



# BRIEFING

## **‘Strengthening Partnerships: Next Steps for Compact’**

### **The Relationship between the Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector**

**Home Office consultation.**

**Deadline for responses to the Active Community Unit at the Home Office is 12<sup>th</sup> July 2005.**

‘Strengthening Partnerships: Next Steps for Compact’ is a consultation document published by the Home Office’s Active Community Unit in March 2005. It seeks views on proposals to strengthen the existing Compact arrangements between the voluntary and community sectors (VCS) and public sector bodies such as local authorities and primary care trusts. Most local authority areas in England either have or are developing them. They are documents setting out an agreement between them about how they will conduct their relationship. This can include items such as how much consultation time the public sector body promises to allow the VCS feed into local policy and practice decisions and that the VCS will operate in a transparent way.

However, the current Compact arrangements have been criticised for being inaccessible because the codes are lengthy so it is difficult to be sure whether an action goes against the Compact. Where there is particularly good or bad practice, there is no clear way to highlight it.

The new proposals do not automatically replace the original Compact arrangements. Instead they make for an advanced form of it. Partners would be able to opt-in to it and it would be called ‘*Compact Plus*’. Compact Plus is in part intended to place greater emphasis on the funding relationship.

Precise proposals include all partners agreeing to “mainstream the Compact across” their organisation. Specific suggestions for commitments from public sector bodies include implementing “multi-year funding models and make payments promptly, offering payments in advance of expenditure to organisations

wherever appropriate”; giving “a legitimate proportion of funding for overhead costs”; to “respect the independence” of the VCS; and to “work with the breadth” of the VCS. Suggestions for specific VCS commitments include having “a real understanding of cost bases and the proper application of full cost recovery”; “when competing for contracts, set[ting] out clear outcomes which will be delivered”; having “robust monitoring, evaluation and financial management systems”; and operating “through open and accountable organisations”. It is recommended that the full list of commitments be supported by definitions to minimise the risk of non-compliance and arguments about what is meant by each commitment.

The major new suggestion is the introduction of a *Compact Champion* whose assistance would be available to Compact Plus members and those working towards it. The champion would be neutral between the VCS and government and responsible for:

- helping potential Compact Plus members to understand it
- reviewing compliance with Compact Plus, this being a condition of membership
- deciding whether a member has not complied with Compact Plus when a complaint is made
- possibly withdrawing Compact Plus membership
- possibly imposing penalties
- possibly awarding compensation
- awarding a ‘kitemark’ for display on publicity material

The government will “work with the voluntary and community sector and the Compact Working Group [VCS group working with government]...with the aim of publishing final joint proposals in Autumn 2005.”

The consultation carries questions covering a wide range of issues. They include how you think the VCS should be referred to i.e. VCS, ‘third sector’, ‘not-for-profit sector’ etc. and whether you would add or remove anything from the full list of proposed commitments.

Responses to the consultation should be sent using the details below. You are advised to read the short set of notes on page 52 of the full document which make specific requests and give information about the material you submit.

The full document can be viewed in pdf format at  
[www.activecommunities.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.activecommunities.homeoffice.gov.uk)

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