

CALDERDALE VCSE STRATEGY 2024-2029

A roadmap of collaboration, innovation and representation to build strong partnerships and provision both for and delivered by the Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sector in Calderdale.



JOINT FOREWORD FROM -



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Our new VCSE Strategy sets out how together we aim to ensure a flourishing, sustainable voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector in Calderdale.

It reconfirms our commitment to working together in a way that enables all partners, including the VCSE sector to participate equitably and proactively in the delivery of our shared Vision for Calderdale that everyone should be able to live a larger life. This Strategy has been co-produced with partners across the VCSE sector, Council and health services. It has been developed in the backdrop of some really difficult years, with austerity, the Covid pandemic and now the cost-of-living crisis impacting massively on our residents, our communities, our services and all of our organisations' ability to deliver.

We recognise there have been challenges and difficult issues to work through which have not always been good for our partnership relationships, and we have seen some organisations close in recent years. Despite these challenges, Calderdale continues to be recognised as a place with strong partnerships, where creativity, flexibility and hard work has helped us to be kind, resilient and improve even in tough times.

This Strategy is also about how as a place and partnership we need to respond to the world around us. The world is changing, and the needs and aspirations of our communities are changing. Calderdale is a place blessed with an amazingly committed vibrant VCSE sector but if we want the sector to thrive so that it can support our residents, we know we must see a step change in our relationships and our patterns of investment.

We are proud that we have co-produced this Strategy together, reflecting our commitment to doing things the right way for the long term. We are pleased to endorse this shared VCSE Strategy for Calderdale, which sets out our shared vision for Calderdale's VCSE. It sets out our shared commitment to change in the way we work together - underpinned by an agreement to develop shared principles, values, and behaviours- and three key priority areas for action - a shared plan for change over the next five years (2024-2029).

J. Scullion

Jamie Blain

A S. Eversen



Compassion



“Respectful, trusting, well-established relationships exist within the voluntary sector and across sectors.”

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THE CALDERDALE VOLUNTARY COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISE (VCSE) STRATEGY - A SUMMARY

Our long-term aim

We will work together to ensure that there is a flourishing, sustainable local VCSE sector that a sector that enables people to live larger life by:

- Making a real difference to quality of life for Calderdale residents and communities
- Attracting and developing people of all ages and abilities in paid and unpaid roles
- Working alongside those in public and private sector organisations as respected equals

Our **3** priorities

- Release capacity of the VCSE sector by identifying activities or processes that can be stopped, streamlined, or improved
- Increase accountability and transparency between all partners by being open about decision-making, use of resources, priorities and what works
- Nurture and protect VCSE people, organisations and partnerships to ensure a strong VCSE and partnerships for future generations



TO ACHIEVE THESE PRIORITIES, WE WILL TAKE NINE ACTIONS

- 1** Develop a local Calderdale agreement reflecting how the VCSE and public sector bodies will work together and hold each other to **account** for delivery of our strategic intent
- 2** Invest time and funds to ensure learning is shared and lived experience and co-production approaches are more highly valued
- 3** Reduce the time and effort involved for all grant administrators and applicants
- 4** Clarify and nurture the role of VCSE representatives in formal and public sector decision-making boards and forums
- 5** Develop a consistent and joined-up approach to volunteering in Calderdale
- 6** Increase representation / inclusion of the voices of Asian, Black and ethnic minority leaders in processes, meetings and decision-making
- 7** Improve the effectiveness of contracts and commissions involving VCSE organisations
- 8** Increase clarity on how local funds are allocated and spent across the partnership
- 9** Simplify the support offered to local VCSE organisations and ensure clear communication and accessibility



INTRODUCTION - WHY DEVELOP A VCSE STRATEGY?

The strategic importance of the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector in Calderdale

There are over **1,500** VCSE organisations in Calderdale, of all shapes, cultures and sizes. The VCSE sector is hugely diverse and complex, as is its relationship with the public sector and communities.

Our voluntary organisations largely employ Calderdale residents and spend a high percentage of their money in Calderdale, contributing significantly to the local economy.¹

Between them, these organisations:

- Employ **5,151** staff – that's 5.6% of the local workforce (based on total 91,500 Calderdale jobs)
- Supported by over **13,500** volunteers.
- Overall, the VCSE sector in Calderdale contributes almost **£550M** to the local economy.²

As well as playing a significant role in Calderdale's economy, the co-production work for this Strategy has reinforced the critical role that the VCSE plays across the Borough.

¹ CLES (2021), Measuring the Value of the VCS in Calderdale: https://www.calderdale.gov.uk/ords/nweb/COUNCIL.minutes_pkg.view_doc?p_Type=AR&p_ID=81814

² Statistics taken from Inclusive Economy Strategy for Calderdale 2024–2029 (draft) and from Chapman, Tony, & Wistow, Jonathan (2023), Local Health and Social Wellbeing: The contribution of the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector in Yorkshire and Humber: https://www.wypartnership.co.uk/application/files/8116/8509/4266/contribution_of_the_VCSE_sector_in_Yorkshire_and_Humber_June_2023.pdf

INTRODUCTION - WHY DEVELOP A VCSE STRATEGY?

Our VCSE sector is...

- **Strong and trusted and has long-lasting relationships.**

Those working within and with the VCSE in Calderdale have built strong, trusted and often long-lasting relationships. Many commented that the borough was small, and people knew each other well. There is evident passion and pride in making Calderdale a positive place for all to live and work that reflects the Vision 2024 values of distinctiveness, kindness, resilience, talent and enterprise.

- **Recognised and valued.**

Senior leaders across the Council and Health already recognise and value the VCSE and its essential contribution to meeting community needs, improving health and ensuring that good quality of life, resilience and connection are valued.

- **Highly responsive, agile, creative, and innovative**

The powerful and effective response of communities, volunteers and VCSE organisations to local floods and Covid is now well recognised and documented. The Locality report *We Were Built for This* specifically identified that the VCSE provides essential 'cogs of connection' in communities; and that local systems are particularly strong where good relationships already³ existed.

Areas with a history of collaboration like Calderdale can move further and faster. Although it also noted that thought the sector adapted rapidly to these crisis situations, it needs support to meet the challenges of the future. Calderdale's experience of flooding meant that together we were particularly well prepared for the coronavirus crisis.

³ Locality (2020), *We Were Built for This: How community organisations helped us through the coronavirus crisis*: <https://locality.org.uk/reports/we-were-built-for-this>

Councillor Tim Swift, who was then Deputy Leader of the Council, is quoted in the report: “The speed and way in which we are able to respond depended on the existing partnerships, networks and understanding that were in place.”

● **Knowledgeable, professional and skilled**

Many in the VCSE sector are concerned that public sector assumptions about VCSE organisations’ capabilities have not changed, despite the evidence and learning from recent crises. We have heard that Calderdale communities have the knowledge, skills and assets to identify and respond to many of the challenges they face, and that a significant amount of work happens without the involvement of (or funding from) any of the local statutory partners. There is an opportunity to shift more power to communities – and use scarce resources to support those most in need. This requires public sector to work together with partners to make informed and considered judgements about who is best placed to do what, building on the capabilities, relationships and creativity of VCSE organisations where these are most likely to have the required impact and best meet the needs of communities.

● **Vital to the local support system**

Calderdale VCSE organisations offer a wide range of activities and services, many of which provide early intervention and prevention support that create resilience so that individuals do not need or choose not to access statutory or health services.



Local organisations are currently providing critical services that are helping our wider health and care system achieve our aspirations to keep people safe, well and independent in their own homes and communities.



Some examples include:

- Cost of living support, like debt advice and food support
- Mental health support ranging from informal peer networks to accredited services for people in crisis
- Women's services supporting families fleeing domestic abuse and preventing further harm
- Substance use support and supporting recovery
- Cohesion and community safety and place-based support across our neighbourhoods and communities
- Support for immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers
- Support for people with disabilities
- Support people with their discharge from hospital

CASE STUDY - COST OF LIVING SUPPORT FROM FOCUS4HOPE AND NOAH'S ARK TO SUPPORT MONEY-SAVVY COMMUNITIES.

Focus4Hope has partnered with Calderdale financial advice and therapeutic services charity Noah's Ark to further support individuals and families who walk through their doors with access to a highly beneficial course designed to equip people with essential skills and knowledge to better budget their finances and manage their money.

The 'Budget Like a Boss' course covers topics such as distinguishing between priority and non-priority spending, managing debt, making savvy food purchases, and budget-friendly meal planning and cooking.

The course also addresses ways to reduce expenditures, increase income, utilise bank accounts for better budgeting, and understand the impact of impulse buying on budgets.

Many participants, some of whom had never previously had a savings account, have now gained confidence in saving and managing their money without fear.

Upon completing the course it is anticipated that the frequency of reliance on Focus4Hope's Friday Food Club will decrease, with some participants eventually not needing to access the provision at all.



CASE STUDY - WOMENCENTRE MARK 40 YEARS OF PIONEERING SUPPORT FOR WOMEN

Since its founding in 1985, WomenCentre has evolved into a transformative space for women from all backgrounds, helping countless individuals overcome challenges, rebuild their lives, and strengthen their communities.

From the start, the centre offered a sanctuary for women, providing a non-judgmental and inclusive space where women of all backgrounds could find support and solidarity. With a nurse on hand and a doctor twice a week, women were invited to drop in and talk about their needs.

For 40 years, WomenCentre has served thousands of women across Calderdale & Kirklees, recently expanding services in Dewsbury and Bradford. In 2023/24 alone, there were over 4,800 referrals across all services.

With a mission of prevention, intervention, recovery, and empowerment, WomenCentre continues to provide extensive support. From domestic abuse support services, women's mental health and wellbeing services, one-to-one counselling, informal drop-in sessions for advice, guidance and emotional support, as well as initiatives to redirect individuals from criminal justice to health and social care pathways.

Every service is tailored to meet the unique needs of women, equipping them with the resources and confidence to regain control of their lives.



CASE STUDY – ALPHA HOUSE CALDERDALE CELEBRATES KING’S AWARD FOR VOLUNTARY SERVICE

In 2023, local Calderdale Residential, Rehabilitation, and Resettlement charity for offenders, Alpha House Calderdale were presented with their hard-earned King’s Award for Voluntary Service.

Founded in 2008 by Fran Nowell, Alpha House Calderdale offers individuals a chance at new beginnings. Fran’s career within the criminal justice system revealed the harsh cycle many faced upon release from prison, and the lack of support available to them.

Upon their release, Fran met many people battling with drug and alcohol addiction. A large majority were desperate to lead a life of sobriety but often were left to go back onto the streets or into situations that sadly led them directly back to their addiction.

Their latest initiative, funded through the Mayor of West Yorkshire’s Safer Communities fund is their Respect and Safety of Women Diploma, which will encourage good practices throughout the community and further solidify Mayor Tracy Brabin’s Safety of Women and Girls pledge to tackle the deep-rooted gender inequality and subconscious biases to further protect the women of West Yorkshire.



STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The development of the Calderdale VCSE Strategy has been driven by the voices of those working in and with the VCSE sector in Calderdale in response primarily to the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) report⁴ 'Measuring the Value of the VCS in Calderdale' published in 2021 and the Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge⁵ in 2023.

The CLES report confirmed our shared view that Calderdale has a vibrant and well-connected VCSE. It also reflected that:

- Our strong VCSE networks were well tested ahead of Covid-19 by floods.
- Through and beyond Covid, demand on VCSE has been growing with user-needs increasing in complexity.
- The VCSE in Calderdale have some renowned examples of innovation and success.
- That despite good networks some VCSE groups operate with minimal contact with any anchors/isolated from wider network.
- That the VCSE is integral to an inclusive economy and ambitions for community health services but there are limits to its role
- There needs to be fair funding arrangements, the VCSE cannot be the cheap option.
- That the VCSE delivers choice and quality
- Community wealth/capacity building principles should underpin the development of a VCSE strategy.
- That the sector cannot be a substitute for high quality public services – i.e., should not be seen as a 'cheap option' for delivery of services on behalf of public sector but a quality alternative where appropriate.



⁴ CLES (2021), Measuring the Value of the VCS in Calderdale: https://www.calderdale.gov.uk/ords/nweb/COUNCIL.minutes_pkg.view_doc?p_Type=AR&p_ID=81814

⁵ Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council (2023), LGA Corporate Peer Challenge: <https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/council-assurance-and-peer-support/peer-challenges-we-offer/corporate-peer-challenge-76#1-executive-summary>

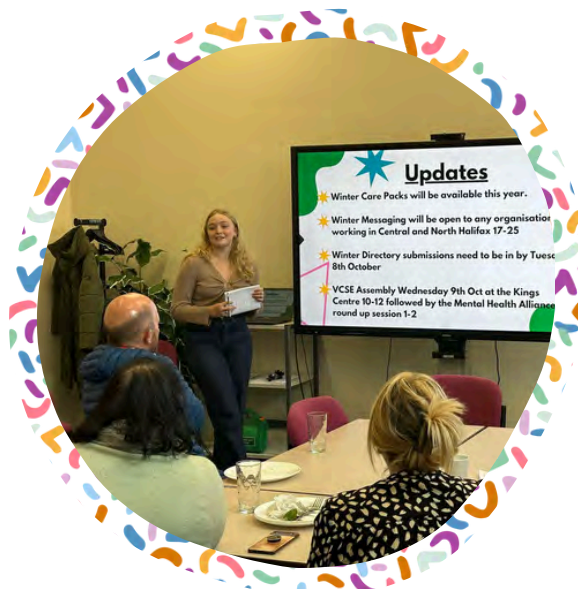
The report reflected positively on partnerships between the Council, health (Calderdale Cares) and the VCSE – and noted that our vision and strategies were aspirational. However, their central recommendations were the formation of a VCSE strategy working group with high levels of representation from the VCSE sector.

‘Developing a truly collaborative VCSE strategy with the VCSE sector will be a positive step towards ensuring the true value the sector brings is always recognised.’

This Strategy is our response to that recommendation. As CLES said to the steering group overseeing their report: ***‘This could be an opportunity to seize the moment to respond to a moment of great need – following the pandemic – and be truly transformational’*** – to fundamentally review relationships between Council, health and VCSE partners in Calderdale and the way the public sector funds the work the VCSE do to help deliver our shared vision for the Borough.

In 2023, the LGA Peer Review re-enforced the need to develop a formal VCSE Strategy which reflected Calderdale Council’s stated commitment to working in partnership with the Sector – and identified clearly that despite many good relationships between local organisations and Council officer the experience was often patchy and inconsistent.

‘Calderdale can point to a wealth of social capital. The quality and depth of positive relationships throughout the Borough across all its sectors and stakeholders are palpable. There is yet more that could be achieved in terms of the value derived from positive collaboration and partnership working. A key element of this becoming a possibility will depend on CMBC taking a more consistent approach to working strategically with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS).’



VCSE ORGANISATIONS ARE KEY TO OUR SHARED VISION FOR CALDERDALE



The strategy has been developed within the context of our Vision for 2024⁶ and beyond.

The Strategy also has clear links to other strategic documents and approaches, which when viewed together show a recognition of the role that VCSE organisations have in achieving our shared strategic actions and outcomes:

- Calderdale Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022–2027⁷ Our Health and Wellbeing Strategy is about how everyone (individuals, families, communities, organisations) can make Calderdale a place where people live longer, safer, healthier lives. Calderdale’s VCSE sector is actively involved in our partnership work to deliver across all **4** of our priority goals – Starting Well, Developing Well, Living and Working Well and Ageing Well.
- Inclusive Economy Strategy for Calderdale 2024–2029⁸ – Calderdale has set out its vision to develop an inclusive economy and sees a thriving local VCSE sector as fundamental to achieving this goal. Community wealth building principles which focus on shaping a fairer and more democratic local economy are integral to achieving this vision. an inclusive economy seeks to develop inclusion and a thriving VCSE sector as essential to an inclusive economy with values like collaboration, social justice and mutual support running central to the mission of social enterprises and charities. Community wealth building is one of the **5** key goals in the new Inclusive Economy Strategy.

2024 CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The development work on this strategy began in October 2023 and continued until April 2024. This was an intense period for local government and the VCSE sector, with many councils – including Calderdale – seeing reduced budgets for 2024, which required them to reduce their spending and seek ways of generating income.

While public sector funding is not the main source of income for the VCSE sector, for many organisations reduced local authority and health budgets nonetheless form part of a very challenging environment.

The VCSE sector has seen a surge in demand in recent years:

- The ‘cost of living crisis’ not only means that many households struggle to cope financially but also has wider impacts on health, relationships and resilience.
- Many VCSE workers are part-time and on relatively low pay, and with rising household costs many VCSE organisations are unable to retain or recruit the staff they need.
- Volunteering was impacted by Covid, and volunteer numbers and types of volunteering continue to change, with many traditional volunteers no longer volunteering.
- With increased buildings / staffing / operational costs and fewer volunteers, VCSE organisations have sought creative responses – enabling self-help and mutual help, fundraising and developing partnerships.



In many ways, councils and voluntary organisations find themselves in similar positions – only short-term funding is available (and with competitive processes), and demand and costs are rising as they operate in an uncertain and politicised environment. The pressure to do more with less and respond to new demands and circumstances has a direct impact on all those providing services to people in need.

Despite this context there are also significant opportunities for our VCSE sector to flourish with the right support and commitments in place

Across Calderdale we are creating opportunities which should enable the VCSE to flourish over the next few years:

- ‘Keep it Local’ principles⁹ - Calderdale Council and the West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board (ICB) are signatories of the six Keep it Local principles which includes committing to our communities and proactively supporting local organisations.

We recognise that the Keep it Local approach isn’t possible without the community capacity to sustain it. Therefore, Calderdale Council endorsed its Community Anchor Policy in 2016.

This Strategy reconfirms our commitment to the six Keep it Local Principles and the Community Anchor Policy and commits to:

‘Celebrate(s) and recognise(s) the key role of community anchor organisations can play in helping the Council deliver its vision..... Community anchors are uniquely placed to help reduce inequalities, grow the economy, and build a sustainable future in our towns and communities. We aim to create as positive a climate as possible to support the resilience of community anchors in Calderdale.’¹¹

- Community led approaches and co-production – Calderdale Council and Calderdale Cares are actively involved in co-producing services for people, focusing on person-centred approaches and collaboration with partners, particularly the VCSE sector. A great example of the opportunities that are coming from this approach is the **Accessible Calderdale Project**.



6 Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council (n.d.), Our Vision: Vision 2024: <https://new.calderdale.gov.uk/council/our-vision/vision2024>

7 Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council (2022), Calderdale Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2027: <https://new.calderdale.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2023-07/Health-and-wellbeing-strategy-2022-2027.pdf>

8 Inclusive Economy Strategy 20224-29 approved Cabinet March 2024 Item 16 - Calderdale Inclusive Economy Strategy - FINAL Cabinet 11 March 2024.pdf (moderngov.co.uk)

9 Locality (n.d.), Keep it Local: <https://locality.org.uk/our-influencing-work/keep-it-local>

10 Defined as ‘independent community led organisations operating in a local area. They are firmly rooted in a sense of place and committed to positive economic, social or environmental change.’ Locality: Theory of Change 2016 <http://locality.org.uk/resources/localitys-theory-change/>

Community anchors is also a term with wider resonance in national/ international thinking about supporting/developing resilient local communities

11 An anchor in our communities | News Centre - Official news site of Calderdale Council

CASE STUDY - CREATING A MORE INCLUSIVE CALDERDALE: VISITS UNLIMITED AND THE ACCESSIBLE CALDERDALE PROJECT.

Local Calderdale Social Enterprise, Visits Unlimited CIC heralds the way to improve access, remove barriers, and make the UK a welcoming and inclusive place through access audits, training courses, speciality consultancy and advice, and focus group involvement working both nationally and at a grassroots level here in Calderdale.

The Accessible Calderdale Project, a local project by Visits Unlimited, began in 2018, and its main aims are to remove both physical and non-physical barriers to inclusion throughout Calderdale. It can be challenging for those with a disability, and their families and/or carers, when days out don't go as planned due to a lack of accessibility, even going as far as avoiding planning a day out due to fears of the journey itself or the venue, won't be accessible.

Calderdale and the wider region have lots to offer, and it is important that businesses, green spaces, transport and access routes are able to be reached with ease and enjoyed by all. Visits Unlimited works closely with the local authority, West Yorkshire Combined Authority and tourist venues such as The Piece Hall, Eureka and Shibden Hall. As well as fostering strong relationships with Calderdale's Voluntary and Community sector.

To ensure voices and concerns are truly heard, Visits Unlimited set up the Accessible Calderdale Disability Access Forum (ACDAF). The forum meets regularly and is made up of residents within Calderdale who each have their own unique experience with disability.



- Building on the Community Anchor Policy the Council has also taken a community led approach to regeneration, working with two of our local Community Anchors, North Halifax Partnership and Halifax Opportunities Trust to develop and deliver the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) hyperlocal programme in North and Central Halifax. This programme is being used to test the impact on the local economy of taking a more grassroots, community wealth building approach, particularly in terms of delivering wider health and wellbeing outcomes and increasing engagement with local people. We are hopeful that these approaches will be rolled out as we develop our locality working, linking with our Town Boards and other opportunities across Calderdale towns and neighbourhoods.



- Community assets and cooperative approaches – The past few years have seen an increasing number of buildings and facilities being taken on by local community organisations. Some of these like Foundry Street have been transferred from Calderdale Council. Others like the Fielden Centre in Todmorden have been given new life by new charitable organisations. All of these are creating new opportunities in the towns and neighbourhoods they serve, for volunteering, enterprise and service delivery. Calderdale Council is reviewing its community management of assets policy with the aim of ensuring these approaches are more sustainable in the future.



- Our work to develop a Cohesion Strategy for Calderdale with Belong network has highlighted the value to Calderdale of our strong voluntary sector and how important high levels of volunteering are to building social cohesion.
- Calderdale was one of the six local areas that Belong surveyed throughout the pandemic in the Beyond Us and Them (2021) research and it consistently showed higher rates of social connection, neighbourliness, volunteering, and trust in local government and institutions than elsewhere in the UK. Belong have however, identified that Calderdale could benefit from working better together across agencies to nurture and facilitate greater 'scope' in volunteering, which aligns with the feedback for the VCSE Strategy creating impetus for a shared aim to nurture and grow our volunteering offer across the Borough.
- Local philanthropy and community spirit - Calderdale is fortunate in being the home to a strong local Community Foundation with an impressive track record of fundraising and local philanthropy. The Community Foundation for Calderdale (CFFC) is working closely with the Council and Calderdale Cares and other funders to increase investment in the VCSE locally as well as celebrate the impact that the VCSE makes.
- Capacity building for the sector – And finally, Calderdale Cares and Calderdale Council have committed to continued investment in and codesign of support for the Voluntary Sector through our voluntary sector infrastructure (VSI) contract. We have committed to a 5-year contract for the re-commissioning of these services and will be inviting interest in being part of an Alliance Contract with the Council and ICB in Summer 2024.



Regionally, there is an increasing recognition of the impact that the VCSE sector has in local communities and a shift in relationships:

- Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Between West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board (ICB) and the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sector in West Yorkshire¹² - The West Yorkshire ICB have recognised the VCSE sector is a vital cornerstone of a progressive health and care system and is committed to embedding the VCSE sector at all the levels of health improvement.
- The West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) is also looking to develop its relationship with the VCSE sector, recognising the role the VCSE sector can play in enhancing employability and addressing social exclusion as well as an important sector in its own right, employing significant numbers of people within the region and committed to principles of Fair Work that are central to the Mayor's Economic Strategy.

¹² West Yorkshire Health and Care Partnership (2022), Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Between West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board (ICB) and the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sector in West Yorkshire: <https://www.wypartnership.co.uk/our-priorities/harnessing-power-communities>

At a national level there are also emerging trends and policy changes that could benefit the VCSE sector. We need to position ourselves so that we can make the most of these opportunities:

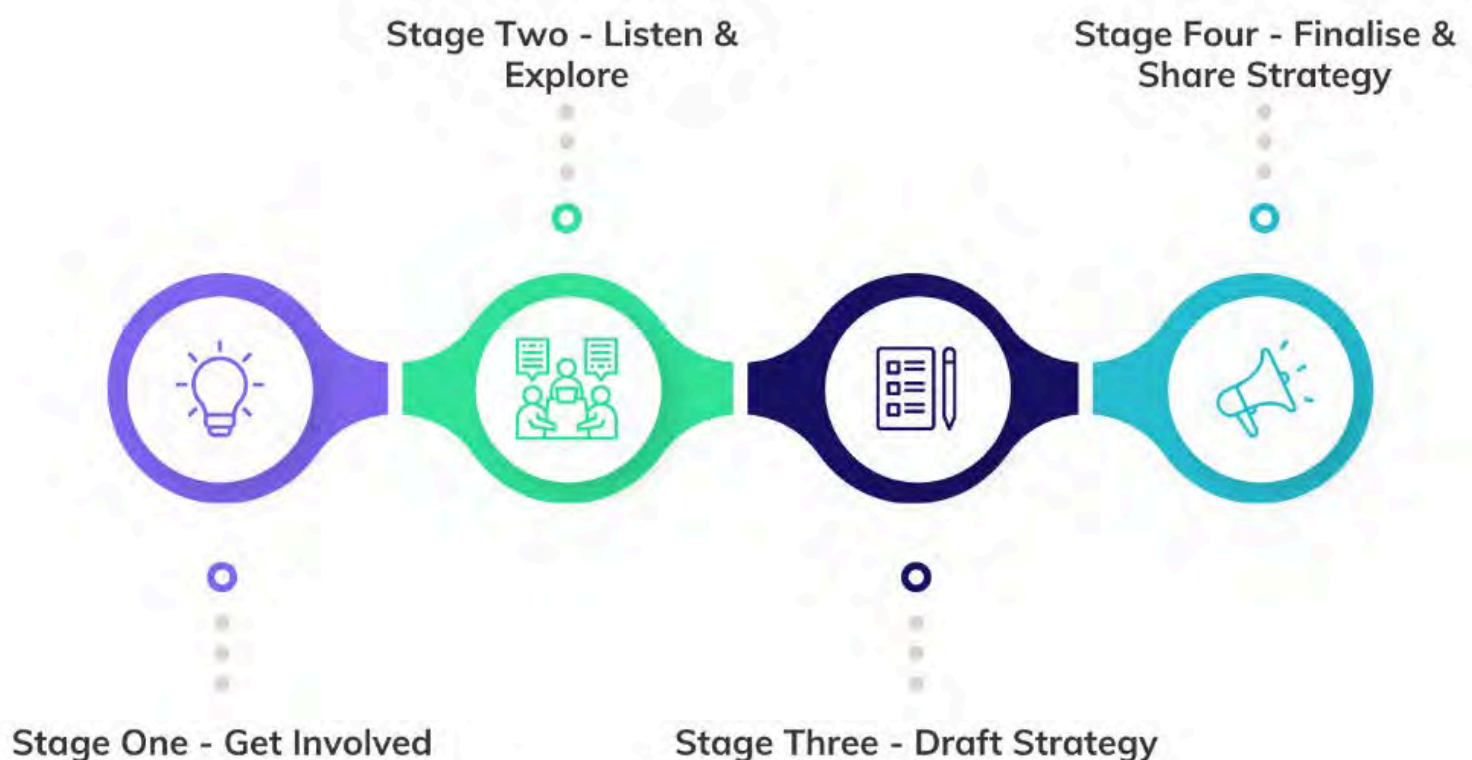
- **Government Contracts:** The UK government is committed to diversifying its supply chains and has made changes to procurement practices to help more VCSEs bid for public sector contracts. This includes building on the Social Value Act to mandate all central government departments to explicitly include social value in procurements, simplifying the buying process, and ensuring prompt payment within 30 days
- **Nationally, health policy is recognising that the VCSE plays a crucial role in improving health, well-being, and care outcomes in the UK.** Here are some opportunities for VCSE organisations within the health and care system. VCSE organisations are essential partners in planning care and supporting a shift towards prevention and self-care. In the coming years there is likely to be significant opportunities for the VCSE to contribute to system transformation, innovation, and integration if it is supported to do so
- **The Road Ahead 2024 Report:** The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) has released a report outlining the opportunities and challenges for the voluntary sector in 2024. It emphasizes the sector's potential role in an election year, the need for a renewed partnership with the government, and the importance of collaboration within the sector to navigate challenges and maximise impact.



A participatory approach to developing the Calderdale VCSE Strategy

The VCSE sector is hugely diverse and complex, as is its relationship with the public sector and communities. This strategy has been developed using a participatory approach that aims to draw on the diverse experiences and insights across the sector and of key stakeholders. This principle was agreed with key stakeholders from the start.

The core of the approach has been to bring in Agile Associates, independent consultants with extensive experience of working with the VCSE sector outside Calderdale, to ensure a fresh perspective and independence. The Associates devised a range of ways of listening to those in the VCSE sector and to the public sector staff working with them. Calderdale Voluntary & Community (VAC) contracted with the Associates and managed available resources.



Co-production Group and Reference Group

Two groups were established to manage the process and materials.

- The Co-production Group created a sounding board for the Associates, checking plans and documents and exploring and reflecting on (anonymised) contributions from stakeholders. Recruitment to the Co-production Group was open to all in the voluntary sector, with one or two key public sector staff joining some sessions.
- The Reference Group membership was comprised of representatives of the Calderdale Voluntary Sector Infrastructure Alliance (VSI Alliance), which is a partnership of six organisations: Calderdale Council, Calderdale Integrated Care Board, VAC, Locality, North Bank Forum and West Yorkshire Community Accounting Service. Chaired by Councillor Sarah Courtney, the Reference Group included the Council, Health, Locality and VAC managers and received input from the Co-production Group. The Reference Group had decision-making responsibility for the strategy drafts.



Listening, exploring, consulting

Agile Associates gathered contributions through:

- semi-structured interviews
- surveys with open text options
- semi-structured group discussions

Over eighty people have engaged individually, and a further ninety people have engaged in group discussions. Co-production Group sessions explored the findings and materials, shaping the priorities and text of the strategy document. A draft strategy was circulated widely for consultation, and feedback shaped the final strategy document.



Progressing the strategy together

All partners will work with confidence and determination to collectively address the issues that impact VCSE organisations, and in doing so release capacity in a context of resources that are already stretched.

All partners will nurture and protect what is good in Calderdale's VCSE sector, the people who are employed in VCSE organisations and those who volunteer to support their local communities to ensure a strong VCSE and partnerships for future generations.

VSI Alliance partners are responsible for the ownership and implementation of the strategy. The VSI Alliance will ask each partner to agree to implement the strategy and report back to the Alliance. Alliance partners will be accountable to the VSI Alliance for progress on the strategy.

In adopting this approach, the aim is to ensure that the strategy is owned by all those involved in working with or for Calderdale-based VCSE organisations, and that action on implementation is taken by all partners, who will ideally work collaboratively and share learning.

Limitations

The development of this strategy has focused on listening to stakeholders and understanding their perspectives. The process has not included an analysis of statistics or performance data, or an assessment of policies or partnership documents. Calderdale's performance has not been compared to that of other areas or assessed. The Calderdale VCSE Strategy should be read alongside the CLES report, the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge and other strategic documents.

Ownership

The final strategy will be signed off by the VSI Alliance.



“The commitment, care, enthusiasm and quality of volunteers and paid workers in the VCSE were widely acknowledged and valued. They go the extra mile.”

WHAT WE HEARD: KEY MESSAGES

Early conversations identified the following key themes:

- workforce
- relationships
- systems
- funding

These themes provided a structure for collecting further insights, concerns and ideas about VCSE experiences in Calderdale.



Workforce



- We heard the pride, enthusiasm and commitment of volunteers and workers in VCSE organisations, and their confidence that their work is important and effective in responding to local people's needs with compassion and innovation. We heard that the work was satisfying but demanding, and for many there is a sense that their work is not widely understood or valued. Low pay and insecurity were a common concern. There were many positive stories about volunteering, including peer support roles that value lived experience. The commitment, care, enthusiasm and quality of volunteers and paid workers in the VCSE were widely acknowledged and valued. They go the extra mile.
- Sustaining funding for paid and volunteer work was a common challenge. Many managers described the stress and long hours involved in securing funding through processes that are often bureaucratic and disproportionate. Some participants shared concerns that their organisations' work is not valued or understood, as it was so often inadequately funded, and that the wide-ranging nature of their roles was not fully appreciated. The demands on charities and the crises of recent years have made it a challenge to recruit and retain trustees. There are real concerns about how a VCSE workforce that was already facing multiple pressures will cope with the current challenging context.

Relationships



- As consultants, we experienced an open, generous and friendly welcome. In participants' contributions, we heard pride in Calderdale and a commitment to making it a great place to live and work. Respectful, trusting, well-established relationships exist within the voluntary sector and across sectors. Those in VCSE infrastructure or community anchor organisations are seen by public sector colleagues as capable, skilled and effective voices for the wider VCSE.
- Some communication systems such as newsletters and networks are valued and effective. However, some people said they were unsure where to go for information, support, connections and advice, while some perceived barriers to new people getting involved in networks and partnerships. Also, in workshops, interviews and survey responses we have heard few voices from organisations led by Black or Asian workers, or those focused explicitly on a race equality agenda. There have been some, but fewer than we expected.
- Some commented on the element of competition between VCSE organisations for funding and attention. A lack of accountability or transparency around certain funding decisions was seen by some to undermine trust, inclusion and collaboration. Some VCSE organisations said they were reluctant to challenge public sector decision-makers, fearing that this would affect their funding from public sector sources.

Systems



- We heard some dissatisfaction with current partnership boards and arrangements: there was some concern about whether participation in them was a good use of VCSE staff or volunteer time. There was recognition of the limitations of having a single representative of VCSE sector diversity on strategic boards, and concern that the same few people are typically involved and that there is a lack of transparency and clarity about decision-making. There also seem to be a lot of meetings to go to, and many say they do not know which to prioritise. Where a VCSE representative is required by a public sector process, some suggest that the VCSE organisation should be paid for the worker time involved. Concerns were raised about a lack of support for representatives, a lack of accountability and a lack of capacity.
- Some said that the arrangements for, and the offer of, VCSE infrastructure in Calderdale are confusing and not joined up. Some in the public sector have raised concerns about VCSE systems, processes and quality standards for larger organisations that deliver services.

Funding



- There is recognition in Calderdale that commissioning local organisations has advantages for the local economy and services. Calderdale has fewer national organisations delivering services than other areas. However, public sector commissioners note that there are regulations that limit their ability to choose local organisations in tenders.
- Increasingly, central government funds are short term and have new monitoring requirements, adding to workloads. We heard significant frustration about inconsistent tendering processes and onerous contracts or reporting requirements. Short-term funding is particularly problematic, demanding and stressful. There were concerns that contract values have not increased to match the demands and costs of service delivery, or the impact of high inflation on costs – this is particularly challenging when demand is high and complex, and costs are rising. Larger organisations are seen by some to get a better funding deal than smaller ones. Many in Calderdale would like to simplify, join up and improve funding arrangements. Health staff indicated that this was a high priority.
- The Community Foundation for Calderdale was highly valued for its processes, flexibility and funding. The Council and Health both provide funds to be distributed by the Foundation, an arrangement that has worked well. Not everyone understood that the public sector funds these grants from the Foundation.
- Funding is a major pressure for VCSE organisations. Some organisations are seeking to reduce reliance on grants and contracts by looking to generate income from property, investments, traded services and donations. Some suggest that large organisations could spend more funds with local VCSE organisations than they currently do.

Overall



There is much to build on in Calderdale VCSE partnerships, including trusting, respectful relationships between caring, skilled people across sectors, and an openness and willingness to learn. In these challenging times, it is important to:

- nurture the valuable people, relationships and organisations in Calderdale
- reduce pressures
- make support easy to access

There are opportunities to make better use of everyone's time through simpler, clearer processes and clarity about structures and meetings.

Improvements to communication, information sharing and transparency will help people build trust, share learning and sustain a resilient and collaborative VCSE sector in Calderdale.

IMPLEMENTING THE VCSE STRATEGY & MEASURING SUCCESS

It is our intention to establish an Implementation Oversight Group (IOG) to take forward the delivery of this Strategy. This will be modelled on the approach used to co-produce the Strategy with invited representatives from VCSE sector, Calderdale Cares Board and Calderdale Council.

It is proposed that the first meeting of the Implementation Oversight Group will be to start the development of the local agreement for ways of working as set out in the actions below. Our intention is that the Principles, Values and Behaviours will reflect our wider ways of working adopted by the Health and Wellbeing Board and Inclusive Economy Board reflecting our comment to be agile, innovative, and flexible; open and honest and accountable; outcomes led, outward and engaging, cooperative and collaborative.

Implementation will be supported by the VSI Services Contract, delivered in partnership by Voluntary & Community (VAC), West Yorkshire Community Accountancy Service (WYCAS), Locality, Calderdale Council and the NHS West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board (ICB). The Implementation Oversight Group will be established once the Strategy has been endorsed by all key partners. It proposed that an annual report from the Group is provided to partners on request. As well as progress on the key actions identified in the Strategy, the annual; report will relevant success measures to be developed in consultation with the Implementation Oversight Group.



OUR HEADLINE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FOR THE VCSE STRATEGY (IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER)

1

Develop a local Calderdale agreement reflecting how the VCSE and public sector bodies will work together and hold each other to account for delivery of our strategic intent

- Collectively produce a document that states the principles by which public sector bodies and the VCSE sector work together, and which acknowledges the importance of the nine actions.
- Build on Principles of being agile, innovative, and flexible; open, honest communication; and accountability and the Values and Behaviours of outcome led, outward and engaging, cooperative and collaborative as documented in the Inclusive Economy Strategy.
- Review the Community Anchor Policy within the context of the new VCSE Strategy and Calderdale agreement.

2

Invest time and funds to ensure learning is shared and lived experience and co-production approaches are more highly valued

- Build on genuine co-production projects to design services / processes that value the experience, knowledge and talents of beneficiaries and participants, e.g. in commissioning processes or service design. Allow the time and flexibility to do this.
- Develop and seek funding for a VCSE-led programme that shares good practice and learning on co-production and on valuing lived experience. This could include access to locally led training, a showcase event and a co-created guide with resources to support co-production activities.

3

Reduce the time and effort involved for all grant administrators and applicants

- Align processes for advertising the availability of grants, application processes and reporting across the Council, Health and the Community Foundation so that similar systems are used. Aim to make processes time-efficient for grant managers, applicants and assessors, and for monitoring and reporting.
- Work towards moving all public sector grant funding to the Community Foundation to ensure consistency of process and improve efficiency and ease of access.
- Pool information about current due diligence requirements and processes for different local funders.
- Develop one common due diligence standard and process that works for diverse VCSE organisations and local funders. Explore data-sharing opportunities that allow a given funder to share due diligence evidence with others.
- Be clear on the purpose and clarify the costs and benefits of any VCSE-specific quality marks that are not linked to a national service provision standard.
- Develop, with VCSE organisations, an agreed set of data fields to be used by all funders in Calderdale for monitoring and reporting. Focus monitoring on the experiences of individuals and communities and the benefits to them and to the environment. Explore opportunities for sharing learning and evidence of impact across services and sectors.
- Develop standard processes, including for data collection / monitoring across all funds.
- Ensure that requirements for applications, monitoring and reporting are timely and proportionate, recognising the additional burden of short-term funding. Grant funders are to adopt the 'eight commitments of open and trusted grant making' of the Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR).
- Fund the delivery of existing services, not only new / innovative approaches.
- Consider one-off, simple grants for core costs and ensure a fair contribution to overheads within other grants.



4

Clarify and nurture the role of VCSE representatives in formal and public sector decision-making boards and forums

- Be clear about the purpose and value of network meetings, events, engagement and partnership boards that involve VCSE organisations Consider the necessity, frequency and length of formal meetings where VCSE representation is required.
- Review the roles and expectations of current VCSE representatives on formal and public sector decision-making boards and forums, including financially where required. Understand if, and how, these representatives communicate with and back to the sector.
- Plan for any changes of representatives, allowing time to make transitions and develop new relationships.
- Make time and space in public sector meetings to explore the issues that most affect VCSE organisations and how to address them together.
- Identify opportunities for representatives to listen to other VCSE voices and report back to them.
- Ensure there are clear mechanisms, processes and approaches for ensuring VCSE voices are heard and their views are captured.
- Make and implement plans for VCSE representatives to reach out to those who are rarely involved to hear their perspectives. Use the strength of existing relationships to encourage open and honest dialogue about issues of power and inequality.
- Consider how the experience and insights of VCSE networks might more actively inform or shape public sector decision-making.



5

Develop a consistent and joined-up approach to volunteering in Calderdale

- Consider setting up a network of staff to recruit and manage volunteers (across the public and voluntary sectors).
- Pool information about roles and organisations, in the public and voluntary sectors, that work on volunteer recruitment, training, management and support.
- Identify and take opportunities to align, simplify and standardise recruitment, selection, communication, checks, training and other processes across Calderdale.
- Develop one easy-to-access space for people to explore available options for volunteering and to register their interest. Use this space to celebrate and recognise diverse volunteer contributions.
- Develop a joined-up, easy-to-access system to provide guidance, resources and support for those who manage and support volunteers – one that is relevant and useful to those in the public and voluntary sectors. Develop dedicated resources for recruiting and supporting trustees.
- Calderdale Council to review its Council Volunteering Policy and procedures in context of new Calderdale wide volunteering offer.

6

Increase representation / inclusion of the voices of Asian, Black and ethnic minority leaders in processes, meetings and decision-making

- Listen to and explore the priorities, experiences and suggestions of Black and Asian leaders in local VCSE organisations.
- Make and implement plans to address barriers and exclusion and to promote minority ethnic participation and voices in VCSE networks and VCSE representation.
- Make and implement plans to address barriers and exclusion and to promote participation and diversity of voices in VCSE networks and VCSE representation.



Improve the effectiveness of contracts and commissions involving VCSE organisations

- Statutory partners are to work towards having longer-term contracts with VCSE organisations, with options for review and break clauses, as an alternative to frequent contract extensions, and to acknowledge the importance of longer-term funding for local VCSE staff and service provision.
- Involve VCSE organisations early on in commissioning processes, and in decisions that affect them, through the use of early market engagement and co-design of services. Consider how to communicate clearly that there is no expectation that they should do ‘more for less’, to avoid unsustainable pricing strategies in tenders.
- Funders are to openly acknowledge that lowering funding reduces service delivery expectations, and, where appropriate, to co-produce / co-design service reductions.
- Be open and clear on why competitive procurement processes are being used. Where competitive tendering is appropriate, co-design processes with local partners and, in evaluating tenders, value co-production and the local economy.
- Pilot new health and public procurement processes and share learning to develop joint understanding.
- Identify measures and indicators that can apply to a range of contracts (across health and the local authority), with closer links to the outcomes that all of them are aiming to achieve. Ensure reporting requirements are clear, fair and proportionate.
- Identify the intended outcomes of strategies and plans. Commission for these outcomes, and co-design simple monitoring and processes to evidence outcomes, where funds are not subject to external monitoring requirements.
- Develop communication and reporting processes that share evidence of impact and outcomes across services and contracts, to share learning and develop commissioning practices.
- Develop a model of how to support and develop consortium approaches for larger local tenders and external funding applications. Seek funds to pilot the model.

8

Increase clarity on how local funds are allocated and spent across the partnership

- Implement open reporting on spending by the public sector and the largest VCSE organisations, identifying where funds are spent in Calderdale and exploring opportunities to increase local spending in the VCSE sector.
- Develop a joint understanding of the 'Keep it Local' approach and identify ways that 'Keep it Local' can be made a reality in support of the VCSE in Calderdale.

9

Simplify the support offered to local VCSE organisations and ensure clear communication and accessibility

- Pool information about VCSE support roles, processes, communication, record-keeping and measures of success across public sector and VSI Alliance partners.
- Make changes to roles, processes, communications and methods of recording to provide clear, joined-up, accessible support to VCSE organisations.
- Develop one system for registering interest in VCSE networks and joining mailing lists, which enables people from the VCSE to provide feedback and suggest agenda items.
- Collaborate to create one website for finding out about VCSE meetings and events and include notes and minutes and basic information for those new to VCSE networks and meetings.
- Bring together VCSE organisations to help them consider how to generate more income from assets, buildings, paid-for services and activities and sponsorship.

VCSE PHOTOS PROVIDED BY:

- Front Page - Event stall for The Brunswick Centre www.thebrunswickcentre.org.uk
- Joint Foreword - Aerial shot of giant art piece symbolising compassion for St Augustine's Centre www.staugustinescentrehalifax.org.uk
- Contents - Live music and dancing at Memory Lane Cafe www.memorylanecafe.org
- Page 1 & 2 - 'Bin Monster' created through a Youth Led Social Action Project in Beechwood Park - in partnership with North Halifax Partnership, Newground Together and Active Calderdale www.northhalifaxpartnership.org www.newgroundtogether.co.uk

- Page 6 - Happy Days Team www.happydaysuk.org
- Page 7 - Focus4Hope Volunteering Hi-Vis www.focus4hope.co.uk
- Page 8 - WomenCentre cake cutting for their 40th Birthday www.womencentre.org.uk
- Page 9 - Alpha House Calderdale team receiving their King's Award for Voluntary Service www.alphahousecalderdale.org.uk
- Page 10 - Focus4Hope 8th Birthday celebration www.focus4hope.co.uk
- Page 11 - VCSE Networking event hosted by VAC www.cvac.org.uk
- Page 12- Edshift Creative activity with young people about Calderdale www.edshift.co.uk
- Page 13 & 14 - Ted Hughes "Thought Fox™" brought to life by Handmade Productions in Arvon North family writing day in Calder Holmes Park, Hebden Bridge.
www.handmadeproductions.org.uk www.arvon.org/arvon-north/
- Page 15 - Visits Unlimited: Making Yorkshire Accessible for Everyone www.visitsunlimited.org.uk
- Page 16 - Willows Nook Volunteer with one of their ponies www.willowsnookequineassistedlearning.co.uk
- Page 16 - Memory Lane Cafe volunteer handing out cups of tea www.memorylanecafe.org
- Page 18 - Calder Community Squash lesson www.facebook.com/caldercommunitysquash
- Page 18 - Wynn, a Calder Valley Search & Rescue Team Dog www.cvsrt.org.uk
- Page 18 - Art from Project Colt's Art Studio space www.projectcolt.org.uk
- Page 19 - Unique Community Hub
- Page 19 - Halifax Opportunities Trust running their Tuesday Takeaway for communities from their Community Garden, The Outback www.halifaxopportunitiestrust.org.uk
- Page 19 - Litter picking by Wainstalls Community Action Group
- Page 19 - MIZKAST volunteers painting a community EQUALITY Mural at Linden Brook children's centre www.mizkast.weebly.com
- Page 21 - 22 - Calderdale Director of Public Health, Debs Harkins supporting The Brunswick Centre during National HIV Testing Week 2024 www.thebrunswickcentre.org.uk
- Page 23 - A sewing volunteer at Heptonstall Repair Cafe www.facebook.com/HeptonstallRepairCafe/
- Page 24 - EMpowered People 28-mile charity social ride www.empoweredpeople.co.uk
- Page 29 - Kitten at RSPCA Halifax, Huddersfield, Bradford & District Rescue Centre www.rspcahalifaxhuddersfieldbradford.org.uk
- Page 29 - Edshift Youth Base Open Day www.edshift.co.uk
- Page 29 - The Next Step Trust Hydrotherapy Pool www.nextsteptrust.org.uk
- Page 29 - Platform One Gallery based in Todmorden Train Station www.platform1gallery.com
- Page 29 - St Augustine's community get together www.staugustinescentrehalifax.org.uk
- Back Page - Curious Motion CIC Dance rehearsal for a Dance Piece www.curiousmotion.org.uk

