



**The South West Regional Compact is a framework for strong and effective relationships between the voluntary and community sector and the public sector in the South West.**

**This year we are reviewing the South West Regional Compact in a slightly different way. Whereas in previous years we have asked partner organisations to describe how Compact membership has influenced their organisations' working practices this year we have asked them what they did to strengthen the relationship between public organisations and voluntary and community organisations. Here is what they told us:**

## **Black South West Network** [www.bswn.org.uk](http://www.bswn.org.uk)

This year the South West Regional Compact Group has supported the setting up of a task group charged with taking forward a regional review of the BME code within in a South West context. Whilst all members are signatories to the BME Code, within the current regional Compact, members felt it would be useful to develop an overview specific to relationships between regional public service and the BME Third Sector in the South West. This would then be set against a number of previously agreed tasks, that would engage all partner organisations in joint action. This will give this element of the Compact some measurable priorities. BSWN welcomes and supports this move and continues to be actively involved in the process of creating the South West overview. BSWN are hopeful that this development will lead to progress within the BME Third Sector that will begin a rebalancing, ensuring a stable environment for a thriving Third Sector that allows all organisations an opportunity to contribute to a positive outcome for all of our communities derived from this aspect of the Compact.

## **Creating Excellence** [www.creatingexcellence.org.uk](http://www.creatingexcellence.org.uk)

Creating Excellence is a Third Sector organisation, and currently provides services and support for both statutory and the voluntary and community sectors in empowerment, design and funding advice for voluntary organisations. Two examples of our work will illustrate how the work we do, and the way we do it, helps both statutory and voluntary sectors work together to meet their shared objectives better.

Over the last five years, in partnership with others, Creating Excellence has developed and supported a region wide set of networks for funding advisers for voluntary organisations. Some of these networks are hosted by local authority workers, and some by workers based in voluntary organisations such as CVSS. Over the last year, a regional bulletin based with a local authority, and a regional funding database administered by a voluntary organisation have come into place. Thus statutory and voluntary sectors work together seamlessly for the benefit of the VCS.

Empowering Communities is the Communities and Local Government funded Regional Empowerment Partnership, for which Creating Excellence is the accountable body. The partnership is made up of representatives from both statutory and voluntary sectors. While a key national objective is to support local authorities in their engagement and empowerment activities, we recognise that this objective will not be met without also supporting Third Sector activities and networks. We are well placed to bring practitioners in both sectors together, as for example in a March 2009 workshop for local authority planners, and community development workers from both sectors, to consider the issues in building communities in the many large new urban extensions planned for the region. Cross-sectoral working is central to how we operate as an organisation.



**SW Compact Group (L to R: Paul Dunn (Equality South West), Rupert Daniel (Black South West Network), Alistair Beattie (faithnetsouthwest), Lesley Frazer (CLINKS), Andy Youl (South West Regional Development Agency), Kerrie Thompson (Job Centre Plus), Mark Woodcock (South West Strategic Health Authority), Barbara McGrath (Job Centre Plus), Nigel Williams (South West Regional Development Agency), Trevor Hazelgrove (Wessex Community Action), Roger Haworth (South West Forum), Rowan Griffin (South West Regional Secretariat), Mark Ellery (National Offender Management Service) Photo Commission for the Compact and Freia Turland Photography.**

## Citizens Advice

[www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)

The Regional Compact is now one of the most significant partnership arrangements between funders and providers in the South West. The good practice arrangements specified in the Compact are increasingly being seen – and used – as the norm, rather than as an aspiration. This has had a positive impact in the advice sector. We will use the Compact increasingly as a “voice of reason” in an ever changing world of complexity and challenge. Where contracts, commissioning, sub-contracting, and consortium bidding are the order of the day, the good practice and common sense of the Compact becomes more and more important.

Significantly the joint work of all the agencies involved in the Regional Compact has fostered real partnerships in our region that go well beyond the funding arrangements. We welcome increasing this partnership in 2009-2010 to improve our joint service delivery.

## Equality South West

[www.equalitysouthwest.org.uk](http://www.equalitysouthwest.org.uk)

Equality South West (ESW) has continued to work with a wide range of organisations during the last year. In particular, we have:

- Participated fully in the work of the SW Compact
- Organised a regional event for public and Third Sector Organisations (TSOs), to develop joint work on sub-regional pan-equality networks
- Conducted a survey of LSPs and the engagement of equality organisations and follow up work on relationships with LSPs
- Disseminated equality good practice guidance on public Procurement and TSOs
- Encouraged public bodies to use local equality organisations to provide training
- Helped public bodies to commission equality work from TSOs and independent consultants
- Facilitated free equality training for RDA funded regional TSOs
- Promoted relationships in ESWs Strategic Partners’ Group, with membership from all sectors

## Faithnetsouthwest

[www.faithnetsouthwest.org.uk](http://www.faithnetsouthwest.org.uk)

Faithnetsouthwest works across the South West region to support the work in the community of all faith groups. We were delighted to join the South West Compact Group in 2008 and we have already used Compact principles, to improve one of our prospective partnership agreements. One of our main priorities is to encourage partnership working between faith groups running or developing community projects, voluntary and community organisations and public bodies. This year we have held a number of events bringing together these agencies. Some of the issues we have covered have included, the commissioning of public services, the personalisation agenda for more person centered adult social care services and the opportunities there are for faith groups. These events have been particularly beneficial in alerting commissioners and those responsible for the personalisation agenda, of the potential of faith groups as providers of public services for the whole community.

We have also featured the contribution of faith groups in providing premises for financial advice giving by CAB and other Third Sector advice agencies. We have enabled some faith groups to take advantage of CAB money workshops and produced a report on the potential of faith groups to house or provide financial advice (with suitable training), which is becoming increasingly important in the current financial downturn.

We have continued to support a number of faith fora in various parts of the region, bringing together faith communities, community organisations and public bodies to give their views on issues of common community concern. This has enabled faith groups to contribute to the strategic planning process and enabled discussion on such diverse issues as



**Nigel Williams and Roger Haworth with 2008 National Compact Award for Excellence at a Regional Level** *Photo Commission for the Compact and Freia Turland Photography*

teenage pregnancy, supporting refugees and asylum seekers and supporting offenders and ex-offenders to integrate back into the community.

We have just produced a publication for public bodies, Third Sector organisations and indeed faith groups themselves, on understanding and working with faith groups.

We continue to support the Face to Face and Side by Side framework for faith groups' social action, which was published in July 2008. We held a regional event, showing what could be done to promote joint work between all sectors, featuring presentations from faith based community organisations, a local authority and central and regional government.

In 2009 we will establish a membership structure bringing faith groups, public bodies and voluntary and community organisations into a more formal membership of our organisation, building on the preparatory work we have done in 2008.

## Government Office for the South West

[www.gosw.gov.uk](http://www.gosw.gov.uk)

GOSW's stand-out achievement for 2008-09 has to be the inclusion of National Indicator 7 – the measure for a thriving Third Sector – in 11 of the 16 Local Area Agreements in the South West Region. Implicit in that is that these local partnerships will spend the two years from November 2008 working alongside Third Sector partners to ensure their skills and specialist knowledge are deployed to maximum effect. Compact Principles will be at the heart of successful and holistic Local Strategic Partnerships and we congratulate those who adopted this important national Indicator.

GOSW and other regional offices also supported the preparation work for a national Action Plan to support the Third Sector and its partners. We ensured that partners' views were taken into account so that when the plan, Real Help for Communities, was launched in February 2009, it contained practical measures to support the 3rd Sector including an undertaking to refresh the Compact by November 2009. At the time of writing a regional conference is planned with key stakeholders to discuss how we take forward these actions.

## National Offender Management Service

<http://noms.homeoffice.gov.uk/noms-regions/south-west/>

In June 2008, the Ministry of Justice published its Third Sector Strategy – Improving policies and securing better public services through effective partnerships, 2008 – 2011.

The four main drivers of the Strategy:

- enabling voice,
- strengthening communities,
- transforming public services, and
- encouraging social enterprises

are all based on the Compact principles.

The Compact is also a key element of the Ministry of Justice and the National Offender Management Service' Working with the Third Sector to reduce reoffending plan. This sets out commitments and a three-year programme of action to underpin and help achieve a reduction in adult re-offending through working with the Third Sector.

Against a backdrop of huge structural change the South West NOMS team has been committed to developing the relationship with the voluntary and community sector. The economic downturn will hit the VCS hard and so much of the activity has been based around capacity building and strengthening the sector.

Examples include:

- Supporting a range of VCS agencies by assisting and supporting a range of funding bids
- Working with VCS infrastructure organisations such as CLINKS to provide a real voice for the sector within prisons and probation
- Providing funding to support a VCS SW forum established for VCS organisations working with offenders
- Promotion of the sector by inclusion in the reducing re-offending pathways and involvement in high level events
- Working with partners to ensure Third Sector access to tendering opportunities
- Ongoing work in the development of social enterprises in association with a range of VCS partners.

## South West Forum

[www.southwestforum.org.uk](http://www.southwestforum.org.uk)

South West Forum is the voice for voluntary and community organisations in the South West. Our role is essentially a strategic one – working to ensure the voluntary sector is fully engaged in policy making and that organisations have the support they need to be as effective as possible. In other words we are committed to helping to ensure an “environment for a thriving Third Sector” – one of the key National Indicators adopted by the majority of local area agreements in the South West. In order to achieve this we worked throughout the year to build a stronger and more effective relationship between voluntary and community organisations and public sector organisations.

Thanks to support from Capacitybuilders we have built a strong regional strategic partnership to lead the modernisation of voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations’ support services in the South West. This partnership brings together sub regional consortia, regional voluntary and community organisations networks and key public sector partners. We are running a learning programme to promote and share good practice, supporting new or under-funded regional networks and implementing a strategy to promote and broaden public sector investment in voluntary and community sector support services.

We have run some very successful conferences during the year – bringing together people from voluntary and community organisations and public sector organisations to learn together, share expertise and facilitate collaboration and partnership. Our events on “building healthy relationships”, “environmental volunteering”, “stronger communities” and voluntary sector independence have attracted almost 400 people and have been rated good or excellent by over 94% of participants. Our partners in

these events include NHS-SW, Care Services Improvement Partnership, Natural England, Capacitybuilders, Regional Empowerment Partnership, GOSW and the Big Lottery Fund.

What underpins all of this is our commitment to promote and implement the South West Regional Compact and to this end we have not only actively participated in the Regional Compact Group meetings but also provided the Group’s secretariat functions.

## South West Regional Secretariat

[www.southwest-ra.gov.uk](http://www.southwest-ra.gov.uk)

The South West Regional Secretariat supports the work of three separate organisations, the South West Regional Assembly, South West Councils and South West Employers. The Secretariat is managed by the South West Regional Board. Each organisation has its own Member structures and makes its own policy decisions. The organisations are brought together by the board.

SW Councils have had a long history of engagement with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). The on-the-ground knowledge and experience of this sector is essential to improving the local delivery of services and improving the lives of local people.

SW Councils value Membership of the Regional Compact Group because this allows a networking and liaison point between the Voluntary and Community groups and Regional Organisations. It allows the sectors to come together, discuss their different views and ensure their voices are heard. SW Councils commends the Compact for its recent national Compact Award and looks forward to continued participation.

Voluntary and Community Sector Membership of the Regional Assembly has also often aided discussions on strategic planning, housing, transport and economic development.

Involvement of the sector has ensured that the

voices of different professions, specialists and points of view are heard and fed into policy making. Good examples of this have been the involvement of the VCS in developing and drafting the Climate Change Action Plan and prior to this, the Integrated Regional Strategy.

## South West of England Regional Development Agency

[www.southwestrda.org.uk](http://www.southwestrda.org.uk)

The South West Regional Compact, and the shared working principles it promotes, have been an important focal point around which the South West RDA's relationship with our regional partners has developed over a number of years, and throughout 2008.

There were a number of important developments during the year which have worked to improve and enhance our relationship with the region's Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS), described in chronological order below:

- In January, on realisation that the consultation process for the development of our Corporate Plan 2008-11 was not Compact compliant, we organised some extra consultation sessions, specifically to seek feedback from the region's VCS. We realise this action stems from contravening the Compact, but we also hope that it shows we value our relationship we have with VCS partners and that we are keen to hear, understand and consider their views.
- In March, the Compact was raised at a meeting of the Infrastructure Development Partnership (IDP), a group which seeks to modernise the region's frontline voluntary and community organisations, as an example of good practice in working relationships, which the IDP could use. Enhanced working relationships have since been fostered as a result. The RDA acts as an honest broker, or critical friend, of this group. We do not contribute any money to the activity, but we think it's important to be engaged and informed.

- In October we contributed to a submission that the Regional Compact Group (RCG) made in response to a consultation being undertaken by the Commission for the Compact. The Commission is the oversight organisation that seeks to ensure the Compact is upheld in practice; they were consulting on the future of the Compact. Our submission included rejecting the idea that the Compact should become a legally binding document. This, we felt, was contrary to the process of developing the document and the concept of shared working principles. The RCG came to a consensual view before providing a submission, but this followed robust debate. We think this points to the development of our relationship with the VCS, in that we aren't guarded in our contributions to discussions, i.e. being open is best. This may mean differences of opinion are aired, but it is more productive to first understand all viewpoints and then come to collective agreement.

- In November we sought to progress with a number of collaborative actions as part of Compact week, alongside taking action as individual organisations. Whilst there was ample will, lack of capacity meant that the collaborative work, including job shadowing opportunities, wasn't as successful as we'd originally hoped. We will learn from this and do better in 2009.

- A major achievement and something that we, alongside our RCG partners, can be proud of, was winning the Compact Award for Excellence at a Regional Level in November. Announced at an awards lunch, followed by an evening reception at 11 Downing Street, the award recognises the RCG partners' collective commitment to shared working principles, as detailed in our shared document. Winning the award gave us the opportunity to promote the importance of the VCS to a large number of RDA staff at an away-day and afforded us other promotional opportunities via our website and newsletter.

Looking back over the year, it becomes apparent that we have achieved a lot, despite the limited resources (time and money) that we are able to afford Compact work. That is not to say the activity isn't important however. Indeed, healthy and adult working relationships are even more important in the current economic downturn where we need to pull together to hasten the recovery. We look forward to working with our partners in 2009, using the Compact as a useful tool to ensure that we in collectively work towards a brighter economic future.

## **SWAN – The South West ACRE Network**

[www.swan-network.org.uk](http://www.swan-network.org.uk)

SWAN – the South West ACRE Network was delighted to have become a signatory to the South West Regional Compact during this last year, recognising as it does, the importance of the real, two way, communication and engagement opportunity which the Compact affords, and being proud to be associated with colleagues from all sides who have achieved so much together, and nationally in the Compact Awards.

SWAN supports the work of its seven member rural community councils and provides a rural

issues point of focus for the region and regional colleagues. We are pleased that all our member RCCs are fully engaged with the work of sub-regional Compact Groups as the work they perform is of immense value in advising our task at a regional level. Both SWAN and its member RCCs recognise that by being signatories to the Compact it is beholden on all parties to make it work by being open and truthful in their relationships. The Compact is not, and should not be seen to be, a stick with which to beat the Public Sector, and, at the same time it is not, and should not be used as, an escape clause to obviate obligations to partners. We would endorse the comments above from our colleagues in the South West Regional Secretariat, regarding the role of the Voluntary and Community Sector representatives within the body of the Assembly by their membership of the Social Economic and Environmental Partners Group. This has been a rewarding process for all and has demonstrated how, by working together across sectoral and other divisions, so much can be achieved. We hope this continues into any new arrangements that follow the demise of the Regional Assembly, in the true spirit of the Compact.

## **Other signatories to the South West Regional Compact**

**The following organisations became signatories to the Compact during 2008 and will be invited to submit contributions to the 2009 Annual review:**

**Natural England** – [www.naturalengland.org.uk/regions/south\\_west/contact/default.aspx](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/regions/south_west/contact/default.aspx)

**Jobcentre Plus** – [www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/JCP/Aboutus/index.html](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/JCP/Aboutus/index.html)

**South Western Ambulance Service NHS Trust** – [www.wcas.nhs.uk/](http://www.wcas.nhs.uk/)

## **Sign up to the South West Regional Compact**

If you are a representative of a regional organisation and you believe that you could sign up to the principles of the Regional Compact, or you would like further information, please contact South West Forum on – Tel 01392 823758, E-mail [admin@southwestforum.org.uk](mailto:admin@southwestforum.org.uk), Fax 01392 823033, or post to South West Forum, Unit 6, Cranmere Court, Lustleigh Close, Matford Business Park, Exeter, EX2 8PW