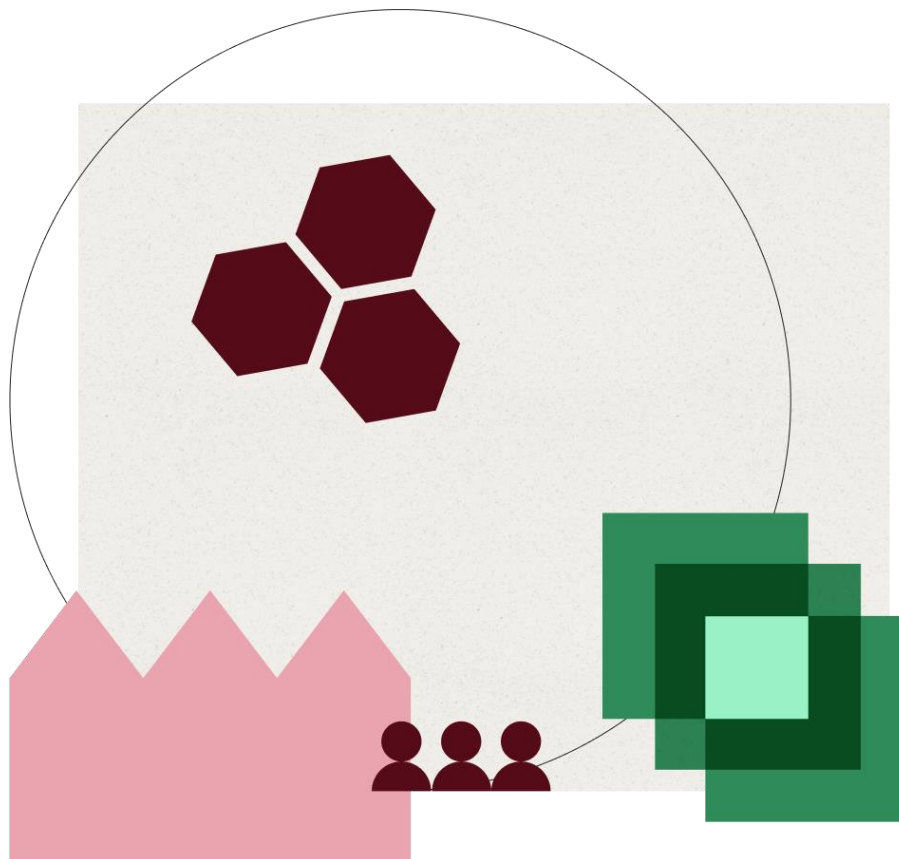


Greater Manchester VCFSE Accord Interim Progress Report

October 2024



Secretariat



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The GM VCFSE Accord is an agreement between the VCFSE sector, GMCA, its constituent local authority members and statutory partners and GM NHS Integrated Care System a relationship of mutual trust, working together, and sharing responsibility.

vcfseleadershipgm.org.uk/work/the-accord

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Executive Summary

This report sets out a 'mid-point' evaluation for the first year and a half of the current GM VCFSE Accord Delivery Plan. As the first report of its type which has been prepared about the Accord work, it will also showcase achievements since the signing of the landmark Accord agreement in 2021, take a broad view of our partnership working, examine progress towards its eight commitments of the Accord and of its success in driving system change.

This evaluation also aims to examine the difference being felt by the partners in the GM VCFSE Accord across GM, explore what has and hasn't worked in the collaboration and consider the integrity of the Accord agreement itself. The report will consider the changes which have been influenced by work carried out using the funding provided by GMCA and GM NHS Integrated Care allocated at a GM footprint to enable delivery across the city-region. However, it should be noted that it has been difficult to directly attribute cause and effect in some cases – so the report also describes the wider impact and direction of travel towards the Accord vision, aims and commitments.

The primary audiences for this evaluation are the GM VCFSE Leadership Group, GMCA and GM Integrated Care. However, it will also contain information and learning for the wider VCFSE sector, local authority, Integrated Care System and other wider and national partners.

The evaluation uses a logic model which was created for the Accord to describe the agreed commitments, outcomes and longer-term impacts which are being looked for. The activities described in the report under each commitment are acting to enable change with the result that the VCFSE sector can better deliver positive outcomes for communities and citizens in GM. The evaluation prioritises consideration of process and outputs working towards the Accord commitments set against the framework of the logic model, over attempting to prove impact through specific and cumulative measurements. It contains analysis of feedback from key stakeholders, programme management reports, products and key achievements, presenting case studies, conclusions and recommendations against the commitments and key elements of the Accord.

The report shows that there have been **significant headline activities** that include:

- scaling up the VCFSE role in operational delivery of health and care outcomes
- building a VCFSE pipeline of skills and employment support
- investment in community ownership models and community-centred economic development
- embedding the VCFSE role in mental health and wellbeing support structures
- pivotal involvement of the VCFSE sector in new models of thinking in public service delivery (for example Changing Futures, Live Well, Primary Care)
- establishing the first Alternative Provider Collaborative in England
- supporting system-level access to the voice of equalities and intersectional lived experience through the GM Equalities Network (GM=EqAI)
- improving commissioning and procurement processes and impact through the Fair Funding Protocol and GM VCFSE Commissioning Framework
- building stronger links to Greater Manchester's GM Networks Connect – which brings together activity around key aspects of poverty and inequality in society
- embracing the work of faith organisations in the GM VCFSE Accord work through interfaith mapping, GMCA covenant and interfaith statement
- supporting a VCFSE distributed leadership model and embedding the voice of the sector in GM boards and decision-making processes, and supporting a ground-breaking revolution in the delivery of population health, early intervention and prevention work across gm as highlighted in the recent King's Fund report¹ on Population Health in GM.

¹ <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/insight-and-analysis/reports/population-health-greater-manchester>

It is clear that there has been strong progress towards the Accord Commitments, evidence of increased understanding of the VCFSE sector, and the successful building of effective partnerships and relationships across Greater Manchester. The VCFSE sector has been welcomed with not only an open door, but with open arms, by public sector partners in order to improve outcomes for Greater Manchester communities and citizens.

The programme of work is enabling the VCFSE sector to be better supported, putting 'scaffolding' in place and formalising structures for the future. The sector is increasingly recognised for its role in service delivery, as part of an inclusive economy, its connection to communities, with good practice being shared between VCFSE organisations which are better connected.

The evaluation shows that the Accord has raised the profile of the VCFSE sector with public sector leaders, facilitating its inclusion in strategic discussions and co-design. As a result of the sector's raised profile, the Accord has changed the approach taken by GMCA, NHS GM and their partners, with an improved understanding of the value that the VCFSE sector brings and public commissioners increasingly looking to the sector as part of their work. Core to the ways of working set out in the original Accord agreement, trust and positive individual relationships have been fostered between the VCFSE and public sectors, with numerous examples of the creation of safe spaces for open dialogue and collaboration.

Recommendations

Based on the progress mapped against each commitment, the evaluation highlights that further attention to commitments covering: the financial resilience of the VCFSE sector; the strength of our VCFSE ecosystem; increasing of co-design of local services; and embedding of the VCFSE as a key partner for the delivery of them, is required. Delivery planning for the next year and a half should include activity to address this.

Accord stakeholders were asked if they thought the Accord is having an impact and leading to change, and what work they felt still needed to be done. The resulting recommendations were:

- 1. Investing in the Sector:** Given the significant challenge posed by NHS and other funding cuts in Greater Manchester, it is crucial that partners continue to recognise that investing in the VCFSE sector is not a cost but a strategic investment.
- 2. Strengthen District-Level Engagement:** While Greater Manchester level work has seen progress, it is vital that the activities and benefits extend to and involve all districts.
- 3. Enhance Communication and Awareness:** Many respondents to the stakeholder survey noted that the Accord's visibility is still limited, particularly among public sector partners.
- 4. Sustain and Build on Relationships:** The Accord has allowed for strong relationships to be built over the past several years, but there is a risk where these relationships are between individuals. To ensure a lasting impact, connections and governance could be further formalised with clear frameworks and shared accountability.
- 5. Address National-Level Challenges:** Greater Manchester is an exemplary model VCFSE involvement in devolution. However, there is a need to continue to advocate for the VCFSE sector in the national political context, challenging historic financial management regimes that stifle local-level collaboration and innovation.
- 6. Championing the sector's role in prevention and growth:** The next phase of Greater Manchester's devolution work will be an important focus for all of us and will set the tone for not only how we collectively improve opportunities and outcomes for our communities, but also how we set the tone for how the sector is seen and understood nationally.

Introduction

The following report sets out our progress under the GM VCFSE Accord Agreement, or a ‘mid-point’ evaluation for the first year and a half of the **2023-2026 Delivery Plan²**, ahead of the full final evaluation report in March 2026. As the first evaluation report of the Accord, it will showcase the achievements since the signing of the landmark agreement in 2021. It aims to set out much of our headline activity, taking a broad view of the progress in partnership working, in working towards its eight commitments and of its success in driving systems change.

About the Accord

The GM VCFSE Accord is a three-way collaboration agreement between the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, its constituent local authority members and statutory partners (including Transport for Greater Manchester) and the Greater Manchester Integrated Care System and the GM Voluntary, Community, Faith, and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) Sector³ represented by the GM VCFSE Leadership Group, based in a relationship of mutual trust, working together, and sharing responsibility. The purpose of this Accord is to further develop how we work together to improve outcomes for Greater Manchester’s communities and citizens.

In this document, where the words ‘we’ or ‘our’ or ‘us’ are used, this includes all parties to the Accord agreement acting with a single voice.

In accordance with the agreed Accord evaluation framework this report sets to review the work through gaining an understanding of:

- **System change** – 360° views assessing and learning from the process of partnership delivery to refine the future delivery model(s)
- **Progress** – Assessing the progress made towards and agreed set of outcome indicators and targets linked to the 8 Commitments in the GM VCFSE Accord
- **Integrity** – seeking a view of the Accord itself and compliance with the values that it contains

The report will explore the development of relationships, system changes and working practices which are happening

as a result of the GM VCFSE Accord, as well as identifying any outcomes achieved so far.

Purpose

The purpose of the evaluation will be to understand the difference that has been reported by the partners in the GM VCFSE Accord across GM as a result of the Accord being put in place. It will also explore what has and hasn’t worked in the collaboration and joint working ‘system’ arrangements which have developed through the delivery of the Accord commitments. It will also consider the integrity of the Accord agreement itself.

The evaluation is a key requirement of the GMCA and GM Integrated Care with both bodies pledging key funding towards the Accord activities.

Accord Evaluation processes fulfil reporting duties but are also seen as capacity building for the leadership in the VCFSE sector. Through programme evaluation, we are building up a longer lasting system of insight gathering and inform continuous improvement, which will be invaluable to the GM VCFSE Leadership Group and other Accord partners.

The results of the evaluation will be used to consider Delivery Planning and VCFSE Accord arrangements after March 2026, including any future funding agreements. Findings will also be shared within the individual districts of GM to inform locality working.

Scope

The evaluation will **only** consider the changes which have been influenced by work which has been carried out using the funding provided by GMCA and GM NHS Integrated Care and allocated at a GM footprint to enable delivery of the Accord across the city-region. However, it should be noted

² <https://www.vcfseleadershipgm.org.uk/news-and-events/three-year-plan-for-the-greater-manchester-vcse-accord-agreed-2023-26>

³ When discussing the VCFSE sector in Greater Manchester, we are referring to voluntary organisations, community groups, the community work of faith groups, and those social enterprises where profits will be reinvested in their social purpose.

that it has been difficult to directly attribute cause and effect in some cases – so the report also describes the wider impact and direction of travel towards the Accord vision, aims and commitments.

it will also contain information and learning for the wider VCFSE sector, local authority, and Integrated Care System partners. The evaluation report may also be of interest for other regions of England which are following our example with the GM VCFSE Accord and developing collaboration agreements like the GM VCFSE Accord.

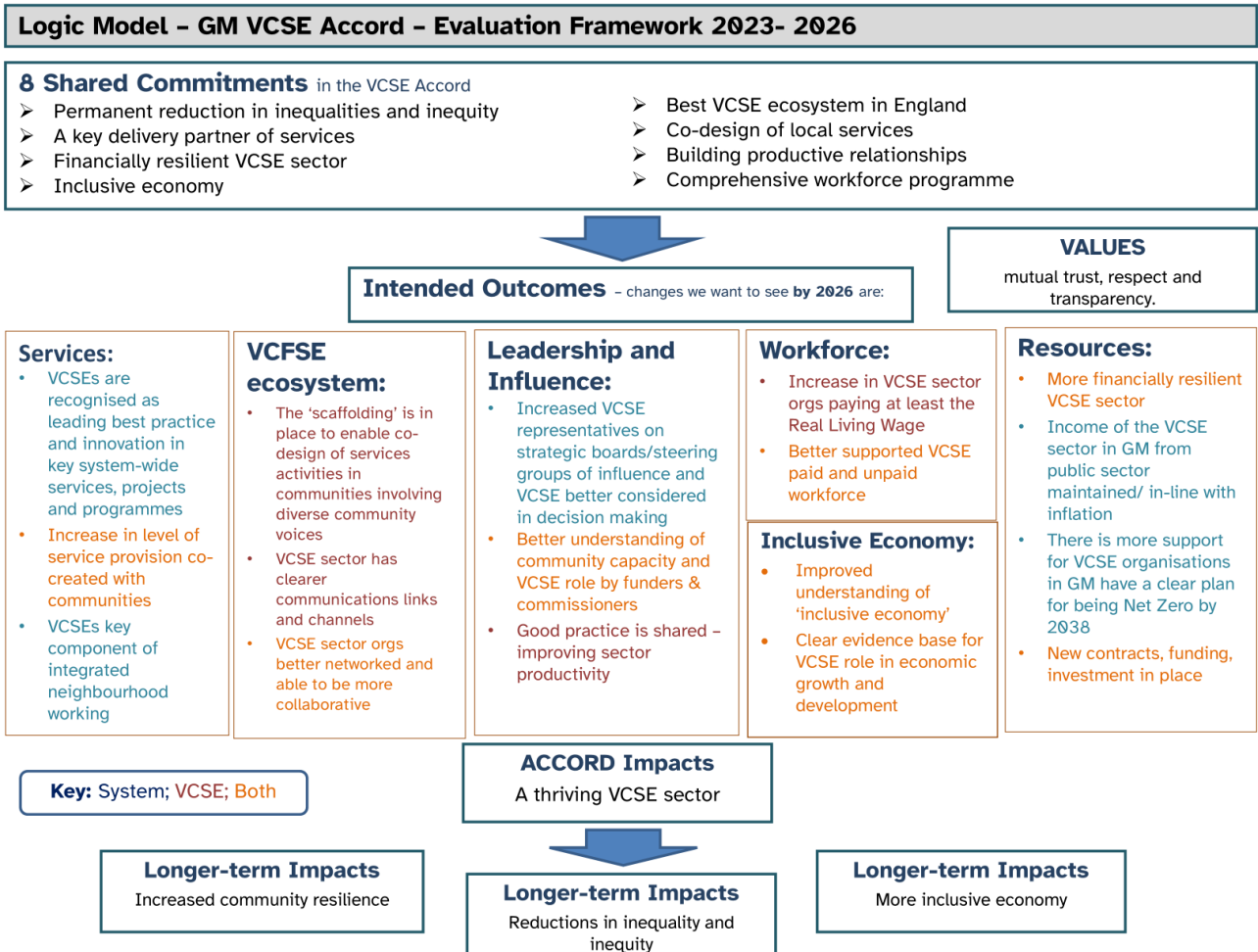
Audience

The primary audiences for this evaluation are the GM VCFSE Leadership Group, GMCA and GM Integrated Care. However,

Logic model

Due the Accord being a programme of enabling work for the VCFSE sector to better deliver positive outcomes for communities and citizens in GM, many of the impacts made will be indirect. As such, a process evaluation model was prioritised, reviewing the process and outputs working towards the Accord commitments set against the framework of the logic model, over attempting to prove impact through specific measurements.

The following logic model for the GM VCFSE Accord has been developed with the GM VCFSE Leadership Group.



Commitment 1: Working together to achieve a permanent reduction in inequalities and inequity

We will work together to achieve a permanent reduction in inequalities and inequity within Greater Manchester, addressing the social, environmental and economic determinants of health and wellbeing.

Our aim is to ensure active VCFSE participation and parity in strategic work to enhance equality, equity and wellbeing.

At the core of the Greater Manchester VCFSE Accord is a shared commitment to collaboratively address and permanently reduce inequalities and inequity within the region. Recognising the interconnected social, environmental, and economic determinants of health and wellbeing, we aim to ensure active participation and equitable representation of the VCFSE sector in strategic initiatives designed to enhance equality and promote wellbeing. Addressing these disparities is fundamental to the Accord's mission, driving the work of the Greater Manchester VCFSE Leadership Group and its various collaborative working groups through a distributed model of leadership. Each delivery objective outlined in the Accord is fundamentally geared toward fulfilling this commitment, reinforcing our dedication to fostering a fairer and more inclusive community.

Headline Activities

- Strategic work with NHS Population Health Team
- Primary Care Network test and learn sites, learnings and recommendations
- The creation of a community of practice around VCFSE data & intelligence

A Shared Vision for Population Health

Leading much of the work, since 2021, the **Population Health working group** and leading organisation **10GM** have been working with our partners to scale up and systematise the role of the VCFSE sector as a strategic partner and provider of services in Greater Manchester's Population Health system, with addressing inequalities at the core of its objectives. This work aligns with, and directly contributes to, the delivery of the Integrated Care Partnership Joint Forward Plan (2024-2029), and NHS Greater Manchester's annual business plans. This works alongside the Accord Agreement bringing together VCFSE organisations with NHS Greater Manchester, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and others in a strong partnership arrangement with a shared vision.

Person and Community-Centred Approaches

Work has been done to maximise the role of people and communities (including through activities such as Social Prescribing, universal and targeted wellbeing and prevention work) to sustain and grow preventative activity which addresses the wider social determinants of health and activities which support the individuals and groups who are at greatest risk of poor health.

Through the Accord, **integrated neighbourhood working and co-design has fed-back vital information on community centred approaches to Primary Care Networks (PCNs)**. Test and learn pilots were developed using the national NHS **CORE20PLUS5** model as a framework through which to explore how long-term, sustainable VCSFE and PCN partnerships can drive targeted action to reduce health inequalities. 10GM awarded **grant funding of over £160,000 between five Test & Learn sites**. These sites sought to engage with PCNs in an area of Greater Manchester in the 20% most deprived in England, focusing on a group that is adversely affected by ill-health and at least one of five key clinical areas of health inequalities, each in a

different locality with focuses on specific communities or clinical need:

1. Stockport Progress and Recovery Centre – **Mental Health and Physical Health Needs**
2. Salford CVS – **Cervical Cancer Screening**
3. Trafford Community Collective – **Holistic Support and Engagement**
4. Groundwork – **Health Services and Wellbeing**
5. Afrocats – **Maternity Care**

The programme worked to:

- **Improve information/knowledge** - Improve the two-way flow of information regarding access to services and need in the community.
- **Increase Access** - Primary Care services visible and present in community settings, building trust and engagement.
- **Improve Experience** - Working with providers and other stakeholders to influence and shape the future delivery of Primary Care services.
- **Improve Outcomes** - Delivering our overall ambition of reducing health inequalities on a hyper-local footprint in our most deprived neighbourhoods

An evaluation partner worked with all colleagues across the five test and learn sites to help deliver the learning and evaluation work creating a full evaluation report⁴. A series of online and face-to-face activities took place, each with a different theme. **A final learning event took place on 5th September 2023 to share learning and a set of 10 recommendations for further action.**⁵

10GM evaluation of the project delivered several design, delivery and sustainability-related learnings, as well as recommendations for VCFSE organisations, primary care networks and the Greater Manchester Integrated Care Partnership setting out a **defined model for future working**. This included using the CORE20PLUS5 model as a basis for PCNs and VCFSE collaboration to support Fairer Health for All, and a shift to prevention-based healthcare as well as making more effective use of community and clinical spaces.⁶

Live Well

The Live Well programme aims to build community-led health and wellbeing to tackle health inequalities in GM. We have seen VCFSE leaders in all stages of the developing model of Live Well, with co-design ensuring the **VCFSE is embedded as an equal partner through governance, delivery and investment at GM, borough and neighbourhood levels.**

We saw **early involvement with the development of the successful National Lottery Community Fund Bid** for Live Well cross-GM programme, with **five locality ‘accelerator sites’** with voluntary sector partners as part of the activity. The VCFSE sector shaped the approach and embedded insight and existing good practice from the sector. Local infrastructure Organisations (LIOs) were involved in developing local proposals and VCFSE leaders have been part of the Live Well Steering Group.

Since the programme’s development into a broader movement, we have seen the **launch of Live Well Community Marketplace** being supported as well as co-design on the programme in Autumn/Winter 2023. This continued with the content planning for the LiveWell **events taking place in 2024**, with an event in October themed around Community Power, **attended by almost 500 people**, in which 10GM hosted a **data & intelligence workshop** and **chaired a panel**. In Autumn 2024, 10GM are collaborating with the **Live Well team to co-host an event** entitled: *‘Getting to the root of good health: The role of VCFSE in Health Creation’*

In November 2023, GM=EqAl consulted on an overview of the Live Well programme, highlighting the need to remove barriers to participation (such as improving the cultural competency of staff), acknowledging and addressing the lack of trust in certain institutions, the need to develop participatory decision-making methods to provide mechanisms for shared decision-making.

The VCFSE leading the Live Well model in Greater Manchester as a key vehicle for community preventative activity has been an influencing and leadership focus for the GM VCFSE Leadership Group, aligning with its confirmation as a Mayoral priority in the lead up to the May 2024 election. Since then, in Autumn 2024, **a letter was written to GMCA**

⁴ <https://10gm.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Final-EvaluationReportMatthewBaqueriza-JacksonLtd-August2300A.pdf>

⁵<https://10gm.org.uk/PCN-test-and-learn.html>

⁶<https://www.10gm.org.uk/assets/files/VCSE-PCNPolicyPaper.pdf>

from the **VCFSE sector** putting forward the role of the sector in the Integrated Settlement. The Live Well model was set out as an important example of how the sector will lead by delivering community services and enacting core community functions such as mobilising communities and offering a positive vision of community power and action.

Live Well Moving Forward

Plans to embed the VCFSE sector in future programme planning for Live Well have been part of strategic and prioritising conversations for the Accord 2024-25, and 2025-26

Intelligence & Insight

A **community of practice for VCFSE data and intelligence has been established** over the last few years, alongside a significant **VCFSE data maturity scoping project**.

Data Group

In Summer 2024, the Population Health Data Group, as an Accord delivery structure, refreshed its terms of reference, purpose and membership, showing how we are improving partnership working and **governance to evidence our values of transparency**.

The Population Health work was **funded and supported by NHS Greater Manchester Population Health**, exemplifying the **additional aligned contracts and work that the delivery structures of the Accord has enabled**.



Photo of a Population Health Data Group Workshop

⁷ <https://10gm.org.uk/VCSE-data.html>

Case Study – Data & Intelligence Maturity Report

From August 2023-March 2024, 10GM partnered with Data Orchard CIC to research and understand the state of data and intelligence in the VCFSE sector in Greater Manchester on a **‘VCFSE Data and Intelligence’⁷ Scoping Project**. The project’s purpose was to understand the current state of data maturity, explore challenges and barriers, and identify opportunities and actions for advancing data capabilities in the Greater Manchester VCFSE sector. The project explored how the sector is doing currently, listened to existing challenges and needs around data, and planned future support and resources that will support identified needs, **producing a report⁸**, a clear set of **key recommendations and several case studies showing how to improve data maturity, and the required systems change**.

As a result of this work, in Summer 2024 a **Peer Learning Network was set up** for VCFSE sector data professionals in Greater Manchester to connect, share best practices, and develop skills. The network aims to inspire improved data approaches and foster a supportive community. Sessions will explore challenges, discuss tools and tips, and build data expertise. The Network will shape sessions and contribute to the **intended outcomes of ‘system access to collective data’; ‘ensuring VCFSE intelligence built into decision-making’**, as a key way of carving out the **VCFSE sector’s strategic role in future delivery models**.

GM Population Health System

Encompassing all the work in this area, strong strategic collaboration with GM population health board has ensured supported integration of the VCFSE sector within local population health priorities including co-design of programmes and initiatives.

In early 2024, the VCFSE sector **participated in the NHS GM Population Health Business Planning Process 24-25** resulting in an objective to *‘scale up and systematise the role*

⁸ <https://10gm.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/10GM-DataandIntelligenceImprovementReportv1.4.pdf>

of the VCFSE sector as a strategic partner and provider of services’.

Success in VCFSE population health activity led to a further need for VCFSE Strategic Capacity, with additional funding being secured for a strategic lead post, commenced in February 2024.

Throughout 2023, input was given into the Primary Care Blueprint by VCFSE leaders across many different workstreams including Population Health, Commissioning, GM Equalities Alliance leaders.

The recent **Kings Fund report⁹ on Population Health in Greater Manchester** highlights us as leading the way.

GM=EqAI

VCFSE sector intelligence has been built into decision-making via improving the partnership and engagement of the VCFSE equalities sector with GM Integrated Care and allied services.

GM=EqAI has ensured the voice of lived experience and an intersectional equalities lens has been considered in input in many public sector strategies and programmes. Some examples being; The **GM Mental Health Strategy, GM Health and Poverty Intelligence, VCFSE Mental Health Leadership Group Scoping Project, BeeWell Survey** and many more.¹⁰

Commitment 1 – Conclusion & Recommendations

Work to set up new models of working towards a permanent reduction in inequalities has been undertaken, through the Primary Care Network project, we have demonstrated a successful model of community working.

Live Well is a key example of Greater Manchester leading a bottom-up approach to welfare and health & wellbeing. Because of this, it has garnered interest from central government as a method to help achieve its health and growth missions. We need to ensure the VCFSE is a recognised leader in this model and is involved in the development of Live Well as it expands and develops into a flagship programme of work. Data is a key area of development across the sector, with regards to health and wellbeing and more broadly. The recommendations of the data & intelligence project in relation to Skills, Tools, Analysis, and Leadership, present a vital piece of future work. Enhancing data literacy, promoting digitisation and automation, and improving access to analytical tools and techniques across the sector, must be prioritised. Additionally, leaders should be supported to develop data strategies, invest in data resources, and build expertise to drive data maturity and innovation within their organisations.

The differing definitions of prevention used across the VCFSE sector and Accord partnership risk causing confusion at a critical time. Work is underway to create a unified definition, which should be widely adopted and promoted once finalised.

Work towards this commitment has been collaborative, with many key health and preventative strategies being co-designed with the VCFSE sector in their conception. With a backdrop of NHS funding cuts, it is important that we maintain this level of involvement at a strategic level. The VCFSE is an investment, not a cost, as community models are the solution to alleviating many current NHS pressures.

⁹ <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/insight-and-analysis/reports/population-health-greater-manchester>

¹⁰ See [Commitment 6](#), for the full scope of GM=EqAI work that contributes to the achievement of Commitment 1.

Commitment 2: Embed the VCFSE sector as a key partner for the delivery of services

We will embed the VCFSE sector as a key delivery partner of services for communities in Greater Manchester

Our aim is to ensure that VCFSE organisations are seen as integral to the delivery of services in communities, alongside statutory-run services and commissioned contracts.

The VCFSE sector plays a critical role in delivering both innovative and mainstream services to communities across Greater Manchester. Efforts to fully embed the sector as a key delivery partner within the wider system are being driven through strategic approaches, including the use of accessible and innovative funding routes such as grants, alongside sustained investment in valued services and infrastructure. Strengthening the sector's capacity and promoting system-wide recognition of its value are also key priorities, supported by influencing work under public service reform.

Headline Activities

- The creation and development of pioneering Alternative Provider Collaborative
- Fundamental programmes for the sector in mental health via Greater Manchester Health Leadership Group
- Influencing Public Service Reform

Public Service Reform

Core efforts towards VCFSE organisations being seen as integral to the delivery of services in communities, alongside statutory-run services has been supported by the Accord through the **VCFSE organising itself at GM level and in localities; the Leadership Group, GM Eq=AL, Mental Health Leadership Group, Inclusive economy, 10GM/LIO Network, locality equalities networks, VCFSE place-based leaders' networks, locality thematic/social action alliances.**

There has been substantial **influencing and involvement work around Public Service Reform** supported by Accord relationships and partnerships in the last few years. In December 2023, **a meeting took place with the GMCA Reform team and VCFSE board** representatives to discuss the current landscape for the VCFSE sector's role in this space moving forward. This led to a **January 2024 GM**

VCFSE Leadership Group meeting dedicated to this topic, with many recent examples supported by the Accord outlined:

- **GM Mental Health Leaders Group** is a network of VCFSE leaders linked to every borough in GM which influences the roll out of mental health services and ensures the voice of the VCFSE is at the heart of this work. Established in 2019, with refreshed membership in early 2024, the group has secured a shift in the working culture and a number of investment streams for the sector, including funds for diverse ethnic communities, online support, integrated crisis care and young families. It has also contributed to the refresh of GM Mental Health strategy.
- **GM Moving – MoU** for the next seven years of partnership working on 'Active Lives for All' signed off in Summer 2024. GM VCFSE Leadership Group, GMCA, GM ICP, TfGM all key partners.
- **Fairer Health 4 All** in Action ([see Commitment 7](#))
- **Live Well model**, VCFSE leadership in innovation sites National Lottery project.
- **Community-led approaches to tackle violent crime** – VCFSE-led Alliances and influencing the Violence Reduction strategy, the work of the Violence Reduction Unit.
- **Multiple Disadvantage** – Changing Futures pilots in 4 Localities, 2 led significantly by VCFSE orgs or partnerships. Presentation on work to Leadership Group in early 2024.
- **Ongoing Cost-of-Living response** in each locality led by 10GM with LIOs, and the GM VCFSE Leadership Group briefing for MPs on the cost-of-living crisis.

Alternative Provider Collaborative (APC)

The Alternative Provider Collaborative (APC) is an example of Greater Manchester leading the way, showcasing a unique approach in driving innovation within the VCFSE health service provider space. The **Alternative Provider Collaborative was founded in July 2022** from direct Accord support in response to the new NHS Integrated Care System. Its establishment was driven by the need for stronger and specific Provider leadership and identity within the Greater Manchester health landscape. In the context of: 20% of GM population not being connected with the NHS on a regular basis; children's health service and adult Mental Health services degenerating into illness-only offers; and NHS GM sustainability and outward credibility challenges

The APC has developed to have **52 partner organisations, 'on-boarding' approximately 2-3 per month.** It also engages with around **25 'associate partners'** who have an ambition to work with the NHS. Services of member organisations range from talking therapies, to cancer screening, to primary and urgent care and reach nearly 2 million residents. **Partners are collectively employing over 2000 people and show turnover well in excess of £150m.** Demand to join the APC exceeds its capacity.

The APC has **worked with a large number of strategic partners** – HealthWatch GM, NCA Procurement team, MFT Procurement team, Salford Uni, Bolton Uni, NHS Confed, NHS Providers, UCL Institute of Health Equity (Prof Sir Marmot), NHSE, TPC, GMCVO, 10GM, GMPCB, demonstrating Accord collaborative working. The Chair of the APC is part of the Fairer Health for All Oversight Group, further linking cross-sector initiatives.

The APC is building a profile nationally as the first provider collaborative of its kind. It stays responsive to national policy, for example through hosting a successful **information**

event¹¹ on the Provider Selection Regime in December 2023, ahead of the January 2024 legislation change.

Recognition in Greater Manchester has built on the Accord, through the **levering in of additional funding by NHS GM Integrated Care**, and the Alternative Provider Collaborative **inclusion in Integrated Care Board (ICB) delivery model.**

Strategic collaboration with the GM NHS is also evident through the work with **Primary Care Blueprint workforce**

team on priorities and its focus of engagement at the **Inaugural Alternative Provider Collaborative Annual Convention.** The well attended event included many senior staff from across the NHS health system.

Case Study - Pioneering Alternative Provider Collaborative's Annual Convention



Context

The Alternative Provider Collaborative's Annual Convention 2023 provided a platform to raise the collective voice of VCFSE health providers regarding variation in health outcomes, showcasing the work of APC members, share best practice and challenge the healthcare status quo, after its first year of operation.

Action

Through influencing activity, the VCFSE sector is embedded as a key co-design partner in shaping and delivering Greater Manchester systems. Market Supply is developed through partnership-building; design and delivery of new solutions; and securing capital investment.

Outcomes

- 130+ attendees, new relationships/collaborations
- APC demonstrated capacity/ability for innovation – important partner in development of creative NHS solutions
- Enhanced positioning within NHS GM
- Challenging conversations re: inequality, racial justice, system overload and social value in GM and beyond

Impact

- VCFSE sector orgs better networked with commissioners, each other and NHS leadership
- Good practice is shared – improving outcomes for people of GM
- Better understanding of community capacity and VCFSE role by funders & commissioners
- More financially resilient VCFSE sector

¹¹ <https://10gm.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/APC-PSR13-12-23.pdf>



Photos of the Alternative Provider Collaborative Convention 2023

In Summer and Autumn 2024, APC expertise has been focussed on work with the NHS sustainability planning team and new care model work. This is likely to have a considerable impact given current NHS GM pressures like funding cuts and a political landscape shift towards preventative, and community based, models. Despite so much development, a testament of its success is that founder partners are all still actively involved.

Commitment 2 – Conclusion & Recommendations

The VCFSE sector has consistently proven itself as a leader in delivering impactful, innovative services that often surpass the outcomes of traditional models. Yet, despite its successes, the sector’s status and recognition remains often undervalued. Contracting realities for VCFSE services do not always align with the foundation of agreements such as the Accord, so there remains a need to turn intention through the Accord into practical outcomes that reflect the sector’s established strengths. While innovation is a value of the sector, sustained funding for established and successful programs is equally essential. Evaluation measures for VCFSE services can be inappropriate, overlooking the unique and meaningful contributions of VCFSE organisations to public service delivery. Contracting frameworks and the implementation of the Fair Funding Protocol across the 10 boroughs, as well as any NHS GM versions, must recognise and support both the sector's proven approaches and emerging innovations. This will help us work towards our **intended outcome of ‘VCFSEs being recognised as leading best practice and innovation in key system-wide services, projects and programmes’.**

Within health, the Alternative Provider Collaborative is an innovative model putting the VCFSE sector at the heart of service delivery. Its work is well connected across the health system, and it continues to raise the profile of the sector. The priority for the Alternative Provider Collaborative of transforming Greater Manchester’s health provider landscape rests on initiatives like the APC Primary Care Transformation Project and strengthening partnerships with anchor institutions. It aims to enhance contracting parity with trusts, increase market share, and emphasise social value. Key efforts include fostering creative service solutions, lobbying for greater recognition, and occupying leadership spaces within NHS GM. The plan also highlights collaboration across networks, the Talking Therapies Working Group, and Mental Health Commissioning meetings. This will all work to amplify GM’s not-for-profit narrative, promote community-driven primary care, and enable providers to hold contracts, ensuring financial stability and improved service quality across the sector. Systemic collaboration and opportunities to challenge existing practices are crucial to this strategy.

However, significant challenges persist. These include the need for stakeholder buy-in, particularly as the APC model is seen as an underdog. There are concerns regarding formal governance, liability, and the complexity of the NHS GM Enforcement undertakings. Additionally, the lack of understanding of social businesses, an uncertain operating environment, and stakeholder resistance pose barriers. Selecting the right strategic spaces to operate, alongside navigating a highly challenging commissioning landscape, will require a careful balance between strategic decisions and winning the hearts and minds of all involved stakeholders. This work is contributing to our **intended outcome of a ‘better understanding of community capacity and VCFSE role by funders and commissioners’.**

Commitment 3: A financially resilient VCFSE Sector

We will build a financially resilient VCFSE sector that is resourced to address our biggest challenges of ending poverty and inequality in Greater Manchester. **Our aim is to work together to maximise new funding sources, ways of contracting and grant giving**

The Greater Manchester VCFSE Accord is committed to fostering a financially resilient VCFSE sector that is well-resourced to tackle the pressing challenges of poverty and inequality in the region. In the face of a difficult economic landscape—marked by systemic challenges and an ongoing cost-of-living crisis—there is a collective determination to explore and maximise new funding sources, innovate contracting methods, and enhance grant-giving practices more locally across our city region.

The current economic conditions have laid bare long-standing issues within the VCFSE sector, such as short-term contracts that foster instability, chronic underfunding, and delays in payments. The pressure is further exacerbated by re-tendered contracts that increase delivery expectations without considering inflation, placing additional strain on resources. In response, **10GM** leads collaborative efforts via the cross-sector **Commissioning & Investment Working Group** of the GM VCFSE Leadership Group. We work with commissioners and system leaders to influence procurement and funding practices that support a sustainable and financially robust VCFSE sector.

Headline Activities

- GMCA Fair Funding Protocol agreement, with implementation in localities and NHS GM version planned
- Educating and guiding the sector and commissioners with blogs, briefings and guidance on challenges and best practice
- Strong collaborative working relationships enabling the VCFSE sector to flag the risk of GM NHS contract cliff edge

- Briefings for the VCFSE sector, **Commissioning & Investment Spotlight** published May 2023
- **Briefing on NHS Contract Concerns** published to support VCFSE in local negotiations in February 2024
- **Procurement Act briefing**¹² published Autumn 2024
- **Commissioning Framework 4 years on Survey** in 2024.
- **Commissioning & Investment Update**
- **Cost-of-Living briefing and activity by local infrastructure, and MP briefing**

Raising Awareness of the Challenges facing the VCFSE sector

Key to this work is listening to the VCFSE sector, understanding present challenges, and helping commissioners to understand and address problems.

This is supported through surveys, blogs, explainers and briefings both for the sector and with the audience of commissioners such as:

¹² https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/6682c2b63024dc5fac17ec7d/66e97b7eb893b39ec0e8402e_The%20Procurement%20Act%20and%20VCFSE%20Sector.pdf

Empowering the VCFSE sector

Through information sharing, we empower the VCFSE sector to have the knowledge and language to make the case for itself more strongly in contracting negotiations.

There are examples of VCFSE organisations successfully petitioning commissioners for fair treatment; including through singular negotiation and collaborative approaches by groups such as the Mental Health Leadership Group; Alternative Provider Collaborative; Commissioning & Investment Working Group; and Local Infrastructure Organisations.

Highlighting Good Commissioning Practice

Key to influencing change is showing what good looks like and the impact that fair commissioning can make in response to the challenges that we face. Several explainers and case studies have been put together and publicised as part of the Accord, demonstrating improved paths forward. Examples include:

- **Transparent Commissioning Case Study Rochdale**¹³, published June 2024
- **Blog**¹⁴ on the **Benefits of Flexible Funding** published Feb 2024
- **Thinking Differently about Social Value in Bolton Case Study**¹⁵ published June 2024
- **Improving Social Value connections in Oldham**¹⁶, published June 2024

Fair Funding Protocols and Commissioning Principles

The **VCFSE Commissioning Framework** was launched in Jan 2020, and re-launched post Covid and Brexit in 2021. It contains 8 key recommendations that would improve commissioning of the VCFSE sector in Greater Manchester. A recent **4 Years On – Survey Review**¹⁷ showed positive practice being retained and emerging, with: Commissioners acting as allies, attempting to navigate unhelpful systems to achieve the best outcomes. Pockets of great co-production practice in localities, and commissioners exploring how they can deliver longer term funding models.

Building on this, Accord principles have been further embedded through the landmark development of a **VCFSE Fair Funding Protocol (FFP) agreement for the GMCA**¹⁸, approved in October 2023 covering: *‘activities and services that the VCFSE sector carries out in communities that are funded by the GMCA’s budget in Greater Manchester’*. The protocol has been a significant step that will: *‘guide how the combined authority plans its grant funding, commissions, and manages contracts with VCFSE organisations’*.

¹³ <https://www.vcfseleadershipgm.org.uk/resources/transparent-commissioning-in-rochdale>

¹⁴ <https://10gm.org.uk/about/blog/blog-benefits-of-flexible-funding/>

¹⁵ https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/6682c2b63024dc5fac17ec7d/66e9847f6755f155ed6c801a_Commissioning-andInvestmentCaseStudyBoltonandSocialValue.pdf

Case Study – Fair Funding Protocol (FFP)

Context

Following the publication of the Commissioning Framework in 2019, GMCA and VCFSE colleagues recognised the need for a more practical tool which would help to embed key elements of the Framework, with the aims of increasing market opportunities for the VCFSE Sector and addressing risks to sustainability in the Sector. This was recognised at the VCFSE Forum in October 2023 – *“How we invest is as important as where we invest”*.

Action

A full co-design process between GMCA, VCFSE Sector, Locality VCFSE portfolio holder and leads, was undertaken with oversight from VCFSE Commissioning and Investment Group. The contents were shaped by conversations at the VCFSE forum in March and October 2023 where key edits were made. A refined draft was then taken through formal decision-making governance within the GMCA, culminating in formal GMCA sign off at Board in October 2023.

Implementation plan developed, outlining both GMCA and VCFSE action required to implement the protocol.

Outcomes

- Growing relationships between VCFSE and GMCA commissioning and procurement leads, and a commitment to work together to test out new approaches *“Huge opportunities for how we procure local services” (VCFSE Forum, Oct 2023)*
- GMCA commissioning and procurement colleagues across the organisation having increased awareness of VCFSE Sector and commissioning challenges; and being supported to understand the protocol, and consider how they might implement it in their own work.

¹⁶ <https://10gm.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Commissioning-andInvestmentCaseStudyOldhamandSocialValue.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://10gm.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/VCFSE-CommissioningFramework4YearsOn.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://democracy.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/mqConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=29416>

- GMCA work and skills commissioners and procurement colleagues refreshing policies and procedures to reflect the protocol and Commissioning Framework recommendations
- Locality Commissioners starting to consider their own Fair Funding Protocols; and including Commissioning Framework and Fair Funding Protocol recommendations in locality policy and process refreshes.

Impact

Ultimately the impacts will include:

- *“A recognition of the need to invest in VCFSE sector activity and give recognition for its role”.... And a way of working that “acknowledges VCFSE is a pivotal part of system not a nice to have”.* (VCFSE Forum Mar 2023)
- Clearer communication channels between VCFSE and GMCA to identify practice issues and collaboratively design and test new models of commissioning and procurement – enabling *“a conversation based on trust and transparency to understand funding challenges”* that is *“built on values, trust and respect, and challenge long standing paternalisation”* (VCFSE Forum Mar 23)
- Wider commissioning bodies (locality and GM NHS) being influenced to develop their own Fair Funding Protocols.
- A more financially resilient VCFSE sector, where:
 - Payments are on time and up front where appropriate
 - Longer term contracts are considered wherever possible
 - VCFSE organisations know about and are ready to respond to future opportunities
 - More employees in the VCFSE sector receive at least the Real Living Wage; and
 - Sector income from GMCA is maintained/in-line with inflation

As a result of this landmark agreement, we can see the wider system being influenced to develop similar commitment. Following the lead of the Fair Funding Protocol, an **NHS Commissioning Framework** is now in progress, alongside work to implement the FFP in the 10 boroughs, by local authorities. The Greater Manchester VCFSE Fair Funding Protocol has shown our city region and Accord partnership is **leading the way**, with VSNW delivering a National Lottery funded project now underway to **develop similar protocols for other parts of the North West**.

Strong Relationships and Shared-Sector Forums

Cross-sector partnerships are key to influencing for financial resilience of the VCFSE sector under the Accord. Capacity has been directed towards supporting, building and maintaining relationships with key commissioners and decision makers across GM and locality systems and towards holding influencing discussions with senior health leads.

NHS Contract Reviews

In Summer 2023, the Greater Manchester VCFSE Leadership Group flagged the need for a more robust process to ensure national concerns regarding a funding cliff-edge for VCFSE groups are addressed and effectively managed in Greater Manchester, despite increasing pressures on NHS funding.

A letter was sent by the GM VCFSE Leadership Group to the NHS outlining concerns regarding risks in VCFSE commissioning and contracting¹⁹. A response letter²⁰ from Mark Fisher, Chief Executive NHS Greater Manchester, was received, providing the assurances requested.

Alongside this letter exchange, **a health roundtable** convening senior health leaders and commissioners in GM, as well as VCFSE leaders on behalf of the sector, took place and the cliff-edge, and other pertinent VCFSE issues were discussed. These included fair payment and parity of esteem with other providers, turning the ICS strategy into consistent practical action, honouring the Accord, Compact and Commissioning Framework, as well as the importance of early conversations, co-design and adding the loss of contracts to risk registers.

¹⁹ https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/6682c2b63024dc5fac17ec7d/66e8515de9de67547d032390_VCFSE-Commissioning-Letter-to-Health-Leaders-28.7.23-Final.docx

²⁰ https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/6682c2b63024dc5fac17ec7d/66e851aa830c7b00eb335b79_230817-VCSE-CC-Risks.pdf

Following these discussions in late 2023, a patchwork view of VCFSE contract funding by NHS GM was highlighted, making it difficult to understand the full scale of the risk to the sector across the city region. Through VCFSE leaders having regular meeting spaces and strong relationships with senior leaders at NHS GM, **a full collaborative review of contracts was able to take place. The risk was logged on the ICB risk register** after a formal paper was submitted. Mitigating action plans were decided collaboratively and worked on together.

Moving into contract reviews for 2024-25, lessons from the process were learnt, with the process improving, through better communication and planning. Commissioning Intentions letters were due to be issued in April/ May, with a target date of 30th June to get all contracts and grants out to providers.

Hospital Trusts and Local Provider Collaboratives

The Alternative Provider Collaborative's work to build relationships with our Hospital Trusts continues, with a Summer 2024 meeting with the Northern Care Alliance Chair, whose Foundation Trust encompasses the areas of Salford, Oldham, Bury and Rochdale. The Collaborative are also growing their recognition and relationships at locality level, with recent invites to present at Stockport and Trafford's Local Provider Collaborative Boards.

Ecosystem Indicators of Financial Resilience

In the Accord Stakeholder Survey, work towards this commitment was deemed the least effective in achieving its aim, with:

61.9% of respondents disagreeing that we have been successful in creating a 'financially resilient VCFSE sector' through the Accord.

Our operating environment is of course a huge factor here. The cost-of-living crisis, inflation, and the increasing pressures on the VCFSE sector threaten an ecosystem which was already struggling to maintain stability.

Despite this, there are certainly some examples that point to success, for example in often underfunded equalities organisations, in Greater Manchester we have examples of success in organisations such as CAHN, GM=EqAl and Ethnic Communities Network that have gone from strength to strength. However, how much these examples point to a wider trend is hard to pinpoint, as the resilience is not felt across the board, a fact sadly evidenced through loss of organisations like Breakthrough UK. We should do more under the Accord to address this commitment.

Other failures we must learn from are not managing to scale up alternative investment streams, for example the community foundation-linked work that fell apart, as well as Live Well Lottery being small scale. Social Prescribing contracts have been particularly under threat, with the contract for Tameside recently being pulled.

Commitment 3 – Conclusion & Recommendations

The findings from the "VCFSE Commissioning Framework: 4 Years On" survey conducted in early 2024 underscore the significant challenges faced by the VCFSE sector in Greater Manchester regarding commissioning practices. Gains made during Covid in grant-making are starting to recede because of the significant system budget pressures, and frustrations surrounding systems for measuring and reporting social value remain high. Additionally, varied practice across localities and GM is creating confusion, with changes in ICS commissioning arrangements leading to increased bureaucracy and a one-size-fits-all approach and loss of crucial local VCFSE and commissioner relationships. These insights are critical as they inform the VCFSE Commissioning and Investment Group's strategic plans for the final year and a half of the Accord agreement.

The operating environment is a huge factor in the sector's journey toward financial resilience. While global financial systems might be beyond local control, there is an opportunity to improve practices within Greater Manchester that can bolster the sector's stability. The historical challenges posed by national funding regimes, compounded by the recent crises such as the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis, have placed considerable strain on the sector. Current funding cuts from NHS Greater Manchester add to this pressure.

A persistent perception of the VCFSE sector as a financial burden rather than a strategic asset remains a barrier. To counteract this narrative, collaborative efforts from Accord partners are needed to shift the perspective, emphasising that investment in the VCFSE sector yields significant returns in terms of early intervention and prevention, community wellbeing, social value, and economic resilience. By repositioning the sector as a strategic investment rather than a cost, stakeholders can help ensure its continued relevance and effectiveness in addressing the pressing needs of Greater Manchester's communities.

Finally, the implementation of the Fair Funding Protocol, including across the 10 boroughs, and advancing a similar agreement in NHS GM present pivotal opportunities over the next 18 months. This has the potential to bolster the financial resilience to the VCFSE sector amid a challenging economic backdrop. Prioritising this commitment will be essential to realising the Accord's vision and strengthening the sector's sustainability in the path ahead.

Commitment 4: To make Greater Manchester a truly Inclusive Economy

We will grow the role of the VCFSE sector as an integral part of a resilient and inclusive economy where social enterprises, co-operatives, community businesses, charities and micro-social business thrive.

Our aim is to increase the market share of social economy organisations in Greater Manchester.

Our intended outcome under the Accord logic model is to improve understanding of 'inclusive economy' within VCFSE sector and, with Accord partners, create a clear evidence base for VCFSE role in economic growth and development. The Accord has supported a large amount of evidence gathering from VCFSE organisations to help feed into policy around inclusive economy. The work led by **GMCVO** on behalf of the GM VCFSE Leadership Group's **Inclusive Economy Working Group** has helped articulate concepts around what we mean by an inclusive economy, building existing practice, and changing the operating environment.

Headline Activities

- 3 x Portfolios of Good Practice for an Inclusive Economy
- The GMCA Foundational Economy Innovation Fund, led by GMCVO and Unlimited Potential
- Influencing to help increase the sector's role in work & skills

Dedicated space to develop shared understanding

The Inclusive Economy working group of the GM VCFSE Leadership Group was set up in 2019 to be a **dedicated regularly meeting space** for conversation the role of the VCFSE sector, social economy, and communities – **particularly those who are marginalised** – within economic policy & development. 'Inclusive economy' has not always been a broadly understood concept within the VCFSE sector and amongst policy makers in GM. In the last few years, major events such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis have forced people to think differently about the economy and to question what we consider 'business as usual'. There has been an increasing understanding in the way that mainstream economic models cause and perpetuate disadvantage, the awakening to this concept has underpinned much of this work.

Describing an Inclusive Economy & Revealing Existing Practice

Articulating what we mean by an inclusive economy has been a central goal of our work, in order to then expand the sector's role within it.

To this end, a number of useful **explainers have been written and widely shared:**

- [What is an inclusive economy?](#) April 2022
 - [What does an inclusive economy look like?](#) June 2022
 - [What do we mean by 'Just Transition'?](#) Sep 2022
 - [Good employment – a key ingredient in an inclusive economy](#) May 2023
- [Breaking down the Greater Manchester devolution Trailblazer Deal](#) Oct 2023

Portfolios of Good Practice

A range of **portfolios** have been produced, to give examples from GM and supporting / brokering experience exchanges to help point to best practice and increase learning:

- [A Portfolio of Good Practice for an Inclusive Economy: Part 1 – Community Ownership](#)
- [A Portfolio of Good Practice for an Inclusive Economy: Part 2 – Net Zero: A Just Transition](#)
- [A Portfolio of Good Practice for an Inclusive Economy: Part 3 – Good Employment](#)

To ensure policy-making around inclusive economy is truly inclusive of communities who are marginalised, much work has been done to ensure **regular collaboration spaces and open events** allowing information exchange and the brokering of key relationships:

- **Week of Action on a Just Transition** 7th to 13th November 2022 – A week of events and workshops showcased the work of the VCFSE sector in support of the environment, sustainability and Just Transition. The week promoted learning about environmental issues, how to become more environmentally friendly and how to support people and communities to make the economy fairer while contributing to the green agenda.
- **Post-election briefing session** ‘*Could our new government deliver a fairer economy?*’ on 31st July 2024 - IEWG co-chairs John Hannen and Helen Clayton; and Graham Whitham presented an online workshop for over 90 participants concerning the new government plans for growth and how these plans might impact social economy.
- **Upcoming events** for late 2024 and early 2025 will explore the Government Budget and its impacts on the sector as well as the role of faith organisations in an inclusive economy.

Case Study - Engaging the VCFSE Sector in Bolton

Through their involvement in the Inclusive Economy Working Group and GMCVO’s inclusive economy outputs – such as the inclusive economy blogs, partners in Bolton have developed a shared understanding of what an inclusive economy looks like and the steps needed to create it. Using this shared understanding, the **Bolton Family (a cross-sector partnership)** developed a new strategic focus ensuring accountability for implementing the plan through local governance structures, including the inclusion of the plan in the Economic Growth and Resilience Plan - the economic strategy for the borough.

²¹ <https://www.gmcvo.org.uk/news/blog-breaking-down-greater-manchester-trailblazer-devolution-deal>



Outcome

The framework of what elements create an inclusive economy was used when co-producing the relaunch of the Bolton Family as The Bolton Family Social Value Partnership, a more strategic space for businesses, VCFSE and anchor institutions to come together and create an inclusive economy through created social value, see the [Bolton Family Social Value Pledges](#)

Impact

- Through helping the local sector to identify and prioritise the GM level policy developments that are likely to have the biggest impact on their organisations and communities, this has freed up capacity through providing a ‘horizon scanning’ function, helping to demystify GM developments
- The inclusive economy work has equipped the local sector with the language they need to articulate their collective role in creating an inclusive economy,

Changing the Operating Environment

Devolution Trailblazer

With the announcement of a new Devolution Trailblazer in the 2022 levelling up paper, and the deal in March 2023, we have led vital work to engage the GM VCFSE sector regarding this change and what it means for the city region and its communities. **Engagement with the Leadership Group**, and the inclusive economy group, including GMCA briefings at meetings throughout 2023 and 2024, and a **letter on the sector’s role in the Integrated Single Settlement** agreement ahead of the October 2024 budget announcement, has driven VCFSE involvement in the latest devolution changes.

Our consultation with the wider sector has been key to this successful work. GMCVO produced a **VCFSE sector devolution explainer**²¹. In April 2024, the sector held an in-person event in collaboration with the GMCA devolution

leads, **“Exploring the VCFSE sector's role in the Greater Manchester devolution single settlement”** which explored the sector’s role in the GM devolution journey for the 5 pillars of the single settlement fund.

Work and Skills

Work to **re-build the VCFSE skills and employment pipeline** is underway, which will be a focus area for 2024-25. Collaboration Planning for an Autumn Inclusive Economy Working Group – **discussion on inclusive employment** with members from the GMCA work and skills team will strengthen this work.

Greener Communities

VCFSE involvement in the Green Challenge group and GMCA Bee Net Zero work has increased through collaboration meetings.

A new environment expertise lead has been appointed onto the GM VCFSE Leadership Group from **Groundwork GM**.

The GMCVO-produced portfolio on a **Just Transition**, supports this work.

Contribution to Greater Manchester Strategies

There has been **VCFSE involvement in the Local Industrial Strategy**, through initiatives such as the **VCFSE administered ‘Foundational Economy Innovation Fund’** developed between the VCFSE sector and GMCA, as part of the Accord in partnership:

Case Study: The Foundational Economy Innovation Fund



Context

The foundational economy or the ‘everyday’ or ‘essential’ economy – is made up of the businesses we all rely on for our daily needs. The foundational economy accounts for over 42% of jobs in the city-region and is made up of more than 60,000 businesses.

One of the aims of Greater Manchester Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) is to improve the productivity of this sector – which includes social care, early years, retail, hospitality and leisure businesses. To this end, GMCA developed the Foundational Economy Innovation Fund (FEIF).

Action

The GMCVO team worked closely with Accord partner GMCA to engage the VCFSE sector in the FEIF. This involved publishing an [inclusive economy blog](#) and hosting a partnership information event all about the fund tailored to the VCFSE sector, involving 30 organisations.

Outcomes

Round 1 of the FEIF invested £190,000 (out of a total pot of £400,000) in VCFSE organisations operating in the foundational economy across the 4 target sectors:

- health and social care
- early education and child care (0-5 years)
- retail and personal services
- hospitality and leisure

One of these organisations was [Unlimited Potential](#), a community benefit society based in Salford, which secured funding for two projects relating to health & social care and early education & childcare.

Impact

“The grant has been essential in helping us explore how our non-traditional solution could fit alongside a mainstream public service system. What we have learned is that there's a far bigger demand for a low-cost solution to loneliness than we'd originally thought, extending beyond health and social care. We have engaged with professionals involved in suicide reduction, for example, as well as the police, who spend considerable time with people who are experiencing mental health issues.

As a result, we have now got a much better idea of how wide the Spreading Our Net approach could be applied, and how to market it in a way that the system understands, which had been a fundamental problem for us.” - Chris Dabbs, Chief Executive of Unlimited Potential.

Commitment 4 - Conclusion & Recommendations

The gathering of evidence, creation of resources, and regular policy dialogues all work to integrate the VCFSE sector's perspectives into regional economic strategies. Building a strong evidence base is crucial to illustrating the VCFSE sector's unique contributions to an inclusive economy, offering clear insights into how social value-driven approaches can reduce inequalities embedded in traditional economic models.

The upcoming devolution deal presents an opportunity for the VCFSE sector to use its evidence base, expanding its influence in policymaking, enhancing its role in shaping local economic strategies, ensuring any additional powers from Central Government can flow right through to communities. Moving forward, upcoming plans like the Social Enterprise Summit and post-budget briefings, are all set to deepen the sector's influence. These planned engagements will enhance VCFSE capacity to respond to policy shifts.

To sustain momentum, it is recommended that the Accord delivery should look to join up the work on inclusive economy to current GM priorities like LiveWell, which takes a holistic approach to community wellbeing by supporting people in accessing employment and leading healthier lives, supporting GM's goal of reaching 80% employment support for those currently out of work. These collaborative, forward-looking efforts will ensure that inclusive economy goals remain central, ultimately enhancing economic resilience across the city-region

Commitment 5: To develop the best VCFSE ecosystem in England

We will build on our existing strengths to build the best VCFSE ecosystem in England

Our aim is to enable VCFSE organisations to become 'anchors' for their place or their community, creating resources, support and connections for them to thrive.

Working towards a shared vision for a Greater Manchester with the best VCFSE ecosystem in England through the Accord we recognise and work from a foundation of shared strengths, empowering VCFSE organisations as "anchors" within their communities, enhancing their roles in building resilience, connecting people, and providing essential resources for local success. The strategy is twofold: fostering a robust infrastructure for co-designing services with communities and creating a cohesive ecosystem that thrives on communication, collaboration, and inclusivity. Through **10GM's** coordinated support across the ten boroughs and the ongoing evolution of strategic frameworks, Greater Manchester has laid the groundwork for a resilient and interconnected VCFSE sector. Key to this ecosystem's effectiveness are enhanced communication channels and networking opportunities supported by **VSNW**, which allow VCFSE organisations to work together, share knowledge, and expand their reach, thus increasing their capacity for impact.

Headline Activities

- Local Infrastructure Organisation Network with work towards Accord commitments driven in 10 boroughs
- Accord Ecosystem Fund
- Growing Networks such as GM Networks Connect, and GM Ethnic Communities Network

Ecosystem Model Established

The work of Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIOs) continues to position VCFSE organisations as central 'anchors' for their communities, a position put forward clearly in the 2020 VCSE Policy Paper. The notion of a "VCFSE ecosystem" is now firmly embedded across the region, and leverages 10GM's strategy to connect and strengthen VCFSE organisations across all 10 boroughs, creating a cohesive network of stakeholders working together for greater impact

Strategic Collaboration

A key success is the establishment of the quarterly **GM VCFSE Forum**²², set up in March 2023, which has driven positive leadership across GM. The Forum facilitates collaboration among various stakeholders, ensuring that VCFSE organisations remain engaged with policy discussions and community priorities. This effort is bolstered by other new GM-wide proponents of activity like **GM Networks Connect**, a network of networks driving social and environmental action, and the **GM Ethnic Communities Network** developing, ensuring diverse and under-represented communities are better included in strategic decisions. **The LIOs group**, supported by 10GM, have created new monthly infrastructure collaboration spaces—covering areas like violence reduction, multiple-disadvantage, and contract pressures. A **successful UKSPF Social Economy bid** was submitted by several VCFSE infrastructure organisations. Working groups were established to develop best practices in Environmental Response, Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion monitoring, and to facilitate Development Managers and Volunteering Network meetings. A coordinated pan-GM engagement was also initiated around the **GM Healthy Weight Strategy**, focusing on collaboratively selecting pilot

²² <https://www.vcfseleadershipgm.org.uk/news-and-events/inaugural-gm-vcfse-forum-brings-sector-and-partners-together>

sites when funding was insufficient for all ten Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIOs).

LIOs have also played a key role in advancing violence reduction efforts, evidenced through work with the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) to co-design safety strategies, thus reinforcing the sector's role as a critical partner in addressing local challenges.

Case Study: LIOs Joint Cost-of-Living Work

The cost-of-living crisis is impacting our community and the VCFSE sector. VCFSE Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIOs) are vital due to their expertise and trusted community ties. They have united to assess their role and advocate for systemic change.

Action

- LIOs provided toolkits, warm spaces, and local practical leadership to lessen the impacts of the crisis for their communities.
- LIOs hosted events with councils, managed emergency grants, and collaborated with Greater Manchester Poverty Action on advice tools.
- A scoping session highlighted LIOs' roles and challenges in the crisis, resulting in a summary paper on key issues and opportunities shared with partners.

Outcomes

- Money Advice Referral Tools were developed in six localities with GMPA.
- 60 warm spaces were established in Wigan by the VCFSE sector.
- Cost-of-living information events were hosted in Bolton with the council.
- The cost-of-living crisis impacts on health and wellbeing were researched and reported on in Tameside.
- The Macc Spirit of Manchester fund provided 20 grants of £1,000 to local VCFSE organisations.
- Discussions on the Bury Anti-Poverty Strategy with various local networks fed into the strategy.

Impact

The VCFSE sector has become a crucial partner in delivering services to Greater Manchester communities affected by the cost-of-living crisis, advocating for under-represented groups, fostering collaboration, and enhancing funders' understanding of community capacity and the VCFSE's role, thereby strengthening the overall VCFSE ecosystem.

Support and Development of VCFSE Organisations in the 10 boroughs

Targeted support to VCFSE organisations has been a focal point of the LIOs' activities, particularly in the crucial context of the ongoing cost-of-living crisis. **The 'Social Investment Pilot'** has empowered organisations by granting them access to critical resources for delivering community-based services.

Across 2023-24, the following work has contributed to the furthering of this commitment in each borough:

- Implementation of the **Community Health Champions** initiative in **Manchester**, engaging residents in health improvement efforts.
- Development of the **Salford Employment and Skills Strategy**, focusing on partnerships with local businesses to create job opportunities.
- Establishment of the **Bolton Refugee Support Network**, providing resources and community integration programs for refugees and asylum seekers.
- Launching of the **Bury Youth Violence Prevention Strategy**, aimed at reducing youth violence through community engagement.
- Capacity-building support through the **Oldham Locality Plan**, enhancing grassroots organisation effectiveness.
- Initiation of the **Rochdale Ethnic Minorities Network**, promoting cultural events and supporting diverse communities.
- Rolling out of the **Tameside Mental Health Strategy**, focusing on awareness and support initiatives for mental health.
- Organisation of the "**Stockport Together**" forums to address local inequalities through cross-sector collaboration, as well as presenting on Accord priorities at **Stockport Meet, Greet and Grow**
- Implementation of the **Trafford Social Connections Project**, aimed at reducing isolation among older adults.
- Promotion of the **Wigan Green Spaces Initiative**, encouraging community involvement in environmental sustainability projects.

Recognised “Anchor” Status and VCFSE role as a Grant Funding Partner

The public sector often collaborates with the VCFSE sector in Greater Manchester to administer key public sector funds targeted at community organisations. This is key evidence of the sector being trusted as anchors and valued for their community knowledge. The embedding of the notion of ecosystem; the raising of the profile and demonstration of how connected the VCFSE sector is; and the building of an even stronger foundation of trust between sectors, is undoubtedly as key to achievements in this area, whilst this is not directly Accord funded activity. Examples of this include:

- **VCFSE-targeted £5 million community grants programme from WEA**
- GMCA Foundational Economy Fund by GMCVO, offering 40 projects were awarded initial grants of £10,000 plus expert support and 15 projects receiving additional grants of £60,000
- GMCA Inspire Arts & Culture Fund by 10GM, worth £300,000
- GM ICP Partnership Fund GM Mental Wellbeing Grants by GMCVO, worth £75,000 this year.

The **£60k Accord Ecosystem Fund** distributed by VSNW, was a key investment from the Accord supporting GM-wide ecosystem activity in 23-24, through **thematic infrastructure grants** delivering the following:

1. The establishment of the **GM Anti-Poverty Forum**, led by Resolve Poverty (formerly GMPA), providing a valuable platform for organisations to collaboratively shape anti-poverty strategies and influence policy development. The collective effort of Resolve Poverty in this area has contributed to 80% of local authorities in Greater Manchester now having an anti-poverty strategy, significantly higher than the 13% observed across the UK.²³
2. **GM Interfaith Mapping** - Engagement with GM Local Infrastructure Organisations, the Metro Mayor, borough leaders, and wider partners involving mapping local interfaith networks to gather data and develop an evidence-based model for effective interfaith collaboration. This has resulted in a **GM Faith and Belief Contribution Statement**²⁴ and a **GM Faith, Belief and Interfaith Covenant**²⁵ both demonstrating improved recognition of this part of the sector in communities

²³ <https://www.resolvepoverty.org/access-anti-poverty-strategies-in-england/>

²⁴ <https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/8447/gm-faith-and-belief-contribution-statement.pdf>

3. **GM Sanctuary Seekers Response Group** delivery by Macc, holding fortnightly meetings to share updates and resources regarding refugee and asylum seeker rights, a WhatsApp group for real-time communication. An in-person event is planned for Refugee Week 2024 to unite VCFSE, public, and private sector partners in support of refugees. Strengthening connections with related initiatives, such as the GM Homelessness Action Network and the Migrant Destitution Action Group, to enhance collaboration and impact.

4. Case Study: GM Mental Health Leaders Group

The Group convened Locality leads from Bury, Rochdale, Oldham, Tameside, and Stockport co-designed a £10k funding initiative to strengthen the VCFSE's role in the GM mental health system, securing matching funds from Pennine Care Trust. They hosted the "Human Factor" launch event in October 2023, attracting over 100 attendees and generating 170+ collaboration ideas, followed by a January 2024 event to develop action plans.

So far, their achievements include enhanced sector relationships, established locality cross-sector working groups, **collaboration with GM mental health trusts to create a Mental Health Providers collaborative**, significant investment from Pennine Care in VCFSE leadership, prototyping similar events in Wigan, and transitioning clinical roles to VCFSE, such as peer support workers in Community Mental Health Teams.

Resilience

August 2024 saw the sector respond at crisis point when violent rioting erupted across the streets of the UK. Work is being done by 10GM and the Greater Manchester Resilience Forum (GMRF) to understand the sector's responsiveness to this and the impact on communities. This remains a pertinent issue moving forward.

²⁵ <https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/9606/greater-manchester-faith-belief-and-interfaith-covenant.pdf>

Commitment 5 - Conclusion & Recommendations

Through the Accord, we have successfully embedded the concept of a VCFSE 'ecosystem' in Greater Manchester. Via 10GM, the ecosystem has been strengthened by a coordinated approach to VCFSE infrastructure support across all 10 boroughs. It is crucial that this continues, ensuring that the ecosystem concept evolves beyond strategic planning and GM-wide connectivity, translating into tangible, locality-based outcomes. By strengthening partnerships, supporting leadership development, and creating inclusive networks like GM Networks Connect, the VCFSE ecosystem demonstrates key examples that point to growing resilience and capacity.

While considerable progress has been made in building partnerships, fostering leadership, and developing inclusive networks, the ongoing challenge is ensuring these advances result in tangible, equitable outcomes at the local level.

A recurring theme is the tension between GM-level strategies and their translation into local authority action. Although some initiatives like the Fair Funding Protocol are trying to push past this - with implementation being consulted on in shared locality and GM spaces such as the VCFSE Forum in October 2024 - there is likely to still be considerable variability in local funding models unless steps are taken to make them more unified, with consistent funding frameworks, enhanced collaboration, and a focus on community outcomes. This inconsistency, coupled with funding cuts from NHS GM and local authorities, complicates the push for a seamless pan-GM approach.

To fully realise the benefits of the VCFSE ecosystem, there needs to be a coordinated and consistent funding framework that bridges local and GM-wide goals. This is especially critical as the sector faces uncertainty around the end of UK SPF funding. UK SPF and E11 have been a vehicle that supports GM locality connectivity, so funding ending in March 2025 represents a cliff edge for other strands of VCFSE work. Furthermore, as LiveWell evolves into a movement shaping public sector thinking in GM, to be delivered in place, we need to ensure plans are joined up across GM and the districts from the start. The VCFSE sector's role in crisis response—such as during the riots in August 2024— also needs support and recognition within these frameworks.

In conclusion, continued investment in local infrastructure, sector-wide collaboration, and the expansion of initiatives like the Fair Funding Protocol will be crucial in overcoming existing challenges. By doing so, Greater Manchester can further embed the VCFSE ecosystem into both strategic planning and local delivery, ensuring the sector remains a critical partner in building resilient, equitable, and thriving communities.

Commitment 6: To ensure that co-design of local services is the norm

We will put into place meaningful mechanisms to make co-design of local services the norm, including expanding channels for service design to be informed by 'lived experience'. **Our aim is to create arrangements to enable local people, groups and organisations to be involved in the design of the services which are provided for them.**

The development of the **Greater Manchester Equality Alliance (GM=EqAl)** supported by **GMCVO**, launched in September 2020, has been a key driver in realising this Accord commitment. GM=EqAl has worked in alliance with VCFSE, public and private sector individuals and organisations, to connect communities to policy makers, and vice versa, to assist with strategic equality and diversity work in Greater Manchester. This alliance has co-created service provisions with communities, incorporating insights directly from the VCFSE sector to better align services with community needs.

The work led by GM=EqAl has also established the **foundational "scaffolding" required for co-designing services** and activities that engage diverse community voices, **setting up clearer communication channels for the VCFSE sector**. This coordinated framework has allowed organisations to be **more effectively networked**, fostering a collaborative ecosystem that amplifies impact across Greater Manchester.

Headline Activities

- GM=EqAl ensuring diverse input with an intersectional is heard in GM wide strategies
- The Voice of Lived Experience in Policy Making Guidance being developed
- A suite of Inclusive Language Guidance being kept up to date

An Intersectional Approach

GM=EqAl takes an intersectional approach, recognising that each individual experiences marginalisation in unique ways due to how multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage compound exclusion. By bringing together a diverse range of voices in a pan-equalities space, GM=EqAl channels multiple perspectives to develop solutions through dialogue. The GM=EqAl Working Group comprises of **30+ VCFSE equalities experts** drawn from a wide range of communities of experience and identity across GM, **with regular meetings, a monthly bulletin, and impact report**. They are a diverse mix of grass roots community organisers and voluntary sector strategic operators who volunteer time each

month to influencing policy at a GM level. GM=EqAl annually conducts a membership review to ensure this. **Key documents, including the Membership Pack and Terms of Reference, were revised in 2023. A member survey was conducted** to guide improvements such as a **new annual celebration event** and better tracking of speakers' post-engagement impact.

Strategic Engagement and Networking

GM=EqAl facilitates connections between the VCFSE sector and partners like the GM Equality Panels and Local Infrastructure Organisations. It serves as an equalities reference group and works closely with local authorities and the Integrated Care System (ICS). Regular roundtables are held with LIO leads to address locality-specific inequality issues and foster collaboration helping equalities organisations be better networked.

Groups, Networks, and Forums Attended

As well as their own network groups, GM=EqAl members actively engage with numerous other boards and networks, such as the Tackling Inequalities Board and GM VCFSE Leadership Group, to influence decision-making and share insights across Greater Manchester.

GM=EqAl Consultation

Across 2023-2024, GM=EqAl has engaged Accord partnership members in a number of thematic areas relating to service design, advocating for inclusion and equity, with lived experience at the core:

- **Age Equality:** Contributed to “**Ageism: What’s the Harm**”²⁶ March 2023 report for **Centre for Ageing Better** highlighting digital exclusion, intersecting discrimination and how it should inform service delivery.
- **Criminal Justice:** GM=EqAl wrote a **letter raising concerns with Greater Manchester Police (GMP)**’s handling of arrests and custody conditions, resulting in a **meeting in October 2023** requesting trauma-informed approaches, with **commitment from GMP to engage more with GM=EqAl through 2024**.
- **Digital:** Feedback on the **GM Information Strategy** focused on transparency and inclusion. Concerns about AI bias led to **discussions with Open Data Manchester** in February 2023.
- **Disability:** In December 2022, **GM Disabled People’s Panel** shared its Cost-of-Living survey, revealing barriers disabled people face in accessing services. In October 2023, a conference on **Neurodiversity, Culture, and Autism** took place, showcasing best practices and intersectional approaches to autism in ethnically diverse communities. Members are currently developing guidance for GPs on these issues.
- **Education:** In October 2023, GM=EqAl discussed with GMCA **Tackling Inequalities in Education**, particularly addressing absenteeism and the impact of poverty, especially following the pandemic. Members raised concerns about punitive measures against parents and the need for integrated educational provisions for disabled children. In May 2024, GM=EqAl discussed the GM 18+ **Skills and Education & Multiple Disadvantaged Offer** to shape the next iteration of the Changing Futures programme to better reach the various communities in GM and reduce inequalities.
- **Environment:** Reflections on unequal climate change impacts and the lack of support for VCFSE sectors were discussed during the **Green Summit and Environment Plan** consultations.
- **Gypsy, Roma, Traveller (GRT+)** communities: GM=EqAl advocated for updated **GMP policies** to adopt

progressive policy of negotiated stopping pioneered by Leeds Gypsy and Traveller Exchange. GM=EqAl have been working alongside GMCA to have the principles of negotiated stopping adopted by all ten localities, as well as developing a strategy of expanding the number of legal sites for nomadic communities. A GM=EqAl member attends this Task and Finish group has highlighted that the absence of data around GRT+ communities is a key barrier in the provision of resources, and that rectifying this should be a key priority.

- **Health:** Engagement with the **GM Mental Health Strategy** and **VCFSE Mental Health Leadership Group** addressed mental health stigma and culturally sensitive care. GM=EqAl have fed into the **BeeWell Survey; GM Health and Poverty Intelligence; GM Primary Care Blueprint Consultation; Fairer Health for All Framework; Live Well**.
- **Race Equality:** A **GMCA and University of Manchester** and **CoDE** presentation in October 2022 highlighted racial disparities and the need to influence policy makers to take further decisive action.
- **Women and Girls:** In April 2023, **End Violence Against Women Coalition** addressed communication barriers for victims from marginalised communities, aiming to improve access to justice for these groups through **collaboration with GMP**.
- **Transport:** GM=EqAl contributed to the GM Transport Plan Consultation and the evaluation of Virtual Wards

Guidance and Publications

Inclusive Language Guidance

GM=EqAl has an inclusive language subgroup which **meets regularly to develop inclusive language guides**. These provide the preferred language by diverse communities as a key resource, to help them be better recognised, heard and understood. In 2023, it updated guidance on race and poverty, and a new social class guide published October 2024 adding to its existing catalogue of guides covering the following²⁷:

- Disability
- Sex and Gender
- Religion and Belief
- Age
- Sexual Orientation
- Neurodiversity and Autism

²⁶ <https://ageing-better.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-02/Ageism-harms.pdf>

²⁷ <https://www.gmcvo.org.uk/publications/gmeqal-inclusive-language-guidance>

- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (and other similar) communities
- Gender reassignment and trans and non-binary identities
- Learning Disability
- Poverty
- Social Class

Case study: Greater Manchester Autism Strategy Ethnically Diverse Communities Focus Group



Context

The Greater Manchester's All Age Autism Strategy was launched in May 2022. GM=EqAl is one of the key stakeholders listed in the strategy. Mari Saeki has been leading this work, as a GM=EqAl member and Project Lead for GMAC.

Greater Manchester Autism Consortium (GMAC), managed by National Autistic Society, has developed an implementation plan for the strategy. Tackling health and care inequalities is a priority, and a commitment was made to increase the participation of autistic people from ethnically diverse communities in the work of Greater Manchester Autism Consortium (GMAC) including the strategic work, events, workshops and groups. In both the support and engagement, and strategic work being delivered, people experiencing racial inequalities are poorly represented and there is a need to both understand and proactively address this.



Mari Saeki speaking at GM=EqAl's Celebration and Showcase event – March 2024

Action

An Ethnically Diverse Communities Focus group was set up to develop, oversee and drive a work-plan to increase the participation of people experiencing racial inequalities across the lifetime of the strategy. GM=EqAl supported the development of the focus group, and its membership is currently made up of five GM=EqAl members, local authority staff, autistic adults and three community groups. GM=EqAl also connected the group to colleagues who expressed interest in the intersectional needs of neurodivergent people.

Outcomes

Mapped organisations interested in the intersectional needs of neurodivergent people.

Collectively designed and delivered a 'Human Library' event in October 2023 with members sharing insights on best practice, discussing the need for cultural competency and exploring the compounding effects of multiple forms of discrimination or disadvantage.

The focus group remains in place and is currently developing a guide for GPs on the intersectional needs of neurodivergent people from ethnically diverse communities, and is working alongside GMCA, the Race Equality Panel and the Faith and Belief Panel to raise awareness and understanding within African churches in GM.

Impact

GM=EqAl members played a key role in the development and continuation of the focus group, allowing GMAC to be better networked and able to work more collaboratively, with good practice being shared.

'Scaffolding' in place to enable co-design of services and activities, with the lived experience and intersectional needs of ethnically diverse autistic adults is being amplified and valued as part of the Greater Manchester All Age Autism Strategy implementation.

There is now a meaningful mechanism in place to increase the participation of people experiencing racial inequalities in the implementation of the Greater Manchester All Age Autism Strategy, increasing community ownership of solutions, and increasing the level of service provision co-created with communities.

The Voice of Lived Experience in Policy Making Guidance

A flagship piece of work progressed from the end of 2023 and into 2024 was the Lived Experience in Policy Making Guidance. It aims to be a **framework for best practice** to allow the voices of people and communities to truly be involved in co-design. **The guidance has been co-produced itself**, through several conversations with networks and groups of individuals and organisations across the VCFSE Accord partners including GM Equality Alliance, GM VCFSE Leadership Group, GM Equality Panel facilitators, GM Equality officers, NHS GM communications and engagement group and GMCA co-production group members to ensure it reflects current thinking and challenges. Planning for uptake and use by the public sector is underway and will be key to the future of progress under this commitment.

New Victims & Justice Workstream

Along with GM=EqAl contributing to 10-year strategy to tackle serious violence across VRU, in Summer 2024, the GM VCFSE Leadership Group have set up a new Victims & Justice working group. This has been led by Duncan Craig from WeAreSurvivors and Gail Health from The Pankhurst Trust with the aim of shaping and supporting the sector's work on victims, witnesses, offenders and the justice system. The objective is to **build a system** and **influence decisions** to ensure that **victims and witnesses** receive the best treatment; while work with offenders is focused on **justice, rehabilitation, and reducing recidivism**. Specific work planned is on leading the challenge to gender-based violence (GBV) in Greater Manchester and delivering the GBV strategy, and ensuring violence against women and girls is not lost within the GBV language. The group will also seek to improve VCFSE representation in key boards of influence. A related campaign to establish the groups leadership voice is planned for 2024-25.

Commitment 6 - Conclusion & Recommendations

GM=EqAl has been incredibly successful in ensuring the voice of lived experience, equalities and diverse communities have been considered in many public sector strategy and plans. While GM=EqAl members contribute expertise, challenges in obtaining follow-up information on progress limit their ability to assess their impact systematically. National policy can further complicate local ambitions, for GM=EqAl and the new Victims and Justice Accord workstream. Looking forward, the work led by GM=EqAl should focus on a select number of priority thematic areas, in line with the Accord, with the public sector committing to enhanced follow-up mechanisms to track the impact of GM=EqAl contributions. The flagship **'The Voice of Lived Experience in Policy Making' guidance** will be a key vehicle towards achieving this commitment in expanding channels for lived experience in service design. Its implementation across the public sector, through embedding and defining clear mechanisms will be essential to its success.

Commitment 7: To build productive relationships between sectors

We will fulfil the potential for building productive relationships between the VCFSE, public and private sectors to address inequity and build back fairer.

Our aim is to work closely with local businesses as well as the public sector to increase their focus on social value and addressing inequalities.

This commitment emphasises the potential of cross-sector collaboration that addresses inequalities. It encourages integrating social value into business practices and public sector work to "build back fairer" through collaborative approaches. Survey data demonstrates that this commitment has achieved notable success, with **92%** of stakeholders agreeing on its effectiveness, marking it as the highest-rated commitment in terms of perceived impact.

Initiatives that work towards this commitment are many, encompassing collaborations with businesses on social value practices, policy input through high-level boards, and the development of frameworks like Fairer Health for All to address inequality in health outcomes across Greater Manchester. Notable progress includes the VCFSE sector's active involvement on key policy and operational boards with the GM NHS Integrated Care and GMCA, which has led to the development of guiding frameworks and collaborative approaches to tackle pressing regional issues.

Headline Activities

- Creating the Greater Manchester VCFSE Forum for public sector and VCFSE leaders to meet driving work across the localities such as the Fair Funding Protocol
- Increase in GMCA grant funding for VCFSE activities has increased from £5.5m in 2021/22 to an estimated £9m in the current financial year.
- Fairer Health for All videos series 'stories of change'

Tackling Inequality and Fairer Health for All

The Fairer Health for All Framework was developed to help the Greater Manchester Integrated Care Partnership (GM ICP) deliver against their commitments to improve health, reduce inequalities and create a greener, fairer, more

prosperous city region as outlined in the GM ICP strategy and the Greater Manchester strategy. Through strong Leadership Group consultation, many **VCFSE organisations participated in a range of co-design and engagement sessions to develop the framework.**

This GM framework will strengthen and enable local action through place-based partnerships by outlining: shared principles for delivery against GM Strategy and ICS priorities to reduce health across the lifespan (Start Well, Live Well, Age Well). It aims to strengthen the system infrastructure required to support policies and programmes that create healthy places and reduce inequalities in access to care, to deliver against national planning guidance and the 5 national clinical priorities in CORE20PLUS5.

Local infrastructure organisations developed a **video series of 'stories of change'**²⁸, illustrating examples of integrated neighbourhood working and transforming health through collaboration and partnerships with local communities and voluntary organisations.

²⁸ [View Stories of Change from the Fairer Health for All programme](#)

A Different Approach to Social Value

A significant portion of the work geared towards increasing organisational social value has been influencing work led by the Commissioning & Investment Group. They spotlight examples to inspire other partners to take a broader and more sustainable approach to social value. An example of this is the June 2024 published Case Study "**Thinking Differently about Social Value in Bolton**"²⁹ which highlights a partnership approach to creating a local Social Value framework, shifting from transactional 'one off' support to building community partnerships through 20 Social Value pledges. This initiative, launched with Bolton's businesses in January 2024, aims to strengthen collaboration between the VCFSE sector and local businesses, culminating in a year-long journey to celebrate Bolton's Fund's 5th anniversary.

Case Study: Relationship with GMCA

This case study explores how the relationships with, and shared understanding of, the VCFSE sector, as well as our own internal ways of working have developed within GMCA since the signing of the Accord.

Work to date at a GM footprint has focussed on building relationships: bringing people together, developing improved ways of working and addressing barriers to productive relationships. Over the last 3 years, there has been a dramatic improvement in the depth, nature and scope of relationships between GMCA and the VCFSE sector. Analysis in the summer of 2024 has shown that **the VCFSE sector is represented on 15 Strategic Boards and over 60 policy development and operational partnerships linked with the work of GMCA**

New ways to collaborate with the VCFSE sector have been created. For example, there have been 3 meetings of the **GM VCFSE Forum** since its inception in March 2023. Around 50 people attended each meeting, including local Councillors, senior officers from GMCA, the GM local authorities and local Health systems, and VCFSE sector leaders from across the city region, including members of the VCFSE Leadership Group. This Forum has led to a number of valuable policy initiatives, including the GMCA **'Fair Funding Protocol'** which supports our financial relationship with the VCFSE sector.

Within the GMCA, there is now a **50-person virtual team of officers** 'working with the VCFSE sector' across all the policy areas. This team shares a Teams channel and meets regularly (online and in person) to hear about each other's work, discuss key operational topics (such as the GM Faith Covenant and approaches to social value) or hear from external speakers.

GMCA also facilitates a **group of commissioning staff from the 10GM local authorities**, enabling operational continuity between the VCFSE Accord work taking place at a GM footprint and locality-driven activities. It is clear from a recent engagement exercise held by the CA with all local authorities, just how important this engagement and collaboration is improving our chances of successfully achieving shared goals.

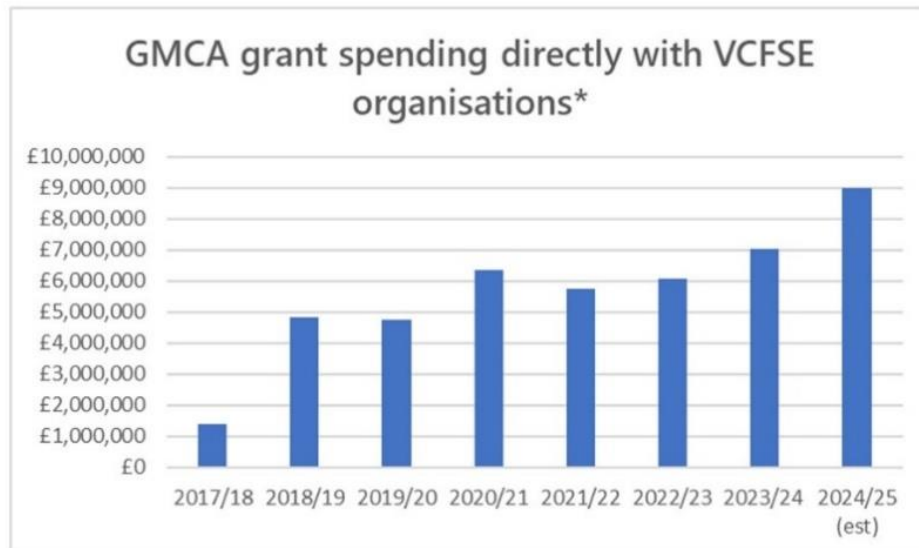
We have created a complex fabric of relationships and engagement which focuses on having the right people in the right conversations. Behind the numbers are conversations between GMCA and its partners, with VCFSE experts bringing lived experiences, technical expertise and solutions, knowledge of issues, people and communities, and a willingness to collaborate around shared goals.

83% of all respondents agreed that the Accord had helped them understand the VCFSE's sector contribution to the **Greater Manchester Strategy**.

In signing the Accord, GMCA has made an organisation-level commitment to the VCFSE sector and supporting/enabling the capacity building of VCFSE organisations. It will be important that we sustain and build these collaborative arrangements as we move towards the new Integrated Settlement with central government, and work towards priorities around Live Well, Housing First and the MBACC, to ensure increased focus on social value and addressing inequalities together.

²⁹ <https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/6682c2b63024d4c5fac17ec7d/66e9847f6755f155ed6c801>

[a_Commissioning-andInvestmentCaseStudyBoltonandSocialValue.pdf](#)



* Taken from transparency reports at [Transparency Reports - Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise \(VCSE\) Grants Awarded - Greater Manchester Combined Authority \(greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk\)](https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/transparency-reports)

Figure 1: A chart showing GMCA grant spending directly with VCFSE organisations

Furthermore, the **total amount of grant funding going to VCFSE activities has increased from £5.5m in 2021/22 to an estimated £9m in the current financial year.**

Commitment 7 – Conclusions & Recommendations

The Accord has effectively strengthened cross-sector partnerships, positioning the VCFSE sector as vital in Greater Manchester’s strategies to reduce inequality. By embedding the VCFSE perspective in policy development and operational planning through strategic boards and initiatives, these partnerships have successfully enhanced the impact of both the GMCA and NHS Integrated Care System, even amid ongoing pressures and uncertainties impacting NHS roles and resources. This collaborative approach has not only expanded the VCFSE sector’s influence but has also been integral to supporting public sector resilience in times of constraint.

While businesses are not signatories to the Accord, there remains significant potential for a stronger partnership approach with the private sector, particularly around social value and sustainable practices. As we can certainly continue to shape public sector frameworks more, a concerted effort to engage local businesses could broaden these initiatives, ensuring consistency and fair access to resources across GM localities. Furthermore, sustaining and growing the VCFSE sector’s representation in decision-making will reinforce its strategic contribution to regional priorities, including emerging goals linked to the Integrated Settlement. Equipping the VCFSE sector to adapt to shifting partnership needs will help solidify its role in addressing Greater Manchester’s social and economic challenges through cohesive, inclusive partnerships.

Commitment 8: To provide a comprehensive workforce programme for VCFSE organisations

We will put in place a comprehensive workforce programme to support organisational and workforce development for VCFSE employers based on and facilitating a more integrated public facing workforce.

Our aim is to improve capacity, capability and employment standards across the paid and voluntary VCFSE workforce in Greater Manchester

Through influencing activity of the GM VCFSE Leadership Group a 2019 VCFSE workforce capability report, was commissioned by GM Health and Social Care Partnership, in collaboration with Macc. This highlighted issues, and recommendations across 6 key areas: HR support, Recruitment, Inclusion, Personal Development, Leadership Development and Wellbeing. **The 10GM workforce development programme** for the VCFSE sector in Greater Manchester was designed to address the recommendations from the report and work towards our **intended outcome of a better supported VCFSE paid and unpaid workforce.**

Delivered throughout 2023 and 2024, the programme ensured long-term sustainability by engaging key Accord partners like GMCA, GM NHS ICP, and the private sector. The programme **aligned with the GM Workforce Strategy** by addressing recruitment, retention, leadership, wellbeing, and new ways of working. **A focus on Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)** included workforce data analysis, support for communities of identity, and provision of bursaries to remove barriers to participation. The delivered programme provided an innovative, collective resource for strategic workforce development in the VCFSE sector, ensuring its sustainability and inclusivity in line with broader workforce priorities across Greater Manchester. Some of the achievements of this long and hard fought for programme demonstrate the impact this has had in several areas:

Headline Activities

- 6-month Leadership Development Programmes for existing leaders and emerging leaders
- Recruitment and workforce hubs
- New research into HR, Pay Conditions and Payroll

recruitment challenges by streamlining hiring processes and uniting efforts to attract talent. Launched alongside it, the Workforce Hub offers extensive support resources and best practices to improve workforce wellbeing and resilience. Within its first two weeks, the Workforce Hub recorded 6,365 page views and engaged over 1,700 users, underscoring its immediate impact on the VCFSE ecosystem.

HR Support

A detailed **analysis of the VCFSE sector's HR support landscape** was undertaken, via the HR Survey³² with the aim of identifying opportunities for collaborative purchasing and pro-bono services. This resulted in the creation of a **specialist database of HR providers** with expertise in the VCFSE sector, as well as the **development of updated HR policy templates** shared across local infrastructure organisations and the **workforce hub**. These actions

Recruitment & Workforce Hubs

The **GM VCFSE Recruitment**³⁰ and **Workforce Hubs**³¹, launched in April 2024, have significantly bolstered sector-wide recruitment and workforce support. The Recruitment Hub provides a centralised platform to increase the visibility and reach of job opportunities, making VCFSE roles more accessible and promoting talent mobility across the sector. Through sector-wide careers communication, it tackles

³⁰ <https://gmworkforcehub.org.uk/recruitment-hub/>

³¹ <https://gmworkforcehub.org.uk/>

³² https://mcusercontent.com/21478fb85b6d9d8b5bcab9838/files/db7492a3-ee20-7130-9b29-4c4a3fb0d3af/VCSE_Workforce_Development_Programme_HR_Survey_Snapshot.pdf

enhanced the capacity of VCFSE organisations to attract, retain, and develop their workforce, ensuring that even **smaller organisations could access crucial HR support without significant financial burdens.**

Research

Key pieces of research were undertaken through surveys, which remain open to continuously collect data, not only in relation to HR support, but also payroll and pay and conditions. The **Pay and Conditions Survey Snapshot report published** shared with VCFSE organisations will provide useful insight to inform benchmarking and organisation policies. The results will help the sector to illustrate to funders and commissioners the challenges faced by VCFSE organisations in maintaining competitive salaries and terms – joining up with the work of the GM VCFSE Accord and the GM Fair Funding Protocol. The **Payroll Survey Snapshot report published** will be used to produce recommendations, and a proposal for a shared payroll for smaller organisations.

Inclusion

The programme placed a strong emphasis on fostering diversity and inclusion within the workforce. This included a masterclass designed to promote workforce diversity for minority groups from diverse ethnic backgrounds and LGBTQIA+ staff. These initiatives were underpinned by research into workforce diversity, pay scales, and workplace accessibility. **The findings led to key recommendations**, and resources published on the workforce hub, positioning the VCFSE sector as a leader in promoting an inclusive, fair, and diverse workplace that reflects the communities it serves.

Leadership Development

The programme also focused on leadership development, particularly for under-represented groups, **through three distinct programmes:**

1. Emerging leaders;
2. Existing leaders;
3. Open workshop series.

This programme offered masterclasses in system leadership, equipping both current and aspiring leaders with the skills needed to drive transformational change in the sector. The provision of **bursaries ensured that**

Case Study: Existing Leaders Workforce Programme

Razia Shaikh-Patel, Educator, Director and Founder, Women's Empowerment through Arts (Trafford/Manchester). Organisation size: Small

About WETA: *"We empower women from a marginalised racial background. We create opportunities and a pathway of progressions for women who never got the chance in their life - especially women who just consider themselves as a "just mothers or a home maker". We help them to be more independent through attending our projects, learning skills, courses, becoming volunteers, gain confidence to climb the ladder of workforce and create a role for them in our own organisation for them to work as a paid staff."*

What motivated you to join the programme? *"I hoped to learn from other experienced leaders, as a peer learning opportunity to improve my performance and productivity, to gain knowledge and to be more effective in my organisation. I want to create a leadership style that inspires and motivates my team with a vision and emotional connection. As a leader, we all know how important it is to keep learning and improving your skills and competencies. There is always room for an improvement through our own reflections, and I always believe in continuous personal and professional development through learning."*

What have you valued about the leadership development programme?

"This programme has been very helpful for me in the sense of learning the systemic, graduation to lead a system. I'm not just a leader, I'm leading the whole organisation, so in that aspect it has been really helpful for me to understand different layers, the iceberg and systems and the functions and motivations. All the learning materials were spot on, I felt heard and listened to. I honestly learnt so many things."

What are you doing differently?

"Everything has been something new to learn and implement in my role in my organisation. Creating an impactful organisation with an understanding of strategic and operational functionality – the functions of every individual – rather than doing everything. We are being more strategic in implementing and we are being more impactful - understanding from that lens as well. We are creating structural changes at WETA going forward. We are only five years old – we are quite new. But then our strength is that trust that we have built, the networking, the ripple that we have created around the people. And the impactful and successful projects. It's the people who make it successful or not successful. Because we understand the need and the grassroots need of the community. There's a gap and when you see there's a gap you can do something about it."

individuals facing financial barriers could participate fully, thereby promoting greater diversity in leadership and fostering more robust succession planning across VCFSE organisations.

Workforce Wellbeing

Recognising the importance of employee wellbeing, the programme delivered masterclasses on the GM Workforce Wellbeing Toolkit, equipping VCFSE organisations with practical knowledge and tools to support their staff. Additionally, **research was conducted into the availability of Occupational Health services and staff welfare programs**, leading to the exploration of collaborative purchasing models.

Good Employment and Real Living Wage Campaign

Other activity outside of the 10GM workforce programme that has looked to support the VCFSE sector workforce in GM is around Good Employment and aiming to **increase the number of sector organisations paying at least the Real Living Wage**.

GMCVO on behalf of the Inclusive Economy Working Group produced **a blog³³** detailing why good employment, as seen in the VCFSE sector, is an important part of building an inclusive economy. They also produced a full **portfolio³⁴ of good practice for an inclusive economy** focussed on this topic, demonstrating several examples of jobs that are fairly paid, provide security and wellbeing at work, and in many cases employing people who may face additional barriers to entering the job market.

In May 2023, the GM VCFSE Leadership Group discussed experiences in paying the Real Living Wage, reviewing member organisation practices, and having an honest discussion about the barriers. Working towards becoming an accredited Real Living Wage Employer became part of the GM VCFSE Leadership Group protocol agreement for members in December 2023.

Commitment 8 - Conclusions & Recommendations

Overall, the coordinated efforts across the 10GM workforce programme mark a significant impact in the level of support available for the VCFSE sector in Greater Manchester. Initiatives under which like leadership development, have clear impact through a set of leaders with strengthened capabilities, fostering a more inclusive, diverse, and resilient ecosystem capable of delivering greater social impact. The programme's innovative design purposefully sought lasting impacts beyond its one-year funding by the GM Integrated Care Partnership. By automating updates between local infrastructure organisations' recruitment hubs and the GM workforce hub, it streamlines workforce practices. The ongoing HR, pay, and conditions and payroll surveys all remain open for future updates, with continuous data input through the Workforce Hubs.

However, progress in some areas risk stalling without further funding, particularly the leadership programme, which was transformative for a cohort of people is tailored to the unique challenges of the VCFSE sector. Prioritising this programme is critical, as it offers sector-specific solutions and insight that broader cross-sector programmes cannot address.

The VCFSE sector has been the birthplace of flexible working arrangements which puts staff and volunteer wellbeing first. But VCFSE organisations are struggling to keep up with private and public sector wage uplifts amid the cost-of-living crisis, as well as back-office costs, and staff are feeling the squeeze. In 2021, 74% of GM VCFSE organisations reported paying staff the Real Living Wage. Support to keep investment flowing into our sector is essential to ensuring this figure rises, not falls.

³³ <https://www.gmcvo.org.uk/news/blog-good-employment-%E2%80%93-key-component-inclusive-economy>

<https://www.gmcvo.org.uk/system/files/publications/Inclusive%20Economy%20Portfolio%20part%203%20-%20Good%20Employment.pdf>

³⁴ <https://www.gmcvo.org.uk/system/files/publications/Inclusive%20Ec>

Engagement and Reach

This section evaluates the impact of the Accord on the engagement and reach of Greater Manchester's VCFSE sector. Our **intended outcome** is to foster a more **interconnected and collaborative VCFSE sector, with strengthened communication links, wider representation on strategic boards, and improved involvement in decision-making**. To achieve these aims, we have established structured engagement routes and key points of contact, enabling strong governance and visibility for VCFSE leaders. This section examines how these efforts have promoted collaboration across sectors, elevated the VCFSE's influence in public sector spaces, and enhanced communication channels to reach and engage stakeholders more effectively.

Headline Activities

- New GM VCFSE Leadership Group website
- Established engagement structures with clear points of contact
- 107 VCFSE representative seats on public sector boards

Clear Routes of Engagement

The **GM VCFSE Leadership Group operates with a distributed leadership model**, forming a coalition of leaders that reflect the diversity and strengths of Greater Manchester's >17,000 VCFSE organisations. As the primary delivery structure for the Accord, the Leadership Group has developed formal engagement routes and reinforced these by maintaining strong governance, including published terms of reference¹, member details, and accessible information across all working groups. **The consistent supported structure of the group is a significant achievement in itself**, ensuring the group's effectiveness and visibility within regional systems and the broader VCFSE sector.

The **GM VCFSE Leadership Group and its direct working group structures** include **127 individual VCFSE leaders**, regularly meeting to hold open dialogue and collaboration spaces to steer, deliver, and keep in operational or strategic contact with the entire breadth of work cited throughout this report.

Key Points of Contact

Key points of contact within the Accord are well-defined, as shown through robust cross-sector relationships (explained under [Commitment 7](#)) and an increasingly accessible view of the leadership across Accord activities. To facilitate connections, the GM VCFSE Leadership Group has maintained an **up-to-date list of representatives on various boards**³⁵, visible on its website alongside photos and contact details in a new **"Who We Are"**³⁶ section, and inclusion in quarterly Accord reporting. This enhanced transparency and accessibility supports ongoing engagement, fostering trust and making it easier for those seeking to connect with specific areas of Accord work to find the right leaders and contacts.

Our Reach in Numbers

- **1385** Monthly GM VCFSE Leadership Group Bulletin Recipients
- **16992** Combined VCFSE Sector Accord Partner Bulletin Recipients
- **127** Individual VCFSE Leaders in Leadership Group and working groups
- **107** VCFSE seats on public sector boards
- **10291** is the combined number of X/Twitter followers for leading VCFSE Accord Partners
- **3114** is the number of LinkedIn Followers Combined for leading VCFSE Accord Partners
- **259** Monthly website users 2023-24

³⁵ <https://www.vcfseleadershipgm.org.uk/list-of-representation>

³⁶ <https://www.vcfseleadershipgm.org.uk/who-we-are>

Accord Communications Group

The **Accord Communications Group** has been a consistent example of cross-sector working in the past few years. Meeting monthly, it convenes communication leads across key VCFSE partners, the GMCA, TfGM and GM NHS.

In 2022, the group undertook an extensive communication channels and network mapping exercise. In May 2023, a **Terms of Reference** were agreed for the group. Other successes have been **early input on the new GM VCFSE website**, a meeting with GMCA to improve their communication around the Accord and agreeing a **new communications plan**.

VCFSE Representatives on Public Sector Boards

Alongside the working groups, also sit **107 VCFSE representative seats** on **64 known GM public sector boards** held by **57 individual leaders**, advocating for the sector on a range of topics. In 2024, **increased demand for VCFSE representatives** on public sector boards created a need for developing a **new streamlined recruitment process** to allow rep positions to be filled more quickly. This new process, led by VSNW on behalf of the GM VCFSE Leadership Group, has allowed for the recruitment of **17 new representative positions in the last 6 months alone**, strengthening the position of VCFSE sector in decision making spaces and allowing better networking across the partnership,

Regular Communication

To compliment in-person engagement, collaboration and influence, strong communication channels and consistent supporting output are essential. Work in recent years, with the **appointment of dedicated GM Comms Officer**, has allowed the group's profile, key messages and contacts to become increasingly visible, within regional systems and across the VCFSE sector.

73% of Accord stakeholders agreed that "The Accord has improved communication and established better channels of communication between sectors"

According to monitoring data, in the period between April 2023 to March 24, under the Accord there were **7037 recorded³⁷ engagements**, representing individual interactions via attendance at meetings, workshops and events, or recipients to emails and surveys across all 9 delivery areas.

1787 engagements were recorded in from April 2023 to March 24 through Accord meetings and events.

Meetings

Online and face-to-face collaboration spaces for the VCFSE sector are an important driver of the Accord activity.

In addition to the Leadership Group, which the Accord supports to meet at least **eight times a year**, there are several "working groups" that serve as collaborative spaces, meeting regularly—some as often as once a month.

- Commissioning & Investment Group
- GM Equalities Alliance (GM=EqAI)
- Population Health Group
- Data & Intelligence Group
- Inclusive Economy Group
- Health Influencing Group

Events

Involvement with and hosting events and opportunities for engagement are all key to the Leadership Group being well networked with the wider VCFSE sector.

In 2024, the Leadership Group and its working groups hosted a series of events that saw successful engagement with the VCFSE sector. These events included the **GM Metro Mayoral VCFSE Hustings** in May 2024 and the GM Integrated Single Settlement Event, and Provider Selection Regime Information Session.

To further support Leadership Group member's involvement with events an 'event calendar' was set up in 2023, to advise leaders of upcoming meetings and events. We also have a new event page of the website, helping to publicise engagement opportunities with GM communities and organisations.

³⁷Due to the nature of the data collection, the actual figure is likely to be much higher.

Bulletins

The GM VCFSE Leadership Group engages with the wider sector, sharing news, opportunities, events and resources via its monthly bulletin, shared with a **mailing list of 1300+ recipients**, across **635** individual organisations.

The Leadership Group bulletin includes news from the Leadership Group and its partners; updates on the Accord; specific GMCA, TfGM, and NHS news and updates; and news, updates and opportunities from the VCFSE sector. It is designed as a ‘quick digest’ and ‘way in’ to the varied work going on across our partners and city region.

Accord outputs and news are also regularly cascaded by Accord partners via their bulletins too, representing the following VCFSE sector reach:

Bulletin Mailing List	Number of Recipients
GM VCFSE Leadership Group	1385
10 Local Infrastructure Organisation Combined Mailing Lists	10738
GMCVO	4372
GM=EqAI	447
Total Bulletin Reach*:	16992 recipients

Figure 2: Table to show the numbers of recipients through VCFSE partner bulletin mailing lists.

*Leadership group members also regularly share content, so the above reach is likely to be even higher.

Responding to Engagement Priorities

The Leadership Group conducts an annual review that examines its structures and engagement to ensure that it is meeting the needs of the sector and our partners. The most recent review identified a need to strengthen expertise and networks with work going on in Faith, Environment, Victims and Justice, and Older People.

This led to new members joining the Leadership Group, including Deborah Murray CEO of Groundwork GM to represent environment networks, and Reverend Ian Rutherford on behalf of faith groups and networks. Duncan Craig, CEO of WeAreSurvivors, joined the Leadership Group to strengthen its leadership in the area of Victims and Justice.

³⁸ See [Commitment 6](#) for more information about the new Victims & Justice workstream

Responsive Structures

Duncan Craig (CEO of WeAreSurvivors) inclusion into the Leadership Group led to the creation of a new Victims and Justice working group³⁸.

The process that saw the creation of this new work stream shows how the structures of the Leadership Group allow for necessary changes to facilitate cross sector collaboration and enhancing the VCFSE sector’s voice.

New Communication Channels Developed

New Public Sector Bulletin

In 2023, a **new bulletin for GMCA officers** working with the VCFSE sector was created with around 50 recipients. This aims to highlight relevant delivery and opportunities to connect up existing activity across the partnership. Expansion of this bulletin to more public sector colleagues is planned.

New Website

From April 2023 to March 2024, our old GM VCFSE Leadership Group website attracted an average of **259 monthly users**. While it served as a valuable resource for the sector, there was significant potential for it to expand its reach and engage a larger audience. In 2024 the new website was developed and launched:

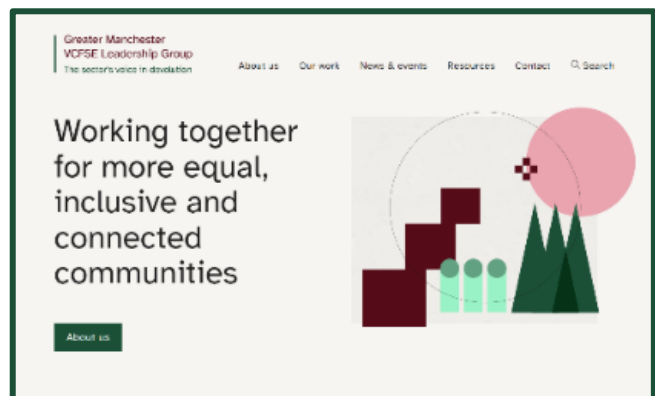


Photo of the new Greater Manchester VCFSE Leadership Group Website Home Page, Published September 2024

Case Study – New GM VCFSE Leadership Group Website

Context

The GM VCFSE Leadership Group required a new website to act as a hub of information for and about the VCFSE sector across the sectors. The redevelopment of the website was needed to enhance the usability and accessibility of the site to fulfil its potential as a resource, and support the aims of the Accord and work of the Leadership Group.

Action

VSNW staff developed a web brief in collaboration with Good Governance Institute consultants. Using the Local Infrastructure Organisation communications network, to connect with web developer Jamabuck. Led by VSNW, the planning was supported by the cross-sector Accord Comms Group at key stages throughout.

Outcomes

- Improved About Us – including [history](#), [FAQ](#), clearer [what we do](#) and [how we work](#)
- [GM LG Member profiles pages](#) – to connect leader expertise

- More useful [Our Work](#) Pages – clearer links to who to contact to get involved, Organisations logos, relevant resources and news
- Additional Our Work pages – new workstreams and work we're involved in e.g., [Victims & Justice](#), [GM Networks Connect](#), [Resilience](#) and [Research Engagement Network](#)
- [Resources directory](#)
- Improved Accessibility

Impact

This work shows the strength of the partnership under the Accord and that systems are in place to support mutual benefit and collaboration.

The impact is clearer communications channels allowing better understanding and recognition.

New LinkedIn Page

In 2024, the **GM VCFSE Leadership Group** launched a page on professional social network site LinkedIn to join other Accord partners and there and to connect the work to an increasing audience of users. The content on LinkedIn is being developed to appeal to the professional audiences there. Significant scope exists for developing knowledge and understanding on this platform.

Engagement and Reach - Conclusion & Recommendations

Feedback throughout many stakeholder surveys indicated that participants from all three parties (GMCA, GM NHS ICS, and the VCFSE) feel the Accord's visibility is somewhat limited, particularly among public sector partners in local areas and in discussions that are not of a high strategic level. This situation, alongside recent communication channel developments such as the GM VCFSE Leadership website, represent an opportunity to enhance communication efforts, which could help raise awareness and ensure that all stakeholders understand the Accord's objectives and achievements. Additionally, exploring ways to align VCFSE communication strategies with those of the public sector, and promoting the Accord's principles throughout all levels of public sector organisations, in particular through the Accord Comms Group, could further strengthen engagement and collaboration. Planning for a campaign to develop knowledge of the VCFSE sector within the public sector is underway to further support this work.

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Equity, diversity and inclusion is integral to every part of the work to deliver the GM VCFSE Accord. We have developed several practices to ensure the delivery of the work embeds Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) throughout its activities as well as being core to specific parts of the programme plans.

An Active, Shared Learning Approach to Our Equality Impact Assessment

In January 2023, ahead of the new 3-year delivery plan, **Lead EDI officer at GM Integrated Care presented to Accord officers** around how to approach EDI for the Accord. The **sharing of NHS GM best practice** spurred an iterative and collaborative process with cross-sector officers of defining and developing the **Accord Equality Impact Assessment framework**. As a result, the GM NHS equality impact assessment checklist has been **part of the annual delivery plan** in each delivery area for the past two delivery years.

Subsequently, to ensure Equality Impact Assessment work became live and enacted practice, rather than a document on the shelf, **Accord Officers undertook an EDI 'action learning set'** led by GM=EqAl lead officer. Taking a dynamic approach to assessing equality impact, this allowed a safe space to learn and discover best practice together as the core group driving activity to support Accord deliverables. **The action learning set gave officers individually owned commitments** with self-set time-frames, working to improve EDI practice across working groups in a realistic, supported and accountable way. Commitments made included:

- Centring diverse group engagement in communications, membership reviews, and planning processes such as monitoring form for group members across workstreams
- Applying EDI learnings to refresh Population Health and Data groups, fostering inclusivity, collaboration, and diverse leadership in meetings.
- Ensuring accessibility by addressing any potential barriers to meeting attendance and participation by asking people
- Broadening community involvement in the inclusive economy workstream, following best practices for comprehensive representation and a wider programme of events

- Expanding reach and awareness of Commissioning and Investment work through a planned calendar of sector engagement activities.

A review of progress on this action learning set, and the setting of new commitments is planned for late 2024.

GM=EqAl

GM=EqAl are a key vehicle for the Accord to ensure the voice of diverse communities, with lived experience are listened to - and increasingly heard by - the public sector³⁹.

To reduce barriers to involvement, a bursary is provided to GM=EqAl members who require one to be able to participate. To ensure wide representation is maintained, **GM=EqAl review their membership and bursaries every year.**

In 2024, the first **'annual celebration' event for GM=EqAl** event was held, to celebrate the achievements of 2023-24 and launch their latest **annual impact report.**

Monitoring

Since the signing of the new delivery plan in 2023, we have strengthened our activity in tracking our success in diverse engagement and involvement by **starting to collect monitoring data** covering whether the organisations engaged with direct Accord activities (via meetings events, mailings and surveys), **represent communities from different inclusion groups.** The monitoring data for 2023-24 is in the process of being analysed with plans to review the findings, gaps and plan accordingly in Winter 2024.

In addition to this, to accompany the sharp uptick in demand for recruitment of VCFSE representative to public sector boards, the Leadership Group has started issuing a **monitoring form to help us understand the reach of the representative recruitment process** in attracting applicants from diverse communities and how successful we are in representing diverse backgrounds in filled seats. Furthermore, in Autumn 2024, the GM VCFSE Leadership

³⁹ Under the [section for commitment 6 \(page 27\)](#) you can find many specific examples on how we have done this and results.

Group will undergo its **first leader monitoring exercise**, to highlight the diversity in the group's leadership and assess recruitment needs.

Data collected via monitoring of Accord engagements, and leader monitoring forms will all feed into the Leadership Group annual review and the Action Learning Sets moving forward.

Race Equality Action Plan

The GM VCFSE Leadership Group has a race equality action plan that is reviewed every year. It was reviewed last formally in June 2023, when three key actions taken on were: equalities representation investment across all LG working groups over next three years; chairs of working groups to review membership of working groups and improve comms &

campaigning. In 2024, a representative from GMCA presented their new Race Equity Framework, with actions being picked up since to cross reference and improve the GM VCFSE Leadership Group's plan as a result. Plans to review the plan for 2024 are scheduled in December.

Core to Delivery

In addition to supporting practices to underpin the work across the whole Accord, the impact assessment process highlighted a number of key areas where EDI is an explicit focus of the programme objectives. This includes the **Commissioning for Inclusion** work with NHS GM, **Population Health** work in utilising the **Core20 PLUS5 Model**, the underpinning objectives of the **Inclusive Economy work** and **GM=EqAl delivery**.

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion – Conclusion & Recommendations

To ensure sustained progress and focus on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) within the GM VCFSE Accord, the integration of monitoring, data analysis, and planned activities will be crucial. The iterative development of the Equality Impact Assessment framework and the commitments emerging from the EDI action learning set have been instrumental in embedding EDI practices across the programme. Efforts to track and analyse data on engagement diversity, community representation, and leadership group composition highlight the Accord's commitment to inclusive leadership and meaningful representation. Regular reviews, such as the upcoming action set evaluation and race equality action plan assessment, will provide ongoing insights, helping to refine and strengthen EDI practices. Going forward, these measures are crucial to ensure the Accord remains adaptive and responsive, fully honouring our commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Integrity of the Agreement and Ways of Working

The GM VCFSE Accord is intended to work in a number of ways:

- Through a shared understanding of the contribution that VCFSE organisations make towards tackling inequality in society, creating a more inclusive economy and addressing the climate crisis.
- Through the building of effective partnerships and relationships between the statutory sector with VCFSE organisations across different geographies (for example GM-wide, district-wide, or in neighbourhoods and communities)
- Through a shared vision, ways of working principles and set of commitments which underpin these partnerships and relationships

Our shared vision is for a thriving VCFSE sector in Greater Manchester that works collaboratively and productively with the GM Integrated Care System, the GM Combined Authority, its constituent local authority members and statutory partners. Our ways of working are those listed in the Greater Manchester Strategy.

A Shared Understanding of the Contribution of VCFSE organisations

Communications output directed at public sector strongly focuses on achieving this aim. The combined efforts of new comms channels such as the public sector briefing, website, MP briefing, all contribute to this. When surveyed:

73%* of **public sector respondents** agreed that the activity of the Accord has **helped them understand the contribution** that VCFSE organisations make in communities.

*A high proportion of respondents who disagreed, said they already were aware of the contribution of VCFSE.

Effective Partnerships and Relationships

The evidence of an effective partnership has featured throughout this report, where examples of cross-sector working have created impactful outcomes.

Some specific examples of cross-sector partnerships that would not exist without the Accord are:

- **GM VCFSE Forum** quarterly GM and locality public sector and VCFSE convening space.
- Internal **GMCA meetings for VCFSE officers** working with the VCFSE and across local authorities convened by Accord lead.
- **NHS Contract Review meetings** that were able to be set up due to the commitment from NHS to the Accord, open communication channels and strength in partnership

- **LiveWell team collaboration** with GM VCFSE sector through Leadership Group and Population Health
- **GM=EqAI numerous network meeting consultations** on public sector strategies

Effective partnerships have spanned both across GM and in localities.

When asked about relationships in the survey across localities a stakeholder from TfGM commented on already having strong connection across GM and also that:

"[TfGM]...being a member of the Accord has supported connections to LA colleagues who support the VCFSE sector on a locality level"

A Shared Vision, Ways of Working Principles

Shared Vision

The GM VCFSE Accord's foundation is a shared vision, as articulated through its commitments, which aims to align Greater Manchester's public sector and the Voluntary, Community, Faith, and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector in tackling critical social, economic, and environmental challenges. This alignment has been validated through significant stakeholder support:

92% of Accord stakeholders agreed that: *the Accord has created a shared vision for partnership working.*

This sense of collective purpose has also led to strengthened collaboration, with:

85% of stakeholders agreeing that the Accord has **positively impacted collaborative working between the public sector and VCFSE organisations.**

The realisation of this shared vision has been supported by key regional strategies—the VCFSE Policy Paper 2020, the Greater Manchester Strategy, and the Greater Manchester Integrated Care Strategic Plan—indicating cohesive efforts across the region. Collaborative engagements in priority-setting, consultations on many new or refreshed high-level strategies, such as the Primary Care Blueprint, NHS GM Joint Forward Plan & Sustainability Plan, the Greater Manchester Strategy refresh, and engagement around the Devolution Trailblazer further reflect this alignment and ongoing dialogue to influence major regional plans.

Survey responses indicate a strong sense of shared vision within the partnership, with one respondent noting the Accord has:

"...laid the foundation for collaboration and working together in partnership."

Others highlighted its practical value, as one respondent shared:

"I have used [The Accord] to check back on the work I do—e.g., around Live Well, to ensure alignment with the commitments."

In May 2024, the **GM VCFSE Manifesto 2024-28** was launched and signed by the Metro Mayor at the VCFSE Hustings, establishing a vision created by and for the VCFSE sector that calls for collaborative action with local statutory partners. This vision builds on the Accord's successes but also highlights barriers to progress, such as the cost-of-living crisis, the lasting impacts of Covid-19, and constraints imposed by national government policy. The manifesto expands on the original Accord's goals, creating new opportunities to champion needed changes that address community challenges. With a timeframe extending beyond the current Accord, the manifesto opens a path for continued collaboration even after the Accord's completion.

Ways of Working Principles

The chart overleaf shows the Accord stakeholder survey responses highlighting the perception of whether the ways of working have been 'upheld' or 'dropped'. As you can see, many Accord Stakeholders in the majority thought the ways of working had been 'upheld' rather than 'dropped'. A few who answered, 'Neither upheld nor dropped' (green) commented that they were not close enough to the work to comment either way.

The strongest principles and ways of working were: **'positive relationships** – building trust'; **'listening** – to understand each other'; and **'respecting** – strengths and alternative viewpoints.

The weakest, with the highest number of answers perceiving the principle had been 'dropped' were **'spreading good practice** – not just 'scaling up'; **enabling** – activities happening in communities and places' and **'celebrating success'**

A chart to how the perception of Accord Stakeholders on how much the Accord Ways of Working have been 'upheld' or 'dropped'

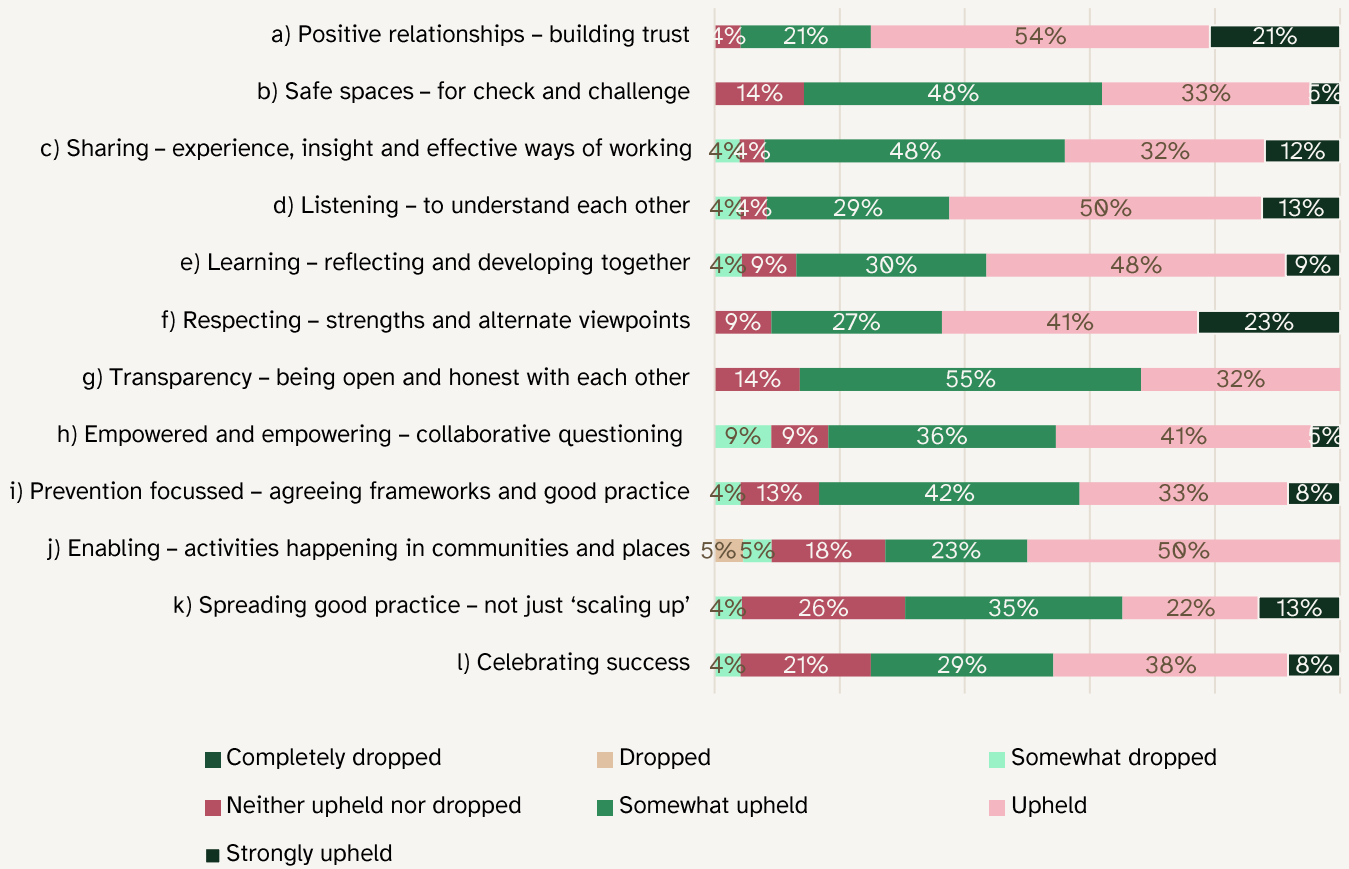


Figure 3: A chart showing stakeholder perception of the ways of working principles

Ways of Working - Conclusions & Recommendations

In conclusion, reinforcing the Accord’s principles can further enhance the existing strong foundations of trust, respect, and effective listening. Celebrating successes more regularly—through case studies, updates, and more recognition events taking inspiration from the GM=EqAl success event and the Alternative Provider Collaborative convention—will embed a culture of achievement and positivity. There remains a need to improve at sharing insights and adapting effective practices rather than merely scaling them. The Accord Commitment Delivery Group quarterly reporting allows a space to celebrate the highlights from delivery in the last quarter, but more regular feedback opportunities on this, with the slides being used more via established and new communication channels, will create a continuous improvement cycle, ensuring the Accord’s approach remains responsive and trusted across stakeholders. Together, these steps will strengthen the Accord’s principles and impact, building on its current strength.

Accord Interim Report Conclusion & Recommendations

There has been clear progress towards the Accord Commitments, evidence of increased understanding of the VCFSE sector, and successful building of effective partnerships and relationships across Greater Manchester. The VCFSE sector has been welcomed with, not only an open door, but with open arms, by public sector partners in order to improve outcomes for Greater Manchester communities and citizens. There are high expectations of the sector in Greater Manchester.

Key Achievements

There have been **significant high-level achievements** that include:

- scaling up VCFSE role in operational delivery of health and care outcomes
- building a VCFSE pipeline of skills and employment support
- investment in community ownership models and community-centred economic development
- embedding VCFSE role in mental health and wellbeing
- driven new models of thinking in public service delivery (Changing Futures, Live Well, primary care)
- establishing the first Alternative Provider Collaborative in England
- supporting system-level access to the voice of equalities and intersectional lived experience through Gm=EqAI
- improving commissioning and procurement processes and impact through the Fair Funding Protocol
- building stronger links to Greater Manchester's Network of Networks
- embracing of faith organisations in the GM VCFSE Accord work through interfaith mapping, GMCA covenant and interfaith statement
- supporting a VCFSE distributed leadership model and embedding the voice of the sector in all GM boards and decision-making processes, and
- supporting a ground-breaking revolution in the delivery of population health, early intervention and prevention work across Greater Manchester. The latter was highlighted by the recent King's Fund report.

We have raised the profile of the VCFSE sector with public sector leaders, facilitating its inclusion in strategic discussions and co-design. The overwhelming consensus is that the Accord has built a shared vision, with **92%** stakeholders surveyed confirming this, whilst there is a strong response from public sector stakeholders that the Accord has helped them understand the contributions of the VCFSE.

As a result of the sector's raised profile, the Accord has changed the approach taken by GMCA, NHS GM and their partners, with an improved understanding of the value that the VCFSE sector brings, therefore public commissioners are increasingly looking to the sector as part of their work. Evidenced by the graph of GMCA spending⁴⁰, and a number of commissioned projects such as the development of VCFSE workforce support; social enterprise initiatives like Our Business; the Work and Skills Community Grants scheme. There are many examples of GM level developments that whilst not funded by the Accord agreement directly, most likely would not have been in place without the basis of activity under the Accord and the principles of the agreement being there to underpin their progress.

When setting the activity from the past few years against our eight GM VCFSE Accord commitments

we can be proud of a huge amount of progress towards the intended outcomes by 2026 that are part of the underpinning framework of the Accord logic model. We have a programme of work that is enabling the VCFSE sector to be better supported, putting 'scaffolding' in place and formalising structures for the future. We have increasingly recognised expertise being drawn upon for our role in service delivery, and in an inclusive economy, our connection to communities, with good practice being shared with VCFSE organisations which are better connected.

Commitment Delivery Recommendation

This report's findings indicate varied progress across different commitments, with some areas advancing more robustly than others. The conclusions and recommendations

⁴⁰ Graph under [Commitment 7, page 34](#)

suggest that several commitments would benefit from more focused Accord activity as outlined in each commitment section conclusion. **Strengthening efforts in the following areas should be a priority as we move into the final 1.5 years of the work programme:**

- Commitment 2 - Embed the VCFSE sector as a key partner for the delivery of services
- Commitment 3 – A financially resilient VCFSE sector
- Commitment 4 – To ensure that co-design of local services is the norm
- Commitment 5 - To develop the best VCFSE ecosystem in England.

Core to the **ways of working** set out in the original Accord agreement, we have built trust and fostered positive relationships between the VCFSE and public sectors, with numerous examples of creating safe spaces for open dialogue and collaboration. We have embraced the **values** of transparency, respect, and shared learning, leading to mutual understanding and shared success detailed throughout this report. By focusing on enabling both GM and local activities, and spreading good practice across our city-region, we've empowered each other through collaborative work. We have worked with integrity; aligned with the Accord's values and commitment to driving meaningful change.

Going Further Together

Looking to the final year and a half of the current 2021-2026 agreement, to maintain our trailblazing status, we seek to continue pushing boundaries, by going even further championing the vital role of the VCFSE sector. By galvanizing the successes outlined in this report, we can unlock our full potential and continue to lead the way for other areas in England.

Through conversation at VCFSE Forums and from the evaluation survey, it is clear amongst Accord stakeholders, while there are so many examples of local success, there is a consensus on the day-to-day that changes, while promising, are not yet widespread or uniformly felt across Greater Manchester's districts. Substantial change towards the Accord ambitions in some cases is hindered by external pressures, such as national financial regimes and the diversion of funding to private sector consultants rather than the VCFSE sector. Many stakeholders cited the potential in the Accord but feel it requires more coordinated action, visibility, and resourcing in some areas, to further realise the vision.

Recommendations:

Accord stakeholders were asked if they thought the Accord is starting to have an impact or lead to change, and in addressing barriers to understanding of the VCFSE sector, what work we still had to do. The below recommendations are a summary of answers given by respondents from right across the cross-sector partnership. These were confirmed at the October 2024 Accord Commitment Delivery Group Meeting.

1. **Investing in the Sector:** Given the significant challenge posed by NHS funding cuts in Greater Manchester, it is crucial for us to continue to recognise that investing in the VCFSE sector is not a cost but a strategic investment. By diverting substantial resources from consultancy and management fees to community services, we can maximise the sector's capacity to address many of the pressures we face. Continued collaboration with the sector is essential to develop sustainable solutions and enhance community health outcomes.
2. **Strengthen District-Level Engagement:** While Greater Manchester level work has seen progress, it is vital that the benefits extend to and involve all districts. Whilst much progress has been made by the work of 10GM, more focus should be placed on ensuring equitable impact across the region, with a tailored approach for local areas, where needed.
3. **Enhance Communication and Awareness:** Many respondents to the stakeholder survey noted that the Accord's visibility is limited, particularly among public sector partners. Greater communication efforts are needed to raise awareness and ensure all stakeholders are fully informed of its aims and successes. Current VCFSE communication efforts should be complemented/met by public sector ones alongside socialisation of Accord principles in all levels within public sector organisations.
4. **Sustain and Build on Relationships:** The Accord is successful as a partnership and has allowed for strong relationships being built over the past several years. In some cases, where individual relationships or specific people have been paramount to progressing of the work, this may pose a level of risk. To ensure lasting impact, connections and roles and governance could be further formalised with clear frameworks and shared accountability. This approach will help embed the VCFSE

sector as a strategic partner across Greater Manchester's public services.

5. **Address National-Level Challenges:** Greater Manchester is an exemplary model for devolution, with our level of VCFSE partnership being what many other regions would strive for. We should continue to advocate for the VCFSE sector in the national political context, challenging historic national financial management regimes that stifle local-level collaboration and innovation, encouraging collaboration and innovation in the sector on an even wider scale.

6. **Championing the sector's role in prevention and growth:** The next phase of Greater Manchester's devolution work will be an important focus for all of us and will set the tone for not only how we collectively improve opportunities and outcomes for our communities, but also how we set the tone for how the sector is seen and understood nationally.