

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

MONDAY 17 SEPTEMBER 2001 AT 10.00 AM

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

MONDAY 17 SEPTEMBER AT 2.15 PM

THE HERTFORDSHIRE COMPACT

Agenda Item No.

4

Report of Assistant Chief Executive (Strategy)

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Executive Member: Derrick Ashley

1 Purpose

The purpose of the report is to consider the adoption of the Hertfordshire Compact. The Compact is a framework document that will help to strengthen the relationship between statutory organisations, including Hertfordshire County Council, and the community and voluntary sector.

2 Summary

Plans to strengthen the relationship between statutory organisations including Hertfordshire County Council and the community and voluntary sector are moving ahead, by developing a new way of working together which should lead to more effective working relationships. This new approach centres on a 'Compact' or framework document, which aims to encourage a new approach to partnership working between government and the voluntary and community sector.

The Hertfordshire Compact is due to be launched during the afternoon of the Hertfordshire Voluntary Sector's Standing Conference called "*Building Bridges: Making Connections*" to be held at the Fielder Centre on 24th September 2001. Owing to this timescale, it has not been possible to get comments from Select Committee Members, but comments are being sought and will be reported to Cabinet.

The idea follows on from the National Compact "Getting It Right Together" which was agreed between the Government and voluntary and community sectors in November 1998. The National Compact aims to build the partnership relationship between Government and the sectors and was the result of extensive consultations with major voluntary sector networks.

The Hertfordshire Compact offers a shared vision of the principles that sustain and motivate the voluntary & community and statutory sectors. It sets out a number of commitments on independence, funding, policy development, consultation and better government which will help develop good relations between the sectors. The Compact can bring a wide range of benefits to those organisations that sign up to it

and both sectors have much to gain from the implementation of a Compact. In particular:

- For the Voluntary & Community Sector, the Compact will encourage recognition of the unique economic and social value and scope of its work, and enable organisations to work more strategically than in the past.
- For the statutory agencies, organisations will have a way of dealing with the “change agenda”, helping them to improve the way they work in partnership with Voluntary & Community organisations and communities.

Owing to the urgency of this matter it has not been possible to put the matter to a meeting of the Resources, Prosperity Partnership and Consultation Select Committee. Comments have been invited from Select Committee Spokesman. Any comments received will be reported to the Cabinet.

3 Conclusions

The Compact will provide an overarching framework document to guide the County Council’s relationship with the voluntary and community sector.

Endorsement of the Compact would be seen by the voluntary sector both as recognition of the contribution it makes to prosperity and social inclusion in the County, and of its independence and diversity.

County Council endorsement would help to ensure that the Compact would become a working document of lasting value.

1 Background

1.1 The Hertfordshire Compact is an expression of the commitment of the voluntary and community sector and other statutory bodies to work in partnership for the betterment of society, to nurture and support voluntary and community activity and to jointly influence national policy where appropriate. The Hertfordshire Compact Steering Group is hoping that a wide range of voluntary and community organisations, county, district and borough councils and health agencies will be able to support the Hertfordshire Compact. The Group hopes that the Hertfordshire Compact will be used as a framework document to help foster and encourage the development of local compacts within district and borough localities and as part of this process it is expected that these local compacts will be supported by countywide organisations.

1.2 The task of developing a Compact between the Voluntary & Community Sector and Statutory Organisations in Hertfordshire is the result of a number of developments including:

- The Report of the Deakin Commission on the Future of the Voluntary Sector (NCVO 1996).

- Government’s acknowledgement of the vital role of the Voluntary & Community Sector in society in its recent policy documents.
 - The Modernising Local Government agenda, including the focus on Community Planning and Best Value.
 - Changes in structures and mechanisms in the NHS, especially at Primary Care level, and the work to develop local Health Improvement Programmes.
 - The vision of the Social Services Inspectors importance of the Voluntary Sector, especially those infrastructure organisations.
- 1.3 In February 2000 Hertfordshire County Council and the main countywide voluntary and community organisations agreed to develop a Compact together. This initiative was inspired by the Government’s own National Compact which was published in 1998 and by the Local Government Act 2000 which introduced a new power for local authorities to promote the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of their areas and a new duty to prepare community strategies. The Hertfordshire Compact Steering Group was set up with representatives from the main countywide voluntary and community sector organisations, District and Borough Councils, County Council and other statutory organisations.
- 1.4 The Hertfordshire Compact is a written agreement, setting out a framework for the future working relationship between local government, the wider statutory sector and the voluntary and community sector. It sets out a range of shared principles, and undertakings from both sectors and incorporates some specific action points for the coming year.
- 1.5 The Hertfordshire Compact Steering Group recognises that within Hertfordshire there are many examples of effective partnership and joint working between the sectors but at the same time recognises that even more can be achieved through closer partnership working. The main aims of the Hertfordshire Compact are to build on existing partnerships and develop the relationship between the two sectors through mutual respect and trust so that together they can provide more effective services to local people and communities in the County.

2 Purpose of the Hertfordshire Compact

- 2.1 In the development and delivery of public policy and services, local statutory organisations and the Voluntary & Community Sector have distinct but complementary roles to play. Voluntary & Community organisations bring a unique ‘added value’ in service delivery, including “closeness” to client groups, providing a communication route for them to become involved in local service planning and in decision making. Statutory organisations in Hertfordshire spend substantial amounts of public money in the Voluntary & Community Sector, either under contracts, Service Level Agreements or grants.

- 2.2 Both sectors add a unique local, grassroots dimension to the framing and delivery of services to meet local needs and both have different forms of accountability and are answerable to a different range of stakeholders. Clearly, it is important not to underestimate the importance of the relationship between both sectors.
- 2.3 The Hertfordshire Compact represents a commitment to establishing a positive relationship between both these two sectors for the benefit of the local community. The purpose of the Compact is to:
- Improve communication, common understanding, collaboration, trust and respect between the Voluntary & Community Sector and the Statutory Sector.
 - Set a framework for effective consultation, representation and partnership working including an agreement on definitions, shared values and joint and distinct undertakings.
 - Sets out the principles for developing working relationships between the Voluntary & Community Sector and the Statutory Sector and acts as a reference document and a process for monitoring and evaluation of the quality of those relationships and partnership working at all levels.
 - Support and reinforce the application of “Best Value” principles in the relationships between the Statutory and Voluntary & Community organisations. The development and delivery of a compact should be completely consistent for the delivery of Best Value.

3 Status of the Hertfordshire Compact

- 3.1 Although this Compact is not legally binding it is the intention of those who have collaborated in producing it, that it should have authoritative status in promoting good quality working relationships between voluntary & community organisations and statutory agencies across Hertfordshire.

4 Role of the Voluntary & Community sector in Hertfordshire

- 4.1 Voluntary & Community organisations play a major role within Hertfordshire’s communities and their work impacts on many of Hertfordshire’s 1 million citizens. The Voluntary & Community Sector in Hertfordshire is a major provider of services, a significant employer and levers substantial amounts of ‘new’ money into Hertfordshire from Government and European funding streams, the Community Fund and Charitable Trusts.

5 Current Partnership Working Arrangements

- 5.1 Over the years’ County Council departments have developed a variety of working relationships with a variety of organisations. Attempts to rationalise this piecemeal development into an effective County Voluntary Sector Strategy

has met with varying success. The recent Best Value Review of Voluntary Sector Funding Processes confirms the need for fundamental changes to infrastructure and processes to ensure that all stakeholders get the best possible value from the total resources available.

6 Resource Implications

6.1 The development of the Compact will take the form of awareness raising within both sectors and the development of local codes of practice on:

- Consultation
- Funding
- Volunteering and Community Action
- Black and Ethnic Minorities
- Disability and Accessibility

6.2 It is expected that this will involve officer time from within the main service departments and the Economic & Community Development Unit.