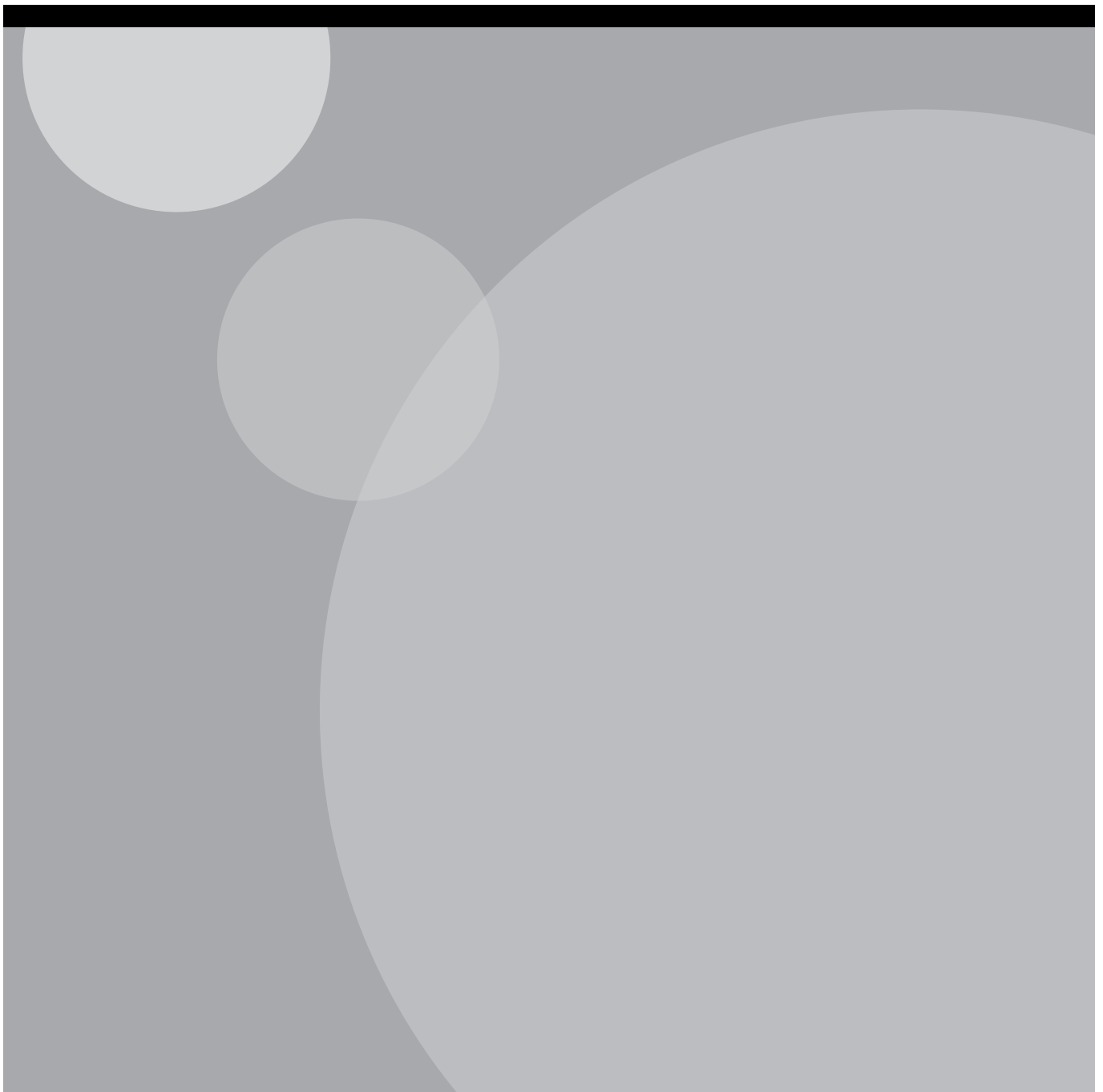




Principles of representation: A framework for effective
third sector participation in Local Strategic Partnerships
Discussion Document





Principles of representation: A framework for effective
third sector participation in Local Strategic Partnerships
Discussion Document

Communities and Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London
SW1E 5DU
Telephone: 020 7944 4400
Website: www.communities.gov.uk

© Crown Copyright, 2007

Copyright in the typographical arrangement rests with the Crown.

This publication, excluding logos, may be reproduced free of charge in any format or medium for research, private study or for internal circulation within an organisation. This is subject to it being reproduced accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the publication specified.

Any other use of the contents of this publication would require a copyright licence. Please apply for a Click-Use Licence for core material at www.opsi.gov.uk/click-use/system/online/pLogin.asp, or by writing to the Office of Public Sector Information, Information Policy Team, St Clements House, 2-16 Colegate, Norwich, NR3 1BQ.
Fax: 01603 723000 or email: HMSOlicensing@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk

If you require this publication in an alternative format please email alternativeformats@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Communities and Local Government Publications
PO Box 236
Wetherby
West Yorkshire
LS23 7NB
Tel: 08701 226 236
Fax: 08701 226 237
Textphone: 08701 207 405
Email: communities@twoten.com
or online via the Communities and Local Government website: www.communities.gov.uk

75% recycled
This is printed on
75% recycled paper

November 2007

Product Code: 07 CRLD 04952

Contents

Foreword	4
Section 1	
Who is this document for?	5
Section 2	
Introduction	6
Section 3	
Summary of the principles	7
Section 4	
How can a set of principles help?	8
Section 5	
What would a set of principles offer?	10
Section 6	
Context and challenges	11
Section 7	
Benefits for the third sector	13
Section 8	
Benefits for local authorities and LSP partners	14
Section 9	
The role of the Compact	15
Section 10	
The Principles of Representation	17
Section 11	
Discussion questions	22
Section 12	
How to Respond?	23
Annex 1 – Member of the stakeholder working group	24

Foreword

By Baroness Andrews and Neil Cleeveley (NAVCA), chair of the working group

The Local Government White Paper, *Strong and Prosperous Communities*, outlines the opportunity to rebalance the relationship between central and local government, between local government and their partners and with citizens. Bringing the White Paper to life will require a new way of working for everyone, including the Third Sector, in order to strengthen partnership working.

The Third Sector is key to delivering the ambitions to strengthen local accountability, shape better places and design and deliver services which meet the needs and aspirations of those who use them. The Government wants the best local partnership working with the third sector to be the rule not the exception, particularly through Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs).

Building on the White Paper commitment to work with the national third sector umbrella bodies, Communities and Local Government convened a working group to establish draft principles by which the sector will organise itself to be effectively represented on Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and local public life in general.

This discussion paper, *Principles of representation: A framework for effective third sector participation in Local Strategic Partnerships*, is the result of the group work in this area. It seeks to set out a series of principles, for the third sector, by which the best of partnership working has succeeded. It is intended as a framework for discussion rather than a template.

It is not for the Government, nor national umbrella bodies, to seek to mandate how you secure effective representation. However, by facilitating the development of these principles and inviting your views we aim to emphasise the importance of growing a partnership between the third sector and local government.

We and our partners on the third sector stakeholder group are keen to hear your views on how the sector might organise itself to achieve more effective representation. All comments are welcome and we hope that you will take the time to respond to this document by way of the methods listed at the end of this paper. The stakeholder group would particularly welcome responses to the questions set out in section 10.

We are very grateful for the commitment and expertise of all those who work in this vital area of natural life. We look forward very much to receiving your comments.

Section 1. Who is this document for?

This document is aimed at third sector¹ groups, organisations and bodies of all sizes operating within an LSP. The purpose of the principles is to assist 3rd sector bodies in coming together to be the collective voice for the sector in an area.

This document may also be of interest to other parties, such as LSPs, Statutory agencies and partners as they are likely to be the most common external stakeholders for the 3rd sector. **This document is not guidance to local authorities, LSPs, statutory agencies and partners as to how to involve the third sector.**

¹ For the purposes of this document we are using the Government's definition of the third sector: "non-governmental organisations that are value-driven and which principally reinvest their surpluses to further social, environmental or cultural objectives. It includes voluntary and community organisations, charities, social enterprises, cooperatives and mutuals."

Section 2. Introduction

The third sector makes a vital contribution to strong and cohesive communities and should be a key and respected partner of the local authority and other local public bodies and the private sector. The third sector is particularly important in ensuring that the voices of the most excluded people are heard.

In some areas the third sector is already engaged strongly with local authorities and their partners, especially where the sector has well-developed infrastructure and networks that offer a two-way flow of information between the local strategic partnership (LSP) and the local third sector. If they are working well such arrangements will result in a well informed local third sector that is integral to local decision making. Engagement is generally strongest where the third sector and local government have a history of partnership; elsewhere the level of engagement is inconsistent at best and weak at worst. Sometimes this is because the local third sector is fragmented and unable to make its voice heard². Sometimes it is simply that local partners do not recognise the value of the sector's voice and have not invested in the necessary infrastructure and networks.

It is in everyone's interest for effective partnership working between the sector and local government to be the norm. In *Strong and prosperous communities*, the Local Government White Paper, the Government set out a "clear expectation that the local third sector will be actively involved with all LSPs in helping to shape the local area"³.

Meaningful third sector participation is a crucial element of an effective LSP, helping it to agree the local vision, set priorities and deliver services to reflect the needs and aspirations of local communities. The White Paper goes on to set out the Government's intention to "work with national third sector umbrella bodies to establish a standard by which local third sector bodies should organise themselves to be effectively represented on LSPs."⁴

The principles set out in this discussion paper are intended to help fulfil that commitment. The role of the LSP more broadly is set out in Communities and Local Government's statutory guidance which is currently in draft being consulted upon.

This paper and the following principles were developed by a third sector stakeholder group, facilitated by Communities and Local Government. – see annex 1 for a list of those who contributed to this discussion paper.

² *Local Area Agreements Research: Round 2 negotiations and early progress in Round 1*, Communities and Local Government, October 2006

³ *Strong and prosperous communities – The Local Government White Paper*, Communities and Local Government volume II, October 2006 p58

⁴ *ibid* volume I, October 2006 p98

Section 3. Summary of the principles

The *Principles of Representation* are set out in full in section 10 and are summarised below.

1. **Accountability** – clearly defined responsibilities for all decisions and actions
2. **Equality** – place equality, diversity and inclusiveness at the core of what you do
3. **Leadership** – the sector’s representatives will need to think and act strategically
4. **Openness** – be as open as possible in all your dealings and relationships
5. **Purpose** – be clear about the local sector’s objectives and support them with a strong evidence base
6. **Sustainability** – ensuring the continuation of the collective voice
7. **Values** – identify and build on the values of the local sector

Section 4. How can a set of principles help?

It is not intended to prescribe how the local sector should organise itself. However, a guiding set of principles should help local third sector bodies develop arrangements that strengthen their representation and widen participation with LSP partners.

The *Principles of Representation* are intended to provide a guiding framework which may:

- assist the local third sector to organise itself and maximise the impact of its voice on the LSP, its strategies and plans; and
- provide information to local authorities and their LSP partners to assist them in understanding how to engage more effectively with the third sector and, through them, local communities.

Whilst primarily aimed at the LSP and its network of partnerships, the principles may be useful to those in the sector engaged more directly with other public sector bodies and with the private sector. The aim should be to create an environment that enables those with a legitimate interest in a particular issue to be heard. This could be through the sector's representation on the LSP and its network of partnerships or through other connections with individual statutory bodies on the LSP.

Many areas have set up some kind of network, forum or assembly, which, if it is to reflect the sector's diversity, is likely to be at the hub for a wide range of specialist networks for smaller groups with shared interests. For example, groups engaged in supporting the elderly, environmental activism or community transport are likely to be involved in themed networks that might themselves form part of a wider third sector network – what might be termed a network of networks. Whatever the local solution, what is important is that there is buy-in from all parts of the local third sector this is where the *Principles* can help.

The aspiration should be to strengthen the voice of the sector, so that all communities can make the most of opportunities to influence local decision-making, either directly or through a local third sector group that represents their interests. It is important to understand that it is not easy to represent what are often divergent interests and reaching agreement may sometimes prove impossible. The very process of involving people, canvassing opinion, consensus building and gathering and disseminating information is time-consuming and may at times appear chaotic. Yet it is ultimately worthwhile – when people are involved in decision making they are more likely to understand how and why decisions are made and consequently retain a greater faith in those who make them.

There may be occasions when it is appropriate for people from the third sector to be involved in partnerships or other forums, but not to be representing the sector, for example:

- where they are invited as a provider with expertise in a particular area of service delivery;
- where there is a need to get the views of under-represented groups whose voices often go unheard; or
- where a third sector *view* is needed. This is similar to the role of a parent governor in a school, where there is no requirement to represent the views of all parents, but simply to put forward a parent's perspective.

In these circumstances it is important to clarify the difference by referring to third sector 'participants', rather than representatives.

It is vital to involve elected members fully when applying these principles locally. There is a clear distinction between their representative role as democratically elected councillors and that of third sector and community representatives. It is essential that the third sector's role is supportive of local democracy and adds value to the work of local councillors.

The principles in this document are not meant to be an exhaustive list and we would caution against simply copying them without some analysis of how they fit local circumstances. Context is important, so find a solution that works for your area.

Section 5. What would a set of principles offer?

The principles offer a framework for effective third sector representation on local partnership arrangements. They will not deliver this on their own and are not obligatory standards but the basis for a discussion about how 'we might get there together'.

The principles are something to work towards. The reality is that it takes time to build representative structures. Comprehensive representation of the third sector will be an iterative process of continuous review and improvement by the sector. The initial stages, perhaps the first year or two, might be led by a start-up group, which may need to reflect the concerns of those that are unrepresented. However, the objective must be to strengthen the capacity of the sector and the community to the point where groups are able to articulate their concerns and be confident that their voices will be heard.

Building the validity of the voice for the sector in the local area should be a core aim. For instance, supporting a proposal with evidence that stands up to scrutiny will enhance the sector's credibility and strengthen its influence with partners. This requires clear and effective methods from the sector for communication and consultation – gathering, assimilating and analysing information from members of the sector to bring clarity and force of argument to the sector's voice.

The intention is not to replace existing good practice, but to build on what already works and offer a framework to address shortcomings. For example, the principles can be seen as supplementary to the local Compact in an area, and can be used to encourage better communication between the sector themselves and the LSP and local public bodies where appropriate.

Section 6. Context and challenges

The Local Government White Paper placed great importance on the role of the third sector, and it was the basis from which the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (LGPIH) was developed. Central to the new performance framework is a reinvigorated LSP, which will be the main vehicle for developing the local vision – the Sustainable Community Strategy – for transforming a place and for tackling hard, crosscutting issues. It offers an opportunity for the third sector to make its unique contribution alongside local authorities, business and other service providers operating at the local level such as the primary care trust and the local police. The LSP is also the forum for agreeing the targets of local area agreements (LAAs), which should secure better outcomes for each area and become the central delivery agreement between the Government and the local authority and its partners.

Whilst the *Principles of Representation* focus primarily upon the third sector's contribution to the work of the LSP, it is important to consider how they might be applied to all aspects of local engagement. The objective should be to avoid duplication and introduce a coherent approach to both third sector and wider community engagement. For example, the new duty to involve, set out in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, due to come into effect 1 April 2009, will require best value authorities (except police authorities) to undertake activities they consider appropriate, to inform, consult and involve *representatives of local persons*⁵ in authority functions where they consider it appropriate. As set out in the draft statutory guidance there are three ways an authority might decide to involve third sector organisations (i) as those who might be interested in, or affected by, a particular authority function (ii) as advocates for local people (in particular the marginalised and vulnerable) and (iii) providing relevant expertise and knowledge to help the authority effectively engage marginalised and vulnerable groups⁶.

Similarly, there is a commitment to a more comprehensive approach to community engagement, which may lead to improved co-ordination across the LSP and its partners. Where there is already a community empowerment network (CEN) in place it may be the right vehicle to take forward community engagement initiatives. It will certainly be important for the third sector to consider the CEN's role in the context of the principles. Where there is currently no CEN there may be lessons to be drawn from their experiences⁷ elsewhere. Whether or not you have a CEN the ring-fenced funding they received in the past will not be available.

⁵ By 'representatives of local persons' we mean a selection of people which the authority considers reflects those who are likely to be affected by, or interested in, a particular authority function. This will vary depending on the type of authority, policy or service area, but could include those that live in an area, visit it, or use a particular service. The term covers groups or organisations such as local third sector groups and businesses as well as individual citizens.

⁶ As the draft statutory guidance is currently out for consultation this is subject to change.

⁷ see *Research Report 15 Making Connections: An evaluation of the Community Participation Programmes*, Taylor, Wilson et al, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister March 2005 also *Getting Citizens Involved: Community Participation in Neighbourhood Renewal*, National Audit Office October 2004.

There are new arrangements for Area Based Grants, non-ringfenced, general grants for local authorities that will be allocated on a three year basis to maximise stability and certainty. The stability of the three-year financial settlements should be passed to the third sector wherever possible. In relation to grants to third sector organisations, the starting point should be three-year funding in all cases, subject to purpose and democratic controls, except where this does not represent best value in individual cases and in terms of overall efficiency.

In most rural areas, parish planning has generated stronger joint action on identifying and pursuing the priorities of local groups. Good parish plans can deliver the appropriate evidence and information on which to base representation of community sector interests. Lessons learned from using parish plans as the basis for community engagement have also been well documented and researched⁸. However, dedicated national funding for parish plans has ended and the remaining national rural programme that contributed to their production will end by April 2008.

Successful third sector representation requires a well networked and co-ordinated sector that has the skills and capacity to participate. Some areas have invested in the capacity of the third sector, its infrastructure and networks to support representation and wider participation. Third sector networks and infrastructure have always considered representing the sector to be an important part of their work, whilst there are no new resources available from government, the current policy climate presents an opportunity for LSPs to have a meaningful discussion about what is needed locally and how it will be resourced. Stronger local strategic partnerships should encourage discussion in the third sector to review how best they use the resources that are available to support strong representation.

Experience of the third sector has sometimes found that building effective representation in two-tier counties with several districts can be challenging; by their nature there are likely to be differing, but equally legitimate, democratic mandates; there may well be a multiplicity of partnerships at all levels; there are often large, sparsely populated areas that can present a very practical challenge to wider community engagement and participation. Many would argue that the term two-tier is itself misleading and that parish and town councils add another layer of complexity. As the government's recent consultation found '*[e]stablishing clear roles and responsibilities in two-tier local authority areas can be problematic*'⁹. The third sector should be aware of the challenges in this area.

⁸ National research: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/communities/parish-planning.htm#research> Regional research: <http://www.swan-network.org.uk/page/communityplanning>

⁹ Local Strategic Partnerships: Shaping their future – An Analysis of Consultation Responses, Communities and Local Government, October 2006, p31

Section 7. Benefits for the third sector

In practice, where an area has invested in more effective and inclusive third sector infrastructure and representation mechanisms, there has been greater involvement for the sector, typically reflected in wider third sector representation on LSP policy and sub-groups. Where third sector organisations feel well represented, they believe it has led to a better understanding among statutory bodies of the value that the sector has in their area. An inclusive voice carries more weight; exerts more influence; provides an efficient point of engagement for external stakeholders; and helps to build better relationships and partnerships. The benefits for the third sector are:

- recognition of added value it brings as a partner, particularly in relation to governance, service delivery and social capital;
- local groups should find it easier to have their voices heard;
- local groups are able to influence services on behalf of their communities;
- it is better placed to make the case for support for community-based activities;
- it is at the heart of decisions that matter to local people; and
- stronger relationships and enhanced collaboration across the sector.

Section 8. Benefits for local authorities and LSP partners

There are benefits for local authorities and LSP partners if the third sector organises itself to provide more effective representation of the sector. The local third sector's roots in the community make it well placed to inform LSP partners' service provision. It brings knowledge and experience of a wide range of locally-based community action, whether specific community groups, particular neighbourhoods, wider perspectives covering demographic groups or complex issues such as homelessness or youth offending. The views of representatives carry far more weight where the third sector has demonstrated to LSPs that they have a legitimate and accountable voice, and the sector speaks with more confidence where it knows it has consulted and communicated with as wide a membership as possible. With the right structures and resources in place the third sector will be able to contribute information and evidence about local priorities and needs to support statutory bodies' decision making and service planning.

A well organised third sector can provide its representatives with an authoritative voice that will strengthen the sector's participation in LSPs, enabling partners to:

- use the experience, knowledge, and skills of the third sector to help design and deliver more effective services;
- use third sector links with communities and users to ensure that services tackle the most deep rooted and intractable problems in ways that will work on the ground;
- strengthen relationships and enhance collaboration between public agencies and third sector organisations and groups working on similar issues or themes, or in the same area;
- access community networks that can help deliver changes in attitude or behaviour for the benefit of the area, for instance to reduce carbon emissions or promote healthy eating;
- co-ordinate services in the public and third sectors, so they don't duplicate or contradict each other and creative synergies can be found; and
- link with the external funding, assets, volunteers and other resources that the third sector brings into the area.

Section 9. The role of the Compact

“The Government and the voluntary and community sector have different forms of accountability and are answerable to a different range of stakeholders. But common to both is the need for integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership...

The Voluntary and Community Sector undertakes to ensure that service users, volunteers, members and supporters are informed and consulted, where appropriate, about activities and policy positions when presenting a case to Government or responding to Government consultations, and to communicate accurately the views put to them in the course of such representations.”¹⁰

The national Compact contains a large number of undertakings relevant to these principles, many of which have been incorporated into local Compacts. As well as the main Compact, the Community Sector codes and the BME code are particularly relevant.

The Compact and local compacts can have a valuable role in supporting third sector representation. It can frame the boundaries of the relationships that exist between the sector and local authorities and other statutory agencies and help to set the ‘terms of engagement’.

Where the Compact has had a positive impact it has resulted in an adventurous process that sparked imagination. It has facilitated an impartial, mature approach to problem solving and has modelled new ways of working, challenging and changing personal behaviour and conduct.

Elsewhere, the impact has been less profound. Nevertheless the Compact has been the backdrop for better relationships and provided an educational experience for key stakeholders. It has helped change culture, encouraging organisations to reflect on ingrained habits and has helped partners identify the value and potential of the third sector. It has been a key incentive to ‘mature engagement’ and it can perform a useful role as a fall-back tool, a strong reference point and guidance document to help resolve conflict.

Many report that the process of developing local compacts was where the real value lay, providing a framework for dialogue between local authorities and the third sector.

¹⁰ Compact on Relations between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in England, 1998

In the final report of the Comprehensive Spending Review's Third Sector Review 2007, the Government recognises the value of real partnership working between the public and third sectors, and restates its commitment to the Compact. The report also recommends that the Commission for the Compact give priority to reviewing the Compact, with the aim of having revised Compact documentation in place by summer 2008. The Commission has welcomed this recommendation, and will, through any review of the Compact aim, among other things, to reaffirm the principles of good partnership working.

Section 10. The Principles of Representation

The following principles offer a framework that the third sector might use to organise effective representation on LSPs. They might be used to develop terms of reference or other clear statements that describe the nature of any networks or collective body, its representatives and what might be expected of them.

The framework should not be seen as exhaustive or prescriptive, but as a reference point from which to start a discussion between the third sector about how they might be better represented in their own area. Indeed, you may decide to develop your own principles with your own headings and your own understanding of what they mean and how they can be applied. The principles are essentially good practice in partnership working.

1. Accountability

Those who represent the third sector or speak on its behalf ought to be responsible to the local sector. Clear lines of accountability also allow the sector's representatives to speak with real authority. This does not mean that all decisions are subject to a consensus, but representatives should be prepared and able to explain decisions and actions. The third sector should:

- a) make sure third sector representatives on LSPs and its theme groups understand their roles and responsibilities;
- b) ensure the wider third sector understands its responsibilities to its representatives;
- c) put into place reporting mechanisms that support the flow of information without creating unnecessary burdens;
- d) make arrangements that enable all third sector groups to participate as fully as possible;
- e) ensure there is clarity about when third sector representatives on the LSP have a clear mandate and when they do not, and
- f) clearly define roles for any officers that might support the sector's representation work;

2. Equality

Reducing inequality should be at the heart of the third sector's work. It should work to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and empower people to make their voices heard. The third sector should:

- a) be open to all third sector groups in the area, regardless of size, that accept the basic principles of equality for other groups;
- b) engage communities and individuals from under-represented groups directly where they are newly arrived and/or do not have the necessary infrastructure and groups to articulate and promote their interests;
- c) ensure that the partnership represents and reflects the community it serves, proactively reaching out to engage the most excluded groups. For example, it may be relevant, for the partnership, to consult in depth those service users who have historically been disproportionately failed by public services. It may also be necessary to take 'positive action' measures in order to target historically excluded groups to ensure that such groups can also benefit from local services;
- d) work with all faith¹¹ and equalities groups, forums and organisations, taking steps to be accessible and in doing so seek to widen participation;
- e) take into account the voices of people who are not able to participate in groups or do not feel as though they belong to one;
- f) accept that in some areas groups may wish to organise separate mechanisms for representing their interests and concerns on the LSP;
- g) make sure that involvement aids cohesion and local relations rather than damaging it; and
- h) remember that real progress will take time, particularly in engaging those who are "hard to reach" and disengaged. People need to be given time to develop expertise and relationships, and to find the most appropriate approaches to participation.

3. Leadership

Those representing the local sector will be dealing with experienced senior public officials. This will require strong leadership skills: negotiation; mediation; assertiveness; dispute resolution; political and influencing skills. However, leadership is not about telling others what to do; rather it is the ability to represent the wider sector and not simply your own organisation or sectional interests. This links strongly to the principles of accountability and transparency. The third sector should:

- a) be prepared to tackle difficult issues;
- b) share and celebrate success;
- c) work within the network's defined structures;

¹¹ Two reports on faith-based representation have recently been published: *Faithful Representation* (Church Urban Fund – Sept 2006) and *Faith in LSPs?* (Churches Regional Network – Dec 2006). Insofar as they relate to faith communities as a distinctive part of the wider third sector, the recommendations of these reports are incorporated into the generic principles set out in this paper.

- d) develop and utilise the skills and experience of its members;
- e) challenge the network to reflect changing contexts and needs;
- f) include all its members and conduct wider consultation in assessing needs and priorities and in developing its future direction and purpose;
- g) recognise and involve its external stakeholders in its development, building inter-dependence and mutual understanding; and
- h) not always taking the majority view when trying to resolve and represent conflicting interests. The voices of a legitimate minority deserve to be equally heard.

4. Purpose

Establish a clear sense of purpose about what you want to achieve, expressed in whatever terms are appropriate. Do not simply deal with the day to day issues; think ahead beyond the immediate horizon. Be clear about the issues that the network will deal with and what will be dealt with by specific third sector bodies. The third sector should:

- a) establish a broad consensus of shared values from which to develop common goals and aims;
- b) plan for the long-term as well as the short-term;
- c) clearly define the stakeholders you wish to work with, including but not limited to LSP and LAA structures;
- d) reach agreement on who should sit on the decision making bodies in your area including but not limited to the relevant LSP boards;
- e) be responsive to change, anticipating the need for developing and supporting new groups that arise from demographic changes, aiding integration; and
- f) embrace demographic and cultural changes that might be required to deliver the wider aims of the network whilst staying true to its values.

5. Sustainability

It is important for the third sector to understand fully the costs involved in starting and then maintaining an effective network for third sector groups and organisations in an area. In particular it may be necessary to consider investment in capacity building to ensure that representation is inclusive. Once identified, priorities should be agreed and future resource requirements explored fully as part of the future planning process. The third sector should:

- a) build relationships and interdependencies that strengthen the position of the local sector and enhance its capacity to develop and innovate;

- b) seek and secure resources to support the expression and dissemination of its collective voice;
- c) look to develop the skills and capacity of members and examine the potential for sharing costs and capacity that might arise from working more closely together;
- d) work in ways that make the minimum use of all non-renewable resources, and explore ways of using renewable resources sourced from within the organisation's geographic boundaries wherever possible;
- e) be flexible enough to take advantage of new opportunities that might arise;
- f) make the most of the talents already at the network's disposal;
- g) identify the skills, experience, and competencies required of members and representatives and invest in their development;
- h) put in place simple and robust arrangements that enable reflection, learning and continuous improvement and
- i) build the sector's capacity to engage with all stakeholders, in particular LSP partners and local communities.

6. Openness

The network should conduct its business as openly as possible. This is vital for its credibility both with its own members but also with its external stakeholders. The third sector should:

- a) ensure that all discussions and decisions are recorded and open to all. Do not conduct meetings behind closed doors. Where, in exceptional circumstances, this is not possible, the reasons should be explained clearly;
- b) have an agreed and well publicised process for selecting third sector representatives on the LSP and its theme groups;
- c) communicate clearly and promptly with all stakeholders, using the appropriate mediums;
- d) welcome challenge as an opportunity to learn and improve;
- e) deal positively with failings by acknowledging and addressing them;
- f) ensure that it shares 'credit where credit is due' in its dealings with the media, network members and external stakeholders and ensure the form and content of communications is agreed between the relevant stakeholders; and
- g) establish clear and consistent lines of communication:
 - Between network members.
 - With the wider third sector.

- With the wider community.
- With the LSP and LAA theme groups.
- With any potential stakeholder – locally, regionally and nationally.

7. Values

In dealing with the practical realities of building and maintaining a network it is essential to keep in mind the valuable traditions and values of the sector. Building a network will mean change and some of the effects might be predictable whilst others might be unexpected and challenging. For many in the sector, working more closely with the statutory sector might be a culturally difficult task and this should be recognised, as should be the benefits that can result. The third sector should:

- a) recognise and preserve the independence of the third sector from statutory bodies, but be pragmatic about building respectful relationships between the sectors;
- b) recognise and value the diversity of its membership and the different strengths they bring to the wider network;
- c) recognise and act upon opportunities for mutual development with internal and external stakeholders;
- d) recognise the mutual inter-dependence of all internal and external relationships, and the benefits that can be enjoyed by all the stakeholders;
- e) recognise the legitimate roles of members and avoid duplication by building upon their work;
- f) think about who it involves and when and be open and honest about the extent of that involvement. Consider how to target those individuals and groups to whom the issue is most relevant. This approach will help to avoid consultation and participation fatigue. It is also more likely to ensure greater diversity and quality of involvement; and
- g) develop the sector's capacity to provide evidence to support its views.

Section 11. Discussion questions

1. Will a set of principles aid third sector participation in your local strategic partnership and its thematic groups?
2. If the third sector is already well represented in your locality, do you think the principles would have made a difference?
3. Are there any approaches to third sector representation you would recommend? We have suggested networks and forums, please give examples of other approaches you have experience of in your area.
4. Do you agree with the benefits we have set out:
 - for the third sector?
 - for the local authority and its public sector partners?Are there any other benefits you would add? If so please tell us what they are.
5. Effective partnership takes time and effort to develop and sustain. Have we identified the main challenges?
 - Please offer examples of the challenges you and your partners have faced in your area and how you overcame them.
6. Do you agree with the principles?
 - Will they make a difference in your area?
 - If not, why not?
 - If they will, please say how.
 - Is there anything missing?
 - Is there anything that you would recommend?
7. Are the case studies helpful?
 - Do you have any examples of good practice that illustrate any of the principles?
 - If so, please share them with us.
8. Are you aware of any tools that would help to apply the principles?
9. We really want to hear about examples of good practice. If you have any, please share them with us.
10. What else could the sector itself do to encourage an effective and well networked local third sector in every part of the country?

Section 12. How to respond

We are keen to hear your views on this paper and the discussion questions above.

Please send any responses to;
thirdsector@communities.gsi.gov.uk

The discussion is open for 12 weeks and closes on the 12th February 2008.

Annex 1. Members of stakeholder working group

Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE)

Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO)

Black Information Link (BLINK)

Capacity Builders

Commission for Racial Equality

Commission for the Compact

Community Alliance

Community Development Foundation

HM Treasury

Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA)

Interfaith Network UK

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Consortium

Local Government Association

National Association of Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA)

National Community Forum (NCF)

National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)

National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS)

Office of the Third Sector (OTS)

Social Enterprise Coalition

Urban Forum

Voice4Change England

Volunteering England

Women's Resource Centre