Improved relationships help groups to obtain funding in Stroud

Working to the principles of the Funding and Procurement Code of the Compact has helped small groups in the Stroud District access funding from the PCT. The PCT's Health Inequalities Facilitator for the Stroud District recently worked with Voluntary and Community Action Stroud District (VCASD) to compile and disseminate information on a small PCT funding pot to local VCS groups. VCASD then provided support to VCS groups applying for this funding. All 9 groups who applied were awarded the funds they applied for.

Forest Voluntary Action Forum promoted the Compact at the Annual Forest of Dean Partnership Conference (on November 28th)

But it's not all plain sailing –

We all know we still have a long way to go. And there are times when the Compact may need to be used as a stronger reminder to partners of their commitments. Earlier in the year, GAVCA was informed by one of its funders that it had frozen payments due under an existing SLA. A timely reminder that this was in breach of the Compact, to which both organisations had signed up, helped that decision to be quickly reversed and the money to be paid.

So has your organisation signed up yet?

Organisations must sign a form in order to formally "sign-up" to the Compact. Only organisations that have signed-up to the Compact can use it to challenge another organisation who they feel may be in breach of it and receive the support of the Compact Group, both in implementing it, but also in resolving any conflicts that may arise due to breaches of the undertakings. The majority of public sector organisations have signed up but many voluntary and community organisations still need to do so. If you haven't already done so, you can download the sign-up form from www.gloshub.org.uk or contact the Partnership and Participation Project at lorrainek@gavca.org.uk

Gloucestershire COMPACT

Public, Voluntary and Community Sectors in Partnership

Working Together – Better Together

What is the Gloucestershire Compact anyway?

The Gloucestershire Compact is an agreement between key local public sector agencies (including county and district authorities) and the voluntary and community sector, to support and improve partnership working between the sectors. It sets out values, principles and commitments on how best the sectors can work together to achieve more for the local community. It is underpinned by six Codes of Practice which contain specific undertakings for the public sector and the voluntary and community sector, as well as a series of joint undertakings, to improve partnership working.

Does it really make any difference?

Having an effective local Compact can lead to better relations between the sectors, and so to better decisions and better services. For public sector partners commitment to partnership working is necessary for many external audits and inspections. For voluntary and community groups it can mean having local public bodies that are supportive and enabling, as well as consultation and involvement that works. This newsletter highlights some of the real differences that the Gloucestershire Compact has already made in the County and, hopefully, illustrates that it is not just another piece of paper but is really changing the way we work together.

Working together increases understanding

This year's review by Gloucester City Council of its funding to the VCS has been a good example of how the two sectors can work effectively together for the benefit of the community. A working group of elected representatives from the Gloucester VCS Forum worked with officers from the City Council over a period of many months to agree the principles and practicalities of the funding. The reps were able to feed back to the forum throughout the process and keep groups informed of the thinking that was going on, with the result that, when the changes were announced, there were no surprises and, although some inevitable concerns from organisations whose funding was uncertain, a much greater understanding of the situation.

We're getting to know each other better!

To mark National Compact Week at the beginning of November, the Compact Group organised a Work Shadowing Programme to help to increase understanding between workers in the Public Sector and the Voluntary Sector about each other's roles, and "work culture." This year, staff from the Public Sector stepped out into the unknown world of the voluntary sector for a day, and next year the process will be repeated the other way round. There was a really positive response from those that took part, illustrated in the following excerpts from the feedback forms received:

"The range of activities my host organisation engaged in with relatively limited resources was over-whelming."

"Something that I admired was the flexibility, commitment and focus of (the staff) in ensuring that their clients get the best possible service to meet their needs"

Participants from both Sectors also found positive learning points that they will be able to use in their own organisation. for example, the worker from the PCT who shadowed staff from Modern Eyes Training will use this insight when looking at how it best supports employment within the PCT for people with impaired sight. A positive spin-off for the VCS host organisation is that the PCT has now also added this Service to its list of providers.

What's happening in the PCT?

Gloucestershire Primary Care Trust (GPCT) renewed its commitment to the Compact in January 2007, but the hard bit of changing behaviours and practice is taking a bit longer to happen. However, there is recognition that we have a commitment under the Compact, even if we're not all familiar with the detail. Compact Champion Di Billingham commented that 'I'm hearing far more references to the Compact from colleagues, and being asked about it more often than 12 months ago, which is progress!'

In order to move things along we are having a joint workshop with the Hospitals Trust and Partnership Trust in January 2008. The workshop will focus on exploring ways in which we can support the compact undertakings in our work in order to develop and improve our partnership working with the voluntary and community sector. Hopefully this programme will be repeated amongst other organisations, such as the local authorities, so that we all develop at the same pace.

GPCT, the Hospitals Trust and Glos Partnership Trust (GPT), are preparing a joint compact implementation plan 'Working together – Better together', which highlights the actions that needs to take place to make the under-takings a reality. The implementation plan will be updated annually and act as a tool for tracking progress.

For further information please contact: Di Billingham, County Partnerships Manager, Diana.billingham@gloucestershire.gov.uk or phone 01242-548830

National Compact success

(from NAVCA Newsletter, October):

The Compact Advocacy Programme recently helped SAIL, an Orthodox Jewish group, secure funding for its summer programmes for inner city boys. The Big Lottery Fund had initially refused funding as they claimed the project promoted religion, but the umbrella group Interlink and the Compact team succeeded in showing how BIG had misunderstood the bid and breached the BME Compact Code in doing so. BIG has apologised and valuable funding has been restored. The Compact Advocacy team is planning a campaign to increase awareness of the Compact in the BME sector by working with relevant infrastructure bodies. For further details contact jess.crocker@ncvo-vol.org.uk