

## **Hertfordshire NI7**

*NI7 is seen as the means to support Compact principles. Investment in strategic engagement has secured stronger strategic level sector involvement and a distinct community focus. Key learning has come from a local survey of public bodies. But the biggest success is giving each county councillor £10,000 to fund local community groups.*

## **Herts Compact is the golden thread of their LAA**

Having trail blazed using their Compact as the golden thread of the Local Area Agreement (LAA) in the first round, Herts Forward are continuing to make this a feature of the current LAA. Their Compact is cited in a number of publications, although cabinet reports have yet to have a Compact paragraph. The Strategy and Partnerships Unit's Team Leader sees NI7 as the Local Compact indicator, and hopefully partners will start doing so too - so that their Local Compacts can drive stronger NI7 delivery. Although Herts are already using their Compact a great deal on their NI7 work, partners have a heightened awareness of how much more there is to do. Even better use of their Compact in NI7 work would be made if Herts drew more on external guidance that informed and prompted them to do so (e.g. using more tools, such as the Local Compact Electronic toolkit and especially its thriving sector scorecard).

## **Investing in NI7 and Compact**

Sector representation in strategic engagement with public body partners is resourced with a £100,000 strategic Leadership contract part of which include allowances to enable the sector to have the capacity to engage at the Herts Forward LSP Core Group.

## **Sector involvement**

Part of the reason for success is the County Council having a Strategic Engagement Officer to involve the sector in LAA and other policy processes. Herts Forward's Partnership Development and Performance Group is also supported. A recent Local Area Agreement governance review has identified the need to increase sector seats to better reflect its diversity. The Sector is well informed and involved in NI7 delivery and there is good use made of web communications including a sector-written blog. Groups generally work well with public bodies to achieve better outcomes for the community and their relations with public bodies continue to improve. Groups are involved across the LAA, including the two Performance Reward Grant programmes: *Think Family* (tackling poverty) and *Response to Recession*. Dialogue and working together on the recession has been strong and well supported (e.g. £1/2m extra CAB, credit union support).

## **Hertfordshire have the full set of NI7 features**

- Broadening relationship building (small groups)
- Building involvement in processes
- Policy development (e.g. economic strategy, community cohesion, volunteering strategy)
- Influencing decision making
- Developing funding opportunities
- Capacity building
- Compact-proofing

## **Biggest success**

The 77 county council members have £10,000 each for grants to local groups. This looks like a significant move by national standards, follows Compact principles by having grants alongside contracts, and the evaluation of impact should give useful learning (e.g. maybe the allocations could be targeted by weighting needy areas?).

## **Key learning**

That public bodies need to work together better to share knowledge and learning on working with the sector, with strengthened communications and they should do more futures-scenario planning. A Compact review is needed to provide a reality check and ensure the Compact is meaningful for delivery. The need for public bodies to play more effectively and cohesively is evidenced from a local survey of statutory agencies in 2009 that will be repeated in 2010. This survey - a counterpart to the NI7 sector survey - is a good and unusual if not unique idea.

**Key challenge**

The Compact needs to support working together in a new era where especially budget pressures are the challenge. Going forward the working together needs to be effective for a different dynamic on a changed agenda. A significant development would be refocusing sector infrastructure as community infrastructure - working together to make this happen would fit well with challenges and priorities.

**The coming NI7-inspired Compact review**

Building on a string of annual Compact awards, the Herts Compact will be reviewed in 2010. This should oil the Compact's wheels, especially in getting the Compact group functioning again, with an updated role. Currently, the County Council and sector infrastructure hold responsibility for NI7 delivery, reporting into the Stronger Communities Group. The review should help join up the various strands of excellence, allowing success to be more visible, celebrated, and built on in meeting fresh challenges. The review is expected to –

- Bring the Compact and NI7 together, including a combined delivery plan
- Present a shared vision of what a thriving sector will look like
- Major on the theme of better communications and broader engagement on the ground
- Identify groups for working together
- Dovetail with community cohesion