



# **Surrey Compact**

**The Surrey Compact is a commitment to continually improve relationships between the public, voluntary and community sector and faith organisations representing service users and carers.**

## **Working with Community Groups Code**

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# **THE SURREY COMPACT CODE OF WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Surrey Compact is a set of principles within which the statutory, voluntary, community and faith sectors agree to work together to develop effective relationships, recognise and value what each sector contributes to general society and to ensure services are delivered in the best way possible, to meet local needs.

This code is one of a number of codes that describes how the Compact will work in practice. This code of practice aims to promote a better understanding of the work of community groups within the wider voluntary, community and faith sector in Surrey.

It is important to understand community groups, what they do, how they operate and how they are different from other voluntary organisations, so the right conditions can be created to enable community groups to feel supported, thrive and succeed.

## **2. DEFINITION**

Community organisations are usually active on a local or community level, small, modestly funded and largely dependent on voluntary, rather than paid, effort. They can be seen as distinct from the larger, professionally staffed agencies, which are most visible in voluntary sector profiles. The range of community groups includes neighborhood-based groups and groups based on common interests or experience, such as faith, ethnic origin and disability through to arts and leisure interests. In Surrey the phrase 'voluntary, community and faith sector' (VCFS) is used to encompass the full range.

## **2.1 Community groups and the voluntary sector**

Although community groups and the voluntary sector are often seen as an homogenous group having similar desired outcomes for the sectors they serve, there are real differences in their structure and style of working.

Community Groups are important because they enable local people to contribute to the development of their communities, enable groups of people to work together to find solutions to common problems, promote active citizenship and community leadership and give a voice to communities in local decision-making.

## **2.2 Community groups and the faith sector**

Faith groups (including Christian Churches of all denominations and other groups belonging to World Faiths) represent a particular part of the community that is not often fully recognised. While practicing their faith is a central activity for most faith-groups, many are also involved in running community services, promoting community development and representing community interests on a voluntary basis.

Involving faith groups is an excellent way of promoting social inclusion because they provide gateways to often excluded communities, they boost involvement in community life and help link the development of citizenship to faith traditions. Faith groups can offer local networks and knowledge, leadership in organising active communities and volunteers, management capacity as well as buildings for community use.

## **3. IN SUPPORTING THIS CODE**

### **3.1 Partners undertake to:**

- Promote community development as a means of building active and sustainable communities based on social justice and mutual respect.
- Recognise the importance of and support local infrastructure or support organisations, community and faith networks as a means of contact, information, training and advice for community groups and more formal voluntary organisations.
- Adhere to the principles of fairness, equality, accessibility and inclusion as central to the effective development and engagement of community groups.

- Share skills, knowledge, experience and good practice and recognise that learning is key to the success of sustainable community development

### **Statutory Sector will seek to:**

- Ensure that community groups have access to appropriate support and resources to enable them to develop e.g. meeting space, workers with community development skills, small grants and appropriate learning opportunities.
- Ensure that information and consultation is targeted appropriately and does not over-burden smaller organisations.
- Involve groups with first hand experience of particular problems in developing and delivering solutions and give the process resources as appropriate.
- Remember that community groups may have limited capacity, and respect their other commitments and the needs of their volunteers.

### **Voluntary organisations will seek to:**

- Raise awareness of the contribution and diversity of community groups within their organisations and networks and work constructively with them.
- Recognise the specific support and information needs of community groups and challenge activities and timescales that prevent community groups getting involved.
- Recognise that the interests of community and voluntary organisations are not always the same, and so make it clear which part of the sector is being represented or discussed, when necessary.
- Encourage active community members to carry out leadership roles in voluntary, community and faith sector networks. Infrastructure organisations such as Councils for Voluntary Services, which sometimes speak on behalf of the sector, will ensure they represent the interests of community groups.

### **Community organisations will seek to:**

- Channel information and views to and from their members or constituency, including through community networks where appropriate and where they are able.
- Encourage quality partnership working and community involvement.
- Promote fairness within the group's remit and influence follow good equalities practice.

- Be clear and open to the community or constituency your particular group speaks for.
- Carry out any reasonable monitoring and evaluation required by funders, in proportion to the size of any grant or resources given.
- Seek advice from support organisations to enable your group to thrive.
- Share specialist and local knowledge with the voluntary and statutory sector to benefit the wider community.

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