



What Makes A Successful Local Compact

A Project Report

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CONTENTS

SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	5
About this report	5
About this study	5
Critical success factors	6
Implications for policy and practice	7
A note on the scope of this study and definition of terms	8
SECTION TWO: EXAMPLES OF SUCCESS FACTORS	9
Introduction to this section	9
Making Local Compacts work: success factors	
Focusing on outcomes	10
Establishing the right structure and links	12
Leading and championing the Compact	15
Involving stakeholders in the Compact	17
Having effective third sector representation	20
Resourcing the Compact	21
Making the Compact real	23
Making the Compact work in two tier areas	27
Outcomes achieved through the development and use of Local Compacts	
Introduction	29
Improved local services	30
Improved funding arrangements	31
Changes in attitudes and understanding	32
Better consultation	34
Third sector being seen in a strategic role	35

SECTION THREE: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE	37
Introduction	37
The nature of the relationship between the public and third sectors	38
Motivation to work in partnership	39
A previous history of positive partnership working	40
The importance of process	40
Building the skills and motivation for partnership working	40
Applying Compact principles in practice	41
Local circumstances	41
Resources needed to support the Compact	42
Representation	42
The value of Local Compacts	43
SECTION FOUR: CONTEXT AND HISTORY OF THE COMPACT	44
The context: cross-sector partnership working	44
Local Compacts	44
SECTION FIVE: RESOURCES	50
Documents referred to in this report	50
Resources to assist in cross-sector partnership working	52
SECTION SIX: FURTHER DETAILS ABOUT THE STUDY	55
Purpose of this research	55
The study sites	55
Research methodology	57
Semi-structured interview questions	59
Table 2: Participating local authorities	61

SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

About this report

This report has been commissioned by the Commission for the Compact to identify factors and good practice that contributes to making Local Compacts work successfully. The report contains six sections:

- **Section one** introduces the study and explains how this report might be used.
- **Section two** presents examples of perceived success factors and positive outcomes from our eleven study areas.
- In **section three** there is a discussion of themes that appear to be common to several areas, and the implications of these findings for policy makers and practitioners.
- **Section four** includes a short history of Local Compacts and provides the context for the study.
- **Section five** contains a short guide to further resources about the Compact and about partnership working between the public and third sectors.
- **Section six** explains in more detail the methodology used for the study.

About this study

There is general agreement within the public and third sectors that the principles of the Compact ought to underpin relationships between the sectors. National and Local Compacts are being developed in the context of increasing pressures for the public and third sectors to work together in partnership, and a growing recognition of the potential benefits of partnership working. However, previous research has shown that there are general difficulties in implementing successful partnerships, and particular barriers to the successful implementation of Local Compacts. Despite these difficulties, there are many examples across the country of Local Compacts being used effectively, not only to improve the process of working in partnership, but also to deliver better services and outcomes for local people.

The purpose of this study was to highlight examples of how Local Compacts are being implemented successfully. Lack of knowledge and guidance about how to

translate Compact principles into practical action is one of the main reasons why good practice is not as widespread as it might be. The Commission for the Compact hopes that this report will be a useful practical tool for anyone who is involved in making Local Compacts work, including officers of local authorities, primary care trusts and the third sector, elected members, volunteers and Board members of third sector organisations.

The Commission intends that the examples set out in this report might form the basis of discussions at Compact Steering Groups, Local Strategic Partnership groups and any other arenas where relations between the third sector and statutory sector are discussed. It is hoped that the report will be of benefit to those who are charged with taking forward their Local Compact, and that the examples of ‘success factors’ highlighted here might provide the inspiration for actions that could be implemented in other local areas.

Critical success factors

Table 1 summarises the key success factors for Local Compacts identified by participants in our study. Further details about each one can be found in the main report.

Table 1: Key success factors for Local Compacts

Critical success factor	How to achieve this	Further information
Focusing on outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Better services ▪ Practical improvements ▪ Quick wins 	p.10
Establishing the right structures and links	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Links to LSP and LAA ▪ Embedding in commissioning and procurement 	p.12
Leading and championing the Compact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Senior leadership ▪ Resources and support for champions 	p.15
Involving stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Multi-sector involvement ▪ Elected members ▪ Service directorates 	p.17

Critical success factor	How to achieve this	Further information
Having effective third sector representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Using established structures ▪ Involving the wider third sector 	p.20
Resourcing the Compact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dedicated workers ▪ Embedding the Compact in a variety of roles 	p.21
Making the Compact real	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Practical tools ▪ Accessible information ▪ Staff induction ▪ Logging Compact wins 	p.23
Making the Compact work in two tier areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Scrutiny mechanisms ▪ Working groups with representation from all tiers ▪ Dealing with local differences ▪ Continuous consultation and involvement 	p.27

Implications for policy and practice

In section three we discuss some key themes that emerged from the study. These are:

- The complexity of the relationship between the public and third sectors, and the need both for policy to reflect this and for support to be given to local partnerships in order to increase understanding of working across sectors.
- Motivation to work in partnership: this is affected by a range of factors, including previous history of working together. The Compact can help to cement good practice if people are motivated to work together, but the Compact alone cannot provide a solution if some of the fundamental building blocks of partnership are absent.
- The importance of the process of coming together to develop a Compact as a means of building mutual understanding and trust.

- The need for Local Compacts to fit local circumstances and to avoid the pitfalls of a 'one size fits all' approach.
- The need for Local Compacts to be adequately resourced, whether that be in the form of dedicated workers or support to enable officers in a variety of roles to dedicate time to the development of cross-sector partnerships.
- The value of effective third sector representation in the development and maintenance of a successful Compact, and the need to provide further resources and support to develop this role.

In conclusion, there is perhaps a risk that the Compact may be seen as an end in itself, when successful cross-sector working is facilitated by a set of factors that exist in their own right, including a Compact. The examples of success factors given by participants seem to support the view that a Local Compact is not particularly useful as a prescriptive guide or a punitive instrument. When a Local Compact is working well it can be used as a rallying point, codifying the behaviours that are needed for good partnership working. Moreover, the process of developing and overseeing the implementation of Compacts can be an important means of cementing some of the key building blocks of successful cross-sector working – mutual understanding, openness, respect and trust.

A note on the scope of this study and definition of terms

The intention was not to focus only on the Compact document itself, but to look at ways in which the public sector and third sector had been able to implement a 'Compact way of working'. Throughout this report we use the terms 'in the spirit of the Compact', 'Compact ways of working' and 'Compact style' interchangeably to refer to a way of relating across the third and public sectors that exemplifies the principles set out in the national Compact. In this respect, the contents of a Compact document are secondary to what happens in practice. So, for example, some partnerships may have only a very brief written document, but partners' behaviour towards one another fully reflects the 'spirit of the Compact'. Conversely, it is equally possible for Compacts to exist as lengthy and detailed documents, whilst the reality is that partners do not act according to the principles set out in the document.

SECTION TWO: EXAMPLES OF SUCCESS FACTORS

Introduction to this section

This section presents findings from the interviews undertaken across the eleven study sites. The purpose of this section is to identify ways in which Local Compacts are thought to have been successful, in terms of both outcomes and process, and to highlight factors that interviewees thought had contributed to making Compacts work.

It is important to note that not all of the factors apply across all of the authorities that took part in the study - although all apply to two or more authorities. As this is a qualitative study, we do not attribute numbers of authorities or interviewees to each finding. Our intention is to draw out examples that might be applicable to other areas, rather than to prove scientifically that there is a causal link between particular factors and outcomes.

The examples are not a definitive or prescriptive list of actions that must be taken to implement a Local Compact; rather, they are included to illustrate what has worked and to help people in local government, primary care trusts, other public agencies and the third sector to think about what might work in their own area.

Focusing on outcomes

Almost all of those we interviewed said that partnerships between the public and third sectors were important because they had the potential to lead to better services and better outcomes for local people. Often, however, this perspective was lost when the day-to-day reality of working in partnership became difficult and relationships floundered. Keeping a clear focus on this potential to achieve improved outcomes was seen as an incentive to make Local Compacts work better. This involves making sure that the Compact working group or steering group is able at times to step away from the detail of what the guidance should say or how disputes should be mediated, to ensure that all participants remain clear about why the Compact is there in the first place.

Case study: Bournemouth

The Compact feeds into the wider principles of developing the right services at community level, and not losing those services through focusing entirely on 'efficiency' or 'smart contracting'. The Compact has helped people from the council to understand how the local voluntary sector can support a whole range services – linking, for example, housing, advocacy, individual care, employment – and that better services for local people will result.

Some local partnerships found it helpful to prioritise the practical issues they wanted to tackle through developing a Compact. This gave some context to the development process, and enabled people to be clear about how the Compact might be used and what it would need to look like.

Case study: Nottingham

In Nottingham, a working group was set up to develop a local Compact. Rather than adopt a Compact template or develop an all-encompassing document, the group decided *‘to look at issues that people were most annoyed about in the sector and what was working well so we didn’t need to look at it’*. The issue the group focused on was funding, and the outcome is that local procurement practices are now much more ‘Compact compliant’. As one interviewee said:

‘If you asked a lot of people in the council about the Compact, they might not have heard of it, but they are really passionate about procurement and making sure it doesn’t disadvantage third sector groups’.

Interviewees recognised that the Local Compact needed to be seen to be useful at an early stage, for people from the public and third sectors to believe that it could be an effective tool to improve relationships. In four local areas, members of the Compact development or steering groups decided to identify some ‘quick wins’ that they knew would make a difference immediately and would have an impact on the way the Compact was perceived.

Case study: Devon

When the Devon Compact Hub was set up, members were mindful that the Devon Compact needed to be practically useful and relevant to the day-to-day working lives of people in the public and third sectors. Members set out to identify ‘quick wins’ – actions that would galvanise support for the Compact and get momentum going. Issues that were addressed early on included the public sector paying third sector organisations in advance instead of in arrears and changing to longer contracts. Once people had seen that the Compact could make a difference, they were more willing to use it to tackle more problematic issues.

Establishing the right structures and links

Almost all of our study participants identified the need for a Local Compact to have clear links to other policy making or scrutiny bodies. One interviewee from Hertfordshire summed this up:

'The most important thing is that the Compact must link with where the real policy agenda is; it must be part of the LSP arena and how it works because that's where decisions are made. The local area agreement includes a performance reward grant; this is linked to targets and hence money coming into the county. The Compact needs to be an integral part of the LSP, LAA and work on community cohesion, not something separate.'

In almost all of the study areas, there was a clear line of accountability from Compact work to, in most cases, the LSP. Typically, a Compact group would report to the LSP board or would even be constituted as a thematic group of the LSP. In this way, partnerships between the public and third sectors were kept under constant review by the bodies that could actually do something about changing the way things worked. In turn, there was a clear formal relationship between the Local Compact and the work of developing strategy for the local area.

Case study: Bournemouth

Bournemouth has established a Third Sector Strategic Partnership Group. This group has evolved from a working group and now has formal status as part of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), sitting alongside other thematic groups. Interviewees from both the third sector and the local authority agreed that the status and power embedded in such a group 'helps people working in different contexts to understand where the group fits in the bigger picture. It also helps public agencies to take its work seriously'.

Linking the Compact to commissioning and procurement

Funding of the third sector, whether through grants or contracts, is often the area of most concern to both the public and third sectors. One of the main reasons cited for having a Compact was to clarify funding arrangements and to make them more transparent and more equitable. Several interviewees mentioned the shift over the last decade away from grants and towards contracts with third sector organisations (TSOs), and towards more and more funding going from the public sector to the third sector.

Alongside this, councils and primary care trusts are increasingly becoming commissioners rather than providers of services, and are contracting with a wide range of organisations, not just third sector organisations. In this climate commissioning and procurement practices have also expanded and changed. As one interviewee put it, there is a danger that these practices are developing *'in a parallel universe'*, divorced from the world of Compacts and relationships with the third sector more generally.

For the Local Compact to have real meaning and influence, it was felt that it had to be reflected in the commissioning of services. For example, in Hertfordshire, Compact principles are applied to contracts let by Adult Care Services:

'Adult Care Services has three year contracts... we try to ensure that the necessary processes are set up six months in advance of a contract needing to be reviewed. Otherwise it might be tempting to wait until December for a contract expiring in March. When it is possible that a contract might not be renewed, we make sure that adequate notice is given, or that a further six months' worth of funding is paid if a decision has not been made in time.'

Case study: Bournemouth

The Bournemouth Third Sector Partnership Group has encouraged commissioners to attend meetings of the group and to hear directly about concerns from the third sector. The group has also set up 'meet and greet' events, where public commissioners and third sector representatives could meet informally, and specific training for the third and public sector on procurement processes. The outcome from this work is that the council is now working towards new contracting processes that are common to all departments and are based on Compact principles. The council has also taken on the role of mediator between third sector organisations and commissioners. This approach has helped to address fears that TSOs will lose funding if they challenge poor practices.

Building transparency and openness

Several interviewees mentioned 'being open with each other' and 'sharing relevant information' as factors that had made the Compact work better. In most cases sharing information had come about as a result of increased trust between the local authority and third sector. Building this trust – often gradually - had been part of a process of developing and implementing a Local Compact.

Case study: Gateshead

When the Compact was introduced in Gateshead, the council agreed to discuss with TSOs the impact of local authority budgetary pressures on third sector funding. There is now an annual meeting, co-ordinated by the council for voluntary service, of all the TSOs the council commissions to provide social care services and the council's group heads and directors of finance. At this meeting council staff have the opportunity to offer a *'reasonably honest position on what the council is doing to manage its efficiencies.'* This has led to a greater understanding on both sides of the constraints each sector is working under, and to a shift in attitudes about why people from different sectors behave as they do.

Leading and championing the Compact

The findings from our research reflect those of earlier studies outlined in section one, in that the role of senior people from both sectors was seen as a critical success factor in making Local Compacts work. These individuals were described as people who could ‘bring about change’ or ‘knock heads together’. In one case, a breach of the Compact was resolved to mutual satisfaction following a challenge from the third sector to the council. As one interviewee explained:

‘It was quite clear that the most important factor was having intelligent senior local authority staff who were genuinely committed to partnership working and willing to admit they’d made a mistake.’

Case study: Bournemouth

The Bournemouth Third Sector Partnership Group is attended by people who are in senior roles in their organisations. These individuals carry the status to influence what happens across their own organisation, so that third sector issues are not seen as a separate concern. Senior members of the Partnership Group have encouraged colleagues – for example commissioning managers – to come to meetings of the group to hear about and discuss issues related to commissioning from the third sector. This might not have happened without the involvement of senior council officers.

The role of a ‘Compact champion’ is to model good partnership working; to promote awareness of the Compact; to encourage colleagues to use the Compact, and to collect information about how the Compact is being used and where there are issues that might need addressing. Typically, each agency signing up to the Compact may appoint a champion.

Having Compact champions was seen as an important way of modelling good practice in relations between the public and third sectors, and of raising awareness of the nature and complexity of the relationship. In practice, however, there is concern, as reflected in earlier research, that Compact champions may not be fully aware of their roles and may receive inadequate support. Where the champion role is working well in promoting 'a Compact way of working' and gathering information about how the Compact is being used, individuals nominated as champions receive continuous support to enact their roles.

Case study: Devon

Devon is a two-tier authority, with nine districts. The county and the districts have their own local strategic partnership (LSP). Each LSP has nominated one person from the third sector and one from the public sector to be a representative on the county-wide 'Compact Hub'. These representatives are described as 'Compact champions'. Their role is to attend Hub meetings and bring forward strategic issues from their own areas, but also to go back to their sub-regions as ambassadors for the Devon Compact.

This structure is not uncommon, but in Devon it has been made to work well in practice through support provided to the champions between meetings. The Devon Compact Development Worker reminds champions about practical tasks they have undertaken to do, and supports them to record examples of how the county and district Compacts are being used. Without this type of support there is a risk that champions may not know how to fulfil the role or that decisions made in hub or steering group meetings will get lost.

Involving stakeholders in the Compact

Multi-sector involvement

Interviewees in some areas highlighted multi-sector involvement in work to develop the Compact as a key success factor. They felt that having other public and private sector organisations, as well as the council and third sector, involved in this work helped to create an environment where partnership working was generally valued and principles adhered to.

Case study: Calderdale

Calderdale has a Compact Steering Group. This is a 'multi-sector' group, which reflects the membership of the local strategic partnership. It includes representatives from the third sector, the council, primary care trust and local Chamber of Commerce. This has led to wide ownership of the Local Compact as something that guides cross-sector working generally. In Calderdale the Compact is not seen as being led or dominated by the third sector or council. Representatives from other organisations who have a commitment to and enthusiasm for partnership working can contribute this to the Compact Steering Group.

Elected member involvement

Again, our research findings echo the findings of earlier work, with some interviewees citing elected member involvement in the Compact as a factor in building good relationships between the third sector and the council. In East Sussex, for example, 48 councillors came together for focus group discussions with representatives from the third sector, including the council for voluntary service and a range of local organisations. The events resulted in fifteen recommendations around how the Compact would deal with the issues of consultation and funding. These recommendations went to the council executive and to the cabinet, with members acting as an important bridge between grassroots third sector organisations and decision-makers.

Case study: Birmingham

Since 2005 Birmingham council has worked to improve the governance of its partnerships with the third sector. This meant ensuring that elected members understood third sector issues and knew how to lead and respond to issues within the spirit of the Compact. Birmingham now has a cabinet member who leads on relationships with the third sector and makes sure that the third sector has access to the council cabinet – for example by hosting receptions for local third sector leaders.

This has led to something of a culture change within the council, which has manifested itself in greater transparency in the way in which the council deals with any problems or issues that arise. In turn, when TSOs challenge funding decisions through their local councillor, the lead member for the third sector is able to reassure the council that the correct, Compact compliant processes were followed in making funding decisions.

Involvement of service directorates

Interviewees in some areas confirmed that representatives from service directorates were involved in Compact development or steering groups. Others suggested, with hindsight, that their Compacts would have benefited from this approach. One interviewee argued that there should be 'service-specific Compacts', since the overarching Compact was too general to be meaningful. There is evidence that involvement of representatives from council service directorates - most commonly social services, housing or crime and community safety - has led to the implementation of a Compact that is relevant to a wide range of third sector activity. As one interviewee explained:

'Voluntary organisations that are all about service provision are too often left out of the process, but are also those most affected by commissioning and procurement practices'.

Case study: Hertfordshire

The Hertfordshire Compact Steering Group is led and serviced by a partnerships team within the council. However, the steering group also involves people from council service directorates, including adult and children's services. Members of the group see this as an important way of making sure that the Compact is relevant to the whole spectrum of third sector activity in the area.

Without involvement from service directorates, relations with third sector organisations that are strategically important in the area – because many of them deliver a high volume of services on behalf of the council – might be ignored. Service leads are also able to ensure that contract monitoring processes are based on Compact principles.

Having effective third sector representation

Implicit in many of the policy documents about ‘partnership working’ between the third sector and public sector is the concept of ‘representation’. In other words, third sector participants in cross-sector partnerships are expected to act not simply on their own behalf but that of other voluntary agencies and stakeholders, including local people. However, TSOs face a number of challenges in carrying out this role. These include unequal power relationships making it difficult for TSOs to speak out, lack of resources, difficulty in understanding the culture of another sector, and practical difficulties in communicating information to and from the third sector^{1*}. Yet when individuals and organisations from the third sector are seen to be representing wider interests, their contribution carries more weight and the third sector is better able to influence partnership activity.

In two areas, having effective third sector representation was seen as a success factor. Interestingly, in these two authorities the structures for representation already existed. For example, in Congleton an active and well established third sector network was seen as a driver for getting a Local Compact off the ground. In areas where third sector engagement is less well developed, local authorities and third sector organisations may need to do some initial work on reviewing and developing representation mechanisms in order to ensure wide engagement with the Compact.

Case study: Merton

Merton CVS is the lead organisation from the third sector for development and maintenance of the Merton Compact. The CVS has put in place a number of mechanisms to support the third sector representative function. For example, there are role descriptions for individuals who represent the sector at any forum; there is a system for consulting with organisations on the CVS database via e-mail in advance of all meetings, so that the CVS ‘representative’ has some means of understanding the views of the sector; the CVS links with others in a community development role, to ensure that the maximum number of third sector organisations have their views considered.

* Note: numbers refer to documents listed in Section five: Resources

Resourcing the Compact

There was general agreement that developing and maintaining a Compact requires support in the form of people with time, as well as commitment, to drive the process forward. However, there were divergent views about the best ways of resourcing the Compact.

Interviewees in the three authorities that actually had a dedicated Compact development worker believed that a dedicated worker had been a useful resource. In most of the other areas, interviewees believed that resources were needed, but not necessarily in the form of a worker.

In some of these areas there was a view that it was important to make sure that taking forward the Compact was part of many people's jobs, not just one person's. Hertfordshire, for example, had decided not to have a dedicated Compact development worker; one interviewee explained:

'It's important that the Compact is embedded in the 'day job', rather than being hived off somewhere separate. Herts does not have a post of Compact officer. That helps embed the Compact, and gives it more credibility, if it is part of different areas of partnership working.'

It is possible that the need to embed wider responsibility for the Compact and the desirability of having a dedicated worker may not be mutually exclusive, and that different approaches will work equally well in different areas.

Case study: Congleton

Congleton has a Compact development worker – one of only around twenty nationally. Having resources in the form of a post was seen as a success factor in making the Compact work in Congleton. Crucially, the post includes other roles, such as servicing the LSP Stronger Communities Thematic Partnership and the Third Sector Network. This gives the post a greater reach and range of contacts than if it were entirely focused on the Compact, and this was thought to work well. The post is funded by the PCT and the council jointly, but is based in the CVS. This combination of resource inputs promotes shared ownership of the work.

Case study: Merton

Merton has not had a dedicated Compact development worker. However, the third sector has been part of the development of the Compact through building it into a range of job roles, and ensuring that Compact work links with other initiatives. The people we interviewed thought this had worked well, because the Compact was not seen as something separate, but had become embedded more widely in the third sector.

Making the Compact real

One of the main issues that has been identified as an obstacle to developing effective Local Compacts is that Compact documents are usually couched in general terms, and contain a series of principles, rather than firm guidance.

Almost all of the people we spoke to told us that 'making the Compact real' had been a key success factor in getting it to work locally. In many cases this involved identifying specific actions that could be taken under the 'banner' of the Compact or developing guidance and tools that would help people to understand how to put Compact principles into practice. Whilst the process of developing tools had been time consuming, it was generally felt that the effort had been worth it.

Practical tools and training

Calderdale has developed a comprehensive and easy to use 'Compact toolkit', which would help organisations to apply the Compact's principles and codes to its own practices and procedures, and assess its level of achievement in each of the areas specified. The toolkit is designed along the lines of a quality assurance toolkit, such as PQASSO (practical quality assurance system for small organisations), and enables users to identify where they can take action.

Case study: East Sussex

The East Sussex Compact Steering Group looked at how they could make the local Compact a practical tool for people to use. They decided to develop a practical training package that could work at a strategic level. They organised an event in 2007, with the help of external facilitators, which entailed 'playing out' 10 scenarios or issues around the Compact. The facilitators drew up a matrix covering each Compact Code and *'the participants had to consider if the Compact applied, and if so which parts, to each of the scenarios'*.

People in two areas, Hertfordshire and Congleton, cited 'making the Compact relevant for the local area' as a key success factor. They cautioned against the approach of taking the national Compact and codes and adopting them wholesale for local use. Whilst national guidance for Local Compacts was thought to be helpful up to a point, they thought their Compacts had benefited from work that had been done to understand better how the general principles might be applied locally.

Case study: Congleton

The people we interviewed in Congleton stressed the importance of developing specific guidance and codes for the local area. In developing the Congleton Compact, the group drew on a toolkit developed by Regional Action and Involvement South East (RAISE), an infrastructure body, and on a flowchart that had been developed in Leeds, but they did not simply adapt the national codes. In essence, they felt that the national codes were very general, were not all relevant to Congleton and were simply a starting point. Therefore, they started from scratch to make sure that the Compact was genuinely a local agreement.

Interviewees cited lack of continuity in staffing or lack of awareness of the Compact throughout the council as barriers to successful implementation. In Merton, the Compact steering group had addressed this problem by getting the Compact included in the council's human resources procedures. Interviewees in Hertfordshire cited this as a good idea, although it has not yet been adopted. It was felt that induction periods provided a good opportunity to embed awareness of the Compact and to send out messages about the importance of partnership working.

Case study: Merton

In Merton new staff in the third sector and the council receive a leaflet about the Compact in their induction packs. Representatives from the third sector now sit on interview panels for jobs in the council that will have a significant third sector liaison role, and new starters with the council visit Merton CVS and meet third sector representatives as part of their induction.

Creating accessible documents

Most of the interviewees thought that they had been successful in creating Compact documents that were clear and understandable, although some felt there had at first been too much emphasis on producing documents at the expense of action. For some, the experience of developing a Local Compact had involved a journey through detail in order to arrive at something very simple.

Case study: Devon

Devon has a detailed Compact, accompanied by codes of practice. However, the Compact hub thought it would be useful to produce some material that could be read and absorbed very quickly by people who might not have lead responsibility for cross-sector working, but would need to understand what the principles were and how to apply them. They produced 'ten things you need to know about the Compact' – one each for council staff, third sector staff and volunteers, and elected members. These are widely used and feedback to champions suggests they have an impact in getting the Compact known.

Constant review and refresh

Whilst people felt that it was not a good idea to be constantly changing the Local Compact, most of the people we spoke to acknowledged the rapid pace of change in cross-sector relationships, particularly over the past five years. This has included changes in the way in which the performance of local public agencies is measured by central government, the spread of contracting for services and the growing emphasis on the role of the third sector in advocating for community interests. These have all meant that Local Compacts developed before 2004 have had to be revisited to ensure that they are still relevant - for example, the language used may be out of date. In Congleton the Compact steering group 'keeps the Compact document alive' by circulating it in a loose leaf format, so it can be updated periodically.

Case study: East Sussex

East Sussex undertakes an annual review of the Compact work to assess what has worked well and what still needs to be done. The Compact group uses a survey designed by NCVO, which goes out to people in the public sector and the third sector. The Compact group then assesses its own progress against an action plan and presents the results, and proposed actions, to the executive board of the LSP.

Logging Compact successes

In Merton, the Compact steering group produces an annual report, setting out all the actions taken under the banner of the Compact. These are described as 'Compact wins'. The experience of recording compact wins has been affirming, as partners can point to tangible outcomes. Recording 'wins' has also helped to generate greater confidence in partnership working and the value it can bring.

Making the Compact work in two tier areas

There was no consensus over the best way to approach Compact development in two tier areas, although this was acknowledged to be a potentially difficult issue. Opinion seemed to be fairly evenly divided, with 'top tier' authorities tending to think that a single Compact ought to apply to both the county and districts. On the other hand, there is evidence that district level Compacts may be easier to implement, since partners are likely to know each other well and will not have to travel great distances to meetings. In most two tier authorities we visited districts had their own Compacts; North Yorkshire was an exception.

Whether there is a single Compact or several, the key success factor is thought to be proper linking, which is likely to take more work and absorb more resources in, for example, travelling to meetings in a two tier authority. Ensuring proper co-ordination between county and district level plans and activities can be time consuming, but making efforts to involve a wide range of stakeholders can pay dividends in terms of 'joined up' arrangements and stronger relationships between different tiers of local government, as well as between the public and third sectors.

Case study: East Sussex

East Sussex has a single Compact for the county and districts. The East Sussex Compact Steering Group is responsible for ensuring that the Compact is implemented and embedded across the county. The East Sussex Strategic Partnership (LSP) scrutinises the work of the steering group.

Having a single strategic document ensures that all public sector bodies and the third sector work towards the same set of principles, codes of practice and action plans. A single document assists third sector organisations whose work falls across several borough and district boundaries, as well as public sector bodies who carry out joint consultations and commissioning exercises.

Case study: East Sussex (continued)

East Sussex Compact Steering Group ensures that all action plans and strategies for implementing and embedding the Compact include the ideas and views of all public bodies operating in the county. The Steering Group has representation from boroughs and districts.

Key success factors in making this arrangement work were identified as:

- Putting together a working group to lead on developing the Compact that has representation from boroughs, districts, PCT(s), third sector organisations, and county.
- Agreeing terms of reference, a work plan, a lead officer to co-ordinate, and a commitment from all to work together on developing the Compact.
- Ensuring that boroughs and districts sit around the table right from the beginning, and that any local differences in the way things work between sectors are captured in the initial draft document.
- Making sure that as the Compact document is developed and put together, activities and information are disseminated widely to both officers and elected members of boroughs and districts.
- Being prepared to take on any comments or suggestions borough and district representatives may have.

Outcomes achieved through the development and use of Local Compacts

Introduction

There is general agreement, amongst the people who took part in our research and more widely, that, in principle, it is worth having a Local Compact. But the Compact has an 'image problem', in that it is sometimes hard to see what difference having a Compact makes.

We asked the people we interviewed to give us examples of changes and improvements that had occurred through having a Compact. Some people found it difficult to think of concrete examples, although most felt that there had been a general shift in attitudes, and some were surprised to be asked the question, as they were used to being asked about problems with the Compact. However, the majority were able to step back and reflect on what had been achieved. In the following paragraphs we describe briefly some of the successful outcomes from Local Compacts.

When asked about the reasons for having a Local Compact, most interviewees made a link between effective cross-sector partnership working and *'being able to achieve more together'* or *'reaping the benefits of joint working'*. In general, people thought there was a link between partnership working and better outcomes for local people.

However, it is difficult to attribute these kinds of outcomes – for example, improved local services – to the existence of a Compact. Not surprisingly, the examples of successful outcomes given by interviewees relate mainly to the impact of the Compact on the relationship between the third sector and the public sector, rather than to the contribution the Compact has made to achieving direct benefits for communities.

Improved local services

Participants were able to give some examples of how a Compact way of working had affected local services. In Bournemouth, for example, the existence of the Compact had led to a better understanding of the contribution of smaller third sector groups, and had highlighted the need to preserve this contribution in a climate of increased contracting with larger organisations.

In turn, people felt that a better understanding of the relative contributions of larger and smaller third sector organisations had led to a better range of services for local people and the ability to reach a diverse range of groups within the community. These improvements were thought to extend to services in housing, advocacy and personal care.

Improved funding arrangements

Interviewees in five of the eleven areas mentioned better funding arrangements as a positive outcome from the adoption and use of a Compact. The following are examples of outcomes attributed to the process of developing a Compact or to the implementation of the Compact:

- Calderdale now has three year renewable funding arrangements, and funding was perceived to be *'on a better footing than previously'*. This gives third sector organisations greater stability, and enables them to focus on their core mission, rather than spending time each year looking for new sources of funding.
- In Congleton public agencies have delegated administration of small grants to the local council for voluntary service – a new system that is perceived to work well. The CVS is perceived as both impartial and close to the community, and it is felt that more effective small grant making has resulted.
- Hertfordshire County Council completely revised its system of funding to the third sector, and now has a process agreed through consultation with the third sector and common application forms across all council departments. The council has also established the Herts External Resources Network, which helps organisations get access to other sources of funding.
- In Merton a decision was made to retain some grants for the third sector, rather than shift entirely to contracts. Voluntary sector grants are now administered by a multi-agency panel, comprising representatives from the council, police, fire service and PCT. This ensures that activity funded by grants reflects multi-sector planning and targets the areas of greatest local need. The system for making decisions is now far more transparent, with a scoring system that is made public.
- Devon's children's centre commissioning process was informed by ways of working agreed through the development of the Compact. The commissioning process has resulted in a range of organisations being involved - which ultimately has led to better services for children and families - and has won an award for good commissioning practice.

Change in attitudes and understanding

Previous research by IVAR and others has shown that successful partnership working can be hindered by entrenched attitudes, stereotypes and myths about how the different sectors work ².

Our own study revealed some examples of the Compact development process leading to a change in attitudes and to an environment that was more conducive to constructive partnership working. For example, in Calderdale:

'The Compact has contributed significantly to an attitudinal shift in the borough. This has meant an improved level of understanding of targets that the public sector is under pressure to deliver and equally that they cannot 'dump' work on third sector organisations.'

Partnership working is strongly influenced by relationships between individuals and by accumulated trust ³. Interviewees in three of the eleven areas mentioned *'improved relationships'* as an outcome from the Compact, and said that they would now feel comfortable going to talk to someone from the council or third sector, whereas before they had come together to develop the Compact they would have been reticent to do so.

Although much of the work that has been done to develop Local Compacts has focused on relations between the third sector and the local authority, an outcome in some areas has been a greater recognition of the third sector amongst other public agencies. Interviewees in Congleton gave three examples of how the existence of the Compact had encouraged joint working between the third sector and other public agencies:

'The multiple sclerosis Group in Congleton wanted to use the hydro-therapy unit, which was under used as a facility and they had had difficulty getting access to it. They approached the PCT who own it, using the Compact's Codes on premises. This helped to get a response from the PCT and the group now use it.'

'The StreetScape Service in Congleton Borough Council was at first sceptical about any links it could have with the voluntary and community sectors. However, the Compact was used to negotiate free advertising space for third sector groups on the side of cleansing trucks.'

'The Fire Service was interested in contacting older people in the borough in order to give them advice on fire prevention. Through making contact via the Compact, Age Concern gave the Fire Service a list of older people's addresses in the borough. This saved the Fire Service a substantial amount of time and money.'

In North Yorkshire, the Compact has been used specifically to identify some inconsistencies in public sector policies and practice that created barriers for effective recruitment and use of volunteers. A county council officer group was established to look at this issue; the group involved people from the human resources department and from risk management. This work has encouraged greater understanding of volunteering issues and, in turn, has led to a more positive approach to volunteering and to more effective use of volunteers.

Better consultation

Consultation processes were thought to have improved in almost all of the areas that took part in the study. Many of the people we spoke to described a process of change that happened as a direct result of discussions during the development of the Local Compact. This example, from Nottingham, is typical:

'Take grant aid – before the Compact we probably would not have thought of a twelve week consultation period – we probably would have had a meeting or two, perhaps consulted with a BME group, talked to an infrastructure organisation...thank you, that's it. Now we are embarked on a proper consultation process.'

In Calderdale interviewees agreed that:

'The twelve week consultation period is now widely accepted in services'. In addition, it was felt that 'the Compact has helped to ensure effective consultation that has itself fed into the commissioning processes and informed commissioning criteria; the consultation has had a real effect'.

In Congleton, an effective third sector network was seen as a key success factor. The outcome of this was thought to be a ready made conduit for consultation, which has been improved through the use of the Compact.

Third sector being seen in a strategic role

Another historical barrier to cross-sector partnership working has been a perception of the third sector as a junior partner or an instrument for delivery, and a lack of understanding of the more strategic role the third sector can play in shaping local communities.

In some of the areas we visited it was apparent that there had been a shift from the third sector being seen as a 'special case' or a 'junior partner' to being treated as a partner with an important strategic role to play alongside the public sector.

An example from Nottingham illustrates this:

'The Children and Young People's Partnership is a crucial way of planning and delivering services across the city. They now pay for voluntary sector representatives to be part of their governance structures at all levels. This has come out of a Compact way of working and seeing the importance of that way of working.'

Similarly, in Hertfordshire, there is evidence that the relationship between the third sector and the public sector has begun to change, with the third sector now being seen as a 'genuine partner'. For example, the primary care trust now involves the third sector from the very start in innovative work around health promotion. As one interviewee put it:

'Two years ago they might just have consulted with the sector about the design of funding application forms. Now they've asked for help on what the programme should look like and how to make sure the wider third sector knows about it. The council for voluntary service organised a joint health summit for the PCT and third sector. This approach empowers the third sector and encourages people to work together.'

The existence of the Compact in Hertfordshire has also contributed to the third sector becoming involved in the planning and scrutiny of local services:

'HCC has a scrutiny process whereby member panels take an in-depth view of a particular issue. When a scrutiny of health spending / budgets in Herts was due to take place, the scrutiny panel wanted direct input from TSOs working in the field of health and took hearings from some. The existence of the Compact facilitated this; TSOs' involvement meant that the panel benefited from a more focused awareness of the practical implications of health service budgets, and refined members' views of where the money was going. It brought in the users' perspective.'

In Birmingham, a more conscious decision was taken to ensure that the third sector was seen in a strategic role:

'We began to see the potential for the voluntary sector to take a strategic role and engage with the public in a different way...so the third sector assembly is a really big thing which has really taken off.'

It seems that the shift towards greater strategic involvement of the third sector is related to changing attitudes of partners, often as a direct result of coming together to develop or oversee a Compact. Where there is an appreciation that the third sector can bring a different and valuable perspective to the planning of services and to the council's role as community leaders, the Local Compact is more likely to be a focus for improving the contribution the third sector can make.

In Bournemouth, for example, the Third Sector Partnership Group has been able to involve representatives from the third sector as 'critical friends', who give constructive feedback on council-led strategies and can be heard because there is a shared understanding that the relationship is not characterised by an 'us and them' attitude.

SECTION THREE: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Introduction

This research has again highlighted the potential difficulties of partnership working between the public and voluntary and community sectors, reflecting the findings of earlier work by IVAR and others⁴. However, it has also uncovered some of the ways in which local partnerships have used their Local Compact as an aid to overcoming these difficulties.

In section three of this report, we draw on the findings set out in section two to discuss lessons for policy makers and practitioners alike.

The nature of the relationship between the public and third sectors

The relationship between the public and third sectors is complex and often ambiguous². On the one hand the third sector is seen as a strategic partner, involved in planning to meet local needs and advocating on behalf of communities. On the other the third sector is simply a contractor – there to deliver a service on behalf of a public agency. Some third sector organisations fulfil both functions, others only one.

This study shows that a number of factors can contribute to an increased understanding of the complexity of this relationship and of the variety of roles that the third sector can play. In addition, there is evidence that in some areas people from the voluntary and community sector have become more aware of the environment in which public organisations operate.

It is suggested that if people from the two sectors understand better each other's distinctive features and respective contributions, partnerships are likely to function more effectively. As one person said:

'The Compact has enabled us to stand in each other's shoes'.

Factors contributing to an increased awareness of the nature of the relationship include:

- Use of Compact champions
- Embedding the Compact in local governance structures
- The development process itself
- Leadership from senior individuals
- Multi-sector involvement in the Compact.

Motivation to work in partnership

Interviewees' descriptions of the process of developing a Local Compact reveal that the changing policy context is a strong driver to 'get the Compact right'. Some participants pointed to individuals with commitment and enthusiasm as the impetus behind Compact development.

It is clear that the Compact in itself does not motivate people from different sectors to work together, but that it is a means to an end. In this respect the process of developing a Compact was seen by some of our interviewees as a journey, which had sometimes been difficult, and had involved a process of learning and change. What had motivated people to persist when seemingly intractable problems arose was not a desire to have a Compact, but a desire to use partnership working as a means to achieve the greater goals of improved services and better outcomes for local communities.

This finding reflects previous research, which has described the concept of 'collaborative advantage' – in essence an understanding of what can be achieved by working together that cannot be achieved alone. Linked to this, research has shown that when partners are able to focus on the bigger picture and keep in mind the end goals of partnership (sometimes referred to as 'super-ordinate goals'), then partners are more likely to work together effectively ⁵.

Lessons, then, for people engaged in developing Compacts at a local level, include the need to be clear about the aims of partnership working, the obstacles to achieving desired goals, and how the Compact might help address these. In localities where Compact development has been neglected, this might be one way of approaching the Compact afresh.

A previous history of positive partnership working

In some of the areas we visited, a successful Compact had been aided by a previous history of positive partnership working. Certainly, it is helpful for partnerships to be able to draw on accumulated goodwill and existing relationships. However, it is also important that cross-sector partnership working is not simply driven by key individuals, without whom the work might flounder.

The Compact was seen as a means to formalise positive ways of working, and to ensure that good practice could be passed on. Initiatives such as including information about the Compact in induction packs and making visits to TSOs part of the induction process for new council staff were seen as an aid to this process.

Conversely, a history of problems – or ‘skeletons in the cupboard’ - can often act as a barrier to implementing a Compact way of working. In the areas we visited the Compact was seen for the most part as an opportunity and a means to resolve historical problems and move forward.

As one person put it:

‘The Compact exposed our laundry; we had to make sure it was clean’.

The importance of process

Some people we interviewed said that they thought the process of developing a Compact had been more significant in fostering good relationships than the Compact document itself. On the other hand, others pointed to the existence of a tangible outcome – in the form of a Compact and Codes – as a means of making good partnership working more sustainable.

Building the skills and motivation for partnership working

The point about process being significant suggests that it may be important not to view the Compact too literally as an end in itself, but to recognise that there is a need to build skills for partnership working. Skills and attributes mentioned by participants in our research included openness, ability to communicate at a variety of levels, understanding of the policy environment and ability to step outside individual and

organisational interests and represent a wider view.

However, without motivation to work in partnership, partners will have no incentive to develop these skills. In particular, previous research has highlighted the importance of trust as a cornerstone of successful cross-sector relationships (6). Practitioners and policy makers may need to recognise that trust takes time to build up, and that the Compact development process may be one means of doing this.

Applying Compact principles in practice

The general and abstract nature of 'The Compact' is both a strength and a weakness. It is a strength because it is difficult to argue with the principles it embodies, and those principles have endured despite great change in the context in which Compacts are being developed. It is a weakness because it is not always easy to translate those principles into reality.

This research has shown that there are ways to move a Local Compact from an abstract concept to something that is of practical use. Practical aids include a Compact toolkit, clear, summarised information, training events and a log of 'Compact wins'. However, it is important for policy makers to support the practical application of the Compact by recognising that developing these aids requires time, effort, resources and, sometimes, imagination.

Local circumstances

Our examples show that there are success factors across a range of authority types and sizes, and that there is a need to consider which approaches are most relevant to the local setting.

The findings from this research suggest that it might be easier to implement successful Compacts in smaller geographical areas, where participants are likely to know each other better and where partnership governance structures are less complex. However, some larger areas also demonstrated examples of success factors. In larger and two tier authorities, key success factors were linking the Compact in to partnership structures such as the LSP and ensuring that the contribution of a Compact way of working to the local area agreement was clear.

Resources needed to support the Compact

All participants identified resources to support the Compact as critical in making it work. The resources used included national guidance, Compact Voice, dedicated workers, and officer time being freed up to work on the Compact. There is no consensus that a dedicated Compact development worker is the solution to the resources issue, with a strong view that it was important to ‘mainstream’ responsibility for the Compact.

These findings also suggest a wider learning point: it is important that policy initiatives predicated on an assumption that sectors will work in partnership also recognise that local partners need time and support to develop these initiatives.

Representation

This research has shown that the third sector’s ability to play a representative role in Compact development can be a key success factor. IVAR’s previous research ² has shown that local authorities view TSOs as important conduits for reaching and engaging with local communities.

However, the earlier research also highlighted difficulties around the implementation of this role, including tensions within the sector and practical difficulties in creating mechanisms for a range of opinions to be heard. Concerns were also raised about the need to reconcile the local authority’s desire for efficient and consistent lines of communication with the third sector, with the diversity and difference of the sector.

The importance of representation and the difficulties associated with carrying out the representative function effectively point to a need for further work to support third sector representation. In section four, we include a list of recent publications and training designed to assist the third sector in this role.

The value of Local Compacts

This research has shown that Local Compacts can be an effective tool for promoting and facilitating successful relationships between the third sector and public bodies.

There is perhaps a risk that the Compact may be seen as an end in itself, when successful cross-sector working is facilitated by a set of factors that exist in their own right, including a Compact. The examples of success factors given by participants seem to support the view that a Local Compact is not particularly useful as a prescriptive guide or a punitive instrument. When a Local Compact is working well it can be used as a rallying point, codifying the behaviours that are needed for good partnership working. Moreover, the process of developing and overseeing the implementation of Compacts can be an important means of cementing some of the key building blocks of successful cross-sector working – mutual understanding, openness, respect and trust.

SECTION FOUR: CONTEXT AND HISTORY OF THE COMPACT

The context: cross-sector partnership working

Over the last ten years, government policy has placed an increasing emphasis on 'partnership' between the public and third sectors. A perceived need to work in partnership is linked especially to public policy drives to 'modernise' public services; to expand the role of the third sector in the delivery of those public services⁷; and to promote 'social cohesion' and 'civil renewal' in local communities⁸.

In line with these policy goals, national and local policy documents regularly refer to the need for 'partnership' between organisations in the two sectors and to the need to 'improve' such partnerships in order to achieve more 'effective' and 'sustainable' policy implementation⁹. It seems, therefore, that the need for the Compact, and for other means of supporting and promoting effective relationships for mutual benefit, is increasing rather than diminishing.

Local Compacts

Soon after the election of the Labour Government in 1997, the national Compact came into being. In 1998, *The Compact on Relations between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in England*, intended as an expression of the commitment of government and the voluntary and community (or third) sector to work in partnership for the '*betterment of society and to support voluntary and community activity*' was approved¹⁰.

Beginning with a high profile launch, the national Compact set out principles and undertakings to underpin the relationship between government and the third sector in England. While addressing the national arena, the Government also set out its intention to: '*encourage actively its extension... to local government, who will be invited to adopt and adapt the Compact to suit their relationship with the voluntary and community sector*'¹⁰.

In 2002, the Treasury *Cross-cutting review of the role of the voluntary and community sector in service delivery* suggested that there was a ‘remarkable consensus of opinion that the Compact is a ‘good thing’¹¹. According to the review, the idea of the Compact was universally supported and the main problems were commonly identified as ‘lack of awareness and ineffective implementation’.

In the same year the Carrington Report¹² was able to set out some of the challenges of implementation and called, amongst other recommendations, for greater co-ordination across government and for the mediation of disputes. It also emphasised the importance of implementing Compact principles and practice across partnerships at all levels – whether or not such groups had formally labelled their practices as ‘Compacts’.

Subsequent research has indicated serious difficulties with the operation of Local Compacts.

In 2003, *The Paradox of Compacts* was published by the Home Office, together with a tool kit and review of evaluation frameworks¹³. The report described the findings of a study which examined progress in the development of Compacts at national, regional and local levels and revealed some key insights into the state of local Compacts across the country at that time.

The study found that:

- For Local Compacts, leadership ‘*from the top*’, along with champions in both the public and third sectors, was crucial for success; in local authorities the most successful Compacts had active leadership from the lead councillors.
- Continuity was found to be a key element of success; Compact development suffered from change in personnel and changes in the local political environment.
- An effective and trusted voluntary sector infrastructure was also identified as important.

Barriers to success included:

- A lack of understanding of the value of the local Compact, especially among smaller voluntary groups or branches of national voluntary sector organisations.
- Low level awareness in local authorities beyond the key contacts.
- A feeling amongst BME organisations that it was not relevant to them.
- Difficulties faced by rural areas, for example with distances involved in meeting.

Later, the 2005 *Annual Sector Survey*¹⁴ carried out by the Compact Working Group showed that by 2005 out of 388 English local authorities, 78% had a published local Compact, 20% had one underway and only 2% were 'not known to have started'. The report recognised the crucial difference between 'published' Compacts and 'Compact-active areas' and the need to align Local Compacts more with local strategic partnerships (LSPs) and local area agreements (LAAs) so that '*everything else can happen*'.

The Local Compact Developers Network – whose membership had now reached 150 and was used for the research – identified a lack of resources as being the biggest single barrier to the pace of development and to successful implementation. The Compact Working Group was re-launched as Compact Voice in April 2007.

At this time a national Government review of the Compact reflected criticisms that, in practice, the Compact did not work as well as it might¹⁵. Reasons for this included problems in translating high level principles into action, examples of persistent poor practice, particularly where funding was concerned, and the absence of penalties for those who did not comply with the Compact.

In late 2006 the *Joint Compact Action Plan for 2006-8* was presented to Parliament, based on the Seventh Annual Meeting to Review the Compact¹⁶. The action plan included some key outcomes for enhanced effectiveness of Compacts and the actions required to achieve them.

The key outcome for local Compacts was:

'A better application of Compact principles to result in stronger partnerships and greater engagement of communities in policy, programmes and service delivery, social regeneration and renewal.'

The proposed actions included:

- Best practice guidance and promotional work building on what works well at a local level.
- Enhanced integration into LAAs, linked to LAAs needing to include a statement of the involvement of the third sector and local people in the design and delivery of the agreement.
- Promoting, supporting and, where necessary, challenging investment in implementation and awareness building at local level.
- Addressing the need to build the skills of the sector and public sector bodies for effective partnership working and Compact-compliant working.

Two key research reports produced in 2007 painted a critical picture of Compact implementation at a local level and indicated the scale of the challenges being faced.

Stronger independence, stronger relationships, better outcomes was produced by Compact Voice for the Local Sector Independence Day 2007 (4 July), drawing on 106 Local Compact Voice members, covering almost a third of the English local authority areas¹⁷. As a network, the Local Compact Voice was established in March 2003 to share experience and influence national policy. The report focused particularly on the issue of independence.

Key findings included:

- 59% of respondents said local public bodies were not demonstrating by their actions that they understood the independence of the third sector.

- 69% said funded groups feared campaigning would affect their future funding.
- 35% said the council *selected* sector representatives on partnerships.
- Where the sector elected its own representatives, one in four respondents reported a continuing problem of the council '*attempting to interfere*'.
- Almost half the respondents reported that groups found it difficult to represent their users and to be heard.

The report questioned whether Compacts were having enough impact, given the complex changes occurring in the context of LAAs and public service delivery. Respondents saw '*misunderstanding independence as part of a bigger problem of local bodies not understanding the sector*'.

Overall, the report raised the question of whether local independence is being '*compromised on a large scale and across a broad range of issues*'. The report noted that, given the limitations of the research, '*this survey has only taken the pulse, leaving it unclear just how widespread and deep these concerns may be across England*'.

Recognising the problems of implementing Compacts at a local level, NCVO produced a 'Local Compact implementation workbook'¹⁸, a comprehensive and useful guide to making Local Compacts work in practice. In particular, the toolkit encourages a focus on what can be achieved through the Compact, and offers a series of 'troubleshooting tips' to help diagnose and resolve things that are not working.

In 2007, the *Annual Sector Report* was produced by Compact Voice, replacing the former Annual Sector Reviews and taking a wider and longer term view, based on a range of research sources and focus groups¹⁹. Regarding Local Compacts, the *Annual Sector Report 2007* made a gloomy observation:

'The national vision on the Compact has not been replicated on a local level'.

The report reiterated concerns about:

- Under-resourcing of Local Compacts.
- A need for improved guidance and support for local authorities on the implementation of their commitments.
- A mismatch between central government guidance and what happens in practice at a local level.
- Breaches of the Compact in relation to funding.
- Examples of public bodies not respecting the independence of the third sector and *'trying to assert control'*.
- The lack of evidence of good practice.

Taken together, these reports suggest that by 2007 Local Compacts were still not working as well as they could. It is in this context that we set out through our study to explore ways in which some local partnerships have made their Compacts more effective.

SECTION FIVE: RESOURCES

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Resources to assist in cross-sector partnership working

1. The Commission for the Compact

The Commission for the Compact is an independent body responsible for overseeing the Compact - an agreement between the Government and the third sector in England to improve their relationship for mutual advantage and community gain. The Commission works with key partners to take the Compact forward including Compact Voice, who represent the views of the Third Sector on the Compact, the Office of the Third Sector and the Local Government Association (LGA). The Commission's website contains good practice examples, policy updates and the Compact Action Plan 2008-09.

www.thecompact.org.uk

2. Compact Voice and Local Compact Voice

Compact Voice represents the third sector in England on taking the Compact forward. Local Compact Voice supports the implementation of Compacts at a local level. The Compact Voice website includes research reports, case studies and guidance. It also includes links to an on-line discussion forum for the national Compact, and a similar forum for the Local Compact.

www.compactvoice.org.uk

3. Collaboration National Support Service (*Collaboration Benefits*)

The Collaboration National Support Service is one of nine workstreams funded by Capacitybuilders. The role of the Collaboration National Support Service is to facilitate collaborative working between third sector organisations and other sectors. The service is targeted mainly at those organisations that provide support to the third sector, but it is also developing an evidence base about collaborative working, which will be widely available. The service is led by bassac.

www.bassac.org.uk

4. The Partnership Improvement Programme

The Partnership Improvement Programme is run jointly by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) and the Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR). The aim of the programme is to improve cross-sector partnership working between local authorities and third sector organisations. The three principal objectives for the programme are:

- To build trust and mutual understanding across sectoral divides.
- To enable senior staff in local government and the third sector to take the lead in responding to the challenges of working across local authority/third sector boundaries and in local authority/third sector partnerships.
- To develop local improvement plans for more effective engagement and partnership working across sectoral divides.

The programme consists of five facilitated sessions for a mixed group of up to 12 senior officers and practitioners from the local authority and the local VCS, all held in local venues. It is free for participants and is being rolled out region by region over the next three years.

www.idea.gov.uk or www.ivar.org.uk

5. The Improving Local Partnerships Project

The Improving Local Partnerships Project is run by the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA) and funded by the Big Lottery Fund. The aim of the project is to equip local third sector infrastructure organisations (LIOs) with the skills and knowledge to be effective representatives of the sector in cross-sector partnerships. The project includes an information service for LIOs (via NAVCA) and local authorities (via IDeA) and an on-line information bank.

www.navca.org.uk

6. Useful publications

- IVAR (forthcoming, September 2008), *Good practice in third sector representation* – a collection of case studies about how people have made the third sector representative function work effectively in a variety of local settings.
- CLG and NAVCA (August 2008) *Principles of Representation: A framework for effective third sector participation in Local Strategic Partnerships*.
- NAVCA (2007) *Skilling up for LSPs* – research on leadership skills for effective representation.

SECTION SIX: FURTHER DETAILS ABOUT THE STUDY

Purpose of this research

There is general agreement within the public and third sectors that the principles of the Compact ought to underpin relationships between the sectors. On the other hand, the Compact has been criticised on the grounds that, in practice, it does not work as well as it might¹. Reasons for this include problems in translating high level principles into action; examples of persistent poor practice, particularly where funding is concerned; and the absence of penalties for those who do not comply with the Compact.

Despite the criticisms, there are many examples across the country of Local Compacts being used effectively, as reflected, for example, by commendations for excellence in Compact work². The Commission for the Compact, acting on its intention to help spread good practice, engaged the Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR) to carry out this study, which explores what makes successful local Compacts.

This small-scale qualitative study set out to identify and understand factors that contribute to effective Local Compacts, in the hope of assisting local practitioners by increasing knowledge and awareness of how to improve local cross-sector working through the implementation of Compact principles.

The study sites

The study team selected eleven local authority areas, spread across the nine government regions. The authorities were chosen because it was thought that they might exemplify good practice, for example because they had won awards, but also to ensure that they reflected a range of local circumstances.

The authorities chosen were of varying sizes, from small to very large, and included both unitary and two tier authorities. Some were rural and some urban, some with a predominantly affluent population, others more economically deprived. Some areas

comprised a mainly white British population, and others were more diverse; some contained a relatively high proportion of Black and ethnic minority residents.

The authorities that took part were (in alphabetical order):

- Birmingham
- Bournemouth
- Calderdale
- Congleton
- Devon
- East Sussex
- Gateshead
- Hertfordshire
- Merton
- Nottingham
- North Yorkshire.

In each area the study team interviewed people who had been or were involved in drawing up and implementing a Local Compact. Interviewees included people from the local authority, the third sector and from other public agencies. In some areas people took part in a focus group. The team also reviewed Local Compact documents and relevant reports, including reports to the LSP board or council cabinet.

In addition, the study team interviewed a range of people who are involved in making policy about Local Compacts or who have an overview of relations between the public sector and the third sector at a local level.

The team then analysed all the material from the interviews, focus groups and written documents in order to draw out examples both of successful outcomes from partnership working and of factors that seemed to contribute to Local Compacts working well.

Research methodology

Qualitative case studies

The study was based on a case study methodology. The study was designed to be carried out in five phases:

- Phase One: preparation, scoping and review of evidence and research.
- Phase Two: fieldwork: interviews across the cases.
- Phase Three: analysis, draft report writing.
- Phase Four: final report.
- Phase Five: dissemination and presentation of findings.

This approach was chosen as it was considered the best way to explore the complex and wide-ranging issues involved in making cross-sector relationships work at a local level. Within the case study framework, the study team reviewed a range of written material and carried out face-to-face semi-structured interviews and focus groups.

The data collected was then analysed to look for common themes and to highlight key success factors, and a report drafted. The findings from the study will be presented to practitioners at seminars around the country. This will allow the study team to understand whether the findings are useful in practice, and whether there are more examples of key success factors that ought to be captured and explored further.

Phase 1: preparation, scoping and review

To ensure that the study was adequately grounded in earlier research and the wider policy and funding context, phase 1 involved:

- An initial desk-based review of existing material on the Compact and cross-sector partnerships and relationships (including published research, evaluation reports, grey literature, and research in progress within Compact Voice).

- Scoping interviews with key staff from the Commission for the Compact and Compact Voice Team (hosted by NCVO), and Office of the Third Sector.

Phase 2: case studies

When using a case study approach, it is important to select case study sites which provide interesting and divergent cases but are also systematically chosen across a framework using some initial dimensions thought to be important. In this case the key criterion for selection was that the sites chosen were likely to offer some examples of good practice.

The second factor we considered important was to undertake a case study in each of the nine government regions, since we felt that local ownership might be an important factor in spreading good practice.

To mitigate the risk that the interviews and focus groups might yield insufficient evidence of good practice, the study team selected eleven local authority areas, spread across the nine government regions. The authorities were chosen because it was thought that they might exemplify good practice, but also to ensure that they reflected a range of local circumstances.

The authorities chosen were of varying sizes, from small to very large, and included both unitary and two tier authorities. Some were rural and some urban, some with a predominantly affluent population, others more economically deprived. Some areas comprised a mainly white British population, and others were more diverse; some contained a relatively high proportion of Black and ethnic minority residents.

The study team visited each area in person, and undertook face to face interviews and focus groups. Details of the interview framework are given on the next page.

Semi-structured interview questions

(A) Basic information about the person being interviewed (this can be completed before the interview)

- (i) Your name:
- (ii) Your role:
- (iii) Your organisation/ group:
- (iv) Contact details (email, tel and address):
- (v) Name of Compact:

(B) History and aims of the Compact in your area

1. What do you consider to be the **most important reasons** for having a Compact, or enacting compact principles, in your locality?
2. Do you know **which people** or organisations initiated and negotiated the Compact and any working Codes?
3. Do you know **when** the Compact was initiated and negotiated?
4. What do you consider to be the **main aims** of the Compact, or the principles behind the Compact, in your locality?

(C) What factors make for a successful Compact?

5. How do you know your Compact has been successful?
(Prompt: have you experienced any change over time?)
6. Can you give some examples of situations from the last two years where you consider the Compact, or the operation of Compact principles, has had a positive benefit?
(Prompt: what were the situations? What were the benefits? How and what did you do in your organisation to realise those benefits?)

7. Taking one of those situations (the one that you consider the most important) **which factors do you consider were most important** in achieving this benefit?

(Prompts: factors might include the role of formal Compact procedures, clear documents, toolkits, leaflets, public awareness of the Compact or its principles, public signing or ceremonies, long developed working relationships, trust between different partners etc)

8. In your experience, which factors do you consider are necessary to make a successful Compact, or to implement the principles behind a Compact?

(Prompts: mechanisms and processes, e.g. working groups; resources, e.g. dedicated worker, funding; monitoring, e.g. a monitoring group, formal scrutiny relationships, e.g. relations between key individuals; links to other structures, e.g. LSP, LAA)

9. What are the **individual skills** that you consider the people most engaged in this work need to possess in order to make the principles of the Compact work well?

10. Are there particular **collaborative skills, attitudes or attributes** that you consider organisations and partnerships need to possess in order to make the principles of the compact work well?

11. What **kind of support do organisations and individuals** need in your locality to help develop the principles behind the Compact?

(Prompts: training, advice from regional or national agencies, learning from other initiatives)

12. What do you see yourself doing in the next year to develop the principles of Compact working in your locality?

(Prompt – is there anything you would have liked to have done differently?)

(D) Any other points

13. Are there any other points you would like to raise about your learning about local Compacts and the principles behind them?

Table 2: Participating local authorities

Authority	Type	Date Compact signed	Compact development group(s)	Formal links (apart from LA, PCT and third sector)
Birmingham	Unitary / metropolitan	2004	Third Sector Group	LSP
Bournemouth	Unitary	2004	Third Sector Partnership Group	Vision 2026 (LSP)
Calderdale	Metropolitan	2004	Compact Steering Group	
Congleton	District (two tier area)	2005	Compact Review Board	
Devon	County (two tier area)	2005	Compact Hub	County and District LSPs
East Sussex	County (two tier area)	2003	Compact Steering Group	County LSP
Gateshead	Metropolitan	2002	Compact Working Group	
Hertfordshire	County (two tier area)	2001	Compact Group	
Merton	London Borough	2004	Compact Board	LSP
Nottingham City	Unitary	2007	Compact Implementation Group	
North Yorkshire	County	2004	Compact Steering Group	LSP