

Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Engagement Strategy Pledges and Actions

Pledges and actions

Following on from our groundwork to understand the needs of the sector and the council, these are the pledges and actions we have identified to help rebuild and refocus our relationship with the sector.

Our pledge: Organisations in our civil society

We will promote the notion of civil society and recognise its fundamental role in developing the best sense of self and community for all. In doing so we'll recognise the ecosystem of social and community activists, agencies, groups, and organisations that are independent of government (local or national) and look for ways to work more closely with the sector to benefit our communities.

We will:

- Develop a fuller picture of key groups and organisations in our local civil society and find ways of working in a more coordinated way with these organisations to address issues of mutual interest.
- Work with anchor groups and organisations in each of our wards to maximise local impact.
- Champion the concept of civil society, making it an important part of internal and external discussions and activities.

Our pledge: VCSE – insights, importance and impact

We will champion the sector inside and outside the council by promoting its activities, worth, and benefit. We will enable this by gathering more accurate, current, and reliable information from the sector, locally and nationally, and will make informed decisions based on the data and information collected. We will also share this data and information with VCSE organisations.

We will:

- Coordinate planning and working across the council's divisions and service areas in relation to local VCSE groups, organisations, projects, and services.
- Establish better lines of communication between all council staff working with groups and organisations in the sector so that information can be shared promptly and effectively with each other and, where relevant, with the sector and the city.
- Develop a process for officers working closely with VCSE organisations to link up regularly and work more closely with representatives from the local VCSE sector and other civil society actors on important matters, and when reviewing progress of this strategy on a quarterly basis.
- Improve our mutual understanding of assets held by us which are used by the sector, and those that could be used by the VCSE sector, to contribute towards common goals.
- Improve our mutual understanding of the contribution of the VCSE sector to the economy and annually share this information with the local sector and the city.
- Set up an outreach programme for elected members, to familiarise them with the diverse range of groups and organisations in the sector that are working with and/or situated in their wards.
- Work with partners, share and make use of different sources of information, data and intelligence about the local and national VCSE sector.
- Establish systems within the council that enable us to gather, analyse, and understand data more intelligently to direct our work with the VCSE sector for the good of the city.

Our Pledge: Funding and the VCSE

We will do everything possible to help the sector become more financially robust, paying particular attention to micro (less than £10K p.a.), small (less than £100k p.a.), and fledgling or newly established VCSE groups and organisations. As the council can no longer be the funder of first choice, we have to rethink the role we play in relation to the sector and enable it to be funded and supported in different ways.

We will:

- Make use of Crowdfund Leicester as an effective vehicle for financial support of local VCSE sector groups and organisations.
- Engage with and establish stronger relations/awareness of local, regional and national funders.
- Put together a toolkit to display all relevant funding opportunities in an accessible way for the local sector.
- Explore ways of making it easier for VCSE organisations to provide services on our behalf.
- Look at how VCSE partners, the council and other public organisations could pool funding, resources, and capacity to tackle issues.
- Encourage joint fundraising among local sector groups and organisations for activities and projects of common benefit.
- Take the lead as the local voice in lobbying national government for effective funding of the sector.

Our Pledge: Infrastructure support and the VCSE

Put in place a fair and transparent process of assessing VCSE support needs and matching them with appropriate sources of support and assistance, either from our own resources or through other providers.

We will:

- Identify and assess the needs of individual VCSE groups and organisations and meet these with tailored support. This will range from information and advice that is already freely available from local and national experts or peer sources to more direct grant-based or commissioned support.
- Identify and work with local, regional, and occasionally national providers who can meet specific infrastructure support needs of applicant groups and organisations from the local VCSE sector.
- Establish a VCSE peer review and support process.

Our Pledge: Volunteering

We will help develop, improve, and sustain efficient volunteering policies and processes within the sector. We will provide support where we can and share learning with groups and organisations to help recruit, manage and retain volunteers. This will create a connected volunteering ecosystem in Leicester and will encourage better volunteering opportunities to be developed.

We will:

- Lead by example in recruiting, managing, and retaining volunteers.
- Work with VCSE groups and organisations, businesses, and other agencies in Leicester to create a twelve-month action plan to raise the profile of volunteering in the city.
- Use Assemble as an accessible digital platform to promote and update volunteering opportunities from local VCSE groups and organisations.
- Draw on local and national examples of good practice to enhance the quality of the volunteer experience and consider new models for volunteering, such as incentivisation of volunteers in appropriate settings.

- Find ways of sustaining and channelling community spirit shown by grassroots volunteering initiatives that came to the fore during lockdown (such as, mutual aid groups; food and medicine pick-up; keeping an eye on vulnerable neighbours).
- Encourage our council colleagues to volunteer with local groups, organisations, activities, and projects.

Our Pledge: Businesses and the VCSE

We will broker and facilitate relationships between the VCSE sector and businesses, employers and investors to maximise mutual benefits. This takes place at some level now, but we want to make it more regular, reliable and coordinated to be much more beneficial to all.

We will:

- Promote more realistic options for VCSE groups and organisations to develop commercially and sustainably (for example, to establish a 'trading arm' for goods and services).
- Look for opportunities for the local VCSE sector to work together with local businesses for mutually beneficial ends.
- Identify opportunities for the local VCSE sector within government initiatives that apply in Leicester, such as the Levelling Up agenda.

Conclusion

After engaging with the VCSE sector to shape this strategy, it's now clear what our priorities for the upcoming years need to be to build back our relationship.

The VCSE sector in Leicester is ever changing with newer, smaller groups and organisations forming on a weekly basis. We must be able to support these groups to become sustainable and thrive in our city. And although we can't commit to the level of funding as we have in previous years, it is clear we can support in other ways such as through our business connections, providing needs-based infrastructure support, upskilling VCSE groups where we can, volunteer promotion, and creating ways for organisations to collaborate.

This is a pivotal time for the sector, and we are committed to doing everything we can to refocus, reconnect and rebuild the best possible relationship with it.