

Report to:	Cabinet	Date: 15 March 2023
Subject:	Supporting Bury's voluntary and community sector infrastructure	
Report of	Cabinet Member for Finance and Communities	

Summary

- 1.1 The Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector is integral to the fabric of the Borough of Bury. Our *LET'S Do It!* strategy sets out the vital importance of the sector and this has been heightened over the past two years as we've responded, collectively, to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic and heightening cost-of-living crisis.
- 1.2 Local Infrastructure provision is the beating heart of a community's voluntary sector and this specification sets out the requirements for infrastructure provision for the Borough of Bury. This has been developed through the ongoing conversations held between public services, community groups and networks in the Borough – to inform a series of outcomes and requirements have been identified in order to ensure provision which is robust, resilient and ultimately thriving. It builds on the experience and learning of the pandemic response whilst setting out local aspiration and commitments in delivering on the Greater Manchester VCSE Accord.
- 1.3 The Service Level Agreement with Bury Voluntary and Community Faith Alliance (Bury VCFA) has been updated to reflect the development of the Accord, the delivery of *Let's Do It!* and latest insight on the sector. This provision is to support Bury deliver vital community capacity, inspiration and opportunity for greater participation – to improve outcomes for local people, tackle inequality and raise life chances – whilst ensuring effective use of ever scarce resource.

Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 It is recommended that the revised Service Level Agreement with Bury Voluntary and Community Faith Alliance is agreed and funded for 2023/24, with intent signalled on continuation in 2024/25 subject to confirmation of funding availability across the Council alongside health and care partners.

Reasons for recommendation(s)

- 3.1 The funding of infrastructure provision in the Borough provides a clear commitment to the importance of the voluntary and community sector.
- 3.2 By refreshing the Service Level Agreement the report seeks to strengthen the recognition of the sector as a key partner in improving outcomes for local people

and the role infrastructure support plays in ensuring this is robust, recognised and representative.

- 3.3 The agreement allows for a clear focus of activity to develop Bury's VCFSE ecosystem in a tailored manner to best meet local needs, in turn delivering on *LET'S Do It!* and GM VCFSE Accord commitments.

Alternative options considered and rejected

- 4.1 To not fund or make a reduction in funding – this would significantly risk the loss of infrastructure support in the Borough, destabilising the wider VCFSE sector and jeopardise the positive progress made in recent years. Whilst recognising the financial pressures that the Council itself is under, investment in the infrastructure support to the VCFSE sector supports steps to increase the resilience of the sector itself, including supporting groups to attract inward investment into the Borough and diversify income generation streams.
- 4.2 To not update the specification – the last two years have continued so see socio-economic pressures across Bury as the Covid-19 pandemic and cost of living crisis have impacted local lives. This has also been a time though of new opportunity, of successful Levelling Up bids and emerging People and Communities Plans. As such to not update the specification would have risked there not been the appropriate local focus on ensuring a sustainable VCFSE ecosystem, best positioned and supported to enhance and enable local outcomes at place.

Background

- 5.1 The VCFSE sector is the cornerstone of daily life across the country. From welfare and wellbeing support to grassroot sports groups, places of worship to peer support networks, the sector connects people and those people to place.
- 5.2 This specification has been developed at a time of significant socio-economic pressures, as the sector and wider system recovers from the Covid pandemic (including the stepping back of emergency funding and capacity) and deepening economic constraints which directly impact on VCFSE organisations in terms of expenditure and funding, as public services face significant budgetary pressures. Bury is not immune to such challenges but is keen to strengthen collaboration with the VCFSE sector to best support local people and communities.
- 5.3 Within the local sector there are a wealth of groups of different size, reach and focus, as the recent State of the Sector survey demonstrates:
- 1,249 voluntary organisations, community groups and social enterprises making a difference in Bury, ranging from local arms of national charities, to hyper-local mutual aid networks supporting specific communities of interest, and experience.
 - 71% of these organisations are micro-organisations with an annual income of under £10k

- 13% of the sector as being a social enterprise
- 91% of organisations have some direct dealings with other VCFSE organisations
- ONS data outlines a paid employee workforce of 4,019 in Bury's VCFSE sector, equivalent to 2,452 FTE, a contribution of £44m per annum to the local economy. 44% of organisational responses indicated they paid the living wage.
- The survey estimates that there are 26,229 volunteers supporting the VCFSE sector in Bury, providing approximately 131,145 hours of time each week; making an economic contribution of £65m per annum.
- The four main areas of work identified by the survey responses were physical activity sport and leisure; Community Development; Wellbeing, Health and Social Care; and Economic Wellbeing

5.4 The National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA), recognises that: *Strong local infrastructure enables communities to influence decision making, builds partnerships and networks and encourages volunteering opportunities. When this support is accessible locally, individuals and communities thrive.*

5.5 In Bury, infrastructure support to the VCFSE is provided by Bury Voluntary and Community Faith Alliance (Bury VCFA). Formed in 2017, the Bury VCFA is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, registered with the Charity Commission, and has developed into an integral partner in Team Bury through the development and delivery of the *LET'S Do It!* strategy.

5.6 Through Bury VCFA:

- Over the last twelve months £230,007 has been administered by the VCFA in investment into the sector, relating to community safety, anti-poverty provision and physical wellbeing interventions. In addition the VCFA has directly secured investment into Bury's VCFSE sector from 10GM (£8k), The Albert Gubay Foundation (£40k) Bury Primary Care Network (£37k), Forever Manchester Foundation (£22k), the National Lottery Community Funding (£48k) and for the provision of an LGBTQI role (£30k). This is in addition to funding brought in by individual VCFSE organisations who have been signposted to, or supported in funding approaches, by the VCFA.
- In 2022/23 to date, 287 groups have received development support including funding searches; bid checks; support with governance and legal structures; start-up guidance for completely new groups; setting aims and objectives; development of constitutions and registration with the Charity Commission; and support on recruiting volunteers.
- This support included the delivery of training to organisations on adult safeguarding; governance; bid writing (including storytelling); Connect 5 Mental Health training and trauma informed practice.
- In the last quarter alone, 101 different funding opportunities were shared through the VCFA through regular funding bulletins and Meet the Funder events.

5.7 The current Service Level Agreement with the Bury VCFA, at an investment level of £170k per annum, comes to an end on 31st March 2023.

5.8 In order to further strengthen the infrastructure provision, to deliver as per 5.4, the SLA has been revised to take into account of the changing landscape the sector is operating in:

- *Legacy and learning from Covid* – including further developing the vital role (and recognition of) volunteering in the Borough whilst adapting to ongoing cost pressures as a result of the pandemic.
- *GM VCSE Accord* - within Greater Manchester leaders in local government, health and the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE) signed a new GM VCSE Accord in October 2021 to work together in a collaborative way to tackle entrenched inequalities. This was locally endorsed by Bury Council on 17th November 2021.
- *Delivery of LET's Do It* – both in terms of practical delivery but also empowering and enabling the principles which underpin such activity, of focus and targeting in local neighbourhoods; demonstrating an enterprising spirit: to bring together and grow the strengths of local communities by increasingly working together, to deliver 'with' and 'by' not 'to' local people.

5.9 NAVCA outline 4 functions for thriving communities, where people belong and can take action on things that matter to them.

- Leadership and Advocacy
- Partnerships and Collaborations
- Capacity Building
- Volunteering

5.10 These functions have formed the framework for the specification with Bury VCFA, to which specifics in relation to the *LET'S Do it!* delivery and local priorities have been highlighted. This builds on the existing delivery by the VCFA against these 4 functions, with examples provided in the table below.

Leadership and advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitation of the Bury Older People's Network, bringing together both individuals and VCSE groups to champion the voice of older people in the issues important to them, eg, cost of living, transport, access to GP's, feeding these insights into strategic spaces. • Facilitation of the Bury VCSE Leadership Group – providing a conduit for partners to engage with the VCSE sector and vice-versa.
Partnerships and collaborations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home from Hospital: bringing partners together to learn from other VCSE models in GM and developing a new model for Bury – through VCFA involvement an additional £120k has been invested in the local VCFSE sector through this work. • Facilitation of conversations between strategic partners and the Bury Community Support Network

	who deliver a wealth of services in tackling poverty in Bury and development sessions to determine future role of the Network in supporting the Cost of Living Strategy.
Capacity building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hosting the VRU (Violence Reduction Unit) community-led pilot in East Bury and working with the four VCSE Alliance organisations to create a strong local offer connected to other initiatives including the Family Hub and other early help/preventative services. • Delivery of Standing Together and Cost of Living grants to the VCSE sector – including ‘wrap-around’ development support to enable strong bids, briefings, payment processing and monitoring and evaluation with successful applicants. Sharing insights from funded projects with system partners to showcase the breadth of VCSE sector activity in order to stimulate further development of these essential person-centred, locality-based interventions.
Volunteering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting good practice in volunteer management through training for VCSE volunteer-involving groups and providing a ‘Volunteer Bank’ facility for individuals to register for opportunities. • Development of the new Volunteering Strategy which contains system-wide commitments to ensuring Bury is a great place to volunteer and recognising the benefits that volunteering brings to individuals and community wealth building.

5.11 It is proposed to maintain the existing level of funding provision. Previously funded from health and care transformation monies and more recently Contain Outbreak Management Funds, work is taking place to secure long term investment in such infrastructure provision as part of core budgets across the Team Bury system. In the immediacy, Council funding to the level of the existing agreement has been identified. The funding level is consistent with previous years, recognising that there is additional activity and leadership through Bury VCFA whilst addressing the budget constraints the Council is facing.

5.12 To note, the VCFA will be in receipt of an additional £30k in 2023/24 and 2024/25 as a result of UK Shared Prosperity Funding (UKSPF) through collaborative work across infrastructure organisations across Greater Manchester through 10GM. The UKSPF investment is specifically to supplement locality investment rather than be an alternative funding source.

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Links with the Corporate Priorities:

Bury's *LET'S Do It!* strategy repeatedly demonstrates the crucial role community, voluntary and faith-based groups and social enterprises play in our local neighbourhoods and the opportunities for the sector to be central to delivering our collective vision for the future. Through the Team Bury partnership and in particular the Delivery Co-Ordination group, there is a pivotal role for the VCFSE infrastructure provider to assure, enable and exploit the exciting opportunities set out in both the plan and crucially the principles for delivery – to ensure the VCFSE in Bury is integral to developing resilient neighbourhoods, where local people are inspired and enabled to come together to improve local outcomes.

Across every pledge and pillar of the plan the voluntary and community sector will continue to drive collaborative activity in our communities to strengthen community capacity and assets and increasingly connect people to these, to drive self-help, self-care and wellbeing. By working at a neighbourhood level the sector will increasingly connect the most vulnerable with resources and support that best meets their needs and to play a more active role in their communities and take control of their own lives. This builds on the work of Bury's Community Hubs during the pandemic and evolution of Bury's neighbourhood model.

It is in this context the Borough is seeking to secure VCFSE infrastructure provision that best enables the sector, wider system and therefore local communities to deliver on our plan and realise the improved outcomes for local people.

Equality Impact and Considerations:

Bury VCFA lead a number of inclusion related groups, bringing together voluntary and community organisations to co-ordinate and collaborate activity in relation to inclusion in Bury.

Inclusion is specifically referenced within the SLA specification, in terms of increasing seldom heard voices across the sector, increasing representation within and across the sector, and Bury's Inclusion Strategy referenced in relation to accessibility of provision. As such the refreshed agreement strengthens system leadership within the VCFSE on inclusion.

Environmental Impact and Considerations:

Bury VCFA provide infrastructure support across the voluntary and community sector, including to community-led environmental forum and environmental concern groups.

Assessment and Mitigation of Risk:

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
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Sustainability of funding	Provision to be agreed for 2023/24 through this report to accompany discussions with Health and Care finance colleagues to identify long term commitments to infrastructure support in keeping with GM VCSE Accord. .
Opportunity for local VCFSE groups to be best positioned for local commissioning organisations	VCFA provision allows for group development, to strengthen governance and maturity of elements of the sector to be aware of, and best structured (in terms of finance and governance) to be in a position to be commissioned by health providers in particular, reducing demand and cost on statutory provision whilst increasing resilience within elements of VCFSE system locally.

Legal Implications:

There is currently a service level agreement in place between the VCA and the Council, this report proposes to maintain funding provision for a further 12 month period underpinned with the revised specification for the agreement during this time period more sustainable funding sources to be explored.

Financial Implications:

As noted in the report at 5.11 various sources of non recurrent funding have been used to fund this service level agreement in the past. The intention in 2023/24 is to combine a number of smaller budgets for this to continue and to work with public sector partners throughout the year to identify a more sustainable funding source for 2024/25.

Appendices:

Bury VCFSE Infrastructure Support specification 2023.

Background papers:

N/A.

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

Term	Meaning
NAVCA	National Association for Voluntary and Community Action
VCFA	Voluntary and Community Faith Alliance
VCFSE	Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise sector