



## Compact powers to be reviewed

On 7 July Phil Hope, Minister for the Third Sector, asked the Compact Commissioner Sir Bert Massie to lead a debate on whether the Compact should be supported by statutory powers.

Established in 1998, the Compact is an agreement between Government and the third sector in England. It recognises shared values, principles and commitments and sets out guidelines for working together.

In a letter to Sir Bert, the Minister asks the Commission for the Compact to conduct a wide and thorough debate across the third sector on whether the Commissioner should have legal powers to punish bodies that breach the Compact. This will form part of an ongoing root and branch review of the Compact and all its Codes of Practice.

The Minister's call comes after Sir Bert warned that the Compact cannot survive in its current form. Third sector organisations have complained that the Compact and the Commission 'lack teeth', leaving them unprotected in disputes with local authorities.

Phil Hope, Minister for the Third Sector, said:

"Ten years after its inception, it is time to look again at the Compact and how the third sector and local government can work together effectively to deliver first rate public services.

"The Compact has helped to promote good practice in relations between councils and voluntary groups. Since 1998 however, there has been exceptional growth in the third sector, and its involvement in the market for public services contracts has become increasingly sophisticated.

"For this reason, I have asked Sir Bert Massie to review the Compact and its Codes from top to bottom and ask third sector organisations and local government for their views on the Commission's statutory status. If the debate responses suggest there is a need for the Commission and Commissioner to be given legal powers to enforce the Compact, the Government is prepared to start work immediately towards making it happen."

A three-month debate will be undertaken by the Commission in close co-operation with the Office of the Third Sector in the Cabinet Office and Compact Voice, which represents the views of the voluntary and community sector. Input is invited from all bodies that use or are affected by the Compact.

The Commission is already conducting a broader root and branch review of the Compact and its Codes in order to make it more relevant to the new environment in which the third sector now operates.

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