



The Worcestershire Compact
Community Groups;
Code of Practice

Worcestershire Compact provides a framework for the way statutory and the voluntary and community sector (VCS) groups and organisations get together to provide services. It should mean that the people of Worcestershire receive better services. The Compact is also designed to ensure respect and equality between different organisations.

The Compact is supported by the Worcestershire Partnership. The vision of the Worcestershire Partnership is:

‘A county with safe, cohesive, healthy and inclusive communities, a strong and diverse economy and a valued and cherished environment’.

The Compact includes codes of practice which contain further definition, explanation and agreement to ensure that partners are fully able to agree on their relationships.

Reason for the Code of Practice for Community Groups

Research has shown that Compacts improve relationships between community groups and voluntary and statutory organisations, but that small community groups are sometimes not included. This code of practice will try to ensure that in Worcestershire all groups are involved as much as possible.

Purpose of the Code

This code of good practice aims to encourage the statutory sector and the VCS to work closely together to support community groups. It is designed to build the capacity of community groups to support and represent the interests of local people and to become more involved in policy making, planning and delivering local services.

It is important for statutory and voluntary sector organisations to understand community groups, what they do, how they operate and how they are different from voluntary organisations.

The Community Sector

The community sector is made up of groups, networks, traditions and patterns of behaviour among people. They may share physical neighbourhoods, living conditions or common understandings and interests. It is about the community itself taking action to get things done. Much of its activity is informal, independent and often invisible to statutory bodies. The size and rural nature of Worcestershire can also be a challenge for local community groups.

Community groups not only deliver local services they also:

- encourage people to get involved in their communities
- improve health and wellbeing
- strengthen the feeling of community
- build social capital
- advance local democracy

Healthy, sustainable communities include a range of community groups and organisations which, for members of that community, help to create a strong sense of belonging.

The Code of Practice

Based on the national code, this code identifies the issues that are important to local community groups. Whilst the national code relates specifically to the community sector, the Compact for Worcestershire needs to refer to both the voluntary and community sectors. This is in appreciation and recognition that community groups often operate in isolation, can be under-represented and may need the support of infrastructure organisations.

The Community Groups Code of Practice will:

- Provide a basis for mutual trust and acceptance of the roles and responsibilities of the statutory and community sectors
- Recognise the diversity and contribution of the community sector, and promote understanding of what community groups contribute as an important local resource in any community

- Set out the policies, consultative arrangements and support that the community sector needs so it can play an effective role in building successful local communities.

All partners in this Compact agree to abide by the requirements of the Community Groups Code of Practice. It is not a legally binding document but a framework describing good practice.

Who is this code for?

The code has relevance for all statutory agencies in the county as well as all community groups and voluntary organisations. It is intended to be of use to any member of a community group or anyone who wishes to engage constructively with such groups. This includes volunteers and workers from the voluntary and community sector, officers and elected members within local authorities and other public bodies, and representatives on all partnerships – strategic and commissioning.

The code, like the Compact, will be kept up-to-date by the Worcestershire Compact Steering Group which is a subgroup of Worcestershire Partnership.

Key Principles

The code builds on the key principles of the Compact which are:

- To value the positive contribution that community groups make to their local communities across Worcestershire and recognise that this is different to that made by the wider voluntary sector
- Community groups recognise their responsibility to play an active role in issues that concern them
- Develop an understanding of and maintain respect for each sector (statutory, voluntary and community sector), recognising each partner's needs, priorities and contributions to the county
- Appreciate that community groups provide support to individuals and communities and can build better and more sustainable neighbourhoods and

villages

- Ensure that all groups, including those with whom it is difficult to engage, have the opportunity to get involved in issues that are of concern to them
- Encourage joined-up and partnership approaches to the involvement of community groups in issues that concern them
- Ensure that there is easily accessible information and support to encourage more people to participate in consultations and enough time for them to respond
- Use clear language, without jargon, to encourage two way communication.
- Community groups should always be invited to, and actively participate in, any local policy or service initiatives
- All infrastructure organisations will operate in an open, honest and inclusive way in order to support and help build capacity for community groups and community-based organisations.

Commitment by All Partners

In response to these Key Principles we, as partners, commit to:

- Developing better communications between the sectors to ensure understanding of each other's roles so that they can work more closely together
- Supporting community groups, for example, by effective signposting at first point of contact, websites etc
- Ensure community groups receive quality advice and support from the most appropriate organisation
- Working together to build mutual trust and understanding so as to improve relationships and achieve better results
- Ensuring cross-sector participation, at local and county-wide levels, around service development and delivery
- Consulting with the community sector, not speaking for it, in particular those community groups representing or working with 'hard to engage' communities such as black and minority ethnic groups, travelers, people with mental health problems

- Ensuring feedback is provided to those who have been involved in consultations
- Challenging and addressing barriers to community sector involvement by providing assistance (financial and other support) to enable community groups to engage effectively
- Being open about the different interests within the sectors and about potential conflicts of interest and actively seek solutions to resolve them
- Encouraging and enabling community group members to take on leadership roles
- Ensuring that those organisations who receive funding for capacity building initiatives support the needs of community groups
- Endeavouring to develop better communications between all sectors by introducing the Worcestershire Compact and codes of practice to any organisations working with community groups.

Commitment by Statutory Sector Partners

In response to these Key Principles we as partners in the statutory sector commit to:

- Promote and celebrate the important role that community groups play in the county
- Liaising with community groups, local networks and local strategic partnerships at the earliest opportunity when developing local strategies and delivery plans
- Actively supporting the development of community groups, particularly within ‘hard to engage’ communities, through effective signposting so they can get access to information, facilities, resources, training opportunities etc
- Listening and responding to the needs and wants of community groups and giving feedback where appropriate
- Recognising that participation, rather than consultation, is the way forward in engaging with community groups
- Recognising the importance of infrastructure organisations and networks in providing better access to information, support, partnership development, training and capacity building for community groups particularly at the local level.

Commitment by Voluntary and Community Sectors Partners

In response to these Key Principles we as partners in the voluntary and community sectors commit to:

- Encouraging partnership working between community, voluntary and statutory sectors involving the local community wherever possible
- Adopting an honest and open approach, highlighting the interests of the community for which they speak
- Advocate for the community and support its interests
- Linking with existing networks and organisations in order to channel information to and from the community
- Encouraging joined-up and partnership working with community, voluntary and statutory organisations in order to share resources, good practice and to seek funding
- Recognising and understanding the roles, responsibilities and constraints of elected representatives, statutory officers and voluntary sector workers
- Operating in a business-like manner to evaluate their own performance and monitor their spending.

Adopting the Code

The statutory sector and the voluntary and community sectors are expected to adopt this code as recommended good practice in their work. The code will inform the development of and implementation of the Worcestershire Compact. It will be reviewed as part of the annual event and will be part of the annual action plan.

Resolving disputes arising between partners

Disagreements relating to the Community Groups Code of Practice will, where possible, be settled by the parties involved using internal complaints/ dispute resolution procedures. If this is not possible a conciliation process, coordinated by the Worcestershire Compact Steering Group, can be implemented.

For more information, contact:

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A full version of Worcestershire's Compact is available at www.worcestershire.gov.uk/voluntary and www.winc.org.uk/compact

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