

Compact
working together | better together



**Community Groups in
Southend-on-Sea**

A Code of Good Practice

‘Success Through Partnership’

Contents

Part 1

Introduction

Part 2

Aim of 'Community Groups, A Code of Good Practice'

Part 3

The Community Sector and its Importance

Part 4

The main points for a Community Code

Part 5

Key Principles

Part 6

Key Undertakings

Part 7

Shared Values

Part 8

Joint undertakings

Part 9

The Statutory sector will

Part 10

The Community Sector Will

Part 11

The Voluntary Sector Will

Appendix 1

Including Faith Groups



Community groups operate closest of all to the grass roots level. They can be a community of interest or a neighbourhood group

1 Introduction

A Compact for Southend-on-Sea and The Codes of Good Practice

The Compact is a framework for partnership working between statutory organisations and the voluntary and community sector.

The Compact sets out:

- A shared vision.
- Undertakings from both sides.
- Commitment to respect the independence of the voluntary and community sector.
- Systems to help make sure that the agreement works.

The Compact will be supported by Codes of Good Practice in the areas of Funding, Consultation and policy appraisal, Volunteering, Community Groups, including those which are Faith Based and Black and Minority Ethnic organisations.

This is the second of the Codes of Good Practice which will add more detail to the principles laid out in The Compact document. The Code was written by a working group of representatives from the Voluntary and Community Sector and Statutory Bodies.



There are many small groups whose shared interest is a leisure activity, hobby or sport

2. Aim of ‘Community Groups, A Code of Good Practice’

To promote a better understanding of community groups, how they operate within the wider voluntary sector and the particular problems they may face.

By doing so, it will have a positive effect on the way the statutory and voluntary sectors relate to community groups through their policies and practices and create and maintain the conditions and support that will help them succeed.

3. The Community Sector and its Importance

The community sector is made up of personal relationships, groups, networks, traditions and patterns of behaviour among people who share physical neighbourhoods, living conditions or common understandings and interests. It is the community itself taking action to get things done, although much of its activity is informal and often invisible. The community sector ranges from small informal community groups to large multi-purpose community organisations. The community sector is led by values, which include:

- being able to make decisions themselves;
- mutuality;
- equality;
- social justice;
- co-operation; and
- the importance of local delivery at a personal level.

Who are Community Groups?

Community Groups are described in the National Compact’s Glossary as: A group of people with a common cause, often neighbourhood-based but may focus on a single issue for campaigning or self-help. Community groups are likely to be small, local, informal, unfunded and volunteer-run.

4. The main points for a Community Code are:

- Recognition of the distinctive nature of community groups, and how this will affect policy and practice.
- Recognition of the range of groups that make up the community sector, including neighbourhood-based groups and groups based on common interests or experience.
- A clear understanding by all concerned that community groups can play a range of different roles, including:
 - providing a voice for residents and users to public authorities and service providers;
 - building relationships and networks in neighbourhoods and communities, and providing self-help and mutual support;
 - delivering services, often locally and informally
- Approaches to consultation and policy appraisal which tackle the needs of community groups and find creative ways of using the experience of residents and users.
- Guidance for the development of Local Area Agreements (LAA's) states that 'LAA's will not achieve **'better outcomes for all'** unless they reflect the priorities and imperatives of those groups who can often be unintentionally excluded from consultations.
- Funding policies and procedures for community groups, which are in proportion to the scale of funding and the ability of the groups concerned to respond to the needs of the community.

5. Key Principles:

- Achieving more effective consultation with Community Groups by allowing longer response periods, providing easily accessible information, and providing financial support to enable more people to participate.
- Involving Community Groups in development of Local Compacts.
- Better resourcing of Community Groups to allow them to play a larger part in service planning and deliver.
- Both statutory agencies and the voluntary and community sector acknowledge the importance of promoting equality of opportunity for all people, regardless of race, age, disability, gender, sexual orientation or religion. We recognise the diversity of the Southend-on-Sea community and that there will be exemptions under relevant legislation.

6. Key Undertakings:

- Work in partnership to promote good practice (including promotion of the Code) and celebrate success.
- Promote the development of Community Organisations.

7. Shared Values

All partners recognise and value the contribution made by small community groups to the wider voluntary and community sector.

All Partners recognise that healthy, sustainable communities will include a range of community groups which help to create a strong sense of involvement and belonging at local or neighbourhood level.

8. Joint undertakings:

The Statutory and the community sector are committed to developing and maintaining best practice and mutual respect in their relationship.

To act in line with the Compact, they both agree to do the following:

- Keep to the Compact, this and the four other codes of good practice as they apply to community groups,
- Make suitable mention of this code of good practice (along with the Compact and its other codes) as appropriate,
- Develop a partnership approach to tackle strategies for communities, including promoting and sharing best practice and celebrating success.



Community groups are a unique source of local information about the communities in which they work

9. The Statutory sector will

- Take account of the community sector's needs and role, when setting policies or procedures and developing community strategy.
- Help create and maintain the conditions and support that help community groups to succeed.
- Value the work, knowledge and expertise of the community sector.

On funding and other support

- Recognise the value of the contributions of volunteer time to projects, or use as an element of match funding.
- Take positive action to see fair treatment and equal access in applications to funding programmes for all community groups, including faith groups and those who are not normally funded.
- Encourage support for local voluntary sector infrastructure and networking and promote accessible learning and development support for community groups and active community members.
- Recognise the social contribution that faith groups make is not limited to the promotion of religion and assess funding applications from faith groups for social and community activities on their merits, without discrimination.

On working in partnership

- Recognise that communities need resources for partnership working and involvement.
- 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.
- Recognise the contribution that community groups make to Local Strategic Partnerships and their community strategies as well as local regional and sub regional partners such as Thames Gateway South East.



The most successful services result from building partnerships between service providers and service users

10. The Community sector will

- Accept that, as they receive funding, there is a need for monitoring and evaluating their spending, in proportion to the size of the grant.
- Encourage quality partnership working and community involvement.
- Encourage the local community to get involved and take control wherever possible.
- Be clear and open as to the community or constituency a particular group speaks for and where appropriate, channel information and views to and from its members or constituency.



Community involvement will involve give and take and learning to cope with diversity

11. The Voluntary sector will

- Play an enabling role which supports the community sector in its diversity.
- Consult the community sector and consider its different interests alongside those of the voluntary sector before responding to invitations for representation on partnership organisations and other local structures.
- Recognise that the interests and means of operation of community and voluntary organisations are not always the same.
- Encourage active community members to carry out leadership roles in voluntary and community sector networks.



Community groups are often small and independent with limited funds and a simple infrastructure. Many have no paid staff. These characteristics can be both a strength and a weakness.

Appendix 1 - Including faith groups

This appendix looks at the fact that in our society it is not acceptable, or even justifiable, to discriminate against faith groups simply because they are faith groups.

Everyone involved in this code believes that faith groups need to be recognised as community groups because the many faiths form an important part of society. Reaching and working with them is part of equal opportunities and an excellent element of working towards social inclusion. Faith groups often reflect ethnic diversity. While practicing their faith, including worship, is a central activity for most faith-based groups, many are also involved in running community services, promoting community development and representing community interests.

The value of involving faith groups

Faith groups contribute to the whole range of community involvement, from membership of strategic organisations to small-scale project work at neighbourhood level. Including faith groups in community involvement processes can:

- provide gateways to communities who would otherwise be left out;
- boost involvement in communities; and
- help link the development of citizenship to faith traditions.

The Local Government Association (in its 2002 publication 'Faith and Community') says that "Local authorities will want to ensure that faith communities, as social partners, are fully included in the Compact process and feel that their voice is both heard and reflected in the partnership statement that results in the form of a Local Compact".

Among the typical resources that faith groups can offer are:

- local networks and knowledge of local needs;
- leadership in organising their communities to be active;
- management capacity;
- buildings that the community could use; and
- a major source for volunteers.

Funding

Many faith groups make a vital contribution to their local community, or to a community of interest across a town or a wider area. The Government recognises the social contribution that faith groups make as being different from just promoting religion. A failure to understand this difference could lead to faith groups being incorrectly assessed as ineligible for funding. Most faith communities will be able to show a boundary between activities that serve a wider public benefit and those that are for maintaining their own faith identity, and this may be reflected in their organisational structure. The Government and local statutory agencies should assess funding applications from faith groups for social and community activities on their merits, without discrimination. They should avoid trying to enforce terms on faith groups which are charities that are not in line with the terms of their governing documents or their charitable status.



How are Community groups different to Voluntary organisations?

Voluntary organisations are normally more formal, larger organisations and often employ paid staff. Community groups are usually small and run by volunteers.

This document can be provided in other formats and translation of this document is also available.

A glossary of terms relating to Compacts can be accessed through the Compact web-site at: www.thecompact.org.uk

Further information on the Local Compact and a list of signatories to the Compact can be found on agencies web-sites including: www.southend.gov.uk

For further information, or to learn more about A Compact for Southend-on-Sea and The Codes of Good Practice please contact:

**Robert Gray, Compact and Partnership Development Officer
SAVS Centre,
29/31 Alexandra Street, Southend-on-Sea Essex SS1 1BW
Telephone: 01702 350477
Email: compact@savs-southend.co.uk**

**Paul Toms, Voluntary Sector Partnership Co-ordinator
Southend-on-Sea Borough Council
Civic Centre, Victoria Avenue, Southend-on-Sea SS2 6ER
Telephone: 01702 215188
Email: voluntarysectorgrants@southend.gov.uk**