

North East Lincolnshire

Compact

working together | better together

Community Groups
Code of Good Practice

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Introduction

Community groups play an important part in the life of North East Lincolnshire. The development of forums as part of Neighbourhood Renewal is one illustration of how they can be used as a vehicle for effective community engagement.

But the relationship between community groups and the public and voluntary sectors is not always straightforward. Furthermore, establishing and then growing credible community groups can be a difficult process complicated by issues and personalities.

A key objective of this good practice code is to assist this process. In addition, it builds upon and underpins the principles of the North East Lincolnshire Compact.

The Compact is the framework for partnership working between the public and the voluntary and community sectors. It aims to improve this relationship for the benefit of all involved.

It also aims to:

- provide a basis for mutual trust and acceptance of the roles and responsibilities of the public sector and community groups;
- recognise the diversity and contribution of the community sector, and promote understanding of what community groups contribute as an important resource;
- deal with relationships between the community and voluntary sectors, as well as with the public sector, by setting out separate agreements for all three.

The community sector and its importance

The community sector is made up of personal relationships, groups, networks, traditions and patterns of behaviour among people who share physical neighbourhoods, living conditions or common understandings and interests.

It is the community taking action to get things done, although much of its activity is informal and often invisible. The community sector ranges from small informal community groups to large multi-purpose community organisations. The community sector is led by values, which include:

- being able to make decisions themselves
- equality
- social justice
- co-operation and
- the importance of local delivery at a personal level.
- mutuality.

In this context, mutuals are non-profit making organisations where any surpluses made are returned to their members. Mutual organisations exist for the benefit of members and for the purpose of trying to improve their members' lives.

The community sector's value extends far beyond the services it delivers, and includes:

- encouraging people to take part in their communities;
- building social capital;
- improving local democracy; and
- strengthening the feeling of community.

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

The community sector covers the entire range of policy and services. Its activities can range from nurseries and playgroups to community centres and village halls, from tenants' associations to environmental groups, from arts and sports groups to credit unions, and from self-help groups to scout groups.

Examples include Shoreline Housing Partnership's Tenants and Residents' Associations (TARAs) and the forum groups being developed as part of North East Lincolnshire's Neighbourhood Renewal programme.

The public sector sees the community groups as important partners because such activity is a vital building block in developing a more active and involved society. The TARAs and forward groups, for instance, represent opportunities for effective and sustainable "bottom up" community engagement.

Community groups offer a way for local statutory agencies to reach into communities and listen to their views and concerns. They make a substantial contribution to social unity, health and regeneration, and are vital in transforming neighbourhoods and communities.

Community groups can play many roles in their neighbourhoods. They can:

- give a voice to communities and help to strengthen local democracy;
- encourage a balance between self-interest and active citizenship;
- assess the needs of their communities;
- make sure public sector programme resources intended for communities reach them;
- be the first link in breaking the isolation of people who are socially excluded;
- build community unity through community-based events and festivals;
- drive changes to services or kick start activities to address issues;
- provide access to the arts and to sports facilities in poorer or more remote communities; and
- promote a shared responsibility for community safety.

Providing services is an important part of the work of community groups, in a number of situations where:

- a service cannot be provided by a statutory organisation;
- a statutory organisation cannot provide a service economically because of geography, culture or limited scale;
- a service supports existing statutory services, and benefits from community involvement and management;
- a community organisation grows larger and is able to deliver statutory services under contract; or
- a quick response is necessary for an identified need.

To do this, they need access to appropriate support (see North East Lincolnshire's Compact code of good practice on funding).

Summary of undertakings

Joint undertakings

The public and community sectors are committed to developing and maintaining best practice and mutual respect in their relationship. To act in line with the Compact, they agree to do the following.

- Keep to the Compact, this and the four other codes of good practice as they apply to community groups.
- Make suitable mention of this code of good practice (along with the Compact and its other codes) as appropriate and legal, in public sector documents and in voluntary and community sector publications.
- Develop a partnership approach to address North East Lincolnshire's Community Strategy, including promoting and sharing best practice and celebrating success.
- Promote community development based on the following definition:

“Community development is about building active and sustainable communities based on social justice and mutual respect. It is about changing power structures to remove the barriers that prevent people from participating in the issues that affect their lives. It promotes the active involvement of people through sharing power, skills, knowledge and expertise.”

Strategic Framework for Community Development published by the Standing Conference for Community Development in May 2001.

Public sector undertakings

In setting the policy framework:

- Take account of the community sector's needs and role, when setting policies or procedures or carrying out a regulatory role.
- Develop policies towards communities that recognise the importance of communities of people that share a common interest or concern, as well as communities of place.
- Help create and maintain the conditions and support that help community groups to succeed.
- Make sure that regulations affecting community groups are in proportion to the size of the group, and the effects of new regulations are appropriately assessed before they are finalised.
- Involve people with first-hand experience of particular problems in developing solutions (for example, disadvantaged people, socially-excluded and difficult-to-engage groups, people with disabilities and so on, through self-help or user-led groups) and give the process resources as appropriate.
- Value the work, knowledge and expertise of the community sector, including its important role in helping the public sector achieve its aims.

On funding and other support:

- Simplify the delivery of small-grants funding programmes for community groups, to increase access and to get as many people as possible involved in administration and decision-making.
- Recognise the value of the contributions of volunteer time to projects, as equivalent to match funding.
- Take positive action to see fair treatment and equal access in applications to funding programmes for all community groups, including faith groups and those who are not normally funded.
- Be prepared to take risks to support new ideas and business within communities, but still use public money wisely.
- Recognise the importance of community ownership of assets, including land and property, as a basis for community enterprise and development at local level.
- Consider how North East Lincolnshire Council can make it easier for the resources needed to develop and maintain a community sector infrastructure at all levels to become available.
- Recognise and promote the need for accessible learning and development support for community groups and active community members.
- Encourage and promote people to use suitable community buildings, such as community centres and other facilities, as much as possible.
- Encourage support for local voluntary sector infrastructure and networking, which encompasses an independent community sector.

On working in partnership:

- Recognise that communities need resources for partnership working and involvement.
- Make sure that community needs are identified by communities themselves, and that community groups have opportunities to manage projects and have a say in what is considered to be a successful outcome.
- Deliver race equality, including by involving Black and minority ethnic groups.
- Make sure that public sector employees working with communities are adequately trained to do so effectively.
- Recognise the contribution community groups make to the Community Strategy, North East Lincolnshire's Strategic Partnership, and in Best Value reviews and Comprehensive Performance Assessments.

Community sector undertakings

The community sector promises to:

- Accept that, as they receive funding, there is a need for monitoring and evaluating their spending, in proportion to the size of the grant.
- Encourage quality partnership working and community involvement.
- Encourage the community to get involved and take control wherever possible.
- Tackle racism and other forms of discrimination, no matter where it comes from.
- Be clear and open as to the community or constituency a particular group speaks for.
- Where appropriate and where it is able, channel information and views to and from its members or constituency.
- Make sure that, where there is a development agency specifically working with community groups, it co-operates with other appropriate voluntary sector organisations.

Voluntary sector undertakings

The voluntary sector promises to:

- Play an enabling role which supports the community sector in its diversity.
- Consult the community sector and consider its different interests alongside those of the voluntary sector before responding to invitations for representation on partnership organisations and other local structures.
- Challenge timescales that prevent community groups getting involved.
- Recognise the interests of community and voluntary organisations are not always the same, and so make clear which part of the sector is being represented or discussed, when necessary.
- Respond to the information, involvement, practical support and training and conference sponsorship needs of community groups, and count this as a service priority.
- Ask for the views of community groups when reviewing organisational management and looking at forward planning, and include their views when being evaluated by funders.
- Make sure that voluntary sector organisations co-operate with agencies specifically working with the community sector, where these exist.
- Respect the views of other organisations, including community groups, voluntary sector groups, the public sector, and work constructively with them, especially when there are many viewpoints and interests.
- Acknowledge how appropriate it is for voluntary community representatives taking the chair of networks and, in general, be aware of possible conflicts of interest.
- Encourage active community members to carry out leadership roles in voluntary and community sector networks.
- Evaluate the difference made as a result of putting this code into practice, and draw on the results to revise the code as may be mutually agreed by everyone involved.

Consultation

The public and voluntary sectors recognise consultation is at the heart of their relationship. This is covered by the North East Lincolnshire Compact's Code on Consultation and Policy Appraisal.

Conclusion

This code of good practice will be used to set up and improve relations between the public and community sectors, and to help make sure genuine recognition is given to the diversity of the community sector and its activities.

The Compact Steering Group, North East Lincolnshire Council and other public bodies and third sector organisations will work together to promote awareness and use of this code.



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North East Lincolnshire Compact

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Churches Together
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