

GM VCSE Accord Ecosystem: Local Infrastructure Activity 2023-24

VCSE Local Infrastructure plays a crucial role in delivering against the GM VCSE Accord commitment to “Build the best VCSE Ecosystem in the country”.

This report outlines the vital leadership and delivery role played by the VCSE Local Infrastructure Organisations between April 2023 and March 2024 and the impact seen.

Background

A core workstream of the Accord is to develop the VCSE ecosystem; growing VCSE infrastructure capacity and ‘scaffolding’ for involvement of communities of identity, experience and place in each of the 10 districts of Greater Manchester by developing communications and collaboration between local VCSE infrastructure and system stakeholders at Greater Manchester Level.

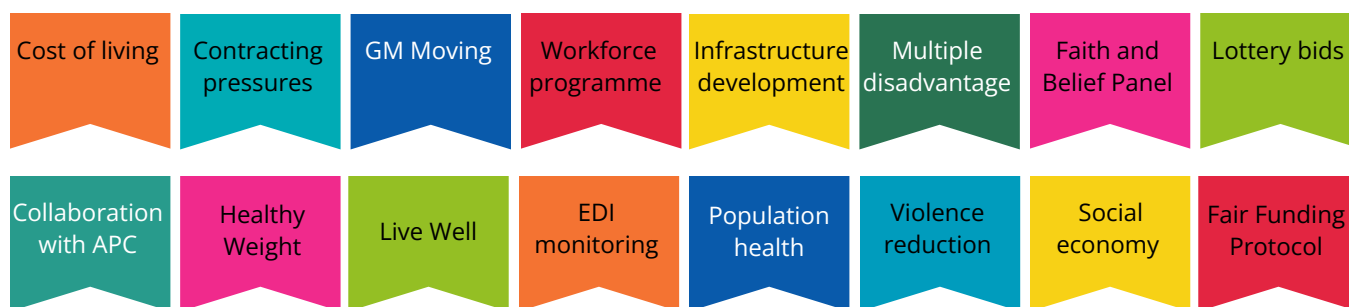
In order to deliver against this, in 2023/4, Local Infrastructure Organisations* committed to connecting locality and GM insight at a strategic level, and influencing GM and local plans and activity. This included two key priorities:

1. Work together to address common issues faced by VCSE organisations across Greater Manchester
2. Connect locality and GM insight at a strategic level, and influence GM and local plans and activity.

**Note that that Wigan locality does not commission a specific VCSE Local Infrastructure Organisation. However, they participate fully in the VCSE Ecosystem Accord workstream, through two key VCSE partner organisations from their newly-formed Leadership Group. For shorthand, we will refer to Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIOs) throughout this report - which will include the work of our Wigan partners.*

Work together to address common issues

23/4, has seen a review and refresh of the LIO collaboration spaces supported by 10GM, maintaining the regular space for strategic work, and growing a new structure for operational collaboration. Both spaces have been well-attended and have covered a variety of topics including:



Examples of the outcomes of this work include:

- A successful UKSPF Social Economy bid submitted by a number of VCSE Infrastructure organisations
- Creation of working groups to develop VCSE infrastructure best practice in Environmental Response and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion monitoring; Communications; and the ongoing delivery of the Development Managers meeting and Volunteering Network meetings and the Workforce Development Group.
- A coordinated pan-GM engagement engagement of communities around the GM Healthy Weight Strategy.
- A collaborative approach to agreeing on pilot sites, where there is insufficient funding to be allocated to all 10 LIOs (for example GM moving pilot sites).

Leadership within GM

In 23/4, VCSE Infrastructure organisations have continued to play a vital leadership role in GM-wide strategic groups and fora, for which the Accord provides a modest financial contribution.

Within the **Accord and VCSE Leadership Group** spaces, LIOs hold leadership roles in the Accord Grant Leads and Commitments Groups that oversee and steer the Accord work. They also provide joint Chair positions for the Social Economy; Commissioning and Investment; and Population Health Sub Groups; Workforce Development Oversight Group; and are members of and regular contributors to the Alternative Provider Collaborative; the Health Influencing Group; GM Equality Alliance; and the Mental Health VCSE Leadership Group.

Within **GM Strategy** delivery, LIOs represent both other local infrastructure and the wider sector in a range of fora including GM Reform Executive; GM Core Reform Group; GM Reform Board; GM Social Enterprise Action Group; Proper Good GM Board; GM Funders Forum; GM Tackling Inequalities Board and Exec; GM Violence Reduction Board; Violence Reduction Unit Community-led Delivery Group; GM Digital Taskforce; GM Moving; GMCA Community Grants Funding Panel; GM VCSE Emergency Response Group; GM Anti-Poverty Forum; GM Cost of Living Response Group; GM Sanctuary Seekers; GMCA Food Security Action Network; GM Live Well governance; and the GM Civic Leadership Group. In addition, Macc provides management support / hosting to the GM Social Value Network; the GM Older People's Network; GM Older People's Equality Panel; and the GM Older People's Mental Health Network; and Thrive Trafford operates as a Panel Facilitator in the GM Faith and Belief Advisory Panel

LIOs also hold positions in key **Integrated Care Partnership and System** oversight and delivery groups, including the Integrated Care Partnership Board; Population Health Committee; GM Population Health Advisory Group; GM Cancer Alliance; Primary Care Assembly, and GM Social Prescribing Ops Group. In addition, Salford CVS, on behalf of local infrastructure, holds a leadership role in both the NHS GM Person-centred and Community Approaches work and also GMCA's Live Well programme.

Civic Leadership

Through Bury LIO's participation in the GM Civic Leadership Group, it has been able to promote GM Civic Leadership opportunities across local networks; connect local people into leadership and shadowing opportunities; resulting in two Bury people being accepted into the GM Civic Leadership Programme.

Violence Reduction

Bolton LIO's leadership and participation in both the GM Violence Reduction Board and the Violence Reduction Unit Community-led Delivery Group has enabled the VCSE sector to influence the Greater Than Violence 10 year Strategy and the development of the delivery plan. It has also secured investment in, and commitment to, community-led approaches to violence reduction in our communities, with Community-led alliances now up and running with violence reduction work being delivered by VCSE sector

Social Investment

Wigan participation in the GM Social Enterprise Action Group and Proper Good GM Board has led to greater discussion on Social Investment packages across GM and links to Social Investment opportunities nationally. Locally in Wigan, this meant Neighbourhood pilots to increase Social Enterprises, including education programmes and Community Organising. Additionally, Wigan hosted a National Enterprise Day in November 23, based around an 80s Game Show format, allowing the local community to interact with Social Enterprises across the Borough and gain an awareness of the products / services on offer.

Raising Awareness of Sector Fragility

Both Population Health and Commissioning and Investment Chairs have, through their rep roles held in the GM Population Health Committee and GM Integrated Care Partnership Board; briefed the system on the fragility of the sector, with regards to funding and contracts. This has resulted in a new risk being added to the system-wide risk register; and targeted work taking place to review all sector-held health contracts and the development of commissioning intentions and principles.

Reform and Single Settlement

Through participation in the GM Reform Executive, Core Group and Board; LIOs have contributed to the Reform Plan on a Page; shaped agendas to ensure that Exec Leaders address the funding reform work needed to mainstream and maintain reform ambitions; and championed the role of VCSE by sharing evidence and case studies to highlight opportunities to strengthen reform that works for people. This has led to an agreement for finance leads to meet to explore funding of reform work; increased awareness of the reform work amongst VCSE partners; a better understanding of the VCSE for strategic partners particularly with partners that we don't as often work with e.g., Probation. Through closer working relationships, this has also led to greater discussion on the role of VCSE in the Single Settlement Devolution Deal.

GM Older People's Panel and Networks

Through its work facilitating the GM Older People's Network; GM Older People's Equality Panel; and the GM Older People's Mental Health Network, Macc have met with relevant housing, health and care and transport commissioners and decision-makers to bring in the voices of older people to their work; reviewed the accessibility of local authority websites and non-digital offer to raise the issue of digital exclusion; and raising with Mental Health commissioners the importance of culture and arts in supporting wellbeing in older people.

Poverty and Cost of Living

Macc, Bury VFCS and Salford CVS have used their representation on the GM Cost of Living Response Group to build strong relationships with key GMCA and Local Authority colleagues alongside VCSE partners.

In order to describe and raise awareness of their role in the poverty response, all 10 LIOs have come together to generate insight for partners - including mapping cost of Living locality VCSE activity in Q1, sharing insight with GM Cost of Living Response Group in Q2, and a further review and paper produced in Q4, outlining activity, risks and opportunities.

The joint work has also involved identifying joint challenges and sharing good practice; and campaigning for issues such as continuation of the Household Support Fund and other grant funding that can be channelled through the LIO and into communities. The joint Cost Of Living paper from February 24 provides further detail of this piece for work.

VCFSE Forums

Over 2023/4, two localities have hosted VCFSE Forums.

In Worsley, Salford CVS co-hosted a session with VCSE and public sector colleagues from across GM, where they showcased key aspects of their work in Salford and GM, including a presentation on the Salford VCSE Strategy, Local Compact, GM VCSE Accord and National Compact, their synergies, opportunities and challenges. Discussions included giving input into the development of the GM Fair Funding Protocol.

In March 24, Bury VCFA co-hosted a Forum in Bury Town Hall, where they gave a local perspective on partnership working between VCSE and public sectors with a focus on anti-poverty work; and facilitated conversation around VCSE intelligence, community resilience, and supporting people facing financial hardship.

Feed locality insight into GM level conversations and strategy

This year, Local Infrastructure Organisations have gathered and disseminated locality VCSE intelligence into GM strategy and decision-making around a wide range of subjects. These include engagement and growing the voice of lived experience; cost of living; approaches to social value; sector fragility and contract pressures.

Driving forward the Accord in localities

Although Local Infrastructure Organisations were not funded to drive forward the Accord in localities, each organisation has continued to do so over 23/24, highlighting the Accord and its contents with local decision makers; raising VCSE sector awareness; and ensuring that the principles are embedded in local strategy. This has included:

- Ensuring that the development or refresh of the local VCSE Strategy references and supports the commitments of the Accord.
- Holding VCSE Forums with their sector to bring partners together to showcase work; gather locality insight to feed into GM; and also share information on the Accord principles and the Accord in action.
- Hosting round tables with senior locality leads, to raise awareness of the Accord and build this into local decision approaches.
- Taking papers to Locality Boards to remind them of their prior commitments to the Accord.

Action Together in Rochdale has driven forward principles and recommendations in the Accord and Commissioning Framework by raising the concerns of small VCSE organisations who were unable to meet ICS requirements, facilitating local meetings to understand concerns and identify solutions with partner. This resulted in an agreement that a proportionate approach to contracting requirements will be taken where able; increased timescales and support offered where the requirement is still needed. They have also logged sector sustainability risks at LCO Board and LCO Executive, resulting in a whole system approach to managing risks, and demonstrable regard for VCSE provision alongside other provision.

Sector 3 has ensured that Stockport's new VCFSE Strategy recognises "the enormous value of the VCFSE sector (and that they want) to do even more to ensure that the sector is an equal and trusted partner and that in turn, they can empower people to have a say about the places in which they live and the services they use". This has led to the development of the VCFSE Alliance which has equal standing to existing partnership boards. They have also co-presented on the Accord to Locality VCSE commissioners; and had an Accord in Action item at their local VCFSE Forum.

Macc has taken a paper to ICS Board on VCSE engagement in locality structures, which has led to an agreement to develop an action plan focussing on engagement, influencing and service delivery. They have also driven forward key elements of the Commissioning Framework by gaining agreement to work together to understand commissioning risks to VCSE organisations following discussions around sector fragility and Adult Social Care, Mental Health, and Children's Services.

Thrive has ensured that Trafford's 5 year VCFSE Strategy and Action Plan has been informed by the Accord and is aligned with the Accord commitments, especially relating to partnerships between the VCFSE sector and statutory sectors, and the contribution that VCFSEs makes in tackling inequalities and creating a more inclusive economy. The Strategy focuses on building a strong and resilient VCFSE sector in Trafford and specifically includes actions around engaging local people in the design of services; increasing the proportion of contracts commissioned to the VCFSE sector; supporting the development of social economy organisations; and developing partnerships between VCFSEs and the private sector.

Action Together in Oldham has driven forward key Accord commitments around Community Engagement and having a Financially Resilient VCSE Sector, by co-producing a paper with the Council Lead to secure a £500K grant investment for the VCSE and raise awareness of the importance of VCSE in prevention and tackling inequalities; securing and distributing another tranche of One Oldham Fund; launching cross-sector Engagement Leads Group with 50 attendees and developing a draft engagement framework and toolkit.



Action Together in Tameside referenced the Accord commitments when facing cuts to prevention provision in Tameside ICS; meeting with local commissioners, Portfolio Lead for Health; raising at Tameside ICS Committee; and escalating to the Exec Director of Commissioning at GM. Although this did not prevent the loss of some key VCSE prevention services, it did lead to an agreement to establish a sub group of the Tameside ICS about commissioning and risk, which the VCSE will be involved in.

Wigan has used the commitments in the Accord when establishing its Terms of Reference and Ways of Working for its new VCSE Leadership Group; and driven forward Commissioning Framework recommendations around Social Value when developing their Community Wealth Building Anchor Partnership – aiming to keep local spend in Wigan wherever possible.

Bury VCFA has presented and discussed the Accord and Fair Funding Protocol at a number of strategic groups including Locality Board, Integrated Delivery Collaborative (ICB), Children's Strategic Partnership Board, the Public Service Reform Steering Group and the Anti-poverty steering group. This has led to a commitment by system leads to attend a roundtable to be held in April 24, and discussions around a pooled investment programme for the VCSE sector in Bury.

Salford CVS has hosted VCSE leadership round table discussions with their interim Director of Adult Services; the City Mayor, and the Director of Children's Services to build awareness of commitments; gain explicit agreement from key council partners to not only adhere to The Compact and local VCSE Strategy – and the GM VCSE Accord and delivery plans - but also to buy in to the ethos that surrounds these agreements. They have also worked with the City Mayor and officers to agree some key deliverables against existing commitments – e.g., VCSE contract uplift reviews. In addition, after hosting an Access to Health Services world café discussion in July 23, ongoing dialogue between primary care and the VCSE sector has built a further commitment to collaborate, leading to 4 new pilot projects. The learning from this work in turn has been fed into GM structures.

Bolton referenced the Accord when submitting funding bids to the Local Authority and Integrated Care Partners, to support the case for investment in the sector. This help in securing the funding. They have also driven forward the Accord commitment around tackling inequality by identifying key priorities for some of the most under-represented VCSE groups which they aim to work toward. These include Campaigning with Good Employment Charter, Better Pension Schemes, Accessibility Guides for GM VCSE to utilise when booking venues, and guides on how to raise under-represented voices across GM.

In Trafford, Thrive held a VCFSE Strategic Forum event with partners in the public sector to codesign the Trafford 5 Year VCFSE Strategy Action Plan. This also included breakout workshops on paying the Real Living Wage and identifying VCFSE sector barriers and how to overcome these, and ensuring the support needs of small/ micro VCFSEs in Trafford are met.



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To learn more about our work with VCSE Infrastructure partners, or to discuss how we can work together, please get in touch - we'd love to hear from you.