A Code of Good Practice for Voluntary and Community Organisations in the Epping Forest District

EPPING FOREST COMPACT

Epping Forest District Council

VOLUNTARY ACTION EPPING FOREST

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COMPACT 2020

Background

The Voluntary and Community Sector is central to a democratic, socially inclusive society. The services provided by the sector complement local authority provision and are part of a whole package of quality services available to the community.   Voluntary and community organisations make a vast contribution to the social, cultural and economic life in the Epping Forest District and beyond. 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 equality and diversity. They help to alleviate poverty, improve the quality of life and empower socially excluded people. The Voluntary and Community Sector can operate most effectively if it has the understanding and support of the Statutory Sector, and vice versa.

What is a Compact?

A Compact is a written understanding between the Statutory and Voluntary and Community Sectors. It defines how the two sectors behave toward each other. It is an agreement between organisations, not individuals, designed to benefit the local community, by establishing an effective relationship between the two sectors and ensuring that energies and resources are not wasted and more joint working is possible. Compacts are not legally binding documents. Their authority comes from the fact that they are developed, consulted upon and formally adopted by local stakeholders themselves.

Shared Principles

The key shared principles and values which underpin the relationship between the Statutory and Voluntary and Community Sector are set out below:

- Voluntary action is an essential component of a democratic society and fundamental to the well-being of the Epping Forest District.
- In the development and delivery of public policy and services, statutory organisations and the Voluntary and Community Sector have distinct but complementary roles.
- Partnership is effective if it works towards common goals and achieves benefits for service users and communities.
- Partnerships must be based on principles of equality, mutual respect and a recognition of differences, as well as similarity of purpose.
- A commitment to avoiding conflict and spreading best practice.
- Parish and Town Councils are recognised as an important part of the statutory sector but with roots in local communities.
- Diversity of the funding base is one of the best guarantees of continued independence for the Voluntary and Community Sector.
- Sustainability and the encouragement of sustainable communities are important in the planning and provision of services.
- Organisations in the Voluntary and Community Sector have different forms of accountability and are answerable to different stakeholders.
- A commitment to equality of opportunity for all, regardless of age, race, disability, gender, sexual orientation, religion or any discriminatory criteria is essential.

- Partnership working across the sectors requires integrity, objectivity, understanding, openness, honesty, accountability, collaboration, leadership, inclusivity and recognition of the contribution of each sector.
- An ability and willingness to recognise the need to communicate with and listen to other partners.
- An acceptance that the statutory agencies play a significant role as funders of some voluntary and community groups.
- A commitment to reaching out and empowering under-represented and disadvantaged communities.
- All partner organisations will appoint a Compact Champion and spread knowledge of the Compact within their organisations.

Undertakings by the Voluntary and Community Sector

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

- To promote effective relationships across the Voluntary and Community Sector and with other agencies.
- To maintain high standards of governance and meet reporting and accountability obligations to funding bodies and users.
- To recognise the need for the value of money in public expenditure and adopt procedures for the monitoring and evaluation of our services.
- To involve users, where possible and appropriate, in the development and management of services.
- To develop and implement appropriate quality standards.
- To seek diversification of the funding base and, if possible, avoid reliance on any single source of funding.
- To act lawfully and comply with Charity Commission guidance, Company Law and other relevant legislation.
- To recognise the responsibilities and constraints placed on the statutory sector, including the democratic responsibility and legitimacy of elected members.
- To ensure that services are transparent, open and inclusive.
- To recognise the added value volunteers bring to organisations, to ensure they are valued and thanked for the special contribution they make.
- To establish and implement mechanisms for dealing with complaints.
- To support the provision of training on Compact issues and a commitment to learn from one another.
- To review the operation of the Compact regularly in conjunction with the statutory agencies.

Undertakings by the Statutory Sector

Public sector organisations working within the Voluntary and Community Sector in the Epping Forest District, recognise that the sector has valuable skills and abilities and, to advance a positive relationship with it, statutory organisations signing up to this Compact agree:

- To recognise, respect and support the independence of the Voluntary and Community Sector, including its right, within the law, to campaign, to comment on and to challenge policy, irrespective of any funding arrangement that may exist and to determine and manage its own affairs.
- To recognise the importance of infrastructure to the voluntary sector and volunteering, including the contribution of Voluntary Action Epping Forest and similar organisations and, where appropriate, to support its development.
- To consult with the Voluntary and Community Sector in a timely and reasonable way, subject to considerations of urgency, sensitivity or confidentiality, on issues that are likely to affect it, enabling effective consultation with users, beneficiaries and stakeholders.
- To promote effective working relationships, consistency of approach, and good practice between itself and the voluntary sector.
- To take account of the need for proportionality, targeting, consistency and transparency in funding frameworks and to recognise the value of long-term funding to the Voluntary and Community Sector to provide stability and to assist in strategic planning.
- To support and actively develop policies and promote opportunities for volunteering.
- To ensure that staff are trained and informed on the nature and importance of the Voluntary and Community Sector.
- To ensure consistency and good practice within and between public sector organisations on issues such as funding arrangements, monitoring and evaluation, consultation and development of services.
- To not expect the Voluntary and Community Sector to deliver services that public sector organisations have a statutory obligation to deliver.
- To treat all Voluntary and Community Sector organisations fairly and equally.
- To review the operation of the Compact regularly in conjunction with the Voluntary and Community Sector.

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FUNDING CODE OF PRACTICE

Introduction

This Code of Practice sets out the principles and undertakings which will inform the relationship between the Statutory Sector, the Voluntary and Community Sector and other partners in relation to funding and procurement.

Both sectors recognise that third sector organisations of all sizes have a contribution to make to the design and improvement of public services, and aim to realise this contribution. Through an innovative and informed grant funding process, the Statutory Sector will recognise the value which the Voluntary and Community Sector may bring to the delivery of its objectives. The Voluntary and Community Sector, through its independence, may identify areas of need in a way which the structure of the public sector prevents it from doing. There are different mechanisms and ways which the Statutory Sector may use to finance this support e.g. through grant giving, funding agreements or procurement. Each of these serves a different purpose and is appropriate in relevant circumstances. Traditional grant giving is generally accepted in relation to smaller grants where there may be an element of capacity building required.

Key Principles and Aims

The following key principles set out the commitment by the Statutory and the Voluntary and Community Sectors to improve the delivery of public services through more effective and appropriate grant funding and procurement practice.

Early involvement - of the Voluntary and Community Sector in the grant funding and procurement processes.

Market analysis - to be carried out to ensure a thorough understanding of how potential providers would satisfy needs.

Process simplification - clear efforts to be made to simplify the documentation and processes associated with grant applications, allocation and procurement.

Risk - Consideration to be given on specifying requirements around the sharing of risk to ensure that risk is not loaded on the provider.

Evaluation - of the grant and procurement process to be appropriate to the value and risk requirement.

This Code aims to:

- Give clarity to the funding relationship between Statutory and Voluntary and Community Sector partners operating in the Epping Forest District.
- Ensure that the Voluntary and Community Sector's need for greater levels of financial security and the Statutory partners' need for accountability are taken into account in all funding arrangements.

The Statutory and Voluntary and Community Sectors undertake to:

1. Recognise the value of funding the Voluntary and Community Sector.
2. Recognise the overriding requirement to deliver best value for money for the Statutory Sector from all its spend.
3. Respect the roles and responsibilities of both sectors and use the skills and expertise within each.
4. Adopt good practice with regard to all funding and procurement arrangements.
5. Recognise the relationship between Statutory Sector funding and national and local priorities and the constraints placed on Statutory Sector funding.
6. Work towards achieving all relevant and appropriate quality standards
7. Agree any Service Level Agreements/Contracts as soon as possible, preferably before the start date of any such agreement.
8. Promote and celebrate the importance of the work that the Voluntary and Community Sector undertakes as a result of the funding from the Statutory Sector.
9. Provide services that are additional and complementary to Statutory Sector services.

The Statutory Sector undertakes to:

1. Maintain a programme for funding the Voluntary and Community Sector that includes both grants and longer term funding.
2. Ensure that adequate lead-in time is available for the Voluntary and Community Sector to respond.
3. Ensure that the process and level of information requested is appropriate for the level of grant awarded.
4. Develop simplified processes to increase efficiency and reduce paperwork.
5. Ensure that information and guidance on funding opportunities are publicised widely.
6. Ensure that any procurement or commissioning process is appropriate to the value and type of contract.
7. Recognise the independence of the Voluntary and Community Sector in managing its organisation and making its own decisions for the benefit of service users.
8. Operate an open and transparent process around how funding decisions are made.
9. Agree longer-term funding agreements where possible.
10. Ensure that deadlines are widely publicised.
11. Provide early notice of any changes that are made to the process or any key dates that may change.
12. Recognise the importance of prudent financial budgeting by Voluntary and Community Sector groups and the need for organisational reserves.
13. Recognise the importance of funding 'core costs' and not only new initiatives or projects.
14. Make widely available and accessible the details of which Voluntary and Community Sector groups receive funding.
15. Offer constructive feedback to unsuccessful applicants.
16. Provide where possible the opportunity for the Voluntary and Community Sector to contribute to funding programme design.

The Voluntary and Community Sector undertakes to:

1. Respect confidentiality and be clear about whom it represents and how it came to its view when consulted about service design.
2. Meet the published deadlines for the admission of applications and monitoring criteria.
3. Have good financial management and monitoring system in place to manage finances and account for expenditure.
4. Recognise that receipt of public funds carries with it responsibilities to the funding body and the public that benefit from the services provided.
5. Provide relevant information and reports to funders to demonstrate the success of the project and the benefits and impact it has had.
6. Recognise that statutory organisations are driven by priorities that will direct where their funding of the Voluntary and Community Sector will go.
7. Recognise the contribution of funders by publicising their logo on headed paper, publicity material and websites where appropriate.
8. Take a long term approach to funding the organisation by considering all available funding opportunities.

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PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT CODE OF CONDUCT

Definition of Public Engagement

The term 'public engagement' covers a wide spectrum of processes that enable different levels and types of involvement in decision-making. In that sense, it involves more than consultation, although consultation may form part of those processes.

Engagement can take the form of written or verbal communication and may be conducted face-to-face, by electronic means or by post. The aim of any public engagement exercise is to gather opinions of potentially affected individuals or groups. Public engagement can be carried out at any stage of developing a policy or project, and more than one period and/or type of public engagement can be applied to any one proposed activity.

In the context of this Compact and this Code of Practice, public engagement refers to engagement with groups and individuals. It is not intended to offer guidance on how to engage with the general public.

Key Principles and Aims

Public Engagement should be:

Relevant - so that responses are useful and unnecessary consultation is avoided.

Accessible - in terms of language, method, time and place.

Accountable - with all views recorded, reported on, given due consideration, and feedback made available.

Inclusive - so that communication, method and opportunities offered do not disadvantage any particular group of people.

Informed - so that maximum benefit is gained from the process.

Timely - to allow adequate time for responses to be compiled from individuals and groups and for the information gathered to be included in the decision-making process.

Balanced - with information provided not being designed to influence the response.

Honest - so that all information provided by either party is based on all known facts.

This Code aims to give guidance on best practice with regard to the ways in which local public sector organisations consult and appraise on local policy development to enable Voluntary and Community Sector groups to make an effective contribution.

The Statutory and Voluntary and Community Sectors undertake to:

1. Respect confidentiality.
2. Put in place protection measures when working with potentially vulnerable people and groups.

3. Support and develop inclusive mechanisms for consultation.
4. Develop clear guidelines and commit to good practice in respect of public engagement processes and policy appraisal procedures.

The Statutory Sector undertakes to:

1. Ensure that activities are planned to allow maximum time and opportunity for individuals and groups to make a considered and comprehensive response, recognising that, wherever possible, a minimum of 12 weeks' consultation period should be provided.
2. Provide adequate resources so that engagement is appropriate and effective.
3. Develop clear consultation processes that explain aims, procedures and boundaries.
4. Provide for engagement from the beginning of any decision-making process so that it is a genuine dialogue carried out with integrity.
5. Provide information about the engagement process.
6. Provide concise but adequate and accurate contextual information to enable people to form a considered view.
7. Ensure that people have the opportunities and support to empower them to be able to shape decisions.
8. Enable the participation of a wide range of individuals and groups and recognise the need for different approaches and resources to achieve this.
9. Value the input of participants and demonstrate this by recording, reporting and taking into account their views, and be willing to change policies and plans as a result of this.
10. Publish consultation results and final outcomes in a timely manner, including reasons and justification.
11. List the Voluntary and Community Sector groups that were contacted and those who responded.
12. Monitor and evaluate engagement processes with participants to identify areas which can be improved.
13. Be flexible and sensitive to the needs of those we wish to consult with and take account positively of the specific needs, interests and contributions of those parts of the Sector which represent marginalised groups and the socially excluded.
14. Use plain language in all public engagement processes.

The Voluntary and Community Sector undertakes to:

1. Encourage volunteers, members, trustees and employees to participate in consultation and share feedback widely on its outcomes.
2. Ensure that responses are accurate and relevant and fairly reflect the views of those they purport to represent.
3. Consult directly with service users and other involved individuals where appropriate.
4. Recognise the importance of consultation and the value of providing accurate and comprehensive information.
5. Provide feedback on engagement processes to help in identifying future improvements.
6. Work to recognised quality standards in engagement when involving users, members and volunteers.
7. Respect any confidentiality requirements.

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VOLUNTEERING CODE OF PRACTICE

Introduction

This Code of Practice sets out the principles and undertakings for how the Statutory and Voluntary and Community Sector and other partners can work together to support and promote volunteering in the Epping Forest District.

Volunteering is an important expression of citizenship and a powerful force for change. Volunteers make a significant contribution to society and should be valued, supported and well-managed.

Definition

Volunteering is recognised as an important expression of citizenship and essential to democracy. It takes many different forms but in essence it is about freely committing time and energy for the benefit of society and the community, without expecting any financial reward. Volunteers contribute to every facet of human life and it is important to value the major contribution that volunteering makes to the quality of life in the Epping Forest District.

Key Principles and Aims

This Code recognises four principles fundamental to volunteering:

Choice - volunteering must be the result of a free choice by the volunteer

Diversity - volunteering must be open to everyone

Reciprocity - volunteers should benefit from volunteering in the sense that they gain satisfaction, feel involved and that they make a difference to the organisation and wider community

Recognition – the contribution of volunteers should be publicly recognised

This Code aims to:

- Raise the profile of volunteering and actively promote it as a community activity
- Value the vast contribution that volunteers make to the local community and beyond
- Acknowledge the variety of volunteering opportunities
- Enable and support more people to get involved in volunteering
- Recognise that local voluntary and community groups can provide excellent training, support and development for volunteers to go into work, either paid or unpaid
- Encourage better practice in the management of volunteers
- Remove the barriers to volunteering

The Statutory and Voluntary and Community Sectors undertake to:

1. Work together to expand the public perception of volunteering by improving the profile, status and range of volunteering activity.

2. Recognise that volunteering is freely given but not cost-free and, as such, support, training, development and promotion for volunteers may incur costs.
3. Recognise that volunteers should not be out of pocket because of volunteering and adopt clear policies regarding the payment of volunteer expenses.
4. Consider whether a role is suitable for a volunteer and recognise that volunteering should never be seen by organisations as a substitute for paid work.
5. Ensure that volunteers are brought into policy-making processes, internal decision-making and responses to Government consultation, taking account of their interests and independent observations.
6. Work together to create and sustain a modern and dynamic volunteering infrastructure that is able to meet the needs of the growing number and diversity of volunteers.
7. Ensure that volunteering activity does not exclude particular groups but is open to all.
8. Share good practice and encourage volunteers, voluntary and community organisations to share knowledge and experience with others.

The Statutory Sector undertakes to:

1. Recognise that volunteering builds skills and experience, enhances employability, promotes social inclusion and contributes to the building of community networks and participation.
2. Recognise the contribution to the District that volunteers make both socially and economically.
3. Recognise the value of VAEF as an infrastructure body assisting potential volunteers in finding volunteering opportunities.
4. Adopt policies to help ensure that volunteering infrastructure can develop realistic sustainable long term funding.
5. Seek to reduce barriers to volunteering and community involvement resulting from existing legislation, regulation and policies.
6. Consult the Voluntary and Community Sector so that proposed legislation, guidance and policies take account of the ways that may affect volunteers and volunteering activities.
7. Encourage the development of employer supported volunteering schemes within their organisations, including employment practices that allow time off for volunteering.
8. Increase staff awareness of volunteering, its benefit to Council services, the District and the wider community.

The Voluntary and Community Sector undertakes to:

1. Consider the needs and interests of volunteers when developing volunteer roles to ensure that they are interesting, diverse and inclusive.
2. Ensure that sufficient resources are budgeted to support volunteers, including effective management and/or peer support, training, a named person to whom they can report, office space and equipment.
3. Ensure that staff who recruit, induct and manage volunteers have this work recognised as part of their job and receive appropriate training and support.
4. Ensure that policies are in place to give volunteers the same protection under health and safety, equal opportunities and public liability insurance as paid employees and

any other policies appropriate to volunteers as listed by the organisation for which they volunteer.

5. Assist volunteers to find volunteering opportunities that fit their needs, interests and abilities and recognise that these may change over time.
6. Seek to widen the opportunities for volunteering and develop a diverse volunteer base.
7. Promote volunteering amongst local communities and support activity motivating more people to become involved.
8. In partnership with recognised accreditation bodies, encourage and enable accreditation of skills acquired through volunteering for recognised qualifications.
9. Adequately protect volunteers against any risks involved in volunteering.

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GROUPS FACING MARGINALISATION –

CODE OF CONDUCT

Introduction

This Code of Practice sets out the principles for how the Statutory Sector, Voluntary Sector Groups and other partners can work together in a positive way with groups facing marginalisation. It identifies their undertakings as part of a commitment to working in partnership for the benefit of all.

The Code is for use by and guidance for the following:

- Racial groups (including traveller, refugee/asylum seeker, migrant worker groups).
- Faith, religious or belief groups.
- Disability groups including mental and physical disability
- Older people's or other age related groups
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender groups
- Groups representing pregnancy or maternity issues
- Groups representing marriage and civil partnership issues
- People living in rural communities.
- Other marginalised groups as appropriate.
- Public Sector Bodies.
- Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations

Key Principles and Aims:

The Code aims to make a positive difference in the relationship between Statutory Sector organisations working with the Voluntary and Community Sector who are supporting diversity and equality in the District. It also aims to acknowledge the contribution of voluntary and community organisations in the development of a democratic and socially inclusive society by enabling individuals to contribute to public life and the development of their communities.

It focuses on the needs of marginalised communities in the District. It recognises that many people still experience social exclusion, discrimination, marginalisation and disadvantage, and aims to set up a framework for promoting:

- A joint commitment to equal opportunity and access, including sharing best practice and promoting good relationships.
- Improved quality and quantity of consultation and participation with marginalised groups.
- Recognition of the specific needs of marginalised groups.

Where points appear to be specific to BME or to disability groups and not common to both, they are listed as such. While all groups and agencies working with BME, disability or other marginalised groups should take account of this code, the voluntary and community groups

whose rights the code is intended to support, are those whose membership is drawn predominantly from disadvantaged or marginalised communities, and not any who provide a service to such communities.

The Statutory and Voluntary and Community Sector undertake to:

1. Develop a partnership approach to responding to policy issues and strategies for achieving equality, including the promotion of fairness and a positive environment for diversity.
2. Promote the development of community organisations.
3. Work in partnership to promote good practice and celebrate success.
4. Work in partnership with other agencies on initiatives to improve services for marginalised groups, social inclusion and cohesion.
5. Recognise that community groups can play a variety of roles such as being a voice for residents and users to public authorities and service deliverers, building relationships and networks, providing self-help and mutual support, and delivering services themselves, often locally and informally.
6. Encourage and support volunteering by, and within, marginalised groups in line with this Compact's Code on Volunteering.
7. Commit to establishing and maintaining best practice in our relationships.
8. Recognise that communication, equality and accessibility should lead to the development of mutual trust and commitment, which can override any specific differences, and deal with each other in such a way that fosters mutual trust and commitment.
9. Make sure that community needs are identified by communities themselves, and that community groups have opportunities to manage projects and have a say in what is considered to be a successful outcome.

The Statutory Sector undertakes to:

1. Seek and value the contribution marginalised groups can make in helping it achieve its objectives.
2. Promote the development of community organisations.
3. Consult appropriately with marginalised groups throughout policy development and implementation.
4. Ensure marginalised groups have fair and equal access to funding programmes.
5. Operate effective and transparent equal opportunities policies. .
6. Ensure that policy development and implementation pays due regard to the public sector equality duty.
7. Seek to overcome the barriers to the effective involvement of marginalised groups in consultation exercises.
8. Present a 'welcoming face' to community groups, given that they may feel intimidated when dealing with large organisations.
9. Take account of the input and contribution of any, and every, genuinely representative organisation.
10. Actively seek out representatives of communities with an interest and work with them when developing new and ongoing initiatives.

The Voluntary and Community Sector undertakes to:

1. Describe its services in a way that the Statutory Sector can understand.
2. Ensure that, as far as is in its power, when a group represents a community (whether of a geographical area or a common interest), the structure of that group genuinely reflects the composition of that community and that it represents its views.
3. Encourage partnership working and community involvement.
4. Encourage the whole community to get involved and take control wherever possible.
5. Ensure that community groups recognise that the Statutory Sector often needs to deal with representative organisations rather than individuals.
6. Encourage active community members to carry out leadership roles in voluntary and community sector networks.

Equality Information Sharing:

Information about the needs or experiences of people arising from or concerning their equality characteristics (which could be age, disability, faith or belief, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, sex, or sexual orientation) is useful to Statutory and Voluntary and Community Sector organisations for planning and developing services. Individually, Compact partner organisations have limited resources to collect equality information and some do not have access to the people who can provide them with information about their experiences or needs.

Sharing equality information gathered about residents and service users in the course of planning and delivering services, increases the pool of information available to individual organisations, and potentially the capacity of equality information as a resource to improve and develop appropriate services.

Protocol:

Compact partner organisations have agreed to implement the necessary systems and share equality information they gather, with each other, for the purpose of planning and improving services. All partner organisations are familiar with the obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998 and take responsibility for all the information they process.

System:

To share information which tells of the experience of the service user from the position of a protected characteristic, Compact member organisations have:

- Identified a named individual within their organisation who will act as a liaison for this purpose
- Agreed that the named individual will respond to requests for information from Compact partner organisations
- Advise requestors of whether their organisation holds the information sought
- Agreed to ensure information shared is anonymised and shared securely