

XYZ – how we work together in Bristol

Bristol's Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector¹ (VCSE) is diverse and works with others to make a significant contribution to Bristol. VCSE organisations work alongside the public sector and Bristol businesses and social enterprises. Together, we create thousands of jobs, provide skills development for people not in work or education, bring funds into the city and provide positive, social outcomes for people, communities and the environment.

Our organisations form various partnerships, relationships and collaborations with others in Bristol and with those from outside Bristol. The new XYZ builds on strengths of the former Bristol Compact to describe how we want our relationships with others to be. It comes from a fundamental premise, that we are more effective when we work well together. In many cases, our relationships do work well and effectively, with great results. However, sometimes things do not work as effectively as planned and relationships can founder. As the city changes, so do our relationships. The new XYZ states our intention to work well together towards clear, shared goals and objectives and aims to help our relationships to be as productive as they can be.

[info box: include link to National Compact and Bristol Compact]

Our principles

One City: Everything we do as partners is done to benefit Bristol, its people and communities. The best impacts for people and communities can only be achieved by our positive and collaborative working relationships.

Honesty: It is only through open communication that strong partnerships can be built and maintained. Direct and honest discussions should be the basis for our relationships.

Respect: We are accountable in different ways and act with transparency, respect and integrity. Effective relationships are built on mutual understanding, co-operation and an appreciation of our differences.

Realism: Our environment is rapidly changing and so our partnerships and relationships are flexible and aspirational, within the bounds of what is possible.

Diversity: We value a multitude of voices, actions and different approaches.

Unlocking potential: By developing our strengths and focusing on what we can do, we will deliver change that benefits people and communities.

Challenge: We make better decisions and provide better services when we challenge each other. We are critical friends – giving and taking constructive criticism to benefit the city.

Themes

The following themes are recognised as especially relevant to Bristol. Under each theme, our commitment to practical actions contributes to effective partnership working.

1. Using the city's resources effectively and delivering impact

Resources are allocated through different processes. In the public sector, commissioning, grant and contracting/sub-contracting processes are commonly used. This happens in the context of Public Contracts Regulations 2015, the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012.

¹ Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector¹ (VCSE) is [use the description from the VCSE Strategy]

Commissioning will

- Use the principles of intelligent commissioning².
- Provide advance notice of opportunities to allow the best market response.
- Choose the most appropriate and proportionate purchasing mechanism (for example, negotiated dialogue, competitive grants, tendered contracts, reserved contracts, framework agreement/dynamic purchasing system), based on the nature of the service and composition (size, type and diversity) of the provider market.
- Foster collaboration through allowing sufficient time for organisations to work together.
- Ensure full cost recovery is recognised as a part of value for money and sustainability.
- Ensure there is balance between the need for accountability and proportionate monitoring and evaluation.
- Be clear about intellectual property and avoid ‘bid candy’³ by using written agreements signed by all parties in advance.
- Ensure maximum social value⁴ through constructive, early discussion and recognise that social value has many forms.
- Ensure there is effective engagement with service users and local communities within commissioning cycles and planning.
- Be clear about commitments made, trust that these will be honoured and ensure that any challenge about concerns is honest, respectful and proportionate.

Collaborations will

- Recognise that collaboration and partnerships take different forms – these are expressions of diversity and are welcomed.
- Work together to evaluate, learn from experience and improve systems.
- Be clear about leadership and different roles in collaborations and partnerships.
- Share and make best use of resources, including best practice, premises, skills and processes.
- Collaborate to provide a city response to funding opportunities.

Fostering market diversity will

- Understand that smaller/equalities organisations have different needs, considerations and offers.
- Ensure that smaller/equalities organisations are actively and respectfully involved from early stages.
- Work towards sustainability (which is better for service provision and service users) with multi-year arrangements, where possible, and robust business planning.
- Consider payment in advance of expenditure to enable smaller organisations to be included.
- Design proportionate processes to enable efficient use of available resources and the inclusion of smaller organisations.

² Audit Commission’s report ‘Hearts and Minds: commissioning from the voluntary sector’ (2007)

³ Definition of ‘bid candy’: Bid candy is where a small respected organisation such as a charity’s reputation is used to enhance a bid, but the lead bidder then reneges on an agreement (Bristol City Council).

⁴ For more information, refer to the Bristol Social Value Policy <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/tenders-contract/procurement-rules-regulations>

2. Engaging and consulting

Working together – by engaging, consulting and communicating – helps us design and deliver the best solutions (policies, strategies and services) for Bristol, its people and communities.

- Recognise that input from diverse stakeholders provides different and valuable perspectives.
- Recognise smaller/equalities organisations are connected with and can facilitate the voices and inclusion of under-represented and disadvantaged groups.
- Be clear about the rationale for engaging and consulting and recognise that both are used in decision making processes.
- Be clear about what can and cannot change in each consultation.
- Maximise participation by using a variety of accessible approaches (for example, events, written communications, online or focus groups) depending on the consultation target group and understandings of how best to engage with them.
- Recognise that some participation may be better enabled through longer consultation periods (up to 12 weeks) and targeted activities.
- Build on what is already known and avoid duplication.
- At the end of an engagement or consultation process, consider the responses, summarise the feedback received and describe any changes.

3. Volunteering and social action

Volunteering⁵ and social action⁶ take place in many settings. For example, through employer-supported volunteering, informal social action in communities and through community organisations. The following points on good volunteering practice, developed in the VCSE sector over many years, may apply in new social action settings and partnerships.

- Volunteering is a choice freely made by each individual.
- Volunteering should be open to all and accessible – support may be required for some to participate.
- Recognise that effective and safe volunteering may require support, training and the payment of out-of-pocket expenses.
- Acknowledge the cost and value of volunteer contributions and social action and social value.
- Recognise that volunteers are motivated to give their time, energy and skills because they gain social involvement, skills development, experience, a sense of contribution or enjoyment.

4. Managing change

Things change and effective management of change helps us to do things respectfully and to minimise impact, particularly on service users. In order to effectively manage change, we need to:

- Work together to manage changes to services, policies and strategies.
- Work together to ensure that the impact of any changes on service users, employees and partners are considered before deciding to end or change funding.
- Work together to ensure that any changes are implemented respectfully and legally with minimal impact.
- Communicate openly and regularly and give suitable notice of change.

⁵ **Volunteering** is defined as any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives. This can include formal activity undertaken through public, private and voluntary organisations as well as informal community participation and social action. Everyone has the right to volunteer and volunteering can have significant benefits for individuals (NCVO).

⁶ **Social action** means taking steps to change the things that are wrong in our society and introducing new ideas and processes for doing things better in the future (Locality).

- If a programme or service is encountering problems, work together to discuss, agree, implement and monitor a timetable of actions to improve performance.
- When changes are needed or a financial relationship (for example, a grant, contract, sub-contract) needs to end, a minimum of three months' notice and a clear rationale should be provided.
- Recognise that new ways of working may involve risk and can require flexibility and support.
- Be clear about the leadership and governance roles in service delivery and performance improvement.

How do we know XYZ is working?

The XYZ applies to relationships between organisations and between individuals representing organisations. Sometimes disagreements and disputes arise in relationships. We recognise that these may be damaging and it is our aim that early, constructive discussions between parties allow solutions to be found. The XYZ provides a foundation for parties to resolve their differences. In some cases, where it has not been possible to resolve a dispute in a timely and satisfactory way, a formal complaint may go through an organisation's complaints procedure. Advice, support and independent brokerage in resolving disputes may be available through organisations, such as Voscur.

This consultation and review of the Bristol Compact are being coordinated by Voscur
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