

## **A COMPACT FOR EAST LoTHIAN**

A Proposal to the Community Planning Implementation Group,  
From East Lothian Voluntary Organisations Network. (ELVON)

In March this year the Scottish Executive supported by COSLA and the Scottish Council for Voluntary organisations (SCVO) published guidance on the development of local Compacts between the voluntary sector, local authorities and others in the statutory sector. The publication was prefaced with forewords by the Minister for Communities, the Vice President of COSLA and the Convenor of SCVO strongly encouraging all local bodies to initiate the development of local Compacts as the framework for developing relationships and creating stronger partnerships.

This paper which is based on the Scottish Executive guidance examines the case for a Compact between the voluntary sector and statutory sector in East Lothian and recommends that the Partnership agrees to the establishment of a working group to take the first steps in developing a local Compact for this area. A copy of the full guidance can be made available to any partner who wishes

### **What is a Compact?**

A Compact or local Compact is a written agreement which defines and manages the relationship between the voluntary sector and one or more public sector bodies. Compacts are not, however, legal documents but are non-binding agreements entered into by the partners.

A Compact will generally comprise more than one document. The Compact itself generally covers the main points of agreement between partners, their shared objectives and aspirations. It would not in itself cover detailed working practices or procedures but might have an accompanying action plan setting out how the Compact will be implemented. Detailed implementation/service agreements covering for example strategies, codes of practice etc. would normally be developed as a second stage procedure and would set out agreements on funding, communication, engagement etc.

### **What benefits can a Compact bring to partners?**

These are largely specific to the partners involved but the Scottish Executive have drawn up a list of potential key benefits based on the experience of partners in existing Compacts. These are:-

1. Strengthening the relationship between partners,
2. Extending opportunities for the voluntary sector's members, supporters and users to contribute their experience and ideas to the development and implementation of public policy,
3. Making the policies and practice developed by public bodies more responsive to the potential and needs of the voluntary sector,
4. Enabling voluntary organisations to communicate more effectively to public bodies the needs of their users and wider constituencies,
5. Extending the opportunities to mobilise the voluntary sector behind local initiatives when these coincide with the objectives of voluntary organisations,
6. Increasing understanding of how the public and voluntary sectors work,
7. Generating evidence and information on the value and impact of the work of public bodies and of the voluntary sector, and
8. Informing longer-term planning and strategic thinking.

**Would there be advantage in having a Compact for East Lothian?**

To properly assess this, account must be taken of the current state/basis of the relationship between the voluntary sector and the statutory sector in East Lothian and whether it is effective. In ELVON we have no information about any agreements formal or informal which statutory bodies might have with other organisations in the voluntary sector and as the local CVS or umbrella organisation with a remit to represent the voluntary sector we have no written agreements formal or otherwise with any part of the local statutory sector. We are thus in no position to make a judgement about the current inter sector relationship. We suspect that others in the Partnership will find themselves in a similar situation. However this is apparently not unusual and the Scottish Executive in their guidance have produced the following checklist which they suggest might be a useful test to identify the potential benefits of a Compact. If Partners consider that most of the questions can be answered with a "yes" a Compact is unlikely to bring additional benefits. If however the relationship between the sectors is not fully effective a Compact could bring added value.

	yes	no	Requires more work
The relationship between partners is strong			
Voluntary sector members, supporters and users can effectively contribute their experience and ideas to the development and implementation of public policy.			
The policies and practice developed by public bodies are			

responsive to the potential and needs of the voluntary sector.			
Voluntary organisations can communicate effectively with public bodies about the needs of their users and wider constituencies			
The voluntary sector is mobilised behind local initiatives when these coincide with the objectives of voluntary organisations.			
All parties have a clear understanding of how the public and voluntary sectors work			
There is good evidence and information on the value and impact of the work of public bodies and of the voluntary sector.			
The voluntary sector can effectively inform longer-term planning and strategic thinking in the area (for example through community planning).			

For our part we in ELVON cannot respond with a “yes” to all of these questions and we consider that most although not entirely negative require more work. We hold to the view therefore that a Compact would result in considerable benefits to all sectors. Partners may wish to consider from their individual viewpoint how they could respond and whether the development of a Compact would be an attractive proposition.

An additional factor in favour of a Compact which Partners may view as relevant derives from a recent review of ELVON. Partners may not be aware but East Lothian Council recently commissioned a review by independent consultants to look at the ELVON service and where necessary re-align ELVON’s functions to meet the strategic aims of the Council in a manner that satisfies Best Value criteria. One of the main recommendations of the review relating to ELVON’s relationship with East Lothian Council is that “There should be a Compact and Service Agreement in place within the next 12 months”.

It would appear therefore there is a weight of opinion that a Compact for this area would be of benefit but Partners will wish consider if a Compact would bring benefits from their individual perspective.

### **Development of a Compact**

There are two types of Compact – bi-lateral (between two parties) and multi-agency (between the voluntary sector and a range of public bodies). The former is by far the most simple to negotiate but is out of line with the current Scottish Executive approach of promoting a joint approach to planning and service delivery bringing. If the Partnership were to opt for a Compact, a multi-agency approach, which the Executive suggest is the preferred approach for local Compacts would fit with our community planning partnership arrangements and would, we consider, be the right option for East Lothian.

If the Partnership determined that the development of a Compact should be pursued the first step would be to convene a **Compact Development Group** which would involve representatives of partners in the public and voluntary sectors and to select a chair or chairs for the group. Public sector membership would be relatively straightforward in that each public sector body represented in the partnership should be represented in the development group. However the voluntary sector membership is more complex. The Voluntary sector is currently represented in the partnership by only two organisations - the local CVS (ELVON) and the local Volunteer Development organisation (VDEL) - but the guidance recommends that there should be a broad balance between the public and

voluntary sectors which if accepted would mean drawing in up to six additional representatives from the voluntary sector. We do not consider that exact equal numerical representation of public and voluntary sectors on a development group is critical as we would hope that the any group would operate on the basis of consensus opinion but we suggest that it would be of value to extend voluntary sector representation to include the major voluntary sector areas of interest for example caring services, children's services, general community services etc.

The selection of a chair or chairs could be a little more difficult. The choices would appear to be:-

1. Choose one person from the partnership to act as chair
2. Choose a representative from each main sector (public and voluntary) to chair Jointly perhaps chairing alternate meetings.
3. Choose an independent person with no specific allegiance to act as chair.

Each option has its merits but in order that the chair is seen to be to completely above board and without bias ELVON would favour the third option. ELVON has identified a possible independent chair and details are given in the appendix.

### **The remit of the group**

We understand from the guidance development groups have largely been allowed to develop their own specific remit. While we see merit in this approach, if the Partnership determine that a group should be established we consider that, while they might be charged initially addressing the question "is a Compact right for this area?" and then, if they find in the affirmative, with developing their own remit, they might be directed to cover as a minimum the issues identified in the guidance i.e.

Gathering the views of all stakeholder groups

Processing these views and considering the possible content of a Compact

Securing the agreement of stakeholder groups to the content of the Compact through consultation and negotiation.

Drafting the Compact

Ensuring that all stakeholders are kept informed of progress at all times.

### **Conclusion and recommendation**

This paper has been prepared by ELVON and is presented to the Partnership with the recommendation that Partners consider the paper and, if they deem it necessary, the Scottish Executive guidance on Compacts on which the paper is based, note the conclusions which follow and agree ELVON's recommendations which are also noted below :-

1. An examination of the current relationship between the voluntary sector and public bodies suggests that many aspects of that relationship could be improved with the development of a local Compact. It is recommended that the Partnership agree to the establishment of a **Compact Working Group**.
2. Any working group established should have as broad a base membership as possible. It is recommended that all public sector bodies represented in the Partnership should be represented on the working group and that the voluntary sector should be represented by ELVON and VDEL together with up to six others representing the main voluntary sector interest groups.
3. The working group should if possible have an independent chair. We recommend that the Partnership consider Ian Holstein Muir, OBE, as a possible chair of the working group.
4. Any working group might be allowed to set it's own specific remit and it is not realistic to expect any such group to complete its work in much less than two years. It is recommended that any working group established for East Lothian should initially be set the task of considering in more detail if a Compact is right for East Lothian and, if they conclude that it is, to determine their specific remit with the proviso that they cover at least the topics detailed in the paragraph above which discusses Remit. It is also recommended that the working group is charged with completing its work as quickly as possible and certainly within two years of its establishment.

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**Please see Appendix 1.**

## **Appendix 1**

### **Ian Holstein Muir OBE, FSQA, MIPD.**

Chairman of Jewel and Esk Valley College since 1995; Director, Association of Scottish Colleges since 1996; Technology Management Consultant since 1995.

Mr Muir was born in Edinburgh in 1937 and brought up in Haddington where he was educated at Knox Academy. He worked with Ferranti as a development engineer from 1962 to 1967, Chief Production Engineer from then until 1977, Manufacturing Manager from 1977 until 1987, Company Systems Manager from 1987 until 1989 and finally as Training and Education Manager until his retiral in 1995. He also served as Chairman of Edinburgh Compact and as a member of NTO Recognition Panel He currently resides in Tranent.

As can be seen from the above Mr Muir has a wealth of experience in both senior management and chairing committees etc. He has a good knowledge of both the public and voluntary sectors but has no specific ties or allegiance to either sector.

We believe that he would make a good independent chair for the East Lothian Compact Working Group and would recommend him to the Partnership. Without commitment we have taken the liberty of informally sounding him out while stressing that any decision about the chair of the Working Group would not lie with ELVON but would be for the partnership. He has indicated that he is available and would be prepared to serve as chair if invited.