

**BMECS's Response to the West Sussex  
Compact Consultation**

**September 2010**

BME Community Services welcomes the opportunity to comment on the **West Sussex Compact**.

BME Community Services (BMECS) is a registered charitable company, established in 2006 to address the gaps and needs in services for individuals, families and groups from the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities, including refugees and asylum seekers in West Sussex.

Our mission is to be a "Support service for BAME groups, individuals and families; encouraging integration, community cohesion, reducing social exclusion and tackling inequalities in West Sussex and beyond."

Amongst our main aims include:

- Promote equality of opportunity and celebrate the value of the diverse communities in our area.
- Promote fair access to opportunities and services that responds to BAME communities needs in West Sussex.

BMECS is committed to equality and diversity which is in the heart of its values, work etc. BMECS will continue to promote equality of opportunity and good race relations between persons of different racial groups, eliminate unlawful discrimination and to provide culturally sensitive services that meet the needs of the diverse communities of West Sussex. BMECS will continue to represent the issues of the West Sussex BAME Communities with the following in mind.

- **Promoting accessibility**

BMECS will continue to increase BAME communities' ability to access support services and ensure through second tier organisations that services are culturally accessible.

- **Valuing cultural diversity**

BMECS will continue to raise awareness of BAME culture amongst the public and voluntary and community sector partners. It will support community representatives to advocate on behalf of their community so that policy development and decision making takes account of the distinctive needs of this community.

- **Promoting participation**

BMECS will continue to encourage participation and engagement of BAME communities in local decision-making.

- **Promoting equality of opportunity**

BMECS will continue to promote equality for all and advocate for BAME communities to be treated fairly with dignity and respect and be given equal opportunity to improve the quality of their lives.

- **Promoting inclusive communities**

BMECS will continue to increase awareness of BAME cultures, building understanding between BAME and mainstream communities.

- **Reducing disadvantage and exclusion**

BMECS will continue to develop and deliver programmes and models as tools to enable local partners to identify and tackle exclusion.

- **Promoting better community cohesion and integration**

BMECS will continue to work with communities and partners to ensure BAME communities are active and well integrated into mainstream society.

- **Promoting good practice**

BMECS will continue to encourage public and voluntary sector partners to show commitment to equality and diversity by adopting and implementing models of good practices that are implemented successfully.

- **Promoting better partnership working**

BMECS will continue to encourage and support partnerships initiatives that have positive impact on the wellbeing of BAME communities

BMECS would like the West Sussex Compact to take note of the following points that it is making on the draft document and would like to be reassured that the West Sussex Compact will follow guidance set out in the National Compact codes of practice relating to Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic (BAME) sector, Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations; Community Groups Code; Consultation and Policy Appraisal Code; Funding and Procurement Code; and the Volunteering Code.

BMECS's first comment is about the format and layout of the draft. We believe that the document, although some of the text is readable, does not look very effective as a reference document. We would like to suggest that the following be inserted in order to improve the document:

- Contents section
- Index and appendices
- Summary of main points at the beginning of each section
- A professionally designed version of the Compact to include pictures and diagrams
- Explain clearly what it can do for our organisation and the communities we serve
- Summary of 3-4 points of what the compact is.

BMECS feels that the introduction of the draft should indicate clearly:

- That the West Compact is an agreement between public sector agencies and the voluntary sector in West Sussex on the way they will work together "*in order to benefit the people of West Sussex regardless of their ethnic or cultural background*" to highlight the commitment of the West Sussex Compact to equality and diversity even though there is an equality code.
- How it relates and supports the objectives of the West Sussex Sustainable Community Strategy since the latter sets out the vision and objectives for West Sussex, and how it influences the implementation of such strategy.
- The importance of partnership working with a thriving voluntary sector to deliver the outcomes of the West Sussex Sustainable Community Strategy, the West Sussex Local Area Agreement and other West Sussex plans/strategies.
- The importance "*to strengthen commitments to good practice, to ensure compliance with policies*", besides enhancing partnerships and supporting the West Sussex Compact and the National Compact.

In the section, "Principles", BMECS would like to suggest the following amendments:

- A short summary highlighting the purpose of these principles should be inserted so that those who are not involved directly in the Compact understand the reasons of such principles and the difference these will make in the implementation of the West Sussex Compact.
- The third principle should be re-written to emphasise the importance of an independent third sector in West Sussex. It should read: *"All partners will recognise the **independence** and rights..... their own affairs. The following should also be added: "An independent, diverse and thriving VCS is fundamentally important to West Sussex. The sector works to tackle disadvantage, poverty and social exclusion; improve the quality of life and values and celebrates West Sussex's diversity. Therefore, its independence should be respected and the needs and special contributions of the sector at both local and county level be recognised"*.
- The fourth principle should have the following inserted: *"All partners should reflect the need to operate in a culturally appropriate and sensitive manner when working with BAME communities"*.
- The fifth principle should have the following inserted. *"Partners will also recognise that BAME communities are under-represented in decision making process and that all partners must make an effort to ensure these communities are fairly represented"*.
- The sixth principle should be re-written to include the following: *"All partners must show their commitment to taking forward the equalities agenda while recognising that BAME communities are disadvantaged and marginalised due to the discrimination they experience. All partners must work to eliminate discrimination, to promote good race relations and community cohesion, to promote equal opportunities for everyone and to recognise, respect and celebrate how our differences enhance and strengthen West Sussex. All partners should agree to embed equality in everything they do from arranging partnership meetings to making funding decisions"*.
- There should be another principle added: *"A shared commitment to addressing disadvantage and social exclusion". All partners will continue to play a central role in creating communities that are inclusive through providing services for vulnerable and excluded groups, understanding and advocating for community needs and empowering communities to help themselves and each other. Partners will work to harness the skills, experience and talents of all sections of the population and ensure that resources and services are targeted according to need, irrespective of age, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality or religion. All partners recognise that this will only be achieved by positively tailoring policies, practices and services to address the specific needs of particular groups within the population, particularly those most disadvantaged and excluded from society.*

The following should also be inserted in the document to strengthen partners' commitment to tackling barriers including discrimination:

- *"All signatories to the West Sussex Compact agree to promote equality of opportunity and social inclusion, to value diversity and to work to tackle barriers to participation and representation such as discrimination, language, disability, and so on".*

BMECS believes that the first section describing the West Sussex partners needs to be inserted in the document after the principles section. It should indicate in details who has the responsibility of developing, implementing and monitoring the West Sussex Compact. It should highlight to whom in the public sector in West Sussex the Compact is relevant, as well as the role played by regional and national agencies in relation to the West Sussex Compact. This section should also define the VCS and its role in the West Sussex Compact and include the estimated number and composition of VCS organisations based in West Sussex. It should mention the role of BAME led organisations – e.g. BMECS - in meeting the needs of BAME communities, including refugees and asylum seekers.

In the section, *"Involvement in Policy Development"*, BMECS would like to make the following suggestions:

- This section should highlight the importance of partnership working in policy work. The title of the section should read *"Involvement in Policy Development and Partnership Working"*. We believe that the effectiveness of policy development will be guaranteed through partnership working and consultation that involves all sections of West Sussex's diverse communities.

This section should also explain how the partnership intends to involve and support West Sussex VCS in policy development. This could be:

- By making sure that the VCS is supported and has routes and representatives to feed their views into the partnership.
- By working and supporting BAME led organisations to engage with under-represented BAME communities.
- By involving BAME organisations at the earliest possible stage so that they can plan effective engagement processes.
- By ensuring much time is given to respond to any consultation or policy proposals in line with the national standard.
- By making sure that culturally sensitive practices are widely adopted to ensure the under-represented BAME communities are involved in the policy development process.

- By making easier for VCS, to exercise their rights to campaign within the law and challenge policies, irrespective of any funding relationship that may exist.
- By acknowledging all responses and providing feedback on the outcomes of engagement or consultation exercise, explaining which requested policy changes have or have not been made and why.

In sub-section 1.3, BMECS would like to add the following:

- *"BAME organisations will assist the public sector in engaging with BAME communities by providing advice on culturally appropriate and effective ways of reaching these communities"*.

In sub-section 1.8.1, BMECS would like to add the following:

- *"And acknowledge the expertise and position of BAME organisations in leading on and representing BAME issues"*.

In the section "Funding", sub-section 4.11, BMECS would like to include the following:

- Recognise that BAME organisations are doing more to support the marginalised, isolated and social excluded BAME communities than the funding awarded to these organisations.
- Ensure the experience and expertise of working with BAME organisations is sustained by providing the necessary resources, including adequate funding to these organisations.
- Award adequate funding to BAME organisations, taking into consideration the amount of work they do rather than the size of the organisation.
- Assess the impact of funding while designing their funding programmes to ensure fairness.

In the section, "equalities" sub-section 5, BMECS would like to include the following:

- The title should read *"Code of Practice on Equalities and Diversity"* to recognise and value the diversity that exists in West Sussex.
- The Code of Practice on Equalities and Diversity seeks to promote social inclusion of isolated, marginalised, disadvantaged and under-represented communities

BMECS believes that the following should be added to stress the commitment of all partners to equality and diversity. Partners should:

- Recognise the importance of equality and diversity in building a prosperous and cohesive community in West Sussex.

Section 5.1 BMECS like to add the following:

- Carry out an equality impact assessment to assess the impact of their policies and practices to ensure that no particular group is disadvantaged by existing policies.
- Use its statutory powers to ensure the systematic integration of equality into the everyday work of its work, involving policy makers across all departments, as well as that of its partners – (internal and external).

BMECS believes that the Code of Practice on Equalities and Diversity should be a platform from which partners show their commitment to equality. The following should be added in the document to encourage partners:

- Include equality and diversity as a fundamental requirement in policy development and practices. These need to be evidenced by:
  - Access to services.
  - Regular promotion of services.
  - Access to training and development programmes.
  - Involvement of disadvantaged groups in service development.
- Use equality monitoring to monitor access by all communities and agencies, analyse and take action to increase equality of access to services.
- Promote fair employment practices and adopt employment monitoring methods to measure these.
- Comply with equality legislation.
- Mainstream equality and diversity in all day-to-day activities.
- Give full attention to the needs of the most disadvantaged communities, like BAME communities, due to discrimination.
- Recognise, respect and celebrate diversity in West Sussex.

BMECS believes that other Codes of Practice should be separately developed. These include:

- A Partnership Code of Practice – to make clear how partners will work together in West Sussex.
- Communication Code of Practice – communication is key to effective partnership working.

- Premises Code of Practice – to ensure VCS, has access to the spaces and facilities they need to carry out activities and deliver services that benefit the community in line with the public sector (e.g. Councils) and partnerships key priorities.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the West Sussex Compact. BMECS will continue to play a major role in ensuring that all communities in West Sussex are given equal opportunity to improve their quality of life regardless of race, ethnic origin, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief.

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