

CAMBRIDGESHIRE COMPACT

Community Groups Code of Good Practice

1. Introduction

The community sector is made up of groups, networks, traditions and patterns of behaviour among people who share physical neighbourhoods, living conditions or common understandings and interests. It is the community itself taking action to get things done, although much of its activity is informal and often invisible. The community sector ranges from small informal community groups to large multi-purpose community organisations.

2. Purpose and Policy Context

This Code of Good Practice sets out the key principles and ways of working and aims to increase understanding of how community groups work. This improved understanding of how groups operate at a local level will inform statutory organisations how best to work with them and how to support infrastructure organisations to the benefit of community groups. This work takes place in a context where statutory organisations are committed to consult with and seek the views of the full range of their diverse communities, on which they are often measured, thereby providing an opportunity for community groups to influence policy. This Code sets out how this might be done to the maximum benefit of local people.

There are four other Compact Codes of Good Practice which overlap with and complement this one, as well the overarching Cambridgeshire Compact:

- Consultation
- Volunteering
- Funding & Commissioning
- Diversity (See section 8 for further information)

3. Community Groups in Cambridgeshire

Community groups are of major significance in the county's 3rd sector. Based on a survey of their membership, Cambridge Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) estimate that at this time in Cambridgeshire there are over 8,000 community groups, with nearly 90,000 volunteers, covering the entire range of policy and services. Other research suggests that this recorded data reflects as little as one third of volunteering activity and that actual numbers of volunteers may well be much higher.

Groups are set up for many purposes; some are established by like-minded people to promote their interests, some campaign on single issues and others provide self-help and support in a local neighbourhood. For example:

- Playgroups
- Community centres
- Village halls
- Arts groups
- Sports groups
- Nurseries
- Credit unions
- Older people's lunch clubs
- Scout groups
- University of the 3rd Age
- Environmental groups
- Youth groups

Community groups play a vital role in connecting and supporting people, many of whom may experience exclusion for a range of reasons.

4. Guiding Principles from the Cambridgeshire Compact

- **Stability** All partners contributing towards sustainability of local community groups
- **Consistency & Fairness** A standard, honest and transparent approach across all sectors
- **Independence** Recognition of the third sector's rights to self-determination and campaigning
- **Accountability** The need for value for money and efficient use of public funds
- **Needs Driven** Recognising the benefits of placing communities at the centre of services

5. The Role of Community Groups

Community groups contribute to the wellbeing of their communities by:

- Understanding the needs of their communities
- Seeking to involve all members of the community
- Co-ordinating community-based activities and events
- Providing access to leisure, sports and culture in local communities and neighbourhoods
- Providing a voice for local people and campaigning
- Providing help, support and services to those who need it, for example, people who are housebound
- Helping people get involved locally, for example through volunteering or community action

In working with community groups the statutory sector needs to take account of the very low resources that groups experience, because of their informal nature, lack of time or limited resources. It also needs to be recognised that groups may not wish, or be able, to be involved in consultations, partnerships or similar statutory led processes. The majority of community groups are either wholly dependent upon volunteers or have minimal paid staff. However, despite often being 'cash poor' these groups are rich in terms of the enthusiasm, commitment, knowledge and experience of the people who support them. Groups are often led by one or two very active local people who give much of their time and commitment. It should be noted that a lack of wider ownership could make it harder to plan for the future.

Councils for Voluntary Service and other local infrastructure organisations have roles to play in engaging small groups through facilitating forums for networking, enabling them to share good practice and expertise. Also, in acting as a conduit, representing the diverse views of local groups and organisations to agencies such as the local authority and other public bodies. Promoting two-way communication, so that the local sector is consulted on policy developments and can contribute to discussions and decision-making at a local level. It needs to be acknowledged that resources are required to do this effectively.

6. The Undertakings

The signatories of the Cambridgeshire Compact are committed to the undertakings set out below.

The Statutory Sector undertake to:

- Provide financial and non-financial support including advice, training and access to accommodation and other resources
- Provide clear and co-ordinated funding guidelines and suitably written funding agreements when appropriate
- Respect and value the campaigning role of community groups
- Consult community groups using plain English giving 12 weeks for responses as set out in the Consultation Code
- Actively encourage the participation of community groups in the development of policy, strategy, planning and delivery of service provision where the groups wish to be involved
- Respond flexibly and sensitively towards community groups
- Ensure that requests for information are proportionate, state clearly the purpose for which it will be used and the ownership of that data and adequately recompense groups for their involvement
- Support voluntary organisations that specifically work for community groups

Community Groups undertake to:

- Maintain appropriate standards of governance, conduct and openness
- Seek to assist statutory sector organisations to the benefit of their communities
- Involve service users, carers, volunteers, and members in decisions about the group's direction and operation

- Accurately consult, record and communicate the views of their service users and members
- Respect the constraints and the policy environment of the statutory sector
- Appropriately access the publicly funded support provided for their support and development

All organisations undertake to:

- Encourage and enable community group members to take on leadership roles through volunteering and community action
- Ensure that diverse members of the community and users of services are included in their plans, consultations and actions
- Consult with community groups and not speak on their behalf
- Respect that there are different interests within the sectors, be open about the potential conflicts of interest and actively seek solutions to resolve them
- Be responsive to the needs of community groups in respect of information, involvement, facilitation, training and practical support

7. Taking the Code Forward

Compact in Cambridgeshire is driven by a multi-agency group, the Compact Development Group, who will have ownership for progressing and monitoring the undertakings set out in this Code. As such, the work will form part of the Group's action planning, communications and performance management processes, with specific attention paid to the engagement of the whole range of community groups.

For both sectors this Code of Practice sets out a framework for strategic direction for working with community groups throughout the county of Cambridgeshire. For local authorities it will play a central role in directing work that will contribute to achievement against National Indicator 7; 'an environment for a thriving third sector'. It is envisaged that this Code will provide a vehicle for promoting Compact and a 'Compact way of working' across the county.

8. Dealing with Disputes

Early resolution of complaints should be sought as close to the source as possible. Any disputes in relation to the application of this code should initially be made to the organisation concerned. If unresolved, it should then be escalated through the relevant local management structure or partnership as appropriate. If the complaint or dispute is not resolved through these processes or if it has wide spread implications for the third sector or for local policy or practice, the issues should be raised through the Compact Dispute Resolution Process.

9. Further Information

9.1 Compact Information

Access the full range of Cambridgeshire Compact resources, including local and national Compacts, signing up, other Codes of Practice and a wide range of further information, on Cambridgeshire County Council web site, just type 'Compact' into the search facility.

9.2 Local Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS)

Each area has CVS offices based on district council boundaries, their staff can help with organisational development, training, quality standards, governance and fundraising. Many CVS also offer services, such as payroll, at competitive rates. Cambridgeshire CVS are:

Cambridge Council for Voluntary Service covering Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire
01223 464696 <http://www.cambridgecvs.org/>

Voluntary & Community Action East Cambridgeshire covering Ely and East Cambridgeshire
01353 666556 <http://www.vcaec.org.uk/>

Hunts Forum of Voluntary Organisations covering Huntingdonshire
01480 420601 <http://www.huntsforum.org.uk/>

Fenland Council for Voluntary Service covering Fenland
01354 659772 <http://www.fenlandcvs.co.uk/>

9.3 Specialist support organisations

The groups below are specialists in their given field and provide support and advice as listed.

Cambridgeshire ACRE Development of rural projects, including Parish Planning and advice on village facilities
01353 860850 <http://www.cambsacre.org.uk/>

The Social Enterprise People Advice and support with regard to commissioning and general social enterprise development
01223 360 977 <http://www.thesocialenterprisepeople.co.uk/>

Young Lives Services and support for organisations working with children, families and young people
01480 494333 <http://www.young-lives.org.uk>

Care Network Free advice and practical support for volunteers wishing to establish or develop local groups and Good Neighbour Schemes aimed at supporting independence for older, isolated and vulnerable people
01954 211919 <http://www.care-network.org.uk/>

Cambridgeshire Community Reuse & Recycling Network

Offering a range of support for organisations and local groups working on local reuse and recycling work

0845 602 7144

<http://www.ccorr.org.uk/>

9.4 Small Grants Schemes

Cambridgeshire Community Foundation manage the County Council vulnerable adults small grants scheme, some districts councils small grants, as well as a range of other funds, many of which are specifically targeted at community groups

01223 421588

<http://www.cambscf.org.uk/>

Young Lives manage the county council small grants scheme for organisations working with children, families and young people

01480 494333

<http://www.young-lives.org.uk>

Cambridge City Council

Elaine Shortt

elaine.shortt@cambridge.gov.uk

South Cambs District Council

Susannah Harris

susannah.harris@scambs.gov.uk

Fenland District Council

Hetty Thornton

hthornton@fenland.gov.uk

Huntingdonshire District Council

Dan Smith

dan.smith@huntsdc.gov.uk

Cambridgeshire NHS

To be supplied

Town and Parish Councils often have small grants available for local groups to undertake local work. For Town or Parish Council details

<http://www.cpalc.org.uk>

9.5 Other

Cambridgeshire.net

Online directory providing contact details and information about community, voluntary and self-help groups, clubs and societies.

<http://www.cambridgeshire.net/>

For further information contact Sandie Smith, 3rd Sector Development Officer, Cambridgeshire County Council on 01223 715471 or email sandie.smith@cambridgeshire.gov.uk