

## **Sunderland Compact: Working Together for a Better Future**

### **Foreword**

Welcome to the Sunderland Compact.

Integral to the Sunderland Partnership is a positive and productive relationship with the Voluntary and Community Sector. This has been central in defining the Sunderland Strategy and will be crucial in helping to achieve its aims, where citizens have an enhanced quality of life, with first class services and facilities, and opportunities for all. The Sunderland Compact will be an essential tool in ensuring that relationships remain positive and develop further.

Whilst the Sunderland Compact provides an accountability mechanism for all signatories, it is our hope that each organisation will use the Sunderland Compact as a tool to positively improve partnership working through an increased understanding of each others' requirements, needs, aspirations and challenges – resulting in partnership working where all partners are treated with respect and equality and where we can work together for mutual advantage and community gain.

Canon Stephen Taylor  
Sunderland Partnership Chair

### **Section 1 What is a Compact?**

There has been a national Compact since 1998. The basis of the Compact is that it is an agreement between government and the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) to improve their relationships for mutual advantage and community gain. Local Compacts aim to make the national Compact a reality at local level by strengthening working relationships between voluntary and community sector organisations and local public sector organisations.

The Sunderland Compact (our Local Compact) provides a framework to improve partnership working between voluntary and community sector organisations in Sunderland and organisations of the Sunderland Partnership, of which the Sunderland Community Network is a partner. The Compact recognises the complementary role and diversity of organisations across the Voluntary and Community Sector; the value of the sector in the development and delivery of policy and services; the critical role of the sector; and the importance of its continued independence.

The Sunderland Compact, including the supporting Codes of Practice which set out the detail of particular aspects of the relationship, should be seen as an enabling mechanism to enhance the existing relationship between statutory organisations and the voluntary and community sector.

The approach of the Sunderland Partnership has been to take the principles and commitments of the national Compact and adapt these to our local needs and priorities.

The Compact has been adopted by all agencies involved in the Sunderland Partnership, and Voluntary and Community Sector organisations across Sunderland, for the benefit of the people of Sunderland, and supports the delivery of the Sunderland Strategy vision:

Creating a better future for everyone in Sunderland:  
Sunderland will be a welcoming, international city where people have the opportunity to fulfil their aspirations for a healthy, safe and prosperous future.

The Sunderland Compact is signed by individual organisations of the Sunderland Partnership and individual Voluntary and Community Sector organisations in Sunderland.

The implementation of this Compact and supporting Codes of Practice within organisations is the individual responsibility of signatories. Where organisations do not follow these commitments, they must satisfy themselves that, if asked, they have good reasons for not doing so.

## **Section 2 Sunderland Partnership**

The Sunderland Partnership is the city's Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). It brings together the public, private, community and voluntary sectors to work together to achieve success, encourage improvement, and tackle and overcome problems for the benefit of all citizens now and in the future.

The Sunderland Strategy is the key document through which partners in Sunderland collectively set out their vision and priorities for the city. The Local Area Agreement will form part of the delivery plan for the Sunderland Strategy, and will seek to ensure that the Sunderland Partnership achieves what it set out to do, to create a better future for everyone in Sunderland.

The Compact is integral to the work of the partnership as a whole, and it will complement and support both the Sunderland Strategy and Local Area Agreement to ensure that working relationships are enhanced for the maximum benefit of the city.

## **Section 3 Sunderland Voluntary and Community Sector**

The Sunderland Community Development Plan defines the Voluntary and Community Sector as:

Registered charities, as well as non-charitable, non-profit organisations, associations and self-help groups and community groups. Must involve some aspect of voluntary activity, though many are also professional organisations with paid staff, some of

which are of considerable size. Community organisations tend to be focused on particular localities or groups within the community; many are dependent entirely or almost entirely on voluntary activity.

The Sunderland Community Network (SCN) provides a formal voice and representation of the Voluntary and Community Sector to the Sunderland Partnership, enabling them to have a say in identifying, shaping and delivering the services included in the Sunderland Strategy through the Local Area Agreement. It also enables the Sunderland Partnership and other organisations to consult with SCN members through its structures.

## **Section 4 Sunderland Compact**

### **4.1 From Agreement to Practice**

All organisations of the Sunderland Partnership are committed to developing shared aims and joint-working practices that aim to:

- Deliver the **vision** and **aspirations** for the city and its people, through the Sunderland Strategy;
- Address **inequalities** within and between communities, with due regard to their duties and responsibilities under equality legislation;
- Promote **active citizenship** – facilitate and support increased involvement of local people in decision making and involvement in their neighbourhoods;
- Support communities in **identifying** and **meeting** their needs, opportunities, rights and responsibilities;
- Adopt **best practice** in joint working.

The Sunderland Compact is supported by 5 **Codes of Practice**, the codes are:

1. Funding and Procurement
2. Involvement and Consultation
3. Volunteering
4. Voluntary and Community Groups
5. Equalities Codes of Practice

### **4.2 Equalities Statement**

All signatories to the Compact recognise and fully accept their responsibilities under equal opportunities legislation that individuals may not be discriminated against because of his or her age, gender, race, colour, nationality or ethnic origin, disability, faith, marital status, family circumstances, sexual orientation or class. There is commitment from all signatories to promote and advocate equality of opportunity, for example in services, volunteering and employment by challenging discriminatory treatment and valuing diversity through positive example.

Signatories recognise and value the importance of each individual within the community they serve, whilst recognising that the Compact primarily aims to establish ways to enhance the relationships between organisations and groups.

### 4.3 Jointly agreed principles

The Sunderland Partnership recognises the importance of the Voluntary and Community Sector in an independent, democratic and free society; and therefore will promote effective working relationships, consistency of approach and good practice between Sunderland Partnership member organisations and the Voluntary and Community Sector.

Both the Sunderland Partnership and Voluntary and Community Sector organisations recognise and agree that:

- A healthy Voluntary and Community Sector is a vital part of a democratic society;
- The work of the Voluntary and Community Sector complements and augments that of the organisations of the Sunderland Partnership;
- Working in partnership with the Voluntary and Community Sector can result in better policy and services and better outcomes for the community;
- Partnership requires strong relationships, including integrity and openness;
- Partnership organisations can help resource the Voluntary and Community Sector;
- The independence of the Voluntary and Community Sector should be respected;
- The roles and responsibilities of Sunderland Partnership organisations provide particular boundaries within which organisations must operate.

**Question 1 - Do you agree with the jointly agreed principles? If not, what needs to change?**

**Answer:**

### 4.4 Joint commitments

The organisations of the Sunderland Partnership and Voluntary and Community Sector organisations in Sunderland have agreed to:

- Promote the Sunderland Compact to employees and members to ensure organisational awareness and compliance;
- Participate in the annual review of the Compact;
- Work in Partnership to further develop and implement the Codes of Practice and associated action plans;
- Develop a common training and support framework, whilst recognising that there is a diversity of need;

- Establish high standards of governance, conduct, meeting reporting and accountability obligations.

**Question 2 - Do you agree with the joint commitments? If not, what needs to change?**

**Answer:**

#### **4.5 Commitments of Organisations of the Sunderland Partnership**

In addition to the joint commitments, members of the Sunderland Partnership have agreed the following:

##### **a. Transparency & Accountability**

- Decisions to be made on a basis that is open and transparent;
- Processes to be as simple as possible and proportionate to the level of risk involved;
- Partners will detail the support they can provide to assist smaller and new organisations to access funding and support mechanisms;
- In line with the role of the sector in promoting broader community development outcomes, monitoring and reporting should also be permitted to take account of 'soft outcomes' such as distance travelled and changes in attitudes / perception.

##### **b. Financial Viability**

- All signatories recognise that a healthy Voluntary and Community Sector, including its infrastructure requires stable funding. Consequently, partners will work to develop a consistent approach to financial support to the VCS which is effective and appropriate balance between the sectors. Partners will refer to the Funding and Procurement Code of Practice for further detail.

##### **c. Representation**

- Where appropriate, Partners will provide an opportunity for the wider community and the Voluntary and Community Sector to contribute to service and programme design at an early stage. This is different, and additional to, the period of formal consultation that should also be undertaken on new policies, plans and programmes;
- Allowing time for planning, decision making and action;

- Partners will respect Voluntary and Community Sector organisations independence and freedom to contribute to policy development. This includes the right to:
  - Comment upon and challenge policies;
  - Campaign for its aims and objectives without compromising any funding relationship that might exist, or its ability to determine and manage its own affairs.
- New policies and procedures will be reviewed together to identify implications for all partners, particularly at the development stage;
- Partners will build on, develop and improve existing empowerment and involvement mechanisms ensuring they are inclusive and take account of the specific needs, interests and contributions of organisations representing hard to reach groups;
- Partners will consult with the Voluntary and Community Sector as described within the Involvement and Consultation Code of Practice.

**d. Quality Standards**

- Partners will provide support for Voluntary and Community Sector organisations to demonstrate and use robust and proportionate Quality Assurance systems and accreditation where necessary;
- Partners will work towards embedding appropriate Quality Standards in contracts;
- Review new policies and procedures to identify implications for Voluntary and Community Sector organisations, particularly at the development stage;
- Where appropriate all Voluntary and Community Sector funders will embrace the values and principles of the National Occupational Standards in Community Development Work and agree to work in line with the values of social justice, self determination, working and learning together, sustainable communities, participation and reflective practice.

**Question 3 - Do you agree with the commitments of the organisations of the Sunderland Partnership? If not, what needs to change?**

**Answer:**

**4.6 Commitments of Voluntary and Community Sector organisations:**

In addition to the joint commitments, Voluntary and Community Sector organisations agree the following:

**a. Transparency and Accountability**

- Where applicable to observe the Hallmarks of an Effective Charity as set by the Charity Commission – focus on impact and outcomes, fit for purpose, sound governance, maximise potential, accountable and transparent and flexible;
- Respect and be accountable to the law, and in the case of charities observe the appropriate guidance from the Charity Commission, including that on political activities and campaigning;
- Involve users wherever possible in the development and management of activities and services;
- Promote effective working relationships with Sunderland Partnership organisations

**b. Representation**

- The VCS representative bodies will:
  - take active steps to assist organisations to fully represent the diversity of communities in the City so that minority views can be taken into account;
  - put in place effective mechanisms for reporting both for organisations and representatives;
  - provide relevant expertise and knowledge;
  - build on, develop and improve existing involvement and consultation mechanisms ensuring they are inclusive, enabling the representatives to take account of the specific needs, interests and contributions of organisations representing hard to reach groups;
  - engage on issues that are likely to affect working partnerships particularly where statutory agencies are proposing new roles and responsibilities for the Voluntary and Community sector, for example, in the delivery of statutory services.

**c. Quality Standards**

- Develop appropriate Quality Assurance systems and accreditation with support from organisations of the Sunderland Partnership;
- Where appropriate all VCS organisations will embrace the values and principles of the National Occupational Standards in Community Development Work and agree to work in line with the values of social justice, self determination, working and learning together, sustainable communities, participation and reflective practice;
- Recognise their duties under equality legislation and seek support from partners to put in place policies for promoting best practice and equality of opportunity in activities, employment, involvement of volunteers and service provision.

**Question 4 - Do you agree with the commitments of the Voluntary and Community Sector organisations? If not, what needs to change?**

**Answer:**

## **Section 5 Monitoring and Reviewing**

A Compact Review Group will be established from the Compact Steering Group, which is chaired by the independent Chair of the Sunderland Partnership, and will include identified Compact Champions and Leaders. The adoption of the Compact is the starting point, and must be regularly reviewed and updated to ensure that it remains relevant to the relationships between Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations and organisations of the Sunderland Partnership. The Compact Steering Group will also form the first stage in Compact compliance issues.

Each Code of Practice, with associated action plans, this main Compact document and the Compact Communication Plan will form the baseline for the initial review in 2009 and each will be updated and adopted annually at the Compact Conference.

Cases which have used the Compact Compliance procedure will also be reviewed at this conference in order to learn from past experience.

The Compact Steering Group will manage the Compact day-to-day. The Steering Group will have equal representation from the organisations of the Sunderland Partnership and Voluntary and Community Sector organisations, and will be held accountable for progress both to the Sunderland Partnership Board and other Compact signatories. This accountability will be through the Review Process and Annual Conference.

### **5.1 The Process**

The Compact Review Group will initially hold quarterly review meetings of the Compact, each code of practice and communication action plans.

These reviews will consider:-

- evidence in respect of the action plans implementation (examples of which are case studies and questionnaires)
- performance indicators (have we achieved what we said we would?)



Knowing what has been achieved is important, but there is also a need for commitment and mutual respect between signatory organisations to ensure that the Compact has been embedded and this is more difficult to measure.

Each review will be written up and circulated to the Compact Steering Group and Sunderland Partnership Board. It will also be posted on the Sunderland Compact website.

Prior to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter meeting of the Compact Review Group an impact assessment questionnaire will be developed and sent out to all Compact signatories. This will measure the impact of the Sunderland Compact and identify both good and bad practice.

An annual review, including the write up of the questionnaire responses, will be presented at the Annual Compact Conference.

## **Section 6 Compact Compliance**

For many reasons, and in varying degrees, disputes may arise as to whether the signatories to the Compact are being Compact compliant. Some disputes will be outside the remit of the Compact, for example, issues with contracts or customer service, and these are best dealt with through an organisation's complaint's procedure, where they have one. Local Compacts do in fact give groups enforceable rights. Cases can go to the Local or Health Ombudsman, and for judicial review as there may be links with Public Law. It is therefore important that we have a series of robust mechanisms for making sure that all parties keep to the Compact, and for dispute resolution. We believe that the Positive Dispute Resolution Process outlined below, and available in detail upon request (to be developed) should enable the resolution of most issues. Both parties must be signatories of the Compact to use this process.

Most issues should hopefully be resolved on an informal basis between the parties, usually by having the appropriate dialogue (whether this is by mail, email, phone, or face to face etc). If at this stage agreement is not reached, and a formal statement of disagreement is provided by either party then the process will be deemed to have reached Stage One and the dispute will be passed to the Sunderland Compact Steering Group.

Stage One:- The Steering Group will investigate, and will write to those concerned giving their view on the breach within 20 working days of being formally involved. This will include recommendations on Compact Compliance, the way forward, and if necessary set out other options.

Stage Two:- If Stage One does not resolve the dispute, either party may decide to seek an independent view from the Compact Advocacy Programme, which may in turn refer you to the national Compact Mediation Scheme or the Public Law Project. There may be some costs involved in these latter processes.

Stage Three:- If the issue has not been resolved, then for local government bodies the advice of the local government ombudsman may be sought. There is a similar Health Ombudsman for health related issues.

For other areas not covered by an Ombudsman, and the above, the NCVO's Compact Advocacy Programme offers support to groups on Local Compact Breaches, including referral to the Compact Mediation Scheme and the Public Law Project.

**Question 5 - Do you agree with the approach and structures we propose for Monitoring and Reviewing the Compact, and Compact Compliance? If not, what needs to change?**

**Answer:**

## **Section 7 Further Information**

Updates to the Sunderland Compact are posted on [www.sunderlandcompact.org.uk](http://www.sunderlandcompact.org.uk) and hard copy updates for the Sunderland Compact folder will be posted out to those who have signed for a copy of the folder.

For general information on the Compact please visit the website or phone Sunderland City Community Development Team on (0191) 561 4621 or Sunderland Community Network on (0191) 565 1566.

To raise a concern about Compact Compliance please contact either Jane Hibberd (lead officer for the Compact) on (0191) 561 4603 / [jane.hibberd@sunderland.gov.uk](mailto:jane.hibberd@sunderland.gov.uk) or Jessica May (Sunderland Partnership Manager) on (0191) 561 1476 / [jessica.may@sunderland.gov.uk](mailto:jessica.may@sunderland.gov.uk)

The Compact Advocacy Programme, Local Compact Advocate (currently Jess Crocker) can be contacted on (020) 7520 2561 or by emailing [jess.crocker@ncvo-vol.org.uk](mailto:jess.crocker@ncvo-vol.org.uk)

Information on the National Compact can be found on [www.thecompact.org.uk](http://www.thecompact.org.uk) or through the National Council for Voluntary Organisation's website [www.ncvo-vol.org.uk](http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk)

**Additional Questions on the Compact Document**

**Question 6 - On the whole, do you think the style and content of the Compact documents are easy to read and understand? If not, what could be improved?**

**Answer:**

**Question 7 - On the whole, do you agree with the general emphasis of the document? If not, what in your view needs to be changed and what is an alternative option?**

**Answer:**

**Question 8 - Is there anything missing from the document that you would expect / like to see?**

**Answer:**