefits from having all government departments committed to it. 	<p>Find out more about the Merlin Standard at: http://www.merlinstandard.co.uk/</p>