

Report to:	Cabinet	Date: 05 March 2025
Subject:	Supporting Local Infrastructure Organisation provision for Bury's Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise Sector from April 2025	
Report of	Cabinet Member for Communities and Inclusion	

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 as a core component in delivering improved outcomes for local people.
- 1.2 Central to a strong local voluntary sector is a high quality, connected and well led local infrastructure organisation (LIO). Local Infrastructure provision is the beating heart of a district's voluntary sector and this specification sets out the requirements for infrastructure provision for the Borough of Bury.
- 1.3 Infrastructure provision is currently provided in the Borough through the Bury Voluntary and Community Faith Alliance, which provides quality assured support, accredited by the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action. In the last two years there has been significant progress against the pillars of leadership and advocacy; partnerships and collaboration; capacity building; and volunteering
- 1.4 To reflect the ongoing delivery of LET'S Do It, the specification for VCFSE local infrastructure provision has been updated and tailored to reflect the latest regional and local context and priorities. It is proposed that the funding agreement with the Bury VCFA continues to increase the resilience of the LIO as a core partner for the Council and broader Team Bury Partnership. This provision is to support the 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 That the revised delivery framework with Bury Voluntary and Community Faith Alliance for local infrastructure organisation provision is agreed and funded for 2025/26, with intent signalled on continuation for the following years subject to confirmation of funding availability across the Council and public sector 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 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 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 diversity income generation streams.
- 4.2 To not update the specification would fail to capitalise on progress made in recent years but more importantly miss the opportunity to further tailor and target the focus of infrastructure support provision to be an enabler and facilitator of a sector contributing in a pivotal way to realising the Borough's LETS vision. 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.

Report Author and Contact Details:

Name: Chris Woodhouse
Position: Strategic Partnerships Manager
Department: Corporate Core
E-mail: c.woodhouse@bury.gov.uk

Background

- 5.1 The Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (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 Bury's LET'S Do It! strategy and approach sets out the importance of the role and impact of the sector on local communities, with the ecosystem of different VCFSE organisations spanning across communities of place, identity and experience.

5.3 Within the local sector there are wealth of groups of different size, reach and focus, as the most recent State of the Sector survey demonstrates, which outlines that Bury's VCFSE sector has:

- 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, proving approximately 131,145 hours of time each week; making an economic contribution of £65m per annum.

5.4 The National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA) emphasised in 2024 that, *"An active voluntary and community sector needs consistent, high quality support from local VCFSE infrastructure support organisations (LIOs). LIOs act as both convenor and connector at place between different statutory bodies, local authorities, charities and VCS organisations that, when working together in partnership, drive and accelerate action, and contribute to positive change."*

<https://www.navca.org.uk/news/the-power-of-local-infrastructure-how-a-new-government-can-work-with-navca-members>

Local Infrastructure Organisations

6.1 A Local Infrastructure Organisation is a voluntary/community group in its own right (with respective governance and charitable objectives set out as required by the Charities Commission) but whose principal purpose is to co-ordinate, facilitate and support the broader ecosystem of VCFSE groups in a given area. Typically, this is through:

- Building strategic relationships and bringing together community knowledge and skills.
- Developing partnerships with key organisations and enabling collaboration.
- Acting as a trusted partner, effectively communicating with and representing communities.
- Building the capacity of VCFSE organisations.
- Supporting early intervention and providing rapid response in crises.
- Contributing to local economic development through employment and volunteering

- 6.2 Local Infrastructure Organisations advocate and champion for the sector, nurture the conditions of the ecosystem to allow it to flourish. They provide insight to/from the ecosystem and ensure that it is representatively represented in partnership activity (planning, delivery and evaluation). They act as convenors and facilitators as much as direct delivery vehicles of services and are not regulatory bodies or inspectorates, but provide support to ensure organisations and networks on meeting such regulations.
- 6.3 Nationally, NAVCA have set out the key components of what would enable LIO's to fulfil their role in improving outcomes for local people, which has informed this report and set in the context of *LET's Do It!*
- Work with the VCFSE sector as an equal strategic partner
 - Work with the VCFSE sector at an early stage to help define problems, hear the voice of lived experience, and co-design services to meet need.
 - Deliver long term stable and sustainable commissioning and funding arrangements
 - Invest in local infrastructure as the convenor, partnership enabler and capacity builder to enable communities and the VCFSE to thrive
- 6.4 Regionally the opportunities to further this taken place through Bury's active involvement with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership and Greater Manchester VCSE Leadership Group. Through this work Bury has signed up to the GM VCSE Accord, where leaders in local government, health and the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE) committed work together in a collaborative way to tackle entrenched inequalities.

LIO Provision in Bury - progress

- 7.1 In Bury, infrastructure support to the VCFSE is provided by Bury Voluntary and Community Faith Alliance (Bury VCFA). Unlike in some other Boroughs in Greater Manchester, namely Manchester, Salford and Bolton, there has not been a long-established infrastructure provision in Bury. Salford CVS for instance has been in existence in its current form since 1973 and has connections back to the start of the 20th century.
- 7.2 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.
- 7.3 As referenced, the VCFA is a VCFSE organisation its own right, and therefore is required to set out their purpose through the Charity Commission for England and Wales: *To promote and strengthen the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise sector for the benefit of the community in the Borough of Bury. To coordinate, organise and enable partnership working to enable positive change in communities.*

7.4 In 2023, Bury VCFA become the first LIO in Greater Manchester to be successfully achieve the Local Infrastructure Quality Accreditation from NAVCA, the national membership body for local infrastructure organisations, whose quality assurance framework is used to benchmark LIO activity in order to best support the voluntary and community sector in England. Bury VCFA Chief Office produced this short video for NAVCA outlining the Accreditation they achieved: [LIQA - Bury VCFA - NAVCA \(youtube.com\)](#). [Bury VCFA was the first LIO in GM to receive this accreditation.](#)

7.5 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

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"> • Leadership alongside the Bury VCSE Leadership Group or a cross-sectoral Team Bury 'LET'S Connect' session to promote connectivity between the public, private and VCFSE sectors and launch the Bury Volunteering Strategy • Active role in GM Accord Development and GM VCSE Leadership group, including hosting the GM Accord Forum in Bury in March 2024 to highlight Bury's LETS approach and embedding the commitments of the Accord and Fair Funding Protocol; and more recently the shaping of the GM Live Well Model • Leadership and facilitation of service codesign including the VCFSE element of the Living Well Mental Health Model and work with the Bury Older People's Network. • Championing workforce development and voice, including as a new Supporter of the Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter; leadership of the Community Cohesion workstream of the Community Safety Partnership and Be A Good Neighbour This Winter campaign.
Partnerships and collaborations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of the Sustain Project focusing on food aid to food trade and shaping of a Food Pantry Toolkit • Facilitation of the Bury VCSE Leadership Group – providing a conduit for partners to engage with the VCSE sector and vice-versa.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitation of community safety related activity through the Bury Community Led Violence Reduction Programme working with young people and their families to address the underlying causes of violence and build aspiration and opportunity. • Work with 10GM and GM Moving on a Test and Learn Pilot site to implement the Sport England and GM Moving ambition of connecting communities. • Collaboration through the GM Workforce Development programme including cross-sector delivery of the Northern Care Alliance Leadership Training • Working alongside Pennine Care and connecting to multi-disciplinary teams, facilitation of a link Worker specialising in housing and welfare support based within the Irwell Unit of Fairfield Hospital
Capacity building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the last year 183 VCSE groups and organisations have received bespoke 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. • Over the last twelve months over £305k of funding and investment has been distributed by the VCFA in investment into the sector, relating to community safety, anti-poverty provision, culture grants, volunteer recognition and physical wellbeing interventions. Funding leveraged by VCFA in 2023-2025 comes to £688,684 including GM Moving; Community Led Violence Reduction Unit; UK Shared Prosperity funding on capacity building and social economy and LGBTQI Forum. Over 350 funding opportunities have been promoted in adding to an expansion of 'Meet the Funder' events to support local groups in accessing external funding including sessions with Forever Manchester, National Lottery and Easy Fundraising.
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.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. • Facilitation of a volunteer development forum to provide learning opportunities, networking and peer support. This has included a focus on volunteer retention and supported the development of new support factsheet. • Working alongside Bury Council, Bury VCFA co-ordinated the delivery of LET's Value Volunteering grants to support volunteer thanks and recognition.
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LIO Provision in Bury – proposal

- 8.1 Through the continued delivery of Bury's LET'S Do It strategy, the importance of the voluntary and community sector in enabling improved outcomes for local communities is as high as ever. In this context it is recognise that a strong and forward-looking local infrastructure provision is vital.
- 8.2 Based on ongoing conversations, both formally through networks such as Team Bury and the Public Service Reform Steering Group; through conversations with sector leads, and through insight gathered through organic discussions across sectors, an updated specification has been developed. This builds on previous work and is anchored in both the pillars of local infrastructure provision as set out by NAVCA, but crucially these have been set against the principles set out in LET's Do It! and are detailed in Appendix A. This recognises the maturing of the LIO over recent years and the context of ongoing challenges and legacy of the social and economic effects of Covid and financial pressures
- 8.3 Where possible the specification sets the outcomes to be achieved rather than overly 'prescribing' a set of tasks, recognising the LIO will be able to craft delivery with and through the sector through 'working with' colleagues and partners.
- 8.4 Examples of the key areas of amplification and revised focus in the updated specification are:
 - Updated reference to the nation and regional policy landscape and the opportunities these present for leadership, advocacy and collaboration, including the GM Live Well Model and Prevention Demonstrator.
 - More explicit reference to the role the LIO can play in championing and support system leadership on safeguarding arrangements, particularly in the context of Working Together.
 - Further sharpen the focus of the role an LIO can play as a partner in enhancing Bury's neighbourhood model particularly in facilitating, brokering and enabling people to come together around a common

bond, issue or opportunity. Specifically to reference Family Hub approach and living Well Mental Health Model.

- Specific focus on identification and foundational support to new and emerging communities and networks, taking an early help approach. Escalating the insight into commission discussions whilst coalescing individuals/ networks with fundamental infrastructure support.
- Use insight of commissioning activity and opportunities between Team Bury partnerships and VCFSE system to identify gaps in community-led provision (and seek opportunities to collaborative address); to link smaller organisations into opportunities generated by larger commissions; to foster collaboration between providers for joint submissions.
- Greater emphasis on the role of volunteering as a route into (re-) employment and skills development, as part of work of achieving NAVCA Volunteer Centre Quality Accreditation

- 8.5 The current Service Level Agreement with the Bury VCFA, at an investment level of £170k per annum, comes to an end on 31st March 2025. This specification has been developed at a time of significant socio-economic pressures, as the sector and wider system recovers from the legacies of 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. There is the ever-present challenge of seeking to manage financial pressures that take effect of reducing Council budgets, seeking a diversification of income sources, increased organisational running costs and providing fair funding in keeping with the VCSE Accord.
- 8.6 This report sets out the intention for developing investment in local VCFSE infrastructure, aligned to LET's Do It! to build on the growing foundations through the Bury VCFA. It is recognised that longer term agreements provide resilience in terms of business planning and in furthering partnership relationships. This aligns with the spirit of the GM VCSE Accord and the developing Memorandum of Understanding between Bury's VCFSE sector and public services.
- 8.7 A challenge is pressures on the Council's funding position, as recognised in the recent budget report. Funding has been identified, at the current level of investment (£170k pa) for the 2025/2026 financial year through a combination of Council (including Public Health) monies and Community Safety Partnership contribution, with work continuing to take place to secure long term investment in such infrastructure provision as part of core budgets across the Team Bury system.

Links with the Corporate Priorities:

Please summarise how this links to the Let's Do It Strategy.

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, 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.

Equality Impact and Considerations:

*Please provide an explanation of the outcome(s) of an initial or full EIA and make **specific reference regarding the protected characteristic of Looked After Children**. Intranet link to EIA documents is [here](#).*

A full EIA has been carried The activity presents significant opportunities to strengthen inclusion across the borough as such this is likely to have only positive impacts on most characteristics.

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.

Increased reference to Safeguarding, including Working Together is included and there is a specific Children and Young People Voluntary Sector Forum which is facilitated through the Local Infrastructure Organisation and chaired by one of the Bury VCFA trustees.

Environmental Impact and Considerations:

Please provide an explanation of the Environmental impact of this decision. Please include the impact on both **Carbon emissions** (contact climate@bury.gov.uk for advice) and **Biodiversity** (contact c.m.wilkinson@bury.gov.uk for advice)

Bury VCFA work with a number of climate action related groups and networks, from links place based Climate Action Partnerships to 'Friends of' Groups with local parks and green spaces to increase public guardianship. This includes provided group/network development support, promotion of funding opportunities and opportunities for collaboration.

Assessment and Mitigation of Risk:

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
Sustainability of funding	Provision to be agreed for 2025/26 through this report to accompany discussions with Team Bury 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:

1. A grant agreement will need to be put in place between the Council and the VCFA setting out the purpose for which the grant is being given and the conditions which apply to this. It is noted that while there is certainty in respect of the funding for financial year 2025/26, the subsequent four financial years will be dependent upon funds being available, and this will need to be reflected in the terms of the grant.
2. When awarding grants, the Council must have regard to the provisions of the Subsidy Control Act 2022. This grant is likely to meet the definition of a subsidy, but it must be assessed for compliance with the subsidy control principles before being awarded, the starting point being the reasons for the subsidy being given as set out earlier in the report and why the provision which the Council is supporting would otherwise remain unfunded.

Financial Implications:

Funding has been identified to support the continuation of the current arrangements in 2025/26. Further work will be undertaken with Team Bury partners to identify ongoing funding as part of the development of the 2026/27 budget.

Appendices:

Please list any appended documents.

Appendix A: Bury VCFSE Infrastructure Support specification 2025

Background papers:

Please list any background documents to this report and include a hyperlink where possible.

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

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