

The Compact Accountability and Transparency Guide

Helping to build stronger partnerships between the Coalition Government and civil society organisations.

Accountability and Transparency Guide

The Coalition Government is committed to the Compact and to ensuring an effective working relationship with civil society organisations¹ (CSOs).

Historically the Compact has been an agreement that sets out commitments and expectations about how the Government and CSOs should work in partnership for the benefit of people and communities. However, this has not been backed up by arrangements for what happens when the Compact is not followed or when things go wrong.

We believe that in order for the Compact to have a real impact in terms of shaping meaningful partnerships and serving as a foundation for the Big Society, it needs to be backed up by arrangements that detail how government can be held accountable and what options are in place for dealing with departures from the Compact.

This document explains what increased measures the Coalition Government is introducing to strengthen the implementation of the Compact. It also explains what to do and whom to contact when things go wrong from informal discussions with departments to formal complaints to the Parliamentary Ombudsman. The purpose of this guide is to increase the transparency around how the Compact is being implemented.

¹ While it is understood that civil society is a contested term, for the purposes of the Compact, civil society organisations include charities, social enterprises and voluntary and community groups.

Implementing the Compact across government

The Office for Civil Society – Cabinet Office

Responsibility for the Compact within government sits with the Office for Civil Society (OCS). OCS is based within the Cabinet Office at the heart of government and works to support civil society organisations. Any comments or questions can be raised with OCS at:

Email: ocs.info@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk

Telephone: 0207 276 6400

Website: www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk

National Audit Office Inquiry

The National Audit Office (NAO) will in 2011-12 carry out a one-off inquiry into the operation of the Compact across government and its agencies. The purpose of this inquiry is to identify areas of good practice, areas for improvement, and to make recommendations about longer term and more permanent accountability structures. Their report will be made to Parliament. This report will establish a sound evidence base on the operation of the Compact and the Cabinet Office stands ready to support existing scrutiny roles including any inquiry which the Public Administration Select Committee (PASC) might eventually undertake on the basis of the NAO report.

Increased Transparency

Increased transparency around how the Compact is implemented and embedded within government departments is crucial to ensuring strengthened accountability. From 2012-13, it is intended that government departments include a statement on how the Compact is being implemented in their business plans. This will demonstrate not only commitment but also how the Compact adds value and context at a more practical level.

Ministers' roles

The Informal Ministerial Group on the Big Society & Localism is jointly chaired by the Minister for the Cabinet Office and the Secretary of State for Communities Local Government and consists of Ministers with responsibility for these matters in their departments. It will be instrumental in monitoring the progress of the renewed Compact and a key forum for raising concerns or dealing with departures from the agreement.

Implementing the Compact within CSOs

Compact Voice

Compact Voice supports the voluntary sector, at national and local level, to take forward the Compact. They provide training and advice to the sector on using the Compact, and represent its interests to national government. Compact Voice provides a free online network, events and guides, a speaker service and more. They also work closely with the Compact Advocacy Programme (details below) to ensure Compact implementation and good practice are widely recognised and upheld.

Contact Compact Voice:

Email: compact@compactvoice.org.uk

Telephone: 0207 520 2451

Website: www.compactvoice.org.uk

Twitter: @compactvoice

Support to CSOs

The Compact Advocacy Programme

If a CSO wants support in dealings with any public body at a national or local level, particularly in the early stages of a potential dispute, they can contact the Compact Advocacy team. Their role is to help mediate and support better outcomes for voluntary and community groups in their dealings with public bodies. If a CSO thinks a public body has made a decision that is not in line with the Compact they can help.

Email: evsadvice@ncvo-vol.org.uk

Telephone: 0207 520 3161

Website: at <http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/advice-support/compact-advocacy/how-we-can-help>

When things go wrong

Complaints about Government Departments:

If a CSO believes that the Compact has not been upheld, the first step should be to contact the relevant department and try to resolve the matter with them directly. If doing so does not help, CSOs may wish to make a formal complaint with that department. The complaint should also be copied to Nick Hurd MP, the Minister for Civil Society for information at compactcomplaints@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk.

Each department has its own complaints procedures.

Follow the link in the table below to learn what these procedures are.

Department	Web link
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills	http://www.bis.gov.uk/contact/complaints
Cabinet Office	http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/content/cabinet-office
Department for Communities and Local Government	http://www.communities.gov.uk/corporate/foi/complaintsprocedure/
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	http://www.culture.gov.uk/contact_us/4911.aspx
Ministry of Defence	http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/Help/ModComplaintsProcedure.htm
Department for Education	http://www.education.gov.uk/aboutdfe/complaintsprocedure
Department for Energy and Climate Change (see bottom of the page)	http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/contact_us/contact_us.aspx
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/policy/opengov/complain/
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/ministerial-feedback-form
Government Equalities Office	http://equalities.gov.uk/about_geo/corporate_information/freedom_of_information/complaints_procedure.aspx
Department of Health	http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/ContactUs/ComplaintProcedures/index.htm
Home Office	http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/complaints/
Department for International Development	http://www.dfid.gov.uk/About-DFID/Contact-us/Complaints-Procedures/
Ministry of Justice	http://www.justice.gov.uk/contactus.htm
HM Revenue and Customs	http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/complaints-appeals/how-to-complain.htm
Department for Transport	http://www.dft.gov.uk/about/complaints
HM Treasury	http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/about_complaints.htm
Department for Work and Pensions	http://www.dwp.gov.uk/contact-us/complaints-and-appeals/

Complaints about Arms Length Bodies, Executive Agencies or NDPBs:

If a CSO believes that an Arms Length Body, Executive Agency, or Non-Departmental Public Body have not upheld the Compact, they should contact them directly as a first step and try to resolve the matter with them. If this does not result in a satisfactory outcome, they can complain to the sponsor government department, that is the department to which that body reports. The complaint should also be copied to Nick Hurd MP, Minister for Civil Society at compactcomplaints@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk.

If a CSO is not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint they should notify Nick Hurd MP, the Minister for Civil Society at compactcomplaints@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk. CSOs may then choose to complain to the Parliamentary Ombudsman.

The Parliamentary Ombudsman:

The Parliamentary Ombudsman provides a service to the public by undertaking independent investigations into complaints that government departments and a range of other public bodies in the UK have not acted properly or fairly or have provided a poor service.

If a CSO is unhappy with the final response to their complaint about a government department or agency, they can complain through an MP to the Parliamentary Ombudsman (also known as the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration). The Ombudsman is independent and will decide whether or not to investigate based on a range of criteria. She will only investigate if she believes there are indications of maladministration leading to injustice. Her investigations are carried out in private.

If the Ombudsman investigates she will report her findings to the relevant government department, agency or public body and to the MP and complainant involved. If the complaint is upheld she will make recommendations for appropriate remedy. On the rare occasions when a public body refuses to follow the Ombudsman's recommendations, she presents a special report to parliament explaining her findings and stating that her recommendations have not been followed. It is then for Parliament to consider what action should be taken.

Details of local MPs can be found on findyourmp.parliament.uk

Please note that the Ombudsman will normally only take on a complaint after all other avenues of resolving the complaint have been exhausted. The Ombudsman believes that the relevant government department or agency should be given a chance to respond and, where appropriate, try to put things right before she becomes involved.

Further information about this independent service may be obtained from the Ombudsman's office at the following address:

Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman
Millbank Tower,
Millbank
London
SW1P 4QP

Helpline: 0345 015 4033

Fax: 0300 061 4000

Email: phso.enquiries@ombudsman.org.uk

Web: www.ombudsman.org.uk

Complaint about a local public body

The guidance above refers to complaints about national public bodies. If a CSO has a complaint about a local public body they should complain directly to the public body as a first step. Their website will have details of their particular complaints procedure. If this does not lead to a satisfactory outcome they can contact the independent Local Government Ombudsman who will decide whether there are grounds for an investigation. The involvement of an MP's is not required when complaining to the Local Government Ombudsman.

Further information about the independent review arrangements may be obtained from the Local Government Ombudsman's office at the following address:

The Local Government Ombudsman
PO Box 4771
Coventry
CV4 0E

Helpline: 0300 061 0614

Fax: 024 7682 0001

Email: advice@lgo.org.uk

Website: www.lgo.org.uk

Further information

Getting help with the Compact

For further support on using the Compact, contact Compact Voice:

Email: compact@compactvoice.org.uk

Telephone: 0207 520 2451

Website: www.compactvoice.org.uk

Twitter: @compactvoice

Contacting Government

For information on the Government's role in implementing the Compact, contact the Office for Civil Society:

Email: ocs.info@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk

Telephone: 0207 276 6400

Website: www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk



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