Compact
voice

Compact Peer Review Tool

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Compact Toolkit:

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this tool is to enable peer review of local Compact operations according to commonly agreed procedures, questions and values. This is aimed at making the Compact stronger and more effective in your region, thus creating a fairer and more productive relationship between statutory and voluntary and community sectors to the benefit of people and the environment in the region.

The tool may also be used internally by a local Compact partnership or an agency which is a major partner in a Compact to review its own Compact work and compliance.

Status

The Compact, and hence this tool, is a key contributor to the Government's Change Agenda and to other similar present and future policies.

The tool is intended to remain useful over a number of years and be able to be revised rather than discarded when circumstances such as relevant legislation and national government policies change. However, to ensure continued relevance, the tool should be reviewed within three years of its adoption.

A Binding Context

The text of the tool assumes adherence to, and therefore does not reproduce, the current national Compact and the law of the land. In a local context it assumes adherence to the relevant local Compact(s). Its values are those of the national Compact and of Compact Voice.

HOW IT CAN BE USED

When the tool should be used

Local Compact groups may choose to have regular reviews automatically after, say, four years. The frequency set for such reviews will be set in the light of perceived local need and the ability of other Compact groups to respond to demand for peer review.

A local group may decide to have a peer review when they spot signs that their Compact may be experiencing problems under the radar, or when it runs into substantial criticism or adverse survey results.

Possible warning signs:

Dropping membership	Where signing-up procedures mean that membership of the local Compact requires some effort and numbers of member organisations can be measured precisely
Declining attendance at meetings	Committed Compact activists may be over-optimistic about such attendance, but if attendances have fallen this is a warning sign. However, in the first year after a major revision or re-launch, some falling off is no surprise
Growing imbalance in the apparent commitment of the two sectors	For example, if similar levels of enthusiasm and attendance in the two sectors change so that one sector is seriously underrepresented
Difficulty in recruiting to membership of the Steering Group (or equivalent)	Especially if recruitment was not previously a problem
Minimal reporting of Compact issues	This might mean that no problems are occurring, but is more likely to mean that the Compact has lost credibility or is not known about
Dismissive reactions to the Compact by influential people	(For example, Chief Executives in either sector or leading councillors) especially if not balanced by strongly supportive reactions
Increasing incidence of problems or familiar problems becoming worse	However, awareness of more problems does not necessarily mean there actually are more problems
Little success in resolving Compact issues brought to the Steering Group's attention	Especially if it seems clear that there was a breach of the Compact
Action not being taken to address Compact breaches	Compact activists (such as the Steering Group chair or the local lead) becoming aware of a high proportion of cases where someone felt there had been a breach of the Compact, but took no action because they had no confidence it would do any good or out of fear of victimisation ("our own grant is up for review next year").
Disappointing levels of response to or answers to surveys on Compact issues	For example, from Compact champions or VCS organisations
Lack of coherent communication between sectors	Statutory and voluntary organisations appearing to be talking different languages or pursuing different agendas that do not intersect
Partnership activity not linked back to the Compact:	Partnership activity is occurring but is not linked to the Compact.

Note that the signs of decline may not be obvious and may occur alongside a great deal of activity.

Building up a picture

The tool does not produce a score. It should always be used with common sense and flexibility, taking into account local circumstances and the broad picture. **An unexpected answer to one question indicates something to look at more closely, but not necessarily a problem**. There are no automatically right answers. After the tool has been used, the answers should be discussed between reviewer and reviewed, and the reviewer should write up and present to the reviewed Compact group a description of the strengths, weaknesses and key issues for development of their Compact.

Depending on the depth and breadth proposed for the peer review and the resources available, reviewer and reviewed may agree to use only certain parts of the tool.

Finding a peer reviewer

It may be best not to go to someone immediately next door, as you may know one another too well, and unwelcome messages might even be held back because of important joint projects in the pipeline. For similar reasons, while relations between district and county Compact groups (where both exist) should be close and mutually supportive, it would be best to avoid a county Compact being reviewed by a district within that county or a district one by the county it's in. While there are advantages in a mutual arrangement (you peer review us and we'll peer review you) in a build-up of trust, mutual knowledge and personal links, it would risk subverting the exercise through loss of objectivity. You may approach another Compact group in the region yourself, or put the appeal through the regional Compact network. That network will establish a system for responding.

WHAT IS A HEALTHY COMPACT?

Two things to be evaluated

This tool may be used to evaluate two related but not identical things. It may be important to distinguish between the two:

- Healthy relations between statutory and voluntary sectors in the area – and
- The local Compact operation doing the right things and improving relations, even if it is from bad to moderate. Evidence of weaknesses in statutory – voluntary relations should be recognised by the responsible Compact group, which should make and implement plans to deal with the problems, but evidence that there's a long way to go is not necessarily evidence that a change of direction is needed.

The world outside

The purpose of creating trusting, productive, fair relations between the two sectors is not to make the two sectors happy, but to make life better for people in the area. Relations can sometimes be too cosy.

Compact Toolkit

Compact voice

1: Membership and level and reach of involvement

a. Do organisations have to sign up to be in membership, or is membership assumed through being part of a Local Strategic Partnership or being on the CVS mailing list, for example?	
b. Is there any way an organisation can drop out of membership other than by resigning or refusing to sign up to a revised Compact – for example by the Champion or equivalent standing down and not being replaced despite reminders?	
c. If a signing-up procedure exists, what is the trend in membership – up, down or flatlining?	
d. Are there any trends in the type of membership, for example progress being made in signing up the remaining statutory agencies while no progress is being made with increasing voluntary sector membership?	

e. Does the Compact cover social enterprises, and have some signed up?	
f. Do some organisations, particularly large organisations, nominate more than one champion or equivalent?	
g. Does the Compact Group have procedures for dealing with disputes about membership such as whether an organisation is genuine and whether membership is appropriate?	

2: Policy and priorities

a. What do the major statutory sector agencies want from the voluntary sector? Is the Compact addressing this, including any conflicts resulting from this?	
b. What influence does the voluntary sector and the Compact group have on statutory sector policy formulation, including deciding what to commission and how?	
c. Do both sectors work together to shape the markets that are their shared space?	
d. Do both sectors, through the Compact Group or otherwise, develop joint responses to central government programmes	
e. Are major policy decisions by the statutory sector Compact-proofed, formally or in effect, informally? Is the Compact-proofing robust and fair? What impact does it have if it identifies issues? Is the Compact group consulted?	

f. Are major policy decisions by the voluntary sector with implications for relations with the statutory sector Compact-proofed (and other questions as above)?	
g. What consideration is given to equality and diversity issues when deciding Compact priorities?	
h. What consideration has been given by the local authority or authorities, by the Compact group and by lead bodies for the voluntary sector, to the Best Value Statutory Guidance issued by the Government in September 2011? (This point will need to be changed if the Statutory Guidance is withdrawn, superseded or supplemented).	
i. How well known is the Statutory Guidance (or later similar guidance) in the local authority or authorities and to what extent is it implemented?	
j. What consideration has been given by the local authority or authorities, by the Compact Group and by lead bodies for the voluntary sector, to the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 and/or any relevant subsequent legislation? With what impact?	

3: Procedures and systems

a. Is there an annual Compact meeting in the area? Is it well-attended and by a good range of representatives (both sectors, young and old, BME and disability organisations, all main parts of the area)? Does it generate lively discussion?	
b. Is the Compact group elected? Does the ruling document (terms of reference or whatever) ensure balanced representation? Are the elections contested, or at least, are enough candidates found to fill the places?	
c. Does the Compact group have clear rules for its meetings and activities? Are they relevant and helpful?	
d. Are the meetings of the Compact group constructive, open to all to voice their opinions and businesslike? E.g., are issues decided at one meeting argued again at the next, or does the meeting take half its time on matters arising? Are reports presented in advance, and if so, do people seem to have read them?	

e. Are all member organisations required to nominate champions (under that name or another)?	
f. Do the champions or equivalent seem to be in appropriate positions and functions?	
g. Are there some member champions as well as officer champions – for example, elected councillors?	
h. Is the operation of the Compact reviewed annually, for example through a report to an annual meeting?	
i. When was the content of the local Compact last reviewed? Has it been reviewed in the light of the latest national Compact, taking account both of local priorities and situations and of the thinking behind national developments?	
j. To what extent does the current text of the local Compact, including additional material, address the main local issues?	

4: Training and induction

a. Is training offered to Compact champions or their equivalent?	
b. What is the level of take-up?	
c. Is it innovative, interesting and factually accurate?	
d. Is there evidence that it's effective and appreciated?	
e. Do champions or their equivalent understand their role? What is the evidence for this?	

f. Is the Compact covered in induction for members (of councils, NHS boards, CVS boards and so on)? To what extent? Is there evidence of this having an impact?	
g. Is the Compact covered in induction for staff of some key agencies, for example CVSs and local authorities? To what extent and with what impact?	
h. What is the extent of networking between champions or their equivalents? Is this made easy by, for example, an on-line forum or regular meetings?	

5: Gathering information and acting on it

a. How well does information flow to the Compact Group from champions or their equivalent?	
b. Does the Group or a key member such as the CVS regularly survey members and/or champions or their equivalent on Compact issues and activity?	
c. What is done with the information gathered?	
d. How well does information flow from the Compact group to member and other relevant organisations?	
e. How well does information flow from the Compact group to member and other relevant organisations?	

f. To what extent are the decisions of the Compact Group evidence-based?	
g. Can the Compact Group, directly or through asking partners, answer key questions about voluntary-statutory relations in the area such as what the trends in funding are?	
h. Do the two sectors share information and analysis on central government policy developments?	

6: The condition of the voluntary sector and voluntary-statutory relations

a. Is the level of activity (including volunteering) in the local voluntary sector increasing or decreasing? Why?	
b. Is the level of statutory sector funding for the local voluntary sector (including contracts and support in kind) increasing or decreasing? How does this compare with national trends? Why? Note: a reduction in funding does not necessarily indicate a deterioration of relations or a departure from Compact principles.	
c. Is local statutory funding of voluntary sector infrastructure services, whether by grant, procured services or both, sufficiently stable to allow planning and sufficiently flexible to ensure it does its job? Is the system broadly acceptable to the voluntary sector?	
d. To what extent can the local voluntary sector speak its mind to the statutory sector and its private sector contractors?	

e. When the voluntary sector needs to speak with one voice to agencies outside the sector, can it do so (for example, through a Forum)? Does it do so in an effective and timely way?	
f. How widespread and deep is the local voluntary sector's understanding of statutory agency priorities and processes?	
g. How widespread and deep is the statutory sector's understanding of and valuing of (not the same thing) the local voluntary sector? Is it getting better or worse?	
h. Is statutory sector funding for the voluntary sector (remembering that the type of funding may change) increasing, reducing or staying much the same? Do the local authorities, the CVSs and the Compact group actually know the answer to this?	

i. How often does the statutory sector fail to consult before making funding decisions affecting the voluntary sector? What are the trends?	
j. How often does the statutory sector fail to give three months' notice before cutting or allocating funding? What are the trends?	
k. Does the statutory sector seriously consider social, environmental and economic value when making funding decisions, including the contracting process?	

7: Publicity and communication

a. Do key partners like the local authority and CVS make clear their commitment to the Compact on their websites? Is there a link from the home-page – what to?	
b. Does the local Compact have its own website or web page? Is it attractive, accessible and informative? Are there figures on usage and what story do they tell?	
c. How are success stories of Compact work publicised? Is there reason to think they reach a lot of people?	
d. Is the Compact referred to in annual reports or at meetings, for example the CVS AGM or workshops on issues like Personalisation of social care or the Right to Challenge?	
e. Are councillors, especially newly-elected ones, briefed on the Compact?	

f. How is the Compact publicised internally by member organisations, particularly but not solely the key ones like the local authority, NHS trusts and consortia and CVSs? How do you know? Are Champions or their equivalent involved?	
g. Do key decision-makers in both sectors understand the Compact and know where they can find Compact information?	
h. Do both sectors understand that the Compact is a commitment by and is binding on BOTH sectors?	

8: Wider links

a. Does the Compact group review external guidance and good practice such as those provided by Compact Voice?	
b. Is the relationship with Compact Voice productive and mutually informative?	
c. Does the local Group communicate with other Compact groups, especially in the region? Is the communication mutually productive?	
d. Is the Compact lead involved in the Regional Network and do they report back?	
e. Has the Compact Group formed any links to the private sector?	
f. Is the Compact group proactive in pursuing new audiences and opportunities (such as Health and Wellbeing Boards and GP Consortia for example)	

9: Trouble-shooting

a. If someone has a problem which they think is a Compact issue – or if they are uncertain about a Compact issue – do they bring it to the attention of Compact champions (or their equivalent) or the Compact group? To what extent?	
b. Do Compact champions or their equivalent become involved in disputes so they can provide information and try to find common ground - or are they acting as spokespeople for the organisation that appointed them?	
c. To what extent do champions or their equivalent report on thornier issues to the Group?	
d. Is there a procedure for mediation or arbitration?	
e. Do people know about it? Is it used?	

f. What are the outcomes from the process?	
g. Given that most Compact issues, once raised, will be settled informally, what is the track record in changing decisions or processes through informal contacts?	
h. How is advocacy publicised and employed? Is it effective?	

10: Looking ahead and being proactive

a. Is the local Compact group anticipating issues before they appear as local complaints or reports, for example from looking at new legislation or reports of what is happening elsewhere in the country?	
b. Do the local Compact group and its partners prepare for eventualities such as loss of funding or departure of key people?	
c. Does the local Compact group have a picture of the likely state of voluntary-statutory relations in the area in, say, five or ten years' time? Does this picture affect its actions?	
d. Does the Group – or its major partners - have a credible vision for how voluntary-statutory relations should be in a number of years? How is it working towards this?	
e. What does the Group (and champions in member organisations) do to prevent problems occurring? Does it work?	

CONCLUSION

This tool will work if Compact activists do not lose their enthusiasm and vision – and the Compact remains relevant.

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