

Legacy of a Compact Hero - Charles Holmes of Warwickshire

Written by Paul Barasi, Local Compact Voice Officer, July 2009

Charles Holmes, one of heroes of the Compact movement, retired this year. His work as Warwickshire's Compact Officer for more than half a decade was legendary - and not just because he was England's longest serving Compact worker at a local level. His effectiveness drew on his personal qualities - modesty and humility, combined with a tenacious passion for the Compact, good practice and fairness. His was a passion infused with deep understanding of partner relations and expertise in handling issues.

Championing

One of the first exponents of Compact champions, Charles developed a support structure for them to share experiences and plug into the County Compact planning system.

- *Champions in public bodies can also hold a portfolio for a service policy strand across the partners.* (This is the final thought Charles had on championing.)

A regional and national leader

Charles shaped the Compact movement well beyond his own county. Frequently making policy and practice contributions nationally, he was also on the ball whenever a national arm of government departed from the Compact. His impact included sharing with other counties the Warwickshire approach and learning, such as at Staffordshire and Worcestershire events.

As the Local Compact Voice regional lead for the West Midlands, Charles brought people together who work on Local Compacts. West Midlands became the top region in doing this, especially during the time when there was a Birmingham Compact worker to team up with. That this region's government office has been especially proactive in supporting Local Compact implementation or the only one to extend this to running a research programme is surely no co-incidence.

Making performance accountable

Charles pioneered peer review of the Compact performance of partner public bodies. Success in getting this accepted and working hung on disarming the concerns among public bodies that they would end up exposed. Charles convinced his partners that the reviews would have integrity and value. This work won the 2005 gold medal - indeed, Warwickshire received commendations

four years running during 2004-7, for implementation and review, mechanisms, Compact way of working, and voice and independence.

- *Processes and systems are not enough to drive and benchmark a Local Compact, because these are actually about human relationships which seek to change the culture of how people engage and behave.*

Warwickshire Compact's new approach on two-tier working

Rather than simply recruit a successor, replacing Charles has been through drilling down Compact work, County level work is led by the Warwickshire Cava Chief Executive, with dedicated admin support. Other staff are responsible for the Warwickshire Compact in a specific part of the county.

- *Countywide Compacts are best implemented with strong local support and ownership*

This is the conclusion Charles had come to and it seems to fit well with the county sector infrastructure changes.

Just before he finished, Charles was engaged in a campaign on council funding cuts. Surprisingly for a county council with as much Compact experience as Warwickshire, the process had not been Compact compliant. The campaign helped restore some funding and drew from the council chief the admission that Compact rules would have to be followed in future.

- *Compacts can't run on auto-pilot nor can we just take for granted that the business will be done the Compact way. Partners - however successful in taking their Compact forward - may find themselves returning to something really basic*