

Highland Compact Annual Meeting – Notes from Focus Groups

A meeting of the Highland Compact, looking to further develop relations between the Public and Third Sectors across the Highland Area, was held on 9th June 2011 at the Town House in Inverness.

The Chair of the meeting was Dr. Ian Gibson, Vice Chair of the Board of NHS Highland and Board Member of Badenoch and Strathspey CVS. Motivational speaker Phil McNally started proceedings, highlighting the promise of positive partnerships. There then followed summaries of relevant activities as well as thoughts on potential developments given by Kelley Miller of Voluntary Action Highland, Carron McDiarmid of The Highland Council; Jan Baird of NHS Highland also gave a presentation on 'Planning for Integration' (the consultation for the integration of Children's and Adult Services between NHS Highland and The Highland Council). After a brief explanation/further emphasis of the role of the Compact Champions (individuals from relevant organisations trained to highlight inter-sector cooperation and mediation where appropriate) from Matt Tyrer of SCVO, the meat of the session consisted of discussion workshops. These broadly considered the achievements of the Compact so far, as well as strategies for moving it forward. A summary of the discussions is presented below.

Achievements so far

There was wide support for the concept of the Compact in principle, with the goal of more open, better and accessible working relationships between the two sectors and organisations across the Highland Area. Some tangible successes were acknowledged- the establishment of the Compact Champions was highlighted as an aid to awareness and encouragement of good practice, and the clarity on funding objectives through vehicles such as the Single Grants Process and requirement of a period of notice for funding changes were also appreciated.

Moving forward

Although positive achievements were highlighted, the bulk of the discussion focussed on further actions to improve the current setup. A summary of the proceedings grouped under emerging themes identified from the discussions is presented below. The themes are:

- ***Momentum and awareness-raising***
- ***Communication***
- ***Clarity***
- ***Representation***
- ***Formalisation***
- ***Commitment and responsibility***

Momentum and awareness-raising

It was acknowledged that although the principles of the Compact were widely supported, very few of the participants had much if any prior knowledge of it. As such although establishment issues were appreciated, a requirement to build on the foundations regarding awareness-raising was widely recognised.

Vehicles to help achieve this were discussed widely, with examples such as the development of case studies to illustrate how the Compact and Champions can be utilised, further development on the role of the Champions and highlighting the Compact's existence within existing partnerships and networks. It was felt that a working knowledge of the Compact for workers in relevant organisations would be very helpful for potential cooperation difficulties across the sectors, and that sufficient measures should be put in place to enable this (e.g. information on induction- see below) .

Communication

Closely linked to awareness-raising, it was acknowledged of the room for improved communication.

The discussions largely focussed on e-communication:

Further development of a 'one-stop-shop' accessible website was widely welcomed; this was seen as an area to mitigate inevitable problems of access within the Highland Area and a vehicle for further awareness-raising.

Although there is a site in place via Highland Life, accessibility remains an issue- [e.g. first result on Googling 'Highland Compact' led to Highland Council website- a question of independence as well perhaps?]. Also, with an acknowledgement of the benefits of it being on the radar of relevant organisations the possibility of portal developments was mooted.

Voluntary Action Highland has developed a blog section on their website – this was something that many favoured developing further, and the possibilities of regular e-bulletins were discussed. Regarding blogging, restricted access within the NHS and Council was something that was also acknowledged and could be looked at.

The Compact Champions were also felt to be a resource which could be used for case studies on the web, as well as perhaps being available to be contacted regarding the Compact practically.

Video-conferencing was also discussed.

There was also some acknowledgement however that e-communication itself was insufficient, yet could be supplementary and/or complementary to initial face-to-face networking opportunities- such meetings as the annual Town House meeting itself should be continued and built upon, with more regular and localised meetings also proposed.

Better communication was also proposed more technically on areas such as the Single Grants Process.

Crucially it was acknowledged that the messages need to be filtered down to all levels, and that vehicles for delivery may also include developments within existing partnerships and forums (it not being necessary to 'reinvent the wheel').

Clarity

More generally it was widely felt that the Compact ought to further emphasise its agenda, so as help to focus its and relevant partners attention on that- e.g. a focus less on funding but on good relations.

It also was felt that the practical relevance of the Compact should also be highlighted- this would be closely related to the previous two headings of awareness-raising and communication.

It was felt that the widespread recognition and working notion practically of a clear common aim would help with potential grievances between organisations and sectors.

As such a streamlining of themes within the Compact was generally welcomed, as well as a greater focus on outcomes in line with the development of a common goal, rather than getting bogged down in more technical process-based approaches. A focus on service users was seen as key to inter-organisation cooperation, as well as the benefits of celebrating successes, however small.

Representation

It was also generally acknowledged that practically the Compact could be reinforced- this was felt important for potential partnership working difficulties and informing managers and new staff at induction (as intimated above).

The potential for interaction across the sectors and a collective identification of areas highlighted as areas for development regarding training.

Networking within vehicles such as the annual meeting were widely supported, with some calls for more regular and localised, as well as electronic, opportunities.

Community Planning Partnerships as well as the Third Sector Forum were also proposed as potential supplementary vehicles for effective representation.

Formalisation

In common with the emphasis of a common goal, the prospect of formalisation of the Compact for actors across sectors and organisation was widely welcomed.

There was some concern as to the level of priority within partners – a formal signing up to the Compact by organisations was seen as a potential way forward in this regard, although some voiced concern over the practicality given the breadth of organisations and interests involved – perhaps a role for CVS in this regard for smaller groups?.

Training provision at induction for new employees and Champions could potentially reinforce this approach.

Commitment and responsibility

A key concern voiced, related to formalisation and representation, was over the issue of commitment and responsibility within the relevant organisations.

Further to a formal signing up to the Compact and the practicalities across organisations, particularly within the more disparate Third Sector, the wider issue of 'ownership' was discussed- a call for greater awareness of shared responsibilities- (many felt that, compounded by a lack of awareness, this was an issue for extra-Council relations and that there was room to tackle negative preconceptions - the Council to be an 'enabler' rather than 'controller').

Similarly, within the Public Sector there were some calls for the NHS to increase its commitment.

Further to the establishment of a common goal, an acknowledgement of who the Compact is aimed at and a reinforcement of its mutuality was seen as beneficial. Where the Compact fits with existing relationships was also an area for development.

E-communication etc. were seen as a potential aid to address the issue of lack of inclusion throughout the Highlands.

The 'Planning for Integration' project (as discussed above) within the Public Sector was seen by some as a potential aid for similar assessment for integration between the Public and Third Sectors.

Proposed Actions

Further to the discussion above, there are a number of emerging themes for the group to consider moving forward, and appear ripe for further attention. These are:

- ***Further development on the role of Champions and case studies***
- ***Opportunities to highlight existence within existing partnerships and networks***
- ***Ensuring that a working knowledge of the Compact reaches all levels***
- ***E-communication development***
- ***More regular and localised meetings***
- ***Work on further emphasis of a common aim for the Compact and its practical relevance***
- ***Promotion of shared responsibility between partners, including the potential for a 'Compact Contract'***