

# COMPACT AT WORK

**Compact**  
voice

Making the Compact work for you

## Hertfordshire: surviving a Compact stress-test

The relationship between the voluntary and community sector in Hertfordshire has come under considerable strain since Hertfordshire County Council reviewed its funding of the voluntary and community sector following the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR 2010). Cuts have been made, as have mistakes, but the VCS is learning to frame its arguments and the council is beginning to listen.

### Impact

There are a number of ways to assess the health of a local partnership, ranging from monitoring the perceptions of partners to measuring statistical trends on the outcomes of joint working.

However, the only way you can really understand the robustness of a partnership is by seeing how it performs under stress. The relationship between the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) is going through such a test.

Despite the fact that many within the VCS have felt that the HCC has been over zealous in the way it has made cuts to the sector, they have continued to present a reasoned and coordinated point of view in dialogue with the council. For their part, the council has given proper consideration to the information that the VCS has provided and in some cases they have been persuaded to reverse their decision to cancel contracts.

A history of working together under a strong local Compact in Hertfordshire

has left a legacy of two sectors that are capable of speaking one-another's language and willing to hear one-another's point of view, no matter how contradictory they might be.

### Summary

Hertfordshire has a relatively strong Compact. Indeed, last year Compact Voice recognised various aspects of the councils funding practices in awarding the area a Green Flag. However, the partnership between the HCC and the VCS has come under stress since the CSR 2010.

The council received lower than average cuts to its budgets (-1.5% compared to an average cut of 5.7%). It may have been expected, therefore, that a more collaborative and positive exchange with the VCS over managing cuts would have taken place than appears to have occurred initially.

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### Compact Principles

1: Partnership  
working

### Tags

Campaigning

Cuts

Evaluation

Local Compacts

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It seems that some of the initial cuts being made to VCS organisations did not represent social value for the community. Although recipients of HCC grants/contracts were all required to complete an impact assessment form, little notice was taken of those organisations whose beneficiaries or services would be significantly affected by the required level of savings. There was a feeling amongst some VCS representatives that the council was – even in a challenging financial climate – being high-handed when making cuts to the sector.

However, previous years of cross partnership effort to develop the VCS in Hertfordshire has ensured that it was sufficiently engaged and empowered to respond to the situation constructively.

For example, as well as support for VCS organisations in finding alternative funding streams, CVS St. Albans has been able to re-open a dialogue about funding decisions.

CVS St. Albans has helped VCS organisations to frame their concerns about the impact that their loss of funding will have on the community. In some cases the council has taken this on board and has even decided to continue some contracts at a reduced level where they had previously decided to end it all together.

Crucially, it is not the mere fact that the council has changed its decision to cancel these contracts that is encouraging. Rather, it is the fact that they were willing not only to listen, but to seriously consider the views of their VCS partners. However not all groups have brought this to the attention of CVS St. Albans or have the capacity to make a claim.

There is – despite the tensions between the sectors in Hertfordshire – a belief that the council takes into consideration the impact that funding cuts to the VCS may have, and its obligation to be Compact compliant seriously.



## Quote

“The Compact framework has helped to shape the format of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) ensuring sufficient notice was given and encouraging an open dialogue between the VCS and the local authority. It has also made it easier for infrastructure agencies to challenge decisions that have an unreasonable impact on vulnerable communities, although there are still cases that remain unresolved.”

Laura Cronshaw, Chief Executive  
CVS St. Albans

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## Relevant Compact Principles

1: Partnership working

## Related links

- [Hertfordshire Compact](#)
- [CVS St. Albans](#)