

# Slough Compact

A commitment by Slough's voluntary and Community sector and statutory bodies to strengthen partnership working.

## Purpose of the Compact

Slough's voluntary, community and public sectors have the shared aim of making Slough the best possible place to live and work. The Compact affirms the mutual respect and value with which each sector regards the other. However, as we progress towards the shared aim some ground rules for how we work together are needed. Whilst the Compact is not a "legal" binding document it does have the support and commitment of all partners

## Values

The signatory partners will adhere to the following values that will underpin the way we behave towards each other:

**Equality**  
**Integrity**  
**Objectivity**  
**Honesty**

**Respect**  
**Transparency**  
**Accountability**  
**Consistency**

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## **Shared Commitment - we:**

- Recognise that roles are complementary that by working together more can be achieved for Slough's residents.
- Respect and understand each other's aims and objectives.
- Respect and understand the constraints under which the statutory and voluntary and community sectors operate.
- Are flexible, adaptable and open to new ways of working together.
- Recognise and treat each other as equal partners.
- Will work continually to communicate with and listen to small and hard to reach groups and communities of interest.

## **The Voluntary and Community Sector**

- Recognises the constraints Government directives and performance indicators place on the statutory sector.

## **The Public Sector**

- Recognises the independence of Slough's voluntary and community sector and its right to challenge policy and practice.
- Recognises the diversity of Slough's voluntary and community sector as its strength.

# WORK IN PROGRESS

## Background

From January 2004 a 'Steering Group' established by Slough Focus that includes all of the major public sector partners, as well as voluntary and community sector representatives, have worked together to put in place the Compact and its protocols (guidelines of good practice). This group will now continue its work as the Management Group to oversee implementation.

Continued consultation is part of the development process, with both local voluntary groups and organisations and with the statutory agencies Slough. It is important that everyone understands the purpose of the Compact and is able to use it.

This document reflects the outcome of the initial consultation process and describes the overarching principles for the development of public, voluntary and community sector relationships. It is supported by a series of "protocols", or 'guidelines for good practice' that describe how different aspects of the relationship should be undertaken (for example communication, funding, consultation, volunteering). The Compact will have a complaints process and monitoring arrangements.

## What Next

This document lays down the principles about how we work together; it is backed up by practical guidelines that translate these into behaviour that can be checked. Informed by statutory, voluntary and community sector research and consultation, these guidelines deal with:

- Communication.
- Community Development/Capacity Building.
- Consultation, Engagement and Involvement.
- Funding.
- Premises and Facilities.
- Procurement and Contracting.
- Volunteering.
- Partnership.

These will all be in place by November 2006. However, this is a living document and will be subject to change, as the need arises. The first review will be undertaken in 2007.

To ensure that the Compact is useful and is used to strengthen our relationships and improve ways of working together, the Management Group will continue to oversee its implementation. An independent mechanism to monitor and review the Compact will also be established, as well as a system to resolve any disputes that may arise from time to time.

## For reference

A national Compact between the government and the voluntary and community sector has been in place since 1998. Each region (i.e. South East, North West) has one, as do many statutory agencies (e.g. the Learning and Skills Council and National Health Service). Each local authority area in the UK is required by government to have a Compact in place. In developing a Compact for Slough we have ensured that this document relates directly to the Berkshire Learning and Skills Council's regional Compact with Regional Action and involvement South East and the national 'Working Together' strategy.

## Contacting the Compact

Further comment or discussion on any aspect of the Compact will be welcomed. You can contact us at:

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Farkhanda Ahmed  
Partnerships Administration  
Slough Borough Council  
01753 875610

# Slough Compact Protocols

## Accommodation and Premises

Public bodies may have accommodation or premises that are made available to the voluntary and community sector for hire, rent or lease.

There is common agreement that:

- Provision of accommodation as in-kind support to the Voluntary and Community Sector should reflect local policy and priorities.
- Small community groups and those groups working with under-represented communities will have particular needs that must be identified.
- An imaginative and creative approach is needed to building up the accommodation supply base to address a wide range of needs and that this is a challenging target. A voluntary sector resource centre providing a range of development facilities could provide a solution to accommodation difficulties experienced by some organisations.

The public sector will:

- Help the Voluntary and Community Sector meet its premises needs should it have suitable accommodation available.
- Publish clear guidelines for policy, priorities and any subsidies or conditions for use and maintain clear and transparent methods of access.
- Apply any subsidy or in kind support agreed against published policy and priorities equitably and in a flexible and cost-effective manner based upon a realistic needs and eligibility assessment
- The public sector undertakes to be responsible and responsive landlords, upholding the principles of good estate management.

## The Voluntary and Community sector:

- Acknowledges that policy concerned with accommodation and premises should reflect current legislative limitations for use, and that rental and lease values will be set at a market level.
- The Voluntary and Community Sector acknowledge that the public sector cannot meet all their accommodation needs
- Agrees to apply the principles of good governance and to fulfil the covenants of their leases

# Slough Compact Protocols

## Commissioning, Procurement and Contracts

This protocol is based on the shared understanding that the Voluntary and Community Sector provide services to the community and may be able to contract with the public sector:

- either to deliver a current service in an efficient and high quality way following a procurement process
- or to develop a partnership response to a recognised need and to deliver this through a contractual arrangement with public sector funding.

It is recognised that some voluntary organisations feel excluded and do not know how to contact statutory services.

In order to achieve this there is common agreement that changes in approach are required, including:

- developing a culture of exploring new ways to achieve results and to communicate effectively in order that service needs are met by provision
- involvement of the VCS in mapping and brokerage about service needs and responses
- providing access to information about the range of services currently delivered both in the statutory and the voluntary and community sectors.
- considering alternatives to in-house provision and a testing assumptions about established methods of delivering services
- a strategy to support the engagement of the VCS in commissioning and procurement should be developed.

There is shared agreement that:

- commissioning bodies should focus on best value
- ideally there should be consultation with and support to the VCS during the development of specification for service contracts
- one of the priorities for capacity building in the VCS should be to increase the ability to enter into a procurement process
- a “level playing field” should be created so that the VCS is able to compete equally for contracts
- the strength of the infrastructure of the VCS is critical, in such areas as governance, finance and management to ensure quality of provision but that this has cost implications
- the independence of organisations must not be compromised by contracts for services with the public sector
- tensions can arise where an organisation has an advocacy role on behalf of its users with the delivery of services through contracts which it may have to challenge; this tension should be managed in a context of mutual understanding in

order to meet mutual interests. VCS groups should not be penalised contractually for following up grievances

- there may be potential conflicts of interest between an organisation's remit and service commissioning and that these conflicts should be handled sensitively and with understanding on both sides

#### The Voluntary and Community Sector

- accepts that confidence and trust in the delivery of service(s) by them needs to be developed by the statutory authorities
- recognises the need to be flexible
- recognises that there may be limitations in the ability of the statutory sector to provide support beyond the specification phase
- recognises that planning for grants and services has to be carried out by the public sector and that there is a risk of non-renewable contingency planning
- some government funding is short term and comes with time and financial restraints which may limit the ability of the public sector to give complete clarity on all occasions

#### The Public Sector will

- clarify terminology and provide a clear definition of the difference between grants, commissioning and procurement
- provide clear guidelines for procurement, where possible providing information targeted at the VCS
- set up invoicing and administrative procedures that take into account the way in which the VCS operates, within the limitation of legislative and audit processes
- where possible, undertake prior consultation on evaluation criteria and monitoring which would include community benefits, quality frameworks and the cost and quality of outcomes
- endeavour as far as is possible to provide access to the VCS to allow it to tender and to make information about to key contacts, departments, information points and opportunities for commissioning available
- engage the VCS in commissioning strategies and process wherever possible
- agree to explore alternatives to in-house provision and to test assumptions in this area
- undertake that, as far as is possible, and subject to constraints upon government funding, to put budget setting, awards and renewals in a timeframe that does not disadvantage VCS organisations
- assist, facilitate and clarify the form filling process for tenders as far as is possible and practical
- provide information about what may be included in Full Cost Recovery
- the public sector undertakes to give a reasonable notice of the extension or termination of contracts, within the constraints of timeframes that may be set by government funding, in order to allow VCS groups to adjust accordingly
- provide a clear and transparent process of review and consultation so that all parties are aware, and agree on what is being reviewed and why

# Slough Compact Protocols

## Communication

Communication between the voluntary and community sector and the public sector should be clear, concise, effective, easily understood and should meet the needs of a diverse community.

Good communication is the cornerstone of a positive working relationship and shows mutual respect. It must focus on ensuring that the right people are targeted at the right time and in the right way.

**There is common agreement** that the following things are necessary for good communication and will be put in place by each partner:

- Positive feedback is essential and underpins a strong relationship.
- Up-to-date contact information should be readily available and each partner undertakes to provide this.
- A single point of contact for enquiries, problems, questions and information is the most effective method of accessing public sector bodies and voluntary and community organisations and where possible this will be made available.
- Existing networks such as Partnership Boards and the Community Care Forum as well as specific events such as the Volunteering Fair, Funding Fair and Slough Focus should be used as opportunities for sharing information.
- Both sectors agree to ensure that communication is available at the right time and in good time, for example advance notice of meetings, to allow for any preliminary work or actions to be carried out.
- Information about key policy, service or personnel changes and the promotion of important events should be shared promptly and clearly.
- From time to time it may be helpful to share information and publicity.
- Each sector recognises that it may be necessary and important for partners to make public statements that reflect its policy and approach to issues but that they will endeavour to respect the position of others.

The Public Sector will:

- Undertake to develop and put in place suitable methods of communication to improve its contact with the Voluntary and Community Sector.
- Publish communication strategies (where these exists) and provide a forward plan.
- Use a variety of appropriate and proactive communication methods that take into account accessibility and knowledge of recipients.

The Voluntary and Community Sector will:

- Recognise and adhere to internal public sector systems for communication when it is shared.

# Slough Compact Protocols

## Community Development and Capacity Building

**By community development and capacity building, we refer to a set of approaches and initiatives that have the overlapping objectives of:**

- Helping local people to grow in confidence and skills so as to be able to work together to find their own solutions to local problems.
- Strengthening community networks for information sharing and mutual support, and widening who they include.
- Developing effective business and community organisations that become self-sustaining.
- Promoting resilient communities.

### **There is Common Agreement that:**

Working together effectively to achieve these objectives requires:

- a willingness on all sides to start from where people and organisations are and develop shared understandings of what different players can realistically contribute.
- wide use both of different local languages and different modes of communication so as to engage a wide cross-section of local people.

Given the diverse and changing population of the Borough and the challenges facing public agencies in delivering the local community strategy that a strong commitment to community development and capacity building on all sides of the community, voluntary and public sector partnership is required.



## To support this all parties agree:

- to show tolerance and flexibility and to negotiate their mutual relationships, taking account of changing capacities and support needs
- to develop an inclusive community that thrives on diversity
- the necessity to start from where people and organisations currently are
- to develop a shared understanding of what different players can realistically contribute

**Voluntary and Community Sector organisations** that seek to play a part in local life undertake to accept the responsibility for developing effectiveness in delivering their chosen goals and working towards self-sufficiency in their activities.

## The Public Sector

Slough Borough Council agrees that it has a lead role and will work towards a position where it is able to:

- strengthen its own capacity for working within a community development framework
- support other public agencies in using these approaches.
- make an effort to ensure that initiatives from different agencies are mutually informed and well-co-ordinated.

While community capacity-building should be part of many peoples' roles in partner agencies, it also requires skilled and dedicated professional support to be effective.

# Slough Compact Protocols

## Community Engagement (Consultation)

There is common agreement that:

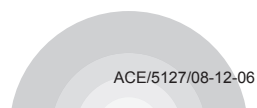
- Consultation is a two way process in which all are equal partners.
- All parties should be consulted, informed and involved in major issues for the town and encouraged to take part opportunities to discuss them.
- Feedback is important, making use of responses to consultation and making those who took part aware of the results.
- Guidelines for good practice, should be developed that are clear, transparent, dynamic, flexible, and regularly reviewed and updated.
- Consultation and community engagement should be tailored to the audience. This includes providing materials which are accessible (e.g. in community languages, in large print, paper copies), clear (using words and concepts familiar to the audience) and realistic, taking into account the time and other resources available to those taking part.

The Public sector:

- Will (as far as possible) identify and map community stakeholders and the voluntary and the community sector undertakes to assist in that process and to establish clear aims for community engagement
- Accepts the need to engage with the community prior to consultation, to encourage the voluntary and community sector in helping to set the agenda and to avoid confusion between 'briefings' and 'consultation'.
- Undertakes to ensure that early and meaningful consultation takes place which feeds into any decision making process.
- Undertakes to share information gathered during the consultation process and to inform the voluntary and community sector what other consultations are ongoing
- Will use community specialists/experts for consultation wherever possible and will reimburse any reasonable costs incurred by individuals or organisations taking part in a consultation.

## The Voluntary and Community sector:

- Will endeavour to establish a structure for participation, engagement and representation.
- Accepts the need to be realistic about the limits of power that the public sector possesses.
- Undertakes to assist the Public sector to identify and map out community stake holders.



# Slough Compact Protocols

## Finance and Funding

The Voluntary and Community Sector looks to the Public Sector for financial support and the Public Sector looks to the VCS as a key strategic partner and for service delivery. Financial matters can define and over-burden the relationship, it is critical that the Compact articulates the common understanding and contributes to an equitable relationship where funding matters do not dominate the relationship.

There is common agreement

- There is a need to discuss with the VCS strategic planning; for funding and the VCS accepts that the Public Sector will take many issues into account when it sets priorities
- That funding criteria that is clear, consistent, transparent with accountability for any grants awarded is essential.
- The Public Sector has finite resources available to them and with the best will in the world will not be able to meet all expectations and there is need to manage VCS expectations
- That the VCS must be realistic about what can be managed and the Public Sector understands that not all VCS groups wish to grow.
- That both sectors need to work towards improved access to resources for the VCS this includes:
- An understandable and competent tendering process for Public Sector services is essential.
- About the need to develop advice, guidance, support and training for the VCS.
- That constraints upon central government funding to local statutory agencies for service delivery means that cash and time limits cannot be extended and some funding may be subject to short notice periods.

## The Public Sector:

- Undertakes to set priorities and demonstrate their local relevance and to be equitable, culturally and linguistically sensitive and provide equality of access in its financial dealings with the VCS.
- Accepts the need to provide clear and consistent information about the criteria and processes for applications and bidding. This includes making sure that they are accessible and understandable.
- Will be open to new methods of monitoring and evaluation wherever possible and to link it to size and risk (e.g. ESF funding) and make grant holders clear about the criteria.
- Understands the need to assist with capacity building and to provide clarity about VCS groups that wish to expand into Public Sector service delivery may do so. This will include a pre-qualification database of Voluntary and Community Sector groups and support with development to meet qualification criteria
- Agrees to continue their commitment to long term (currently three years) strategic (corporate) funding arrangements where possible
- Will be as clear as possible about cash and time limits set by central government on some funding.

## The Voluntary and Community Sector:

- Recognises that it has a responsibility to organise itself effectively and to communicate clearly.
- Accepts that monitoring and evaluation is part of grant process that must be completed in a proper and timely way.
- Accepts that the Public Sector is often constrained by external funding requirements and may not always be able to vary these.

# Slough Compact Protocols

## Partnership Working

Partnership has come to mean both formal arrangements for joint working and less formal collaboration between organisations and agencies that have a shared need or opportunity.

Partnership working is both a vital way of ensuring a solid infrastructure for the town which allows problems to be shared and resolutions found and, often, a requirement to ensure funding and resources from government and other agencies.

It is generally accepted that collaboration brings more effective and efficient results and can reduce confusion among residents and clients of services, particularly those who live in disadvantaged communities.

**A strong Compact depends on the quality of its partnerships, the protocols articulate this. The Partnership protocol summarises shared values and key principles that will allow the Compact to be tested.**

**Accordingly there is shared agreement that**

The values and principles of the Compact apply to successful partnership and these are listed below.

- Respect and understanding
- Equality
- Diversity/accepting difference (and different points of view)
- Value others
- Integrity and honesty
- Flexibility
- Transparency
- Openness
- Clarity
- Professionalism



Successful Partnership requires common values and mutual respect to make it strong this is built upon good communication and interpersonal relationships that can take time to establish, there are fundamental requirements of good partnership:

- all parties, including clients and customers, should be treated in the same way - with respect, dignity and good service.
- avoids a blame culture
- rests on a shared commitment and mutual responsibility
- it requires:
  - professional courtesy and professional practice
  - mutual respect and understanding
  - clear and fair rules on funding and governance
  - clear and open communication
  - a willingness to negotiate and compromise (and 'active listening')
  - a willingness to solve problems and meet challenges together

# Slough Compact Protocols

## Volunteering

Volunteers are an essential part of the well being of any community and they make a vital contribution to service delivery.

All organisations in Slough (voluntary, statutory and private) recognise the value and celebrate the contribution of volunteers to the economic and social development of the town.

### **There is common agreement that all partners will:**

- work to ensure volunteering is open and accessible to everyone and remove barriers to volunteering opportunities such as gender, age, qualifications, race, religion and sexual orientation.
- actively work to ensure that there are diverse roles and opportunities available to volunteers.
- provide an adequate and reasonable period of consultation specific to volunteering which may need to be over and above that listed in the consultation code of practice in order to allow volunteers time to respond to a changing situation.
- actively work to encourage volunteering whilst recognising and respecting that volunteering is a free choice.
- endeavour to ensure that volunteers are representative of Slough's diverse community.
- undertake to ensure that volunteers are not used as a substitute for any paid role.
- ensure that volunteers have clearly defined role and job descriptions and that the health and safety of volunteers and end users is secured.
- work towards volunteers not being out of pocket because of their volunteering activity.
- recognise the need for a local volunteering infrastructure.

## **There is also common agreement that:**

- volunteers should be made welcome and treated as an integral part of their organisation and given the same treatment as salaried staff such as induction training, participation in team meetings, involvement in social events.
- funding bodies should accept that volunteer's expenses are a legitimate cost.
- volunteers should be given sufficient and appropriate resources in order to fulfil their role and to encourage their continual involvement in volunteering.

# " THE COMPACT "

Working together in partnership

## Partners

Slough Council for Voluntary Service

Slough Borough Council

Slough Business Community Partnership

Slough Race Equality Council

Slough Refugee Support

Volunteer Centre Slough

East Berkshire College

Thames Valley University

Learning and Skills Council

Thames Valley Police

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service

Heatherwood & Wexham Park NHS Trust

For more information visit: [www.slough.gov.uk](http://www.slough.gov.uk)