

Community Groups Code of Practice

1. Background

- Although the principles and undertakings contained in the Compact apply across the Voluntary and Community sector, particular consideration needs to be given to the specific needs, interests and contribution of community groups. Community groups are associations of people who come together to pursue a common cause or interest, often on a mutual basis.
- They are usually run entirely by volunteers for people like themselves.
- It is important that the distinctive needs and interests of community groups are taken into account by both statutory and voluntary organisations, as their perspectives and concerns may differ from those of other voluntary organisations.
- All partners to the Compact will consider, when available, the national Code of Good Practice which is being developed to facilitate and reflect this, and will include actions that support the relevant sections of this Code within the Swindon Compact Action Plan. These actions will include the development of a voice for community organisations in partnership working.
- What is the difference between a community group and a voluntary organisation? The table below should give an overview of the types of organisation. The difference may seem unimportant, in some ways both types of organisations work with the same principles and toward the same goals. However as community groups are 'harder to reach' they can often be underrepresented and under consulted.

← Range →	
Community groups	Voluntary organisations
Member-led (where the community controls direction and purpose)	Staff-led
Neighbourhood, village or community of interest	Wider area
Less formal structure	More formal structure
Lower or no income	Higher income
Membership-based	Client-based
Self-help and mutual support	Support and development
Providing informal and autonomous (independent) services	Providing specialist or contracted services
Representing community interests, residents and community members	Supporting client groups

- The community sector includes charities, community organisations, campaigning organisations, religious (faith based) organisations, sports groups, arts groups and environmental groups.
- These organisations/groups are independent, defining their own aims and objectives and choosing methods by which they achieve them, they are made up of volunteers. Sometimes a management committee will employ staff to assist in this. The groups usually have a constitution, which guides the activities and development of the future work.
- An important principle for the Code of Practice is that there is an inclusive approach. However with reference to the above table it is important to recognise the difference between a voluntary organisation and a community group, and tailor working practices accordingly.

2. Why do we need a 'Code of Practice'?

This Code of Practice will set out effective and agreed principles for joint working across the sectors for the benefit of the people of Swindon. It will help all those involved to build on the principles and existing partnership working and will guide the voluntary / community sector, public and private sectors in their work.

This code aims to:

- Provide a basis for mutual trust and acceptance of the roles and responsibilities of the Government and community groups.
- Recognise the diversity and contribution of the community sector, and promote understanding of what community groups contribute as an important local resource in any community.
- Deal with relationships between the community sector and the voluntary sector, as well as with the Government.
- 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.

3. Key Principles for joint work

Working together and building on Swindon's strong tradition of partnership between the public, private and voluntary sectors.

- Making the best use of resources as we continue to develop a comprehensive and co-ordinated approach to common goals.
- Encouraging a creative spirit of enterprise which will enable groups and individuals to succeed.
- Working with the key principles set out in the community strategy of:
 - - Citizenship, pride and identity
 - Equality, inclusion and cohesion
 - Sustainable development
 - Partnership working

a) Citizenship, Pride and Identity

- Making Swindon's strong community spirit even more vibrant by better and clearer communication and consultation.
- Seeking new ways of involving individuals and groups in decision-making processes.
- An independent and diverse community sector is fundamental to the well being of a democratic society.

b) Equality, Inclusion and Cohesion

- Equal Opportunities - making sure there is no discrimination against individuals or groups on the grounds of disability, race, age, sex, marital status, social and economic status or political beliefs.
- Vulnerable People - protecting and helping vulnerable children and adults to achieve lives that are safe and secure; helping them to join in, and contribute to, the life of the community via access to a choice of lifestyles.
- A community group has a responsibility and entitlement to campaign and act as advocates, within the law.

c) Sustainable Development

- Making sure that meeting today's needs will not rob future generations of the ability to meet theirs. We will protect the environment and use natural resources carefully while we pursue high and stable levels of economic growth and employment, together with social progress.

d) Partnership Working

- All partners are accountable both individually and collectively for their actions and aim to act with integrity, objectivity, openness and honesty.
- All partners are encouraged to take an active part in relevant consultations and forums, such as the Community Advisory Panel (COAP).

4. Community groups commitments to the Public and Private Sectors

Community groups will recognise the responsibility it has to the residents of Swindon and others who may come into contact with it. The community groups will:

- Maintain high standards of governance, conduct and openness.
- Meet legal, reporting and accountability obligations to funders and services users.
- Observe the appropriate guidance from the Charity Commission including that on political activities and campaigning.
- Develop quality standards that are relevant and appropriate to each group.
- Consult service users, carers, volunteers, and members.
- Consult the public and private sector and actively encourage their involvement in the work of the voluntary/community sector.
- Accurately communicate the views put to them in the course of a consultation or when presenting a case.
- Promote effective working relationships within the community/voluntary sector and with partners.
- Campaign to improve practice, policy and services.
- Continually monitor and review partnership working to ensure that best practice is achieved.
- Where appropriate work within the framework set out by agreed strategy documents such as the community strategy neighbourhood renewal strategy.

5. Public and Private Sector's commitments to Community groups

The public and private sectors recognise and value the contribution that the community sector makes to society and will:

- Actively encourage the participation of the community sector in the development of policy and strategy.

- Actively encourage the involvement of the voluntary /community sector in the planning and delivery of service provision wherever possible.
- Consult the community sector using methods and language that do not exclude.
- Promote clear and co-ordinated funding guidelines and suitable written funding agreements when appropriate.
- Respect and value the campaigning role of the community sector.
- Continually monitor and review partnership working to ensure best practice is achieved.
- Recognise that, in the interests of equality, account has to be taken of the low level of resources available to some groups when compared to large public and private sector bodies.
- Respond flexibly and sensitively towards community groups.
- Endeavour to provide non-financial support including advice, training and access to accommodation and other resources.

6. Joint commitments

The public, private and community sector will:

- Work together to strengthen the community's infrastructure and networks and build for the future.
- Endeavour to ensure that, so far as is possible and appropriate, all members of the community and users of services are included in their plans, consultations and actions.
- Establish clear processes for jointly evaluating the impact of the Compact and compliance with the stated principles.