Department for
Social
Development
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Concordat

between the Voluntary & Community Sector and the Northern Ireland Government

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The Agreement

1. The shared vision of Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector is to work together as social partners to build a participative, peaceful, equitable and inclusive community in Northern Ireland.

2. In this partnership Government recognises the nature, diversity, and value of the contribution which the Voluntary and Community Sector makes to the social, economic, environmental, political and cultural life of Northern Ireland. It recognises, respects and supports the independence of the sector and its right to campaign within the law, to comment on and, where appropriate, to challenge government policy. It recognises and values highly the importance of volunteering and civic participation where individuals contribute actively to the development of their communities and to meeting the needs of others, in a way which is complementary and of equal importance to financial investment.

3. In this partnership the Voluntary and Community Sector acknowledges the discrete and strategic role played by Government in the development of public policy and delivery of Programme for Government objectives. It recognises and respects Government's responsibility to provide the legislative framework for society and the parameters within which it acts in doing this. It also welcomes Government's recognition of the significant role played by the Voluntary and Community Sector and its contribution to society. It acknowledges the legal and financial framework within which Government works and its responsibility for public accountability for resources.

4. This Concordat lays the foundation for a partnership based on mutual trust and respect and will open up opportunities for more active participation by the Voluntary and Community Sector in developing public policy. It will enable the energy and talent both within Government and the sector to work together towards the development of a better civil society

5. This Concordat is an agreement between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector which outlines the key values and principles[1] and establishes a set of shared commitments[2] on how Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector can work together to better serve the people of NI. Signatories to this Concordat share the belief that these partnership arrangements will assist citizens and communities to empower themselves, make a significant contribution to democratic governance, bring people and politicians closer together, provide a better understanding and opportunities to influence decision making and resource allocation.

6. The Concordat establishes new and refreshed structures of engagement between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector. This will help shape the effective use of resources, including the development of good professional practice and the provision of appropriate accountability.

7. The Concordat can contribute to a more cohesive civil society. Effective partnership between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector can make a valuable contribution to more responsive and people centred public services: strengthening communities and harnessing expertise in helping design better public policy and services. There is a need to grow philanthropy, build capacity and capability and help ensure that ` decision making and policy development is evidence-based.

8. The Concordat will enhance the engagement of Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in policy development and implementation. This engagement will contribute to both the delivery of "Programme For Government" objectives and the development of a vibrant civil society. Working effectively together will help, for example, to develop sustainable, safer communities, ensure a well protected and valued environment, contribute to economic growth, tackle poverty, disadvantage and inequality, and assist in the promotion of health and well being.

9. The Concordat has been developed by the Partners within the context of a devolved Government in NI recognising the current economic environment and unique operating contexts of North/South and East/West relationships. The contribution being made by the Voluntary and Community Sector to economic and social activity within NI is highly significant.

10. The Concordat creates a framework which supports opportunities for greater co-operation and joined-up activity. This will include increased collaborative working, modernisation, smarter and different funding mechanisms, reducing the administrative burden and the enhancement of skills.

11. It is recognised by the Partners that the implementation of the Concordat will require recognition and commitment across the public and Voluntary and Community Sectors at regional, sub regional and local levels.

12. This pledge by Government and the voluntary and community sector committing to work together is underpinned by the establishment and implementation of an agreed set of commitments. These commitments and the structures proposed for their successful implementation are set out at Annex 2 to this Concordat. It is also important that all of the partners have a shared understanding of underlying values and principles and these are expressed at Annex 1 below.

[1] Shared values and principles are listed at Annex 1 below

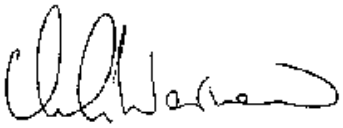
[2] Shared commitments are listed at Annex 2 below

Signatories to the Concordat

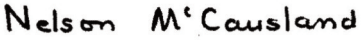
Peter Robinson
First Minister

Martin McGuinness
Deputy First Minister

Michelle Gildernew
Minister for Agriculture, Arts and Rural Development



Nelson McCausland
Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure



Caítríona Ruane
Minister of Education

Danny Kennedy
Minister for Employment and Learning

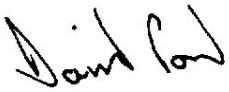
Arlene Foster
Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Edwin Poots
Minister of the Environment

Sammy Wilson
Minister of Finance and Personnel

Michael McGimpsey
Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

David Ford
Minister of Justice

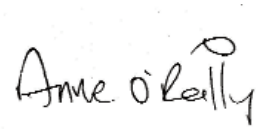


Conor Murphy
Minister for Regional Development

Alex Attwood
Minister for Social Development

Signatories to the Concordat

Anne O'Reilly
Age NI



Bernadette Best
Action Mental Health

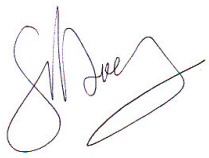
Bob Stronge
NICVA Chairperson

Brenda MacQueen
Dry Arch Centre for Families

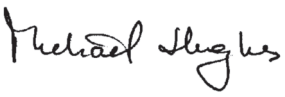
Colin Devine
North West Community Network

Elaine Conway
Children in Northern Ireland

Jim Deery
Ashton Centre



Michael Hughes
Rural Community Network

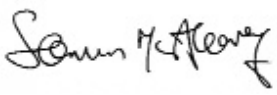


Olwyn Lyner
NIACRO

Patricia Haren
Womens Support Network

Seán Ó'Muireagáin
Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta

Seamus McAleavey
NICVA



Sue Christie
NI Environment Link

Wendy Osborne
Volunteer Now

ANNEX 1

Shared Values and Principles

The clearly identified roles and shared values as articulated in the 1998 Compact which underpin the relationship between government and the VCS are still valid today and are worth restating here within this Concordat:

Shared Values

- **Accountability** – being answerable to all relevant stakeholders in relation to the propriety of policies, actions and use of resources
- **Active citizenship** – participation of people in society through volunteering, community involvement and self help initiatives
- **Community** – people working together in localities or interest groupings to strengthen and improve their lives by harnessing their experience, skills, creativity and potential and identifying issues, needs and imaginative solutions
- **Democracy** – a society that enables all its citizens to participate, to share rights and responsibilities, and which incorporates an independent voluntary and community sector
- **Equality and Good Relations** – fairness, inclusion, good relations and equality of opportunity in relation to employment and services and equality of access to resources and decision-making processes for all the people of Northern Ireland
- **Partnership** – creative relationships between the public, private and voluntary and community sectors that broaden experience and understanding and promote the development of holistic approaches
- **Pluralism** – upholding the rich diversity of cultures, identities and interests within Northern Ireland
- **Social Justice** – cherishing all citizens equally, through the pursuit of fairness, tolerance, and social cohesion, opposing all forms of discrimination and ensuring the participation of those who are most marginalised.

Shared Principles

- Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector have distinct yet complementary roles in contributing to the social, economic, environmental and cultural life in Northern Ireland
- the provision of funding and other forms of support by Government is an important means of strengthening the capacity of the Voluntary and Community Sector and enabling it to contribute effectively to the attainment of Government objectives
- effective partnerships between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector bring added value to their efforts to improve quality of life in Northern Ireland
- successful partnerships must be based on openness, trust and recognition of the constraints on other partners
- it is realised that creative partnerships are open to change and provide opportunities to work in flexible and innovative ways which can help to promote a socially cohesive society that respects difference and welcomes diversity
- encourage active citizenship through volunteering, community involvement and self help initiatives within all sectors of society and by all age groups
- support the community development process as an important way of enabling people to contribute to issues which affect their lives and the communities in which they live
- realise that working on an intersectoral basis to promote and enable widespread participation in society is central to overcoming social exclusion and developing policies and services that are well targeted and sensitive to need
- respect the right of the Voluntary and Community Sector to comment on, to challenge and to seek to influence Government policies
- understand that advocacy and campaigning on behalf of individuals, groups and causes is a distinctive characteristic of the voluntary and community sector
- recognise that the Voluntary and Community Sector has a vital role in identifying and in addressing issues of social justice and equality, and in protecting and promoting the value of our environment
- recognise the need to develop standards of good practice which ensure quality and accountability in relation to policies, services, management and the use of resources
- accept the need to promote, identify and disseminate good practice where it occurs

ANNEX 2

Commitment Programme:

1. To ensure the successful implementation of this Concordat it is agreed by all signatories that a set of specific commitments identifying key activities is the most appropriate implementation and control mechanism. These commitments will act as key drivers for change, each helping to ensure the effective delivery of significant elements of the Concordat.

2. This list is not exhaustive but rather illustrative of the joined up activity between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector which will bring real benefit to society. Co-ordination and control arrangements for the delivery on the commitments made within this Framework document will be the responsibility of DSD as lead Government partner for relationships. Detailed delivery responsibility will be determined and allocated as the commitments are rolled out but will follow best practice in being clearly assigned to a responsible owner and time bound. It will be an important responsibility for the Joint Forum to regularly review implementation of the agreed commitment list, approve additions and report on progress.

3. The following is a list of indicative commitments; an action planning process with SMART objectives will be developed and implemented for each of these commitments to ensure successful delivery.

i. To formally present to the NI Executive and Assembly a yearly report from the Joint Forum through the DSD Minister on issues impacting on the Voluntary and Community Sector.

ii. To review the Terms of Reference and Membership of the Joint Forum, which includes the Voluntary and Community Sector Panel and the Inter-Departmental Group, to reflect this new agreement and emerging public sector structures and responsibilities.

iii. To engage with senior representatives from the NI public service on a six monthly basis to review key policy issues arising from implementation of the Concordat commitments following submissions received from Joint Forum.

iv. To agree and develop best practice guides which impact upon the relationship, for dissemination across Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector.

v. To explore the use of alternative funding structures between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector including, for example, the use of grant-in-aid, memoranda of understanding and service level agreements.

vi. To work together to implement an outcome-focussed approach to funding.

vii. To work together to remove duplication of services, systems or overheads where this exists

viii. To maximise opportunities for Voluntary and Community Sector participation in procurement processes

ix. To develop proposals for embedding Full Cost Recovery within contractual arrange ments between public sector and voluntary and community sector organisations.

x. To provide opportunities for the Voluntary and Community Sector to influence and examine the impact of government policy.

xi. To investigate the potential for community asset management and ownership in NI.

xii. To explore and develop processes whereby Concordat non-compliance can be addressed.

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