

THE BRISTOL COMPACT

GOOD PRACTICE GUIDELINES

Guidelines for agencies/organisations acting as a landlord to the voluntary & community sector in Bristol

Purpose of these guidelines:

These guidelines aim to set out some of the considerations that landlords with voluntary sector tenants should be aware of. They are intended to give both landlords and tenants some certainty in matters related to letting and renting property and seek to promote a greater understanding of the voluntary sector's property needs.

This document is not a 'blueprint' – it is important to recognise that each property relationship is unique and that only a true partnership approach and personal contact will bring long-term benefits to the voluntary sector.

Background:

Local authorities and statutory agencies rely more and more on community buildings as a means to consult communities and Best Value has resulted in an increased role for community consultation.

The functions of community buildings vary from area to area, but almost all contribute towards the following:

- encouraging active citizenship
- building the capacity of the local community
- developing social cohesion
- encouraging volunteering and skill opportunities

Community buildings:

- earn a significant part of their income from rent and hirings
- funding is the main difficulty for almost all and for many the struggle is getting more difficult
- a large proportion is older than 40 years
- the majority is owned by the local authority
- need to develop the skills of their management committee
- depend on a secure and stable tenure

The Bristol scene:

It is estimated that almost 1 in 10 people use community buildings every week. Bristol has a wide variety of community premises, ranging from small meeting rooms within housing estates, church halls and social clubs to community centres and large multi-purpose community facilities.

The uses of community buildings in Bristol include: meeting place, social club, after-school club, pre-school facilities, healthy living centre, rooms for hire, community arts venue, day care facilities, community education, Learn Direct centre, UK Online centre, community sports, youth club, etc.

To further develop the use of community buildings, statutory agencies should not only see community buildings as simply a 'resource' or 'gathering place' for the local community, but encourage their use as a 'cultivator' to further develop communities.

Whilst some community buildings are self-supporting, the majority relies on funding from statutory authorities. Changes in funding structures in recent years, eg SRB money, European funding and Lottery grants, have created opportunities for voluntary groups to purchase their own buildings or acquire long leases on their premises.

Most community buildings in Bristol are at least 15 years old, with some well over 40-50 years old, and this is having a big impact on operating & maintenance costs. Statutory authorities should consider the most effective means of supporting the voluntary sector in operating community premises, either through grant funding, tenancies at below market rent, or a combination of both.

Factors that are critical to the success of community buildings:

- vision of the management committee
- leadership with long-term commitment
- involvement and ownership by the local community
- internal and external attractiveness of the premises
- access to good quality support
- good balance of uses

Statutory agencies in Bristol should:

- appreciate the value of community buildings
- recognise the independence and autonomy of voluntary organisations and balance this with the level of control exerted in relation to community buildings
- encourage the best possible use of community buildings and help develop their potential by building the capacity of management committees
- recognise the nature and level of the support that the voluntary sector needs and offer access to high quality, practical and relevant support