

Key Messages from the The Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector (VCSE)

Community Works – June 2024

BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

The previous iteration of this document (2019) outlined the value the VCSE provides to the statutory sector and invited stronger working relationships with our partners. A lot has changed since then. For example, our local population has become more diverse and there is a greater focus on equity and inclusion. Also, VCSE organisations, along with our partners, are operating post-pandemic, during a cost-of-living crisis and within a climate and nature emergency. There are significant challenges, but also opportunities for utilising our strengths and resilience and working together. As such, Community Works¹ has refreshed the VCSE's key messages, which are presented below. **Our overarching message is that strategically involving, and investing in, the VCSE can achieve greater impact and result in both short-term and longer-term savings for statutory partners, not least through working to meet community needs and preventing escalation to crisis level interventions. Weakening or loss of the sector undermines wider efforts and the local offer.**

KEY MESSAGES

- 1. The VCSE is a valuable partner to the statutory sector. Involving us in strategic decision-making and co-design, as well as service delivery, is more efficient and impactful**
 - VCSE organisations provide considerable value to our partners including strong connections to communities, insight into local needs, guidance drawn from our experience, examples of good practice, and national knowledge to add to the local picture. The sector is a system-leader in some areas of delivery, creating new models, new ways of reaching communities and expertise that can be utilised by our partners
 - VCSE organisations can be equal partners in strategic decision-making. We welcome early and meaningful invitations to contribute and to co-design services and solutions. We value open and transparent conversations and can act as a trusted partner in sensitive areas of discussion
 - VCSE organisations can help, and have helped, with integration of services and joined-up delivery, working collaboratively and effectively with a range of partners.

¹ These key messages were drafted by over 80 member organisations at the Community Works AGM in November 2023, then circulated to Community Works Reps and a wider membership of almost 600 organisations for comment. They were updated and finalized in June 2024.

2. Collaborating with the VCSE helps to prevent problems and improve the wellbeing and safety of people and communities. Loss of the sector undermines the local offer

- VCSE organisations typically intervene at an earlier stage, preventing difficulties from worsening and crises from occurring for individuals and communities
- VCSE organisations work hard to safeguard and support residents – including those who are most ‘vulnerable’ or at risk of discrimination and abuse
- We provide safe and inclusive spaces where people are listened to, access support and feel less alone. We also provide access to opportunities and resources so people can develop their skills and resilience, become and stay well, and live and work independently
- The VCSE is working to support environmental sustainability, protect natural resources and mitigate the effects of climate change on people and communities.

3. Partnering with the VCSE helps to achieve equity and inclusion, by addressing barriers for under-served communities and facilitating greater involvement

- VCSE organisations have trusted relationships with people and communities that are less likely to approach or engage with statutory services
- Our services are typically informed and/or designed by the people we support
- The local sector includes hundreds of small, grassroots groups, including groups run by and for minoritised and under-served communities
- The reach and relationships we have enables us to identify barriers and gaps within local services, facilitate access to information and services, gather diverse views and help people who have ‘fallen through the cracks’.

4. The VCSE can help statutory partners to access resources, including funding and volunteers

- VCSE organisations are experienced at bidding and tendering. Some use statutory funding to leverage additional funding and support from outside the city; and others lever in income without recourse to statutory funds
- Some VCSE organisations are volunteer-led, others recruit and train volunteers that provide invaluable support to people and services. Volunteers contribute time, skills and knowledge to enhance local services and the local economy. Volunteering is also a way of building skills and of promoting and supporting re-entry to employment
- The sector is diverse and contains a range of providers, from those at a grassroots level to larger organisations. VCSE organisations can often pivot and adapt, working flexibly and innovatively.

For further information, please contact:

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