

VCFSE STRATEGY PROGRESS REPORT

Report of Cabinet Member for Communities, Culture and Transport

1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update members on impact of work undertaken to achieve the ambitions set out in our Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) Sector Strategy, in the 12 months from April 2023 to March 2024.
- 1.2 Specifically, the report references our support and achievements as they relate to VCFSE strategy priorities:
 1. VCFSE Investment
 2. VCFSE Capacity Building
 3. Building Community Power through VCFSE partners
- 1.3 These priorities are also embedded within our ambitions for neighbourhood working, through Stockport's Neighbourhoods and Prevention Programme (One Stockport Local).
- 1.4 We last presented an update to this committee in August 2023 [VCFSE Strategy Update - August 2023](#). This report builds on that update and provides further detail on Stockport's VCFSE sector.
- 1.5 This report was written with the support and contributions of VCFSE partners, most notably Stockport's VCFSE Infrastructure organisation, Sector 3.

2. BACKGROUND AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT

- 2.1 Stockport is home to a thriving, diverse, talented and passionate Voluntary Community Faith and Social Enterprise sector. Our commitment to supporting a thriving VCFSE sector is outlined in The One Stockport Borough Plan [The Stockport Borough Plan - One Stockport](#), One Future <https://www.onestockport.co.uk/one-future-plan/>, and Stockport's VCFSE strategy launched last year ([VCFSE+Strategy+2023.pdf \(squarespace.com\)](#)).
- 2.2 The strategy was co-produced by partners from across the private, public and third sectors and sets out a clear strategic intent and ambition for Stockport's VCFSE sector. It is reflective of the important value and contributions that organisations and volunteers give to Stockport, our residents and our neighbourhoods.
- 2.3 The priorities in this strategy are aligned to key partnership and council programmes of work. For example, investment and capacity building for the VCFSE sector is a key priority for our Neighbourhoods and Prevention Programme. At its core, this recognises the importance of a resilient and connected community to making people feel at home in their local area. We know that when people face challenges, they look for help and support locally. This often includes seeking support from local VCFSE organisations. who help people to feel

connected and included, as well as providing vital information, advice and support as well as care to local spaces.

- 2.4 In 2021, in order to better understand the sector locally, Stockport Council along with Sector 3 commissioned the State of the Sector Report ([State of the Stockport VCSE Sector 2021 — Sector 3 Stockport \(sector3sk.org\)](#)). The research described the significant breadth of the support provided to our communities through the local VCFSE sector, the invaluable contribution of services and support through the pandemic and the contribution made by the sector to Stockport's local economy, alongside the challenges faced by many of our VCFSE partners.
- 2.5 The findings of this report are still relevant, as VCFSE partners face increasing demand for services, continue to provide support to some of our most vulnerable residents, and do so in a climate where access to funding for VCFSE organisations is increasingly competitive.

3. VCFSE and Community Cohesion

- 3.1 Recently, Stockport, along with communities across the UK, has witnessed an increase in racism, Islamophobia, far-right activity and community tension. During this period, the Council with Greater Manchester Police (GMP), convened a multi-agency tension monitoring group which met daily to coordinate our local response, liaise with Greater Manchester and share intelligence.
- 3.2 Alongside this, we also actively reaching out and meeting with our community leaders to understand their concerns, provide reassurance and discuss the ideas and actions we want to see for Stockport. VCFSE sector partners have been at the forefront of the support we have provided to residents, even when many of our VCFSE partners, staff and volunteers have been personally affected by these actions.
- 3.3 The issues that have come to the fore demonstrate that partnership working and Stockport's brilliant VCFSE sector have never been more important. In this context the contribution of the sector towards community cohesion and creating communities of acceptance where hatred is not tolerated must continue, and will be a top priority for the future. We are convening a community cohesion working group, this will look at key priorities including: investment in community development/ rebuilding trust; working with schools and youth justice around prevention and radicalisation; review of our hate crime reporting and support offer; proactive communications and engagement; and, our approach to insight gathering and monitoring tensions
- 3.4 We will be bringing a report which will outline our plans to develop a community cohesion strategy to the next scrutiny cycle in October.

4. ACHIEVEMENTS against our VCFSE strategic priorities

PRIORITY 1: INVESTMENT

- 4.1 This priority was about ensuring we are maximising investment opportunities for the sector. This includes local grants, commissioning arrangements and maximising external investment (including through social value).

Community Investment through One Stockport Local Fund

4.2 Our Community Investment priorities in 2023-24 were as follows:

- Sustainable funding for the sector
- Investing in the VCFSE sector
- Maximising opportunities for Social Value

4.3 Between April 2023 and March 2024, the fund delivered several targeted funding rounds. This was in response to the findings of a review of the fund, completed in the summer of 2022, which highlighted that VCFSE organisations welcomed more opportunities to apply for funding throughout the year, alongside thematically focussed grant opportunities. Some highlights from the grant funding rounds in this period are provided below:

GM Standing Together Grant (GMST)

4.4 Stockport Council receives the GM Standing Together Community Safety grant, worth £100,000 per annum, to support our Community Safety and Community Cohesion priorities. The fund is allocated by Greater Manchester Combined Authority to support VCFSE partners to provide support and services around the following thematic priorities:

- Public protection and youth diversion
- Protecting vulnerable groups
- Promoting community cohesion

4.5 In April 2023 Stockport Council opted to underwrite GMST so that we could award up to 3 years of funding to VCFSE organisations, thereby supporting the sustainable funding priority set out in the Greater Manchester VCFSE Sector Accord [Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise Accord - Greater Manchester Combined Authority \(greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk\)](#).

Warm and Well Grants

4.6 In the autumn and winter of 2023, with key learning from our 2022 award-nominated Warm Spaces project, we launched Warm and Well, with grants of up to £1,000 awarded between 25th September and 31st December 2023 for activities delivered no later than 31st March 2024.

4.7 A Warm and Well launch event was held at Stockport County on Wednesday 25th October at their Social Wellbeing group, followed by a Money Maximising Roadshow. Warm and Well was also an opportunity to promote access to our Cost-of-Living Hub and helpline to ensure residents had access to the support when needed. The 'Hub & Spoke' Model connected all Warm Spaces to a local library, helping promote local financial/digital and social inclusion and wellbeing support.

4.8 Some examples of innovative Warm and Well ideas are described below:

- Clothing swaps
- Slow cooker projects
- Sewing and altering clothes by hand classes
- Paint swaps and upcycling workshops

4.9 It is now timely to take stock of the Warm Spaces funding as such a review of this is currently underway.

Town of Culture Grants

- 4.10 In July 2023, Stockport Council became GM Town of Culture and was awarded funding to support activities aligned with our local Town of Culture priorities (Stockport Tastes, Stockport Sounds, Stockport Makes, Stockport Moves).
- 4.11 74 projects, activities and events were delivered through small grants of up to £500 administered through One Stockport Local Fund. The local knowledge, reach and connections developed through the One Stockport Local Fund were key to ensuring smaller community groups and organisations from across the borough were able to apply for funding and that all residents and communities had the opportunity to benefit from cultural activities in their local communities.

Commissioning with the VCFSE

- 4.12 Across the Adults and Childrens system, there are strong examples of commissioning local organisations to enhance the offer to residents. One area of focus this past year has been developing new offers and approaches to offering short breaks to children with a special educational need or disability. The VCFSE have also been core delivery partners in the roll out of Family Hubs. There has also been a huge amount of work in adult social care and health, including joint work with Signpost for Carers in developing a carers strategy.

Social Value: Match My Project

- 4.13 Stockport is home to a myriad of thriving businesses wanting to make a difference in their local communities. In 2024 Match My Project was launched in Stockport, in partnership with Sector 3, as a way of supporting these priorities and enhancing the work already taking place to maximise social value opportunities in Stockport. Match My Project is an online platform which connects businesses with community organisations and residents to deliver social impact in our local communities.

PRIORITY 2: VCFSE Capacity Building

4.14 Investment and partnership working with Sector 3

Stockport Council works closely with our local VCFSE Infrastructure Sector 3. In 2021 we agreed a 3-year strategic grant for Sector 3 with the aim of growing a resilient infrastructure network/ organisation for Stockport's VCFSE. The ambition was very much around facilitating growth, capacity and resilience across the sector.

The specific focus was:

- Developing strategic sector voice
- Growing volunteering
- Strengthening the activities of local VCFSE (Voluntary, Community, Faith, and Social Enterprise) organisations through training, funding, advice, and guidance.
- Building stronger partnerships with local organisations.
- Ensuring diverse groups are represented within decision-making bodies, committees, and community forums.
- Encouraging active participation from individuals of different backgrounds, ensuring their voices are heard and valued.
- Addressing specific issues related to identity, place, and interest through joint initiatives

4.15 We have also funded Sector 3 for additional support and focussed work, including:

- Development of Community Champions programme: to recruit and train local residents as community champions to enhance access to local health and wellbeing services through proactive community outreach, providing information, and signposting.
- Funding Development Lead: with a focus on empowering VCFSE (Voluntary, Community, Faith, and Social Enterprise) organisations in Stockport to independently secure funding.

4.16 Sector3 continue to make significant strides in the delivery of the VCFSE Strategy for Stockport, some examples of these include:

- Launched the inaugural Stockport Rocks! Volunteer awards
- Successfully hosted an event with 40 organisations in attendance.
- Delivered 3 training sessions, engaging 30 organisations.
- Provided VCFSE representation at 12 Stockport Council strategic boards.
- Uploaded 30 new volunteer opportunities, receiving 90 applications from residents eager to volunteer.
- Recruited and trained 12 new community champions.
- Represented the local VCFSE sector at a Greater Manchester level
- Leading impactful work in Stockport by encouraging startups and supporting new social enterprises through the Proper Good programme.

4.17 Sector3 have also been working closely with VCFSE leaders and representatives to develop a new VCFSE alliance which will be launched in September this year. This alliance will provide a focal point and forum for delivery of the VCFSE strategy and facilitate strong partnerships with the intention of ensuring a thriving and resilient VCFSE sector.

Growing and supporting local volunteering

4.18 Volunteers are the lifeblood of our communities and have a massive impact on the lives of all residents. Coming from all walks of life, all ages, backgrounds, and communities. There is an estimated 57,000 volunteers in Stockport and they bring a diverse and unique range of perspectives and skills with a shared passion to make a difference for local people or places in Stockport.

4.19 An important focus of the VCFSE strategy is the growth and support of volunteering. This is hugely reflective of the important contribution of volunteers during the Covid-19 pandemic. The legacy of which is the Stockport Volunteer Hub.

4.20 This year also saw the launch of Stockport's inaugural volunteer awards, Stockport Rocks! The awards celebrated 150 volunteers, who had been nominated from across the community, and saw 400 guests gather at Edgeley Park to honour the dedication and selfless contributions of local volunteers. The event followed Volunteers Week, an annual celebration during the first week of June to showcase and give thanks to volunteers up and down the country.

4.21 Some other areas of development for this priority over the last 12 months include:

- Sector3 launched their new Volunteer Hub to support local VCFSE organisations to recruit and support volunteers and support the sector to develop their volunteering practices

- A new volunteer co-ordinator network was launched to support VCFSE organisations to learn, collaborate and improve their volunteering practice
- Sector3 hosted three “Meet, Greet and Grow” events for our local VCFSE organisation
- Our Warm Spaces Offer has seen hundreds of volunteers supporting our local charities, community groups and libraries, so that we could open up community spaces to provide a warm welcome, hot food and drinks over the winter months, for some of our most vulnerable residents.
- 376 active DigiKnow volunteers have helped residents to access data, devices and digital skills.
- Our DigiKnow partners are supporting local VCFSEs to grow their digital capacity through the donation of devices, software and consultancy support.

Supporting Social Enterprises to grow and flourish (Proper Good)

4.22 Proper Good is a community organisation and partnership, delivered with strategic support from Sector 3. It was launched in 2022, to support local social enterprises to grow and flourish. Proper Good has been incredibly active and impactful in supporting our local social economy. Key achievements this past year include:

- Launch event attended by over 70 cross sector partners
- 8 Flourishing Fridays
- 4 Community Soups with 12 pitches
- CPD Day
- 12 Indie Bookkeeping sessions
- 12 beneficiaries of 48 hours of 1:1 Mentoring
- 8 beneficiaries of small group support sessions
- Tailored sessions for example on finance (6x) and social investment (2x)
- National social enterprise day showcase and Celebration
- Six social enterprise steering group meet-ups
- Social Enterprise Christmas Marketplace

Ensuring we are a 100% digitally inclusive borough - DigiKnow

4.23 Our award winning DigiKnow partnership continues to supporting better access to digital skills, devices and data for all of our residents. The update below on DigiKnow relates specifically to activity which has supported our VCFSE strategy priorities. However it is important to note that the alliance is wider reaching and supports our strategic digital priorities. Some examples include:

- ***Improving the reach of our DigiKnow Partnership.*** This year DigiKnow was shortlisted for 2 national awards and also expanded membership to include 25 new organisations, five of which are VCFSE partners.
- ***Joining up our digital inclusion and financial inclusion support.*** For example, DigiKnow partners involved in delivering activities for school age children has enabled outreach to parents on low income for devices and improvement of their digital skills.
- VCFSE providers, Viaduct and Starting Point working together to strengthen to ***support more residents to get online to improve their health and wellbeing and access health services*** and support for example: train health colleagues as Digital Friends; producing videos in partnership with Viaduct to show people how to get the NHS App and another video of NHS staff talking about the benefits of getting online for your health.

- Digifest Town of Culture activities culminating in a local Digifest Conference in February 2024

Building VCFSE capacity through new investment in Digital Volunteering

4.24 In November 2023, Starting Point (DigiKnow co-founder) were awarded £220,000 of funding over 2 years, from Big Lottery. The grant funding has enabled Starting Point to develop a new online volunteer training and resources toolkit which is being rolled out across our DigiKnow partnership.

Building VCFSE digital capacity by distributing devices to support our VCFSE partners

4.25 Community Computers, a local community interest company who restore and renovate used digital devices which they then sell on at low cost to people who might otherwise not be able to get online. They are also helping local VCFSE sector organisations. Over the past year for example Community Computers supported five of our Equity Network Partners with free laptops and software.

VCFSE capacity building to support Migrant Communities

4.26 The VCFSE sector are essential to make sure that our residents from migrant backgrounds, many of whom are very vulnerable, feel supported and welcomed and can access information, advice and support here in Stockport. This area was particularly identified as a priority for capacity building in response to additional requests for support for new communities such as from Ukraine and Afghanistan.

4.27 Support from the VCFSE sector and other partners is wide and varied, and some of this support provided this year is summarised below:

- Yaran a specialist mental health charity also have a regular presence at our contingency accommodation sites, offering one to one and group support sessions, yoga, holistic therapies and art therapy.
- Our Multifaith Network has provided a range of informal support, for instance through volunteers offering weekly volunteer led ESOL classes and co-ordinating the distribution of clothing.
- 3rd wave have distributed pre-loved bicycles and ran bicycle repair and maintenance classes, pram repair sessions and mindfulness activities
- SREP youth workers have delivered one to one support to young people, group cookery, ESOL, women only and men only wellbeing sessions
- Refugee Action are supporting people through the asylum process, offering casework and move on support
- Webb Lane Allotment offer grow cook eat sessions and wellbeing through access to their allotment
- Pure Innovations co-ordinate a social prescribing offer for asylum seekers and help people to access community support
- Social support and welcome packs through Stockport Ukrainian Centre
- Support for hosts and guests to maintain healthy relationships through Reset

PRIORITY 3: COMMUNITY POWER

Community Power through Community Networks

4.28 Stockport Council, with Sector 3 and equality leaders have been working together to improve the way we engage with, and support communities of identity, through the

creation of Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) networks. There are eight VCFSE led EDI networks in Stockport:

- Women and Girls
- Veterans
- LGBTQI+
- Stockport Race Equality Partnership (SREP)
- Disability Network
- Young People's Network
- Refugee and Asylum Seekers Network
- SEND network

4.29 We have invested in our VCFSE partners to lead the networks through One Stockport Local Fund, and whilst each network has flexibility to develop at their own pace and to focus on activities and priorities which matter most to them, they also share several key features:

- The Chair of each network is also someone with lived experience
- Each network is also a member of Stockport's Equity Network
- Members of each network meet regularly

4.30 Networks also receive dedicated support from Council Officers and Sector3, with regular opportunities to meet together and collaborate.

4.31 Local networks consciously mirror Greater Manchester (GM) Equality and Diversity Panels, whose aim is also to enable people with lived experience to have a direct impact on GM strategy and policy.

4.32 Some further examples of joint work by networks and SMBC are included below:

Disability Network

4.33 The Disability Network worked with Adult Social Care colleagues to make our charging policy clearer and more transparent and we now fund Disability Stockport to maximise benefit uptake among social care recipients. This has helped people to maximise their income and has also contributed to a reduction in Council debt associated with care charges.

Stockport Women and Girls Network

4.34 The network has active membership base with over 50 and 60 attendees at meetings and events. It has developed an action plan which is aligned to One Stockport priorities. The network has successfully applied for funding to raise awareness of Violence Against Women and Women's Safety and recently funded a 4-week Leadership for Women Programme, focussing on goal setting, confidence building, communication, and assertiveness.

Stockport Race Equality Partnership

4.35 Stockport Race Equality Partnership hosted its second Race and Culture Awards ceremony in February 2024, to acknowledge people who work and live in Stockport, who strive to promote equality and community cohesion.

Respect Network

4.36 Our LGBTQIA+ Respect network have been supporting the regeneration of Stockport town centre, through the creation of a mural which represents all of our networks. Respect have worked closely with autistic LGBT residents and the local hate crime partnership working with police.

Stockport Armed Forces Network (SAFFCO)

4.37 Stockport Armed Forces Network is currently working towards becoming an incorporated organisation. Stockport Armed Forces Day increased footfall in the town centre by 34% on the day and SAFFCO is also supporting the development of the Greater Manchester Armed Forces strategy and delivery plans.

4.38 Stockport Interfaith network

Stockport Interfaith network has united in response to the community tensions and acts of racism and discrimination. This group will be important in shaping work around community cohesion moving forward.

4.39 Some other highlights for our networks include:

- 30 network members and organisations attended a Stockport Interfaith Round Table
- The Disability Network hosted a Christmas Family Fun Day and engaged with attendees around the One Stockport Health and Care Plan
- Equality and Diversity Summit held at Stockport Town Hall in June 2023
- January 2024 Network Leads Meeting bringing Council and VCFSE Equity Leads together to plan for the future
- Stockport Race Equality Partnership awarded £100,000 by Big Lottery to support the sustainability and further development of the Race equality Network
- EDI networks members involved in the development of the Health and Care Plan.
- Active Communities Network hosted a Community Soup event which provided small grants to support grassroots groups. Also involved in developing and delivering the Stockport Moves event.
- Green Network hosted the Greenstock event to raise awareness of climate change.

Community Power through Neighbourhood Working: Team Around the Place

4.40 There are seven Team around the Place (TAP) networks across Stockport, which provide an informal neighbourhood co-ordination and networking function for local public services and VCFSE sector organisations. Team Around the Place is a mechanism for bringing together key, multi-agency and multi-sector connectors to identify the issues which are important to a community and to develop a multi-agency response to improve health and wellbeing for our residents.

4.41 Some of the developments this year include:

- All our TAP networks have identified collective priorities and develop opportunities for collaboration
- Rolled out an Anti-Poverty small grants programme for VCFSE organisations working in their area. 36 organisations benefited from grant funding, including five community groups who had never previously received any grant funding and who have now been connected with further support from Sector3
- In the Heatons and Reddish we have been working closely with Heaton Moor medical practice to launch a pilot to increase uptake of Attendance Allowance among eligible patients.

5. FUTURE PRIORITIES

- 5.1 Priorities for the VCFSE Strategy in 2024-2025 are building on these successes and will continue – aligned with the Neighbourhoods and Prevention ambitions for One Stockport Local.
- 5.2 As our One Stockport Local offer in neighbourhoods further develops, the role of VCFSE partners will continue to be central to our ambitions to make Stockport the best place to live, work and visit. Investment and capacity building support for the VCFSE is also a key priority in terms of continuing to and to improve the health, wellbeing, prosperity and resilience of our residents.
- 5.3 In response to the unrest and acts of racism and discrimination during August, work around Equality, Diversity and Inclusion particularly community cohesion will be a key priority in the coming months. A multi-agency taskforce will drive this work alongside the community networks.
- 5.4 A brief summary of our priorities moving forward is provided below:

VCFSE strategy	Area	Focus for 2024-25
Investment	Community Investment and Capacity Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued investment in Sector 3 as VCFSE Infrastructure organisation Sector 3 Engagement with VCFSE Sector around future priorities State of The Sector Report Social Value and Corporate Social Responsibility Strategic voice of the Sector through VCFSE Alliance
Capacity Building	Digital Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued focus on devices, data and skills Developing our Digital Inclusion reach across neighbourhoods Reducing Digital Poverty Improving health and wellbeing through digital solutions Growing our Digiknow Network Development of our Digiknow Volunteer offer
	Migrant Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-ordinated support for migrant communities residing in contingency hotels Securing GM funding to develop the VCFSE offer to prevent destitution and homelessness Supporting Homes for Ukraine guests and hosts
Community Power	Equality Diversity and Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A focus on community cohesion and the codesign of a Community Cohesion Strategy for Stockport Continued investment in Equity Networks Developing closer partnership working between Equity Networks Embedding equalities objectives in our neighbourhoods and prevention programme Networks supporting development of One Stockport Partnership Plans and Strategies Roll out of our Engagement and Participation

VCFSE strategy	Area	Focus for 2024-25
		Strategy and toolkit with Networks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuing to implement the Race Equality Framework locally
	Neighbourhood Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing and strengthening the role of TAP Captains in Area Leadership Teams Roll out of Neighbourhood Profiles Developing Action Plans informed by data and intelligence Engaging with communities about what matters in neighbourhoods
	Partnership Wide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launch of Stockport's VCFSE Alliance in September 2024 to ensure parity between VCFSE, statutory and private sector partners in terms of influencing and shaping One Stockport Partnership plans, strategies and services

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 It is recommended that the committee note the achievements outlined in this report and provide comment and feedback on the future priorities described in the report

BACKGROUND PAPERS

There are none

Anyone wishing to inspect the above background papers or requiring further information should contact Kathryn Rees / Holly Rae on 07989208640 / 07800617550 or alternatively email Kathryn.Rees@stockport.gov.uk / holly.rae@stockport.gov.uk