

A COMPACT

BETWEEN

LANCASTER CITY COUNCIL

AND

THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

IN THE LANCASTER DISTRICT

Introduction

The Voluntary Sector and Lancaster City Council strongly believe in the value of working in partnership.

This document sets out a commitment to work together more closely and effectively and to respect each other's rights and responsibilities. It offers a new approach to partnership and a framework to develop more detailed agreements in specific areas in the future.

This document sets out the following key principles that underpin a partnership approach:-

- It forms the basis for future agreements between the Council and Voluntary Sector and provides a framework for partnership working.
- It applies to Lancaster City Council and the full range of organisations in the voluntary sector in the whole of the District.
- It is not intended to be prescriptive, nor is it legally binding.

Partnership Principles

This Compact seeks to promote effective working relationships, consistency of approach and good practice between Local/National Government, and the Voluntary Sector.

- Mutual respect and a spirit of trust.
- Acceptance that voluntary activity is essential to fostering citizenship and a sense of community in the Lancaster and Morecambe area.
- Regular consultation to develop common aims and objectives and to inform the development and delivery of services.
- Equality of opportunity for all regardless of race, gender, ability, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation or religion.
- Independence for voluntary and community groups in order for them to advance their aims, including the right to disagree with and challenge Council policy.
- The expectations of each of the partners for the partnership being clearly stated.
- Council funding will be focused on organisations and issues that help it to meet priorities stated in the Council's Corporate Plan.
- This Compact will be subject to a review as appropriate.

The Value of Voluntary Groups and Volunteering

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations describes Voluntary Organisations as follows:-

“A voluntary organisation is interpreted broadly as a self-governing body of people who have joined together to take action for the betterment (as they see it) of the community and are established otherwise than for financial gain.”

The National Centre for Volunteering describes volunteering as follows:-

“Any activity which involves spending time, unpaid, doing something which aims to benefit someone (individual or group) other than or in addition to close relatives, or to benefit the environment.”

Voluntary Groups are distinctive and can have the following advantages:-

- Acting as advocates for particular groups.
- Providing excellent community links, particularly with those who might be regarded as hard to reach.
- Having a capacity to innovate, experiment and test new ideas.
- Promoting change and involving the local community.
- Providing people with the opportunity to influence issues which affect their lives.

Voluntary and community activity is crucial to the development of the whole of the District as a thriving, confident community where people are proud to live, work and learn.

It also helps to promote equality of opportunity and a better quality of life for the people of Lancaster and Morecambe.

Mutual Commitments

Lancaster City Council and the locally active Voluntary Sector will:-

- Seek to achieve and maintain high standards of governance, conduct and openness.
- Regularly review the impact of this Compact.
- Promote positive and effective working relations between the local voluntary sector, Lancaster City Council and others in the public and private sectors.
- Seek to achieve and maintain good practice in meeting legal, reporting and accountability obligations to stakeholders including local residents, funders and service users.
- Observe good practice in addressing any issues of concern raised by partners.

Lancaster City Council's commitments to the Voluntary Sector:-

Lancaster City Council recognises and values the contribution that the voluntary sector makes to the community and wants to ensure this contribution continues, and throughout its work it will:-

- Support partnership working with voluntary sector to maximise access to financial resources not normally available to the Council as a statutory body but which the voluntary sector can access.
- Respect and value the voluntary sector.
- Actively encourage the participation of the voluntary sector in the development of strategies and policies of the City Council.
- Consult the voluntary sector on issues that are likely to affect it, particularly when new roles and responsibilities for the sector are being proposed and seek to ensure that realistic timescales for consultation are given, to enable effective and meaningful local consultation.
- Recognise that whilst voluntary groups may have few monetary or physical resources, the true economic value of the voluntary sector will always be acknowledged.
- The City Council recognises that there are two major categories of voluntary sector funding:-

(a) Voluntary sector grant aid

This form of funding may be provided on a one-off basis, through Miscellaneous, Welfare and Sport & Recreation grants.

The City Council will develop a clear process and framework for applying for funding and periodically review this in consultation with the voluntary sector. It will include:-

- Easy to use forms and guidance notes, that are widely available.
- Named contacts in each directorate, able to provide information and advice.
- A clear, easily understandable process for assessing applications.
- An explanation where an application is unsuccessful.

- Give clear reasons why applications for grant aid are refused.
- An annual application cycle with a clear timetable.

(b) Service Level Agreements

These are concerned with the delivery of services by the voluntary sector for and on behalf of Lancaster City Council, and with the need for the Council to be accountable for grant funding.

Agreements may be for periods of up to three years, subject to annual review of performance and will be:-

- Linked to the City Council's Corporate Objectives
- Appropriate to the services being provided.
- Negotiated and agreed by the parties to them.
- Written in plain language.
- Contain clear and agreed specifications for the work involved.
- Have systems for monitoring and evaluating the service provided.

The City Council, alongside Lancaster Council for Voluntary Service, will work with the Voluntary Sector, to help them access other sources of funding.

Undertakings by the Voluntary Sector

Voluntary Sector groups will:-

- Use grants made by the City Council to further the Council's Corporate Objectives.
- Normally have written constitutions setting out how the group operates and how it is accountable.
- Keep accurate records and financial accounts.
- Observe guidance from the Charity Commission to ensure best practice in running voluntary and community groups and in service provision.
- Be able to show how and where grants or funding have been applied and be able to demonstrate clear benefits to the community in terms of the activities undertaken (outputs) and the results of those activities (outcomes).
- Be able to demonstrate that the organisation endeavours to raise funds from a range of sources.
- Implement policies that promote best practice and equal rights in activities, employment, involvement of volunteers and fair service provision.
- Develop quality standards to measure standards of service delivery, whilst ensuring that they are relevant and appropriate to the different sizes and structures of local voluntary and community groups.
- Consult with service users, carers, volunteers and members on policy development activities and planning and development of local services.