

Voice4Change England

Response to the Commission for the Compact's consultation on Compact Business Plan 2007-10

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Voice4Change England welcomes this opportunity to comment on the Compact Business Plan for 2007-10.
- 1.2 Voice4Change England (V4CE) is a coalition of 20 national and regional Black and minority ethnic third sector organisations which aims to provide a co-ordinated voice for the BME third sector.
- 1.3 V4CE was developed from the BME Sub-Group of the Compact Working Group, which since 1999, has worked to ensure that the BME sector benefited from, and recognised the benefits of Compact agreements between the Government and the voluntary and community sector. It is for this reason that the V4CE has taken a keen interest in responding to Commission's Consultation.

2. Overview of the Response

- 2.1 V4CE believes that to date, the Compact has had limited impact on improving the footing for BME Third Sector organisations in their relations with the public sector, particularly with public sector funding and commissioning bodies. The experience of V4CE members and networks is that parallel to small/medium generic third sector organisations, BME organisations also continue to struggle to secure long term funding and appear to be disproportionately unsuccessful in securing service delivery contracts. The reasons include;
 - o Lack of awareness about Compact principles and Good Practice Codes;
 - o Lack of understanding and skills on how to implement/utilise Compact principles in contractual agreements; and
 - o Lack of knowledge about support agencies that can provide support with regards to Compact implementation.
- 2.2 In the detailed response set out at the end of this paper, V4CE makes recommendations to address these issues. Recommendations seek to equip BME Third Sector organisations to make better use of the Compact. The response follows the four main categories of the Business Plan: Performance, Policy Development, Promotion and Learning.
- 2.3 Overall, V4CE seeks assurance that the specific needs and issues of the BME Third Sector organisations are addressed into each of the Business Plan tasks. We understand that the rationale for the Business Plan is to create a map of activities to allocate financial resources for a set period of time. V4CE would like to see a commitment from the Commission to define tasks and resource them sufficiently to ensure that BME Third Sector organisations have recourse to the Compact and that benefits it offers.
- 2.4 V4CE would like to assist the Commission in taking forward the proposed recommendations. In particular, V4CE would like to be involved in reviewing the BME Code of Good Practice; organising tailored training sessions for the BME Compact practitioners; providing intelligence to scope the BME Third Sector's support needs in current funding environment (nationally, regionally and locally); and in developing the Compact BME section on the Commission's website. This is not an exhaustive list but a demonstration of our support and commitment for the Compact Business Plan to succeed.

3. Methodology

- 3.1 V4CE's response is informed by the Partnership who provide a co-ordinated voice of the BME Third Sector in their respective regional and national domains. V4CE's origin, as stated earlier, is based on its Partnership forged from the BME sub-group on Compact. The response outlined in this paper is therefore based on informed and practitioner understanding of the Compact Principles and its Codes of Good Practice in relation to the BME Third Sector.

4. Contact us

We would be happy to discuss our response further with the Commission for the Compact to take the Business Plan tasks forward for the benefit of the Third Sector in general and for the BME Third Sector in particular.

Likewise we would welcome comments and suggestions from third sector organisations on any part of this response.

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V4CE Response on the Tasks, Purpose and Outputs of the Compact Business Plan 2007-10

Summary of Tasks, Purpose and Outputs of the Compact Business Plan 2007-10	V4CE Response/ Recommendations	Explanation/Comments
<p>I PERFORMANCE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A model of an assessment tool that can be tested and consulted on. • Influence inspectors and regulators to promote Compact principles within inspection and regulatory frameworks so that they provide incentive for Compact working for example the published criteria for Compact working. • Training. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 V4CE recommends that the assessment tool model should have sufficient scope and flexibility to be accessible by small/medium generic and BME Third Sector organisations. 2 V4CE expertise on the Compact to be employed in the design of assessment tools and in advising on the testing and consultation approach to ensure that the toolkits are fit for purpose. 3 V4CE urges the Commission to include more resources for raising awareness of the Compact to parts of the sector that to date have not been accessing the Compact i.e. BME and small third sector organisations. 4 V4CE recommends that there should be a specific task for delivering tailored training to the BME Compact practitioners on Compact implementation for example on public law, alternative dispute resolution, funding, commissioning and procurement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public sector and the third sector organisations are very different in the structure, capacity and nature of their work. Development of a single assessment tool for both sectors may result in the tool being ineffective in practice. The assessment tool should be context specific. In doing this, experience of V4CE Partners should be sought by the Commission. • Regulatory frameworks should be based on the principle of fairness to support the BME and other small/medium third sector organisations and communities in their understanding of the Compact in practice. The experience of V4CE partner organisations confirms that while the awareness of Compact and its good practice codes has increased in general, it has still been low within the BME third sector, resulting in large number of BME third sector organisations not benefiting from the Compact principles. Marketing and promotion of the Compact particularly within the BME Third Sector is still important. • Compact Implementation: Tailored training for the BME Third Sector to implement the Compact and the supporting Codes is not available e.g. public law, alternative dispute resolution, funding, commissioning and procurement. V4CE believes that the BME Third Sector cannot be an effective Compact partner at the table if it does not have the requisite training and skills to use the Compact.

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<p>II POLICY DEVELOPMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production of short sharp statement of the Compact and its Codes. • Review of the Compact and its codes and consulted on. • A statement of Compact that is agreed, can be complied with and can be monitored. • Drive improvements to funding, commissioning and procurement to press for implementation of the Compact and codes and Government's commitment to longer term funding for the third sector. • Production of a baseline study of how the Compact is working and the key current issues nationally, regionally and locally and across sectors. • Support local and regional implementation of the Compact and influence the development of the LG Bill and its targets and guidance for LAAs. 	<p>5 V4CE agrees with the production of summary statement of the Compact and its Codes. It recommends these statements should also clarify legal force that the Compact may have for parties in contractual agreements. The latter will come from the relevant case law and will therefore need to be regularly updated.</p> <p>6 V4CE should be involved in the review of Compact and the BME Code and advise on the consultation process.</p> <p>7 V4CE urges the Commission to reconsider the timing for the production of 'A Statement', as experience has shown that reaching consensus across the partners (public, voluntary) will take time.</p> <p>8 V4CE gives a high priority to bring improvements to funding, commissioning and procurement through the Compact implementation. It is vital that the Commission influence the length and scope of the contracts in favour of small/medium third sector organisations. The current contract regime favours big third sector organisations. If this issue remains, it will continue to remain a significant barrier to small generic and BME organisations from procuring for public services.</p> <p>9 V4CE recommends that the Compact should urge all Local Authorities to consult and involve BME organisations prior to finalising the LAA targets.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To utilise resources effectively, the Commission should assess the achievements of the Compact and related Codes in assisting the third sector. • V4CE welcomes the Commission's plan to review the Compact and its Codes. BME Code of good practice should include clear guidelines on funding and procurement for BME organisations. For example, BME Code should stress the importance of targeted funding in areas where particular ethnic communities are lagging behind (lack of educational attainment in Bangladeshi community, etc). • In particular the assessment should consider the actual use and effectiveness of the BME Compact Code of good practice in consultation, funding and procurement for BME organisations and communities. For example, use of BME Code in highlighting the importance of targeted funding in areas where particular ethnic communities are lagging behind (lack of educational attainment in Bangladeshi community, etc).

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	<p>10 V4CE recommends that there should be a specific report produced on how BME third sector organisations can be supported in the funding environment, nationally, regionally and locally.</p>	
<p>III LEARNING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education and training; the provision and dissemination of resources: website continually refreshed and evidence of growing use by both sectors. Courses sourced or produced, evaluated and promoted. 	<p>11 V4CE recommends that the Commission should set out a task to develop an electronic resource, a toolkit – for raising awareness of the Compact and the BME Code of good practice. This resource should include practical help in the application of the Compact while entering into a contractual agreement.</p> <p>12 V4CE also recommends to the Commission to develop a good practice section on its website to consist of case studies and guidance for the BME organisations on Compact implementation. V4CE would be happy to work with the Commission to source good practice stories for wider dissemination and learning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toolkits are reasonably successful in the third sector. A Compact Effective Implementation Toolkit would help in the Commission’s tasks to raise awareness, ensure implementation and compliance of the Compact principles.
<p>IV PROMOTION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of Compact to promote the voice and campaigning role of the third sector. Draft business plan with strategies and actions. • Leadership, liaison and promotion of the Compact through the Commission. 	<p>The Commission should focus on championing the Compact for small/medium generic and BME Third Sector organisations. To this end, Business Plan strategies and actions should set out clear tasks as recommended above.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Commission for the Compact should pay special attention to small/medium generic and BME Third Sector organisations that have most struggled to improve their partnership working with the public sector organisations. The Business Plan should set out specific tasks for this purpose. Unless that is done, there is a genuine concern that the financial resources will not be committed and that smaller and less well established parts of the sector will once again not receive benefits of Compact principles.