

4. Community Groups

Introduction

Although the principles and undertakings contained in the Trafford Compact apply across the voluntary and community sector as a whole, particular consideration needs to be given to the specific needs, interests and contribution of community organisations

We as partners believe it is important for statutory and voluntary sector organisations to understand community groups, what they do, how they operate and how they are different from voluntary organisations, and to create and maintain the conditions and support that overcome their particular problems and help community groups succeed.

Research has shown that local Compacts improve relationships between community groups and voluntary and statutory organisations, but that small community groups are sometimes not included in the process and the content. This Code of Practice will ensure that these groups are involved as much as possible in the ongoing review and implementation of the Compact.

Aims & Objectives:

The Community Groups Code of Practice aims to promote a better understanding of the community sector within the realm of the voluntary and community sectors in Trafford. By doing so, it will have a positive effect on the way the statutory and voluntary sectors relate to community groups through their policies and practices.

This Code seeks to:

- Provide a basis for mutual trust and acceptance of the roles of and responsibilities of the public agencies and community groups.
- Recognise the diversity and contribution of the community sector.
- Promote understanding of what community groups contribute as an important local resource in any community.
- Identify ways that statutory and mainstream voluntary sector organisations can work with community groups to remove the barriers they face
- Outline ways of ensuring that the skills and experience of community groups add value to policy and service development and delivery, particularly at the local level.
- Set out the policies, consultative arrangements and support that the community sector needs so it can play an effective role in building successful local communities.

Definitions:

What is the Community Sector?

The community sector ranges from small informal groups to large multi-purpose organisations and is very diverse, reflecting the range of different communities (of geography, of shared interest, or of shared identity) with which people associate themselves.

The differences between the voluntary & community sectors

The National Occupational Standards for Community Development define the Community Sector and the Voluntary Sectors as:-

The Community Sector

the whole range of autonomous collective activity undertaken by neighbourhoods or communities of interest, to improve life and conditions. It is a spectrum which extends from informal activities, to more organised community groups

The Voluntary Sector

the range of groups whose activities are carried out on a not for profit and which are not public or local authorities. These organisations would normally be formally constituted and employ professional and administrative staff. They may or may not use volunteer help

The differences

- *often groups in the community sector are less formal, have few if any staff they often work with volunteers and on a self help basis;*
- *they are usually locally based.*
- *organisations in the voluntary sector may be bigger and can be providing services on behalf of the local council or health trust; they may be local, regional or national organisations – which may have branches more locally. They are often charities or charitable companies.*

Note: There are many more community groups than there are voluntary organisations

The community sector covers the entire range of policy and service areas. Its activities can range from nurseries and playgroups to community centres and village halls, from arts and sports groups to credit unions and from self-help groups to scout groups.

The value, strength and contribution of the community sector

Community groups offer a way for public agencies to reach into communities and listen to their views and concerns and they are vital in transforming neighbourhoods and communities.

The benefits to the Borough of Trafford provided by its community groups include:

1. giving a voice to particular communities, either geographic or of shared interests, and helping to strengthen local democracy. Community groups are a unique source of information about the communities they work in.
2. providing people with the opportunity to influence issues which affect their lives helping to develop a greater sense of ownership of local services and programmes;
3. enabling communities to take responsibility for their own destinies;
4. allowing individuals to see the benefits of working together for the common good;
5. making sure that resources intended for communities actually reach them;
6. promoting change, involving the local community;
7. helping promote equality and diversity;
8. building local unity and community spirit through community-based events and festivals
9. being the first link in breaking the isolation and social exclusion faced by many people;
10. providing services where:

- a service cannot be provided by a public organisation;
- a service supports and complements existing public and non-public services, and benefits from community involvement and management;
- a community organisation grows larger and is able to deliver public and non-public services under contract; and
- a quick response is necessary for an identified need.

Healthy, sustainable communities are characterised by having a range of community groups and organisations.

The benefits of the Compact for community groups include:

- An increase in awareness of the nature and diversity of the community sector.
- Improved communication between the public agencies and community groups.
- More effective delivery and evaluation of services.
- Better use of resources.

To achieve these benefits public agencies should target community groups in communication and consultation strategies and policy reviews.

The Trafford Context

The Trafford Partnership acknowledges the contribution that community organisations make towards society and to social inclusion and cohesion. The Trafford Community Strategy is committed to ensuring that, by 2021, Trafford will be a great place for everyone in all parts of the borough to live, learn, work, and relax. The strategy confirms that improvements can only be achieved in partnership with local communities:

One of the key aims of the sustainable community strategy is to :

“Improve community engagement and participation in all aspects of living and working in Trafford, particularly by disabled people, carers, those over 50, children & young people and people from Black and Minority Ethnic and new communities.”

“Above all this is about our partnership with you. Local people feeling involved, welcome and confident that they can make a difference to their community is central to the work of the Partnership. All of the most important things we want to achieve depend on individuals and families working together with us in their neighbourhoods.”

Community organisations are central to achieving these commitment.

What community groups needs to fulfil their potential

There are many barriers that prevent or hinder community groups from flourishing and achieving their aims. If statutory, voluntary and community sectors are to work in genuine partnership then these barriers will need to be identified and tackled, otherwise community groups will find it very hard to participate.

- Capacity

One issue is that of the capacity of the groups. Most are run entirely by volunteers from within the community, who all have constraints on their time and energy. These volunteers may be committed but may lack the skills and expertise needed to operate effectively. They may also lack the confidence to participate at a partnership level. Most groups say that they don't have enough volunteers to achieve their aims.

- Sustainability

It can be hard for small community groups to maintain any degree of sustainability. Funding streams change or end; local initiatives come and go. The emphasis on project-based and outcome-focused funding can be hard for local groups to understand or engage with. In addition, support to local groups is very often ad-hoc and short-term, determined mainly by what funding is available rather than where gaps and needs exist.

- Communication

Another barrier is the lack of communication between community groups and statutory agencies. In many cases community groups aren't aware of who they need to communicate with, in which agencies. Often when statutory agencies seek to communicate with local communities they use inappropriate language and methods. Rather than considering what can be done to communicate with, and effectively involve community groups, statutory agencies often choose to engage with voluntary sector organisations who are more experienced in and geared up for consultation and partnership working.

- Knowledge

A related issue is the variance in levels of understanding and experience of working with community groups, within statutory and voluntary agencies. There are some examples of excellent community development work in both sectors. However, the reality is that whilst some are well aware of the value of the community sector and the importance of engaging and working with community groups, many others have little or no understanding or experience of this.

- Venues

Within the Borough there is a very real lack of accessible and affordable venues for community group meetings and activities. Whereas other types of organisations may be able to travel further, a lack of appropriate and accessible venue can prevent a community group from even getting off the ground.

UNDERTAKINGS

The Code of Practice is made up of a series of undertakings for all or specific partners, which all work towards the main aims of the Code, as set out above.

SHARED UNDERTAKINGS:

- a) All partners recognise the value, strengths and contribution of the community sector, including recognising its distinctive nature and how this will affect policy and practice.
- b) All partners recognise the diverse range of groups that make up the community sector in Trafford.
- c) To recognise that community groups can serve geographical communities as well as communities of interest or identify
- d) All partners share a clear understanding that community groups can play a number of different roles including:
 - providing a voice for residents and users
 - building relationships and networks in neighbourhoods and communities
 - providing self-help and mutual support
 - building social capital and community cohesion
 - delivering services
- e) The need for accessible learning and development support for community groups and active community members should be recognised by all partners.
- f) All partners should encourage support for local voluntary sector infrastructure and networking which encompasses an independent community sector, and recognise that communities need resources for partnership working and involvement.
- g) Public, private and voluntary sector partners should ensure that staff working with the community sector are properly trained. Public sector partners should ensure that decision makers within their organisation are also aware of the strengths, needs and concerns of the community sector in Trafford when taking decisions which affect the community sector.
- h) All partners should work together to encourage the local community to get involved wherever possible.
- i) Practical support is especially important for community groups. Public and private sector partners should seek to identify other kinds of support that could be offered as well as grants, such as premises, equipment or access to training.
- j) Community groups should be made to feel fully included in partnerships and attention should be given by all public, private and voluntary sector partners to openness, mutual respect and involving community groups from the start of a project.
- k) Recognise that the active participation of community groups is a sign of a successful partnership
- l)

STATUTORY SECTOR UNDERTAKINGS:

- a) To value the unique perspective, work, knowledge and expertise held by community groups, and how they can help statutory partners achieve their aims

- b) To identify the barriers that prevent or hinder community groups from achieving their aims; to identify ways of tackling these; and to seek to make the necessary resources available
- c) To recognise that in order to involve community groups meaningfully there may be resource implications, and to address this
- d) To encourage and support the development of community groups which represent people and communities who tend to be socially- excluded, disadvantaged or hard to reach.
- e) To involve people with first-hand experience of particular problems in developing solutions (for example, disadvantaged people, socially excluded people, hard to reach communities)
- f) To provide the necessary and appropriate support for the individuals involved in community groups to participate in partnerships and consultations, and to get involved in decision making – *this includes meeting their personal support / training needs, building confidence etc.*
- g) To ensure that policies recognise the importance of communities of interest, as well as communities of place.
- h) To develop approaches to consultation and policy appraisal which tackle the needs of community groups and find creative ways of using their experience and expertise, and should take into account the community sector's need and role when developing policy and service plans.
- i) To explain clearly to community groups why they are important to the agency.
- j) Public agencies should have a lead officer who is available to get involved with community groups and to support them in building relations within the community sector.
- k) Training and induction should include understanding community groups and how members and staff at all levels should communicate and involve them.
- l) To develop a better understanding of the practical needs of community groups and their members and address this when creating partnerships and multi-agency work

VOLUNTARY SECTOR UNDERTAKINGS:

- a) To recognise that both the community and voluntary sectors share many beliefs, principles and values
- b) To recognise that the interests of the community and voluntary sectors are not always the same, and be clear about which sector is being represented when taking part in consultations or otherwise influencing policy decisions.
- c) To value the unique perspective of, and informality of community groups
- d) To play an enabling role in the participation of community groups in community consultations, planning and planning
- e) Not to speak for or represent communities when there are community groups that would be more appropriate to take this role
- f) To consult the community sector and consider its different interests before responding to invitations for representation on partnerships and multi-agency task groups
- g) To recognise the specific needs of the community sector when developing information, training, conferences etc
- h) To share knowledge, information and resources wherever possible

COMMUNITY GROUPS' UNDERTAKINGS:

- a) To participate positively in local partnerships and consultations
- b) To draw attention to the specific reasons or issues which prevent their participation via appropriate means
- c) Recognise discrimination that exists within the community, and how this might prevent people from getting involved in the group
- d) To work to involve all parts of the community they serve, especially those that traditionally haven't participated
- e) To encourage people within their community to take up learning and training opportunities aimed to enable them to participate more confidently and actively
- f) Where possible, to seek to share knowledge and good practice with other community and voluntary sector groups
- g) To implement good practice that fit to the needs of group and do not adopt a one size fits all method.
- h) To be clear and open about the community or constituency that a group speaks for.
- i) To channel information and views to and from their members or constituency whenever they are able and they feel it is appropriate.
- j) To ensure their groups are as inclusive as possible, and accessible to all members of their particular community.
- k) Active community members should be encouraged to carry out leadership roles in voluntary and community sectors networks by all partners, especially voluntary sector partners.

Action Plan:

An action plan will be draw up annually in relation to the undertakings:

Links to other codes of practice:

The Trafford Compact group will seek to identify areas of common concern for all Codes of Practice Work streams.