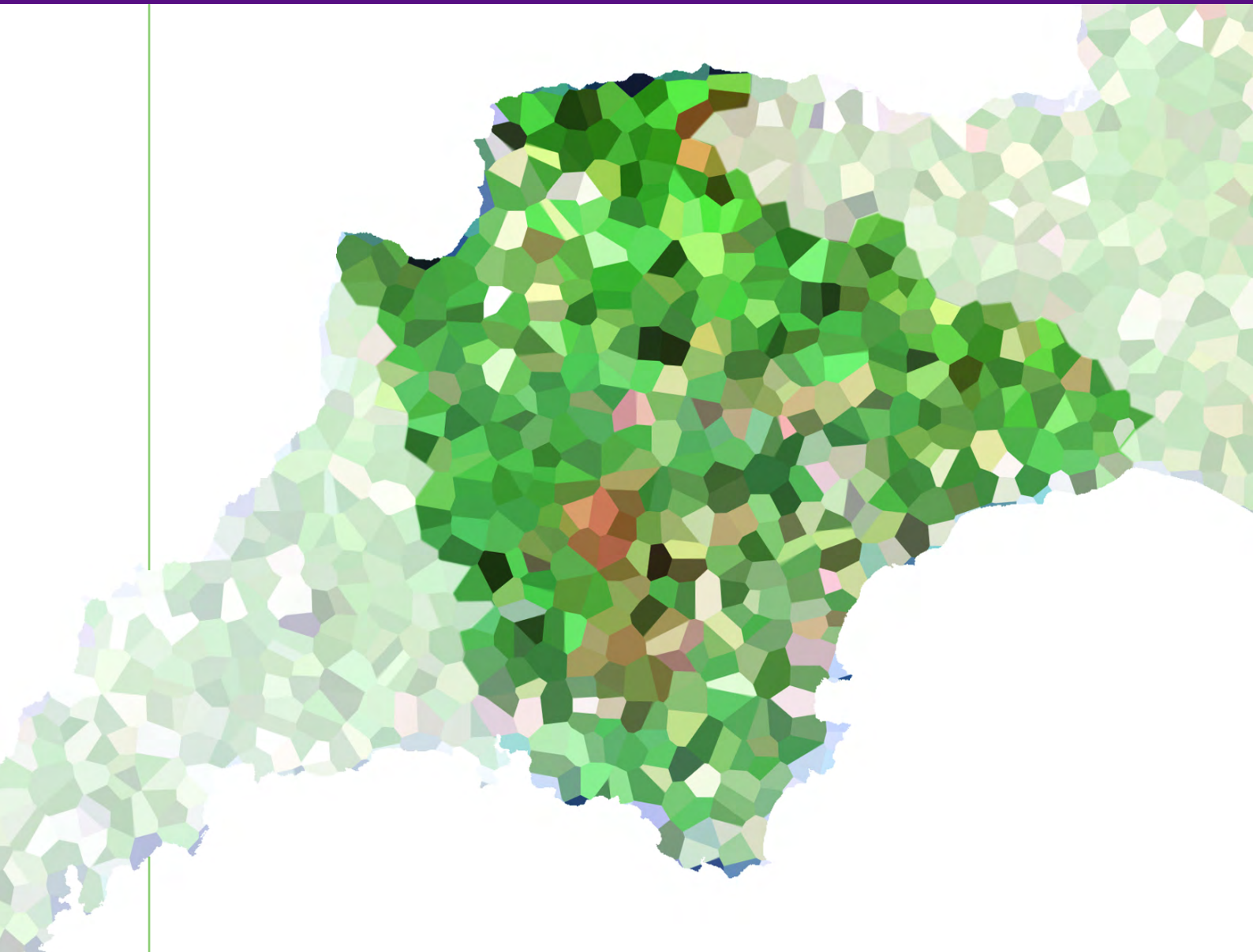


A Compact for Devon

Community Groups

Code of Good Practice

June 2008



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A selection of quotes taken from working group members is included throughout this document.



Compact for Devon

The Compact is the agreement between the Statutory Sector (including Devon County Council, District Councils, Devon Primary Care Trust, other Healthcare Trusts, Connexions, Police, Fire Service etc.) and the Voluntary and Community Sector, to improve and develop their relationship for the benefit of each other and the communities they serve. It was revised in 2005. For further details contact www.dacvs.org.uk (DACVS*).

The Compact sets out:

- A shared vision and principles
- Actions from both sides
- The Statutory Sector's commitment to respect the independence of the Voluntary and Community Sector, and
- Systems to help make sure that the agreement works

The Compact is supported by six codes of good practice covering:

- Funding and Procurement
- Volunteering
- Equality and Diversity
- Consultation
- Community Groups
- Partnership

The Funding and Procurement Code, the Volunteering Code and the Equality and Diversity Code were published in November 2006. The Consultation Code, the Community Groups Code and the Partnerships Code were published in June 2008. The Compact is informed by the Codes of Practice and together they form Devon's agreed approach to partnership working. None of the documents should be taken in isolation.

Local Compacts have been agreed in most areas to cover relations between local councils, other local public bodies and the voluntary and community sector. The Compact for Devon and this Code of Practice are informed by the national Compact on Relations between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in England (Home Office, 1998), a national code of good practice and numerous Codes from other places.

“There is a direct correlation between an active and vibrant community sector and a confident and supportive community in which it is a pleasure to live”

For more information go to www.thecompact.org.uk or www.homeoffice.gov.uk. The Volunteering Code is also informed by the Working Together for Devon Code of Practice on Volunteering and Community Action.

The Compact for Devon and its Codes of Good Practice have been developed by the Devon Compact Hub, whose representation stretches across the diverse range of organisations (both voluntary & community and statutory) in the County. Individuals from organisations across the spectrum of the sectors took part in the consultation on the draft documents in a variety of ways including:

- Working groups
- Voluntary sector forums
- Postal/email questionnaires
- Local Strategic Partnership meetings
- Internal organisation meetings

Implementation of the Compact and its Codes of Practice is the responsibility of each organisation. The Compact Hub sees the Compact and its codes as living documents that will be used as the basis of continued partnership working between the two sectors.

The Devon Compact Hub is responsible for carrying out regular monitoring and an annual review of the Compact for Devon and its Codes of Good Practice. For a list of Compact Champions and their contact details please go to www.dacvs.org.uk or telephone 01392 202057.

Rurality

The Compact for Devon recognises the issue of rurality* and the impact that this has on providing services in rural areas.

“Engaging in community based action has meant everything to me. It has helped me to improve the quality of my life and the lives of others, as well as make friends and develop new skills”

1

Summary

This Code of Practice forms part of the Compact for Devon and aims to promote and support the work of the community sector in Devon.

It sets out the key responsibilities and commitments of all those who work with the community sector, and of the community sector itself.

1.1 It recognises that:

- a. the community sector in Devon provides a range of services to local people and communities which improve the quality of life and life chances of those communities and people
- b. the community sector can represent real value for money
- c. the community sector can play a range of different roles including:
 - providing a voice for residents and local service users
 - building relationships and networks in local communities
 - providing self-help and mutual support to build community cohesion*
 - delivering services, often locally and informally, based on their assessment of community need
- d. the community sector is generally well placed to understand the needs of local people
- e. developing the capacity of the community sector is beneficial for everyone
- f. community sector organisations have responsibility for operating within the law and along the lines of best practice and sound governance
- g. the community sector in Devon operates in a county where rurality presents specific issues and challenges

It promotes the recognition by local statutory agencies and the formal voluntary sector* of the distinctive nature of community groups, and how this distinctive nature will affect policy and practice.

2

Introduction

2.1 What is the Community Groups Code of Practice?

This Code of Good Practice aims to provide a basis for mutual trust and understanding between the statutory sector, the more formal, established voluntary sector and the community sector in Devon. It will support the development of effective relationships and underpin the need for accountability between sectors. In doing this, this Code will have a positive effect on the way statutory agencies and the established voluntary sector relate to community groups through policies and practices.

2.2 To achieve this, the Code recognises:

- the valuable contribution of community groups as an important local resource in any community
- the diversity of the community sector
- the specific challenges facing the community sector
- that the largest social contribution of all is made through the effort of volunteers

2.3 The partners using the Compact and this Code of Practice are committed to:

- a. understanding and recognising the value of the community sector
- b. seeking to better understand the values that underpin the community sector, including: equality, social justice*, co-operation, local action, local delivery of services and support
- c. acknowledging that the community taking action to identify its own issues and to get things done is of great value
- d. understanding that community action extends far beyond the value of the services themselves – to developing social capital*, improving local democracy, promoting active citizenship* and strengthening the identity of a community, which impacts positively on the health and well being of the community as a whole
- e. valuing the diversity of the community sector
- f. making appropriate practical changes and modifications to practice, which will have a positive impact on the work of the community sector

2.4 How does the Community Groups Code of Practice complement the Compact for Devon?

Although the principles and commitments contained in the Compact for Devon apply across the voluntary and community sector, particular consideration needs to be given to the specific needs, interests and contribution of community groups, hence the development of this Code.

“I’m delighted with this Code. I work in a community organisation and if we got the respect that this Code implies then it would really support us to be more effective with our client group”

3

The Community Sector

3.1 What is the Community Sector and why is it important?

It is important to understand what community groups are and what they do, how they operate, how they are different to voluntary organisations, and why they are so vital to healthy, stronger and sustainable communities.

The community sector is made up of: personal relationships, groups, networks, traditions and patterns of behaviour among people who share physical neighbourhoods, living conditions, common understandings and interests. Community groups are associations of people who come together to pursue a common cause or interest. Community groups are member focussed and member led rather than run by paid 'professionals'.

The community sector covers the entire range of policies and services. Its activities can range from nurseries and playgroups to community centres and village halls, from tenants' associations to environmental groups, from arts and sports groups to credit unions, and from self-help groups to scout groups. Community groups which make up the community sector are about the community itself taking action to get things done to effect positive change, rather than waiting for it to be done for them or to them. Much of this community based action can stay informal and as such can seem invisible.

3.2 The value of the community sector

The value of the community sector extends far beyond the action it takes and the services it delivers. An active and healthy community will include a range of community groups which help to create a sense of identity and belonging, and:

- encourage active citizenship
- build social capital
- improve local democracy

3.3 Rural Devon

Devon is made up of a mixture of rural and urban areas, and the community sector in Devon is active across the county as a whole. This Code encourages partners to recognise the challenge of providing services in rural areas as being different to the challenges of working in urban conurbations*. Rural Devon faces challenges including dispersed populations and communities, isolation, poor transport links, loss of local services and in some areas deprivation. All of this impacts on the ability of the community sector to work effectively, and shapes the way in which services are designed and delivered.

4

Key Commitments and Undertakings by Stakeholders

4.1 Good Practice Checklist

ISSUES

Devon has a rich history of community action and delivery of services and support by the community sector at a local level. In developing this Code, the wealth of expertise, knowledge and service delivery history that exists within the community sector is acknowledged, valued and supported.

The ability of the community sector to work effectively in partnership with the statutory sector and established voluntary sector is seen as vital to the ongoing development and health of the community sector.

ASPIRATIONS

In supporting this Code, key stakeholders commit to a range of practical and value based good practice issues and aspirations, headlines of which are below:

4.2 All sectors undertake to:

- a. develop and maintain best practice and mutual respect in their relationship
- b. promote the Compact for Devon and the Codes of Practice and make mention of the Compact for Devon and the Codes of Practice where appropriate in documents and publications
- c. promote and share best practice for community development and action, and celebrate successes
- d. address the challenge of promoting community development based on building active and sustainable communities built on social justice and mutual respect
- e. address discrimination and exclusion as appropriate
- f. use plain English and avoid jargon where possible, to avoid exclusion. If jargon is used, to ensure that its meaning is clearly defined and understood
- g. participate in the evaluation of this Code which takes place through the mechanism of the Devon Hub
- h. appreciate the roles, responsibilities and policy constraints of others
- i. ensure that personnel are familiar with and able to work supportively with the community sector

4.3 The statutory sector will also undertake to:

- a. recognise and engage with community sector infrastructure* organisations
- b. explain clearly to the community sector when constraints on working practices might create obstacles and challenges to partnership working with the community sector
- c. recognise the various sources of potential funding available through working in partnership with the community sector
- d. take account of the community sector's role and needs when setting policies, procedures and carrying out a regulatory role
- e. recognise the importance of communities of people* and communities of interest* as well as communities of place*
- f. help create and maintain the conditions that enable community groups to succeed. In doing this, consider ways in which the community sector can influence the design and delivery of services, given that community organisations are well placed to know about local priorities at a community level
- g. help create and maintain the conditions that enable community groups to input to and operate in local partnerships, as well as providing their core services
- h. where possible, adjust existing regulations and in house policies to take into account the size and nature of the group
- i. where possible, ensure that new regulations and in house policies are appropriate to the size and ways of working of the community sector
- j. involve those individuals and groups with real first hand experience of particular problems in identifying and developing solutions to those problems, and where appropriate provide support to enable this involvement
- k. value the work, knowledge and expertise of the community sector, and its important role in helping the local statutory sector achieve its aims
- l. provide funding and support that is appropriate for the community sector, and in so doing:
 - recognise the importance of volunteers and value volunteer time as equivalent to match funding*
 - be prepared to take risks to support new ideas
 - recognise the importance of community owned assets* and promote the use of community buildings and resources
 - seek to recognise and respect a community sector infrastructure
 - promote the need for accessible learning opportunities for the community sector

- m. commit to recognising and respecting an independent community sector
- n. commit to consulting appropriately with the community sector (see the Consultation Code of Practice for detail)
- o. seek out the 'hard to reach' sections of the community sector and build up positive and productive relations with those groups

4.4 Voluntary sector infrastructure agencies* will also undertake to:

- a. play an enabling role and support the community sector in its diversity
- b. create opportunities to support the community sector to actively understand and engage in the Compact for Devon and the accompanying Codes of Practice
- c. consult meaningfully with the community sector
- d. actively seek out partnership working arrangements with the community sector
- e. challenge timescales that prevent community sector involvement
- f. seek clarity on which part of the sector is being represented
- g. respond to the needs of the community sector as a service priority
- h. include the views of the community sector in evaluation exercises
- i. respect the views of the community sector and work constructively with them
- j. encourage active community sector involvement in local networks whilst being sensitive to possible conflicts of interest

4.5 The community sector will also undertake to:

- a. recognise the need for appropriate monitoring and evaluation and sound governance when in receipt of public funding
- b. observe the appropriate guidance from the Charity Commission* as relevant, including that on political activities and campaigning
- c. recognise the constraints that statutory sector agencies have to operate under, and that might at times seem to put obstacles in the way of the statutory sector being able to fully engage with and support community sector initiatives
- d. engage as appropriate in partnership working arrangements and take responsibility for approaching statutory agencies to suggest potential funding opportunities
- e. encourage local community involvement and control

- f. ensure that organisational practices and services are non discriminatory
- g. seek clarity of representation and a clear mandate for acting in a representative way
- h. consult widely – including, as appropriate, service users, carers, volunteers and members
- i. maintain high standards of governance, conduct and openness

In the following sections the concepts of (5) Partnership and Consultation, and (6) Funding and Support, are further developed into concrete action points.

“Without the work of the local community sector, larger and more established agencies would struggle to know how best to develop and deliver services”

5

Partnership, Consultation and Involvement

5.1 Meaningful Consultation

Key to a successful relationship and partnership between the statutory sector, the established voluntary sector and the community sector, is meaningful consultation (refer to the Consultation Code of Practice for detail).

In the 'Key Commitments and Undertakings by Stakeholders' section (2), the need for strong and robust partnerships and effective consultation is outlined. In this section these ideas are developed into a set of action points.

Actions

The following action points will help to enable the community sector in Devon to be active, vibrant and engaged in local democracy and service delivery.

5.2 Statutory Sector:

- a. involve those individuals and groups with real first hand experience of particular problems in identifying and developing solutions to those problems. In doing this, work towards a culture of seeking out solutions 'close to home', whilst learning from best practice examples from elsewhere
- b. commit to consulting appropriately with the community sector. In doing this consider:
 - appropriate timescales for consultation
 - appropriate and accessible formats for consultation (email, postal questionnaires, meetings etc.)
 - appropriate venues for consultation – including the use where possible of community owned buildings
 - recognising the costs associated with participating in consultation (travel, time, sustenance, etc.)

Refer to the Consultation Code of Practice for more detail on this

- c. seek out the 'hard to reach' sections of the community sector and build up positive and productive relations with those groups. This involves breaking the 'cycle of acceptance' that some sections of the community remain outside of partnership arrangements. In doing this, seek the active support and guidance of the voluntary sector and in particular voluntary sector infrastructure agencies

- d. where appropriate, support the community sector's ability to operate effectively in partnerships. In doing this, recognise that the timing and structure of partnership events need to take into account the ways of working of the community sector. For example, events might need to be held in the evening and in community based premises, accessible formats for presenting information might need to be explored, interpreters might have to be used
- e. where appropriate, support the community sector's ability to deliver relevant services that are designed to meet the needs of local communities

5.3 Voluntary Sector Infrastructure:

- a. consult meaningfully with the community sector. Be genuinely committed to hearing what the community sector has to say, and find ways of ensuring that the voice of the community sector is heard and taken into account. Meaningful consultation must include:
 - publicising consultation exercises well in advance and in appropriate and accessible ways
 - proactively seek to engage community sector involvement by making contact with individuals and community organisations clearly affected by the issues being consulted on, rather than waiting to hear from them
 - actively supporting the resourcing of community organisations to take part in consultation exercises
- b. challenge timescales that prevent community sector involvement. Work closely with the statutory sector to ensure as far as possible that the community sector's involvement in partnership, consultation and policy development and appraisal is not prohibited by timescales that are too short and not well publicised
- c. make good links with community sector infrastructure agencies. Seek these agencies out and as far as possible support them to effectively define, develop and carry out their role
- d. encourage active community sector involvement in local networks whilst being sensitive to possible conflicts of interest. Ensure that local networks are aware of the specific issues facing the community sector and that they conduct their business in such a way that the community sector can participate effectively. This might impact on timing of meetings, venues, formats for consultation and distributing information etc.
- e. be clear about 'representation'*. Only seek to represent the community sector where there is a clear mandate to do this

5.4 Community Sector:

- a. encourage partnership working and engage as appropriate in partnership working arrangements
- b. take responsibility for developing sound working practices and good governance, addressing issues such as confidentiality, representation etc.
- c. develop appropriate systems for providing consultation feedback to agencies

“Communities are vibrant and complex. Acknowledging the importance of community based groups really does help towards acknowledging the importance of the health and well being of communities”

6

Funding and Other Support

Some community organisations deliver targeted local services and support very successfully but do not seek public funds for this. Other community organisations seek small grants to develop and maintain service delivery, and others still successfully fundraise for large sums of money.

Appropriate funds should be easily accessible to the community sector, and the skills and expertise on how best to manage these funds should be developed with the support of the statutory and voluntary sector infrastructure. In the Key Commitments and Undertakings, section 4, the need for accessible and supportive funding is outlined. In this section these ideas are developed into a set of action points.

Thousands of people in Devon are giving their time, resources, support and skills to local communities through their work in community groups. This value can be boosted and made more effective by giving extra resources to groups. Community groups can represent real value for money.

6.1 Actions

The following action points will help to enable the community sector in Devon to access public funds appropriately and to manage those funds efficiently and effectively.

6.2 Statutory Sector:

Where funding and support is provided for the community sector, ensure that it is appropriate, and in so doing:

- a. make those funding streams available and accessible to the community sector, by:
 - appropriate publicity
 - appropriate application processes and timescales
 - simplifying the delivery of small-grants funding programmes
 - getting as many local people as possible involved in decision-making and management
 - ensuring that systems for evaluation are meaningful to the community groups in receipt of the funding (for example consider the use of photographs, stories etc. rather than more complex service outputs and outcomes)
 - support community organisations to address issues of the sustainability of funding and income generation, not just short-term funding options

- recognise the importance of the social enterprise* business model and work with the sector to develop a cohesive strategy to promote and enhance this method of working, particularly in relation to organisations working in 'deep rural' areas, in order to help organisations work towards contracting for work
- b. recognise the importance of volunteers within the community sector, and recognise that, unlike the voluntary sector, these volunteers are often not managed by paid staff. Encourage community organisations to develop good practice in their use of volunteers, including calculating the input that volunteers, including trustees, have to the organisation, and include that detail in their reporting and funding applications (refer to the Volunteering Code of Practice for further detail)
- c. be prepared to take risks to support new ideas. Actively work with the voluntary and community sector to appraise the potential success of different ways of working and consider how these ways of working might be of local benefit. Fund scoping exercises* and pilots* to establish the potential of new ideas
- d. recognise the importance of community owned assets and support community sector ownership and management of these assets. Promote and use these assets, such as playing fields, community buildings and resources
- e. seek to develop and maintain a community sector infrastructure. Acknowledge the difficulties of engaging meaningfully with the disparate nature of the community sector, particularly at short notice, and seek out ways of engaging with community sector infrastructure bodies. In doing this, work closely with the established voluntary sector infrastructure agencies, and seek their guidance and expertise
- f. promote the need for accessible learning opportunities for the community sector

6.3 Voluntary Sector Infrastructure Agencies:

- a. ensure that the community sector has the information that it needs about appropriate funding sources in good time
- b. encourage and support the community sector to access training opportunities about best fundraising practice, and make sure that the training content is relevant to the needs of this sector, for example – sustainable funding and good governance of public funds
- c. encourage and support the community sector to develop skills in management and reporting, and consider creative ways of skills development – e.g. mentoring, job shadowing
- d. actively seek out ways to help the community sector to celebrate its successes and disseminate best practice about service development and delivery, and recognise that there are costs involved in doing this effectively

6.4 Community Sector:

- a. recognise the need for appropriate monitoring and evaluation when in receipt of public funding
- b. recognise the need to agree clear outcomes for public funding and to deliver on those outcomes
- c. commit to complying with regulatory requirements as soon as money has been allocated and discuss problems and issues of compliance at the earliest possible stage with the relevant agency in order to maintain trust and to act in a professional manner
- d. consider the pitfalls of receiving public funds, as well as the positives, and make considered choices when deciding whether or not to apply for public funding
- e. seek out training, organisational improvement and continuing professional development* (CPD) opportunities and commit to participating in these opportunities

Appendix 1

Glossary

Active Citizenship

Individuals and communities making a positive contribution locally and to the wider society through active participation in decision making, events and issues.

Charity Commission

The Charity Commission is the independent regulator for charitable activity enabling charities to maximise their impact, ensuring compliance with legal obligations, encouraging innovation and effectiveness, championing the public interest in charity to promote the public's trust and confidence.

Community cohesion

Is the outcome of initiatives designed to work towards better appreciation and celebration of diversity between people in local communities, promoting understanding, reducing hostilities and creating an environment where disparate communities can exist more harmoniously.

Communities of interest

Groups where members have common interests which bring them together, such as leisure activities or environmental activities.

Communities of people

Groups where members have common needs or characteristics, but where there might be a geographical dispersion, such as faith groups or groups of families with children with special needs.

Communities of place

Groups where members are defined geographically, for example those living on a particular estate or those living near an airport.

Community owned assets

Ownership and/or management of physical assets by communities, such as buildings, playing fields and vehicles.

Community Sector

The community sector is made up of personal relationships, groups, networks, traditions and patterns of behaviour among people who share physical neighbourhoods, living conditions or common understandings and interests.

Community sector infrastructure

Community groups that have a representative, advocacy or championing role and in some way work on behalf of the community sector.

Conurbation

A metropolitan area, or a predominately urban region that includes adjacent towns.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Continuing Professional Development is the means by which staff and volunteers maintain, improve and broaden their knowledge and skills and develop the personal qualities required to thrive and develop in their professional lives, e.g. secondments, shadowing etc.

DACVS

Devon Association of Councils' for Voluntary Service works to support the voluntary and community sector to develop and improve its contribution to the lives of citizens in Devon. It is made up of the eight district CVS in Devon.

Infrastructure agencies

Often called 'second tier' or 'umbrella' organisations, they support frontline voluntary and community organisations to develop and deliver services effectively.

Match funding

A requirement by funding agencies that any contributions they make towards programme or project costs should be matched by other funders, or by the applicants from their own resources. Some may allow in-kind contributions (e.g. the value of volunteer time, the use of their premises etc.) to count as match funding.

Pilots

A preliminary or experimental trial or test undertaken prior to full-scale use or operation.

Representation

To gather the views, beliefs, opinions of a person, group or organisation and present those on their behalf, and with their authority, to other people, groups or organisations.

Rurality

Expressed as the density of households outside urban areas with less than 10,000 population, and may also include sparsity, social, environmental and economic challenges. This includes population, transport, remoteness, access to services and deprivation. Please refer to www.defra.co.uk.

Scoping Exercises

To look over and examine a space, activity or opportunity for operation to clarify aim and purpose.

Social capital

The idea of trust, cooperation and goodwill that can be measured within communities when they interact. This is increasingly seen as being of fundamental importance to social inclusion and regeneration programmes.

Social Enterprise

A social enterprise is a business with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community, rather than being driven by the need to maximise profit for shareholders and owners (Social Enterprise: a strategy for success, DTI 2002).

Social Justice

A process whereby members of a community are concerned for the equality and rights of all.

Statutory Sector

Organisations that provide public services as a result of legislation. These include local authorities, NHS Trusts and the police, together with independent agencies such as the Learning and Skills Council, Connexions and the Probation Service.

Voluntary Sector

Although both self-help and community organisations are voluntary organisations, the term Voluntary Sector usually describes the network of larger organisations many of whom will have a policy remit. NCVO (National Council for Voluntary Organisations) describes the Voluntary Sector as comprising voluntary organisations that are not-for-profit, are formal (have a constitution), are independent of Government and self-governing and operate with a meaningful degree of volunteer involvement.

Appendix 2

Taking the Code Forward

To sign up to the Compact for Devon and its Codes of Good Practice, please go to www.dacvs.org.uk or ask for a signatory form from compact@dacvs.org.uk or telephone 01392 202057.

Appendix 3

How this code was produced

The Devon Compact Hub wishes to thank the members of the working group who enabled the development of this Code of Practice:

Jo Hooper	Devon County Council
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Caroline Leaver	North Devon District Council
Carole Pilley	Exeter Community Initiatives
Patsy Temple	Devon PCT
Penny Thame	Community Council for Devon
Debbie Williams	Devon & Somerset Fire and Rescue

Thanks are also extended to all of those who made comment on the Code during the consultation period and helped to make it work for Devon. Your input is greatly appreciated.

This Code of Practice can be made available in alternative formats.

Please contact: **compact@dacvs.org.uk**
or 01392 202057 for further information



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