

The Codes of Practice and Dispute Resolution for Solihull

- **Community Groups**
- **Consultation**
- **Diversity & Celebrating Difference**
- **Funding & Procurement**
- **Guide to Volunteering**

- **Dispute Resolution**

Compact Plus for Solihull 2008 – 2013

Codes of Practice

Within Solihull there are five codes of practice, which all underpin the Compact Plus 2008 – 2013: An agreement to improve relations between the Solihull Partnership and the third sector. The codes of practice are:

- **Community Groups**
- **Consultation**
- **Diversity & Celebrating Difference**
- **Funding & Procurement**
- **Guide to Volunteering**

The five codes and the Compact Plus are accompanied by the:

- **Dispute Resolution**

The information and guidance contained within the codes of practice is the responsibility of everyone within:

- The Third Sector (voluntary & community groups)
- The Public Sector
- The Private Sector

Aims of the Codes

Community Groups

This code of practice aims to strengthen the understanding of the key part community groups play in providing activities, support and delivering services, which meet the needs of local people within Solihull.

Consultation

This code of practice aims to strengthen the understanding of consultation and its importance in involving the whole community in informing decision making processes including strategy, policy development and the design of services. This code will also aim to encourage best practice when it comes to staging consultations, and increasing community participation and engagement.

Diversity & Celebrating Difference

This code of practice aims to increase understanding and awareness of diverse communities, their specific needs and the positive impact they have within Solihull. It aims to respond to the needs of those Groups which support diverse communities.

Funding & Procurement

This code of practice aims to make a positive impact on funding relationships which may exist within the Solihull Partnership. It also aims to strengthen the understanding of the processes undertaken through the funding of organisations and the procuring of services, and should be read in conjunction with the Solihull Partnership common commissioning framework.

Guide to Volunteering

This code of practice aims to strengthen the understanding, encourage best practice and promote the benefits that volunteering brings. This document will act as a guide to help partner organisations that make up the Solihull Partnership, to fully value the role of volunteers and to raise the profile of volunteering.

It is suggested that this document is read in conjunction with Volunteering England's guidelines which can be found at www.volunteering.org.uk

Community Groups

What is a Community Group?

A community group is a group set up to address a common need within a particular community that is not being met elsewhere.

Within Solihull there are a wide variety of Community Groups of different sizes and for different purposes including:

- Area based groups (linked to a specific place or area)
- Groups of common interest or purpose
- Faith groups

The commitment made by all sectors to increase their understanding of the key part community groups play will bring greater recognition of community groups and their contribution to community development work.

Joint Undertakings

All partners signed up to the Solihull Compact Plus and this Code are committed to:

- Working together to build up a picture of the needs of our communities, to agree how these needs can be met and understanding what the respective roles of each sector is in achieving these
- Ensuring that we are open and transparent in the way we operate and actively seek to involve and engage with those, whose interest we represent
- Developing a more co-ordinated approach to how the public, private and the wider third sector in Solihull supports and works with community groups
- Listening to what each other has to say and being clear about what we will do as a result
- Recognising the differing amounts of time and resources available to each sector and therefore adapting processes accordingly

- Linking with support organisations and networks for example SUSTAiN, Enable Solihull, that build relationships between groups and between the sectors
- Having a realistic awareness of the core, on-going costs incurred when delivering services which meet the needs of the community
- Working together in a partnership approach which recognises the positive opportunities that can be achieved and makes full use of the different skills and expertise that exist across the sectors
- Working towards a full understanding of all community groups and organisations that exist across Solihull
- Ensuring provision is extended to all groups and organisations to address specific needs, as and when they arise
- Promoting themselves and their services while also promoting the services of others particularly those providing complementary services
- Making information more accessible and readily available on all relevant subject matters e.g. funding pots, training courses and accommodation.

Consultation

What is consultation?

Consultation is the process and one part of a wider responsibility to inform and involve individuals, local groups and the wider community, on the issues that affect them and their local area, and is an important part of partnership working.

Consultation provides an opportunity to bring the knowledge, experience and expertise of the community into the decision making process. This can relate to new strategies, policies and services and existing ones that are under review. By engaging the third sector effectively, this can lead to better planning and delivery of services.

The commitment from all sectors to carry out meaningful and necessary consultation in a timely manner and providing full feedback will lead to greater efficiency and improved service provision for all.

Joint Undertakings

All partners signed up to the Solihull Compact Plus and this Code are committed to:

Before

- Ensuring consultation is necessary and accessible to all and that any information that is circulated is clear, accurate and jargon free
- Being clear about who we will consult with and why, and ensuring that there is clarity around what can change as a result of the consultation activity and also what cannot be changed
- Involving all representatives that will be part of the process at the planning stages
- Ensuring the needs of diverse and often marginalised communities are met throughout the consultation process
- Having clear aims, objectives and reasons for consulting
- Being clear regarding the influence those involved have on the decision making process
- Giving an appropriate length of time for people to respond, recognising that certain groups may not meet on a frequent basis. Ideally this would be 12 weeks, where this is not possible, reasons for shorter timescales will be given

- Taking into consideration the resource implications for groups if they are to take part in the consultation process
- Allowing adequate time for consultation in the planning stages
- Ensuring that when seeking feedback, any questions included are not 'leading' and are accessible to all.

During

- Considering a range of transparent consultation methods, for example, meetings, questionnaires, exhibitions, letterbox distributions, telephone and doorstep interviews and electronic distribution, to ensure they are appropriate to the aims and objectives of the consultation and facilitate the involvement of all relevant groups
- Being clear about how the information gathered will be used
- Ensuring the information circulated is clear, accurate and accessible (jargon free)
- Complying with appropriate legislation throughout the process
- Publicising consultation exercises effectively
- Being transparent in running consultation exercises and use processes which leave a clear and auditable record
- Ensuring the views of diverse and often marginalised communities are reflected in the responses.

After

- Being open and transparent, and providing adequate feedback on the information received and what outcomes have directly resulted from the process
- Continuing to provide updates on any further progress resulting from the completed consultation process where appropriate
- Keeping records and allow them to be subject to appropriate scrutiny processes, while maintaining Data Protection
- Working together to continuously improve consultation processes.

Diversity and Celebrating Difference

What is Diversity?

Diversity is based on recognising and valuing differences that can impact on us all because we are all different in fundamental ways in terms of our varied needs, ethnic backgrounds, age, cultures, lifestyles, skills and abilities, family make up, education, and areas we live in.

Within Solihull there are a variety of Groups whose role is to represent and support Diverse Communities. These Groups will be of different sizes and purposes and may cover differences of:

- Age
- Disability
- Ethnicity
- Economic prosperity
- Gender
- Sexual Orientation
- Religion
- Location e.g. North, South, Rural

The commitment from all sectors to celebrate differences and accommodate the changing demographic will contribute towards a place where all people get on well together.

Joint Undertakings

All partners signed up to the Solihull Compact Plus and this Code are committed to:

- Recognising, promoting and celebrating the ever changing diversity of the borough and the external factors that contribute to this
- Increasing their knowledge and understanding of diverse communities and their needs through training, development and awareness raising on an on-going basis
- Working towards a partnership approach to understanding and supporting community cohesion and inclusivity

- Promoting and sharing best practice, in terms of working in an inclusive and cohesive way and celebrating success
- Actively promoting dialogue between all groups and organisations across all sectors and, through them, across all communities
- Respecting their differences and recognise any commonalities that may support joint working
- Ensuring there is service provision that addresses the specific needs of diverse groups, as and when they arise
- Eliminating discrimination in all its forms, promoting equal opportunities and equal access to information and services, and building equality into policies, procedures and processes
- Increasing integration which may mean initially working with some groups and organisations in isolation
- Taking specific action to encourage and include diverse communities in consultations, to obtain their views and to ensure that their specific needs are recognised, understood and taken into account
- Making published information available to diverse communities and the groups that represent them in an accessible format
- Recognising that diverse communities need effective representation and take appropriate action to support the development of representative groups and their capacity
- Ensuring that diverse communities and those that represent them have access to appropriate places to meet and are equally served by local infrastructure, inclusive of transport, training, advice and information
- Working with groups that represent diverse communities to ensure that people they represent are not disadvantaged in the provision of services, including education, community safety, neighbourhood management, health, well-being and social care.

Funding and Procurement

What is Funding?

Funding can be defined as money provided to an organisation by an external source usually linked to specific outputs and/or outcomes which will need to be monitored and evaluated.

Locally, funding can be provided to cover a range of costs associated to projects which benefit the community for both revenue and capital purposes. This can be done through many forms including:

- Grants which can be provided to all organisations, both large and small to cover capital and revenue costs and to be spent within agreed timescales which are often dictated by the amount provided
- Commissioning which is the process of allocating funds based on an identified need and is subject to a tender process. This process will normally be delivered through a service level agreement containing performance indicators used to ensure the need is being met.

The process for commissioning funds has many elements and will often be applied to the distribution of grants where it is deemed appropriate. For example the allocation of a large grant may incorporate a Service Level Agreement or Contracts to ensure the funds are spent to provide quality services and good value for money.

What is Procurement?

Procurement can be defined as the whole process of the purchasing of goods, services and works from third parties and in-house providers.

Procurement is a critical process for ensuring that the needs of the community are met. The process spans the whole life cycle from initial concept and definition of business needs through to the end of the useful life of an asset or end of services contract.

All tender processes carried out and contract awards made during the procurement process will need to comply with EU Public Procurement Directives and the principles of non-discrimination, equal treatment and transparency and duties under UK law. The body procuring the service, goods or works will need to ensure that they deliver value for money and take into account the whole life costs in contract decisions; this means considering quality, longer term cost and benefits as well as initial price.

Any organisation procuring goods, services or works will also need to encourage a diverse and competitive supply market, including small firms, social enterprises, ethnic minority businesses and voluntary and community sector suppliers.

The commitment from all sectors to establish and maintain best practice processes in the allocation of funds and the securing of services will have a positive impact on the relationship between the provider and the recipient.

Joint Undertakings

All partners signed up to the Solihull Compact Plus and this Code are committed to:

- Identifying needs and priorities for public sector funding streams within Solihull
- Joining up or standardising parts of funding or procurement chain to minimise burdens on organisations and ensure a focus on delivery
- Actively communicating commissioning, contracting and procurement opportunities through all available channels to ensure openness and transparency
- Ensuring the application and monitoring processes are as straight forward as possible and in proportion to the amount of money involved
- Clearly defining from the outset the outcomes that need to be demonstrated in order to secure the opportunity
- Ensuring that a robust risk management approach is followed to maximise successful delivery of project
- Clearly agreeing the timeframe for the funding in advance wherever possible particularly with regards to the end of a grant/contract period and thereby allowing organisations to better plan for future years and draw up exit strategies if necessary
- Making payments to funded organisations within agreed timescales and in advance wherever possible
- Ensuring that funded organisations have a clear understanding of any payment terms, including the treatment of underspends and the process of repaying them if required
- Recognising that an organisation should be able to recover the full costs associated with providing a service or output and that this should not disadvantage that organisation in any competitive process
- Informing organisations of decisions made regarding their applications for funds and the reasons for these decisions with an opportunity to discuss them at a time that is convenient for all parties involved
- Recognising the need for multi-year funding in certain circumstances alongside annual funding arrangements
- Entering into dialogue wherever possible throughout the funding process providing opportunities to resolve issues and find solutions at an early stage before impacting on delivery
- Working together to explore joint funding opportunities and encourage partnership working
- Providing whenever possible an opportunity for organisations to input into programme design.

Guide to Volunteering

What is Volunteering?

Volunteering describes an activity undertaken by any person that aims to benefit individuals, the community or the environment. It is undertaken freely and is unpaid.

Fundamental Principles of Volunteering

There are five principles fundamental to volunteering:-

Choice

Volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual. Any encouragement to become involved in volunteering should not result in any form of compulsion. Freedom to volunteer implies freedom not to become involved.

Diversity

Volunteering should be open to all, whatever the person's age, disability, gender, race, religion or sexual orientation. Implementing equalities policies and schemes and a welcoming approach are basic to supporting diversity.

Mutual Benefit

Volunteers offer their contribution unwaged but should benefit in other ways in return for their contribution to the community. Giving voluntary time and skills must be recognised as establishing a reciprocal relationship in which the volunteer also receives. Benefits that volunteers can expect to gain include a sense of worthwhile achievement, useful skills, career enhancement and enrichment, personal and social development, experience and contacts, sociability and fun, and inclusion in the life of an organisation.

Recognition

Explicit recognition of the value of what volunteers contribute to the organisation, to the community, to the social economy and to wider social objectives, is fundamental to a fair relationship between volunteers, organisation and government policy and practice.

Support

Good support, management and training of volunteers are an essential part of volunteering. For volunteers to have a worthwhile experience and to feel valued, as well as being able to contribute to an organisation's objectives, they must be well supported.

The commitment from all sectors to understand the benefits of volunteering will ensure the importance and the spirit in which it is carried out is fully recognised and valued.

Joint Undertakings

All partners signed up to the Solihull Compact Plus and this code are committed to:

- Value volunteers' contributions and the spirit with which their time and support is given
- Promoting and supporting initiatives that widen and raise the profile of volunteering and publicise achievements of volunteers locally
- Recognising that managing volunteers effectively requires resources, and that sustainable funding is required where possible
- Understanding the different ways people can volunteer, both formally and informally, and recognise the strengths of both approaches
- Accepting that although volunteering is given freely, it is not a cost free activity
- Having a consistent approach to reimburse out of pocket expenses related to volunteering, wherever possible. For further information and advice please go to Volunteering England's website at www.volunteering.org.uk and look at the volunteering guidelines
- Recognising the work carried out by volunteers is often the same as that of paid workers while at the same time being aware that in certain circumstances paid support will be necessary
- Recognising the value that involving volunteers within your organisation in the decision making process brings
- Striving to support volunteers that have additional needs such as a disability, different language, mental health issue etc so that they can participate fully
- Developing a diverse volunteer base by encouraging volunteering by individuals from currently under represented groups or communities of interest
- Actively communicating training opportunities for volunteers through all available channels
- Learning from best practice examples that already exist within the Third Sector and other best practice local authority areas
- Recognising and understanding that different areas may have different needs when attracting volunteers
- Seeking to promote the benefits that volunteering brings to all organisations, especially in terms of personal development.

Dispute Resolution

Aims & Principles

The Compact Plus process is one of continuous learning, development and dialogue, and it is recognised that, from time to time, differences may arise which need to be resolved. The aim of this document is to provide a framework to resolve disputes that may arise from the implementation of the commitments within the Compact Plus, as quickly as possible, and in an open and fair way to all parties.

It is also intended to ensure that the process of monitoring and developing the Compact Plus is informed by the resolution of disputes.

Enquiries and Advice

Initial enquiries about difficulties or disputes, between any Public, Private or Third Sector Organisation, can be made by anyone and should be directed to:

Solihull SUSTAIN, The Priory, Church Hill Road, Solihull, B91 3LF, 0121 711 3148, compact@solihull-sustain.org.uk (Using your preferred route) copied to the Compact Monitoring Group c/o cvru@solihull.gov.uk

The enquiry may be redirected to an appropriate team/member of staff from within a partner organisation, in order to resolve the matter at an early and informal stage, and you will be kept up-to-date with any progress at all times.

Please note: It is always preferred that difficulties or disputes are dealt with through informal conversations between the parties concerned, and at no point will raising a difficulty/dispute and entering into the formal Dispute Resolution process, have any repercussions on your organisation in the future.

If the matter cannot be resolved at the informal/enquiry stage, then it is only at this point that the following (formal) stages will be pursued.

Stage One

You will be asked to explain in writing (as clearly and concisely as possible) the difficulty or dispute which has arisen including (where appropriate):

- A summary of the issues in the dispute
- The Compact Plus or Code of Practice, principle or commitment which is felt to have been breached/broken
- Names and roles of parties involved

- Date of relevant events/episodes
- Copies of relevant correspondence
- What action has been taken to resolve the matter to date.

The written enquiry will then be referred to the Compact Monitoring Group who will decide if:

- a) The issue falls within the scope/remit of the Compact
- b) Further discussion and mediation can resolve the issue at this point
- c) Further information is required from any of the parties concerned.

We will contact you within 10 working days, explaining what action is proposed and/or requesting further information if required. Stage One will normally be completed within one to four weeks.

If the issue is found to be outside of the scope of the Compact then we will make every effort to provide other options to support the resolution of the issue.

Stage Two

Should it not be possible to resolve the issue during Stage One, a date will be set for a Disputes Resolution Panel meeting – convened by the Compact Monitoring Group – to hear from all parties involved in the issue. This will normally be no later than four weeks from when the dispute entered Stage two of the process.

The panel, which will be made up of both impartial third sector and public sector representatives to ensure there are no conflicts of interest, will invite both parties to bring up to two representatives to attend the meeting. (One of these may be from another organisation to help support the organisation involved)

If after hearing all of the available evidence the Panel is able to reach a decision as to the action that is recommended to resolve the dispute, the Chair of the Panel shall write to all parties concerned outlining the recommendations. This will then be followed up after four to six weeks for an update relating to the acceptance of the recommendations and progress thereafter.

If the panel is unable to reach a decision and feels further evidence is required, the parties involved will be informed and notified in writing accordingly.

Continued overleaf ►

Stage Three

Should it not be possible to resolve the issue during Stage Two and the Panel feel the issue is of ongoing concern, then it shall be referred to the Solihull Partnership Governing Board who may decide to make further recommendations or take further action. All decisions will be made in line with the Solihull Partnership's Code of Conduct.

Written records will be kept of all issues referred to the Compact Monitoring Group and Dispute Resolution Panel, but the details will remain confidential to the Panel.

A summary report containing the details of these issues will also be sent to The Solihull Partnership Governing Board for learning and development purposes on an annual basis.

The Compact Monitoring Group will use all learning and information to assist with the review of the Compact, Codes of Practice and Dispute Resolution in order to further improve and embed these tools at the heart of partnership working between the public, private and third sector organisations.

Next Steps

- The Codes of Practice and Dispute Resolution will be reviewed on an annual basis, to ensure that they remain up to date and fit for purpose. The Compact Monitoring Group will be responsible for co-ordinating the review process
- A promotional programme highlighting the Compact Plus, Codes of Practice and Dispute Resolution is due to commence in early 2010.

Contact Details

If you require further information on any aspect of this document then please contact:

**The Community & Voluntary Relations Service
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
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Solihull, West Midlands
B91 9QT**

Tel: 0121 704 8548

Fax: 0121 704 6404

Email: cvru@solihull.gov.uk

**Solihull SUSTAiN
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This document is also available in large print and electronic format. Please contact us if you require further assistance.



Compact Plus for Solihull 2008 - 2013

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