Neighbourhoods & Culture Scrutiny Commission

Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sector Engagement Strategy Update

Date of Commission meeting**:** 25th April 2024

Assistant City Mayor for Communities, Adult Learning, Jobs & Skills

Lead officer: Andrew Shilliam, Director of Corporate Services

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1. Summary

This report provides an overview of the advancements and future direction of the Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Engagement Strategy. It covers the implementation progress and plans for moving forward, building on the recommendations from the initial scrutiny conducted in September 2023. Additionally, the report includes a status update on the CrowdFund Leicester platform, highlighting its role in supporting community projects throughout the city, and updates the Commission on the arrangements we have in place for managing volunteering in the Council using our Assemble platform.

2. Recommended actions

The commission as recommended to:

2.1 Note the summary report, and

2.2 Make any recommendations for consideration to the Executive Lead and VCSE Engagement Team

3. VCSE Strategy and Delivery

3.1 Following the successful launch of the VCSE Engagement Strategy at Hansom Hall on November 28, where members of the sector, internal colleagues, and other sector partners provided valuable insights, we are moving forward to ensure active involvement from the Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise (VCSE) community.

Strategy Overview

3.2 Our VCSE Engagement Strategy (Please see Appendix 1) serves as a full roadmap that outlines our goals, objectives, and the overarching direction for LCC when engaging with the VCSE sector up until 2027. Our six pledges, allow us to focus and adapt as and when needed with the changing trends nationally and locally where need for support is greatest.

3.3 Relating to each pledge are a series of strategic actions, created to translate the aims into tangible outcomes. These actions encompass a diverse range of initiatives spanning internal awareness, and stakeholder engagement.

3.4 To facilitate the effective execution of our strategy, we have developed an internal delivery plan that details the specific steps, timelines, and responsibilities associated with each action. This plan serves as a guiding framework for the VCSE Engagement Team, providing clarity on the sequence of activities and the resources required for

successful implementation. Through a coordinated approach, we aim to streamline processes, mitigate risks, regularly review, and evaluate success to optimise resource allocation to maximise our chances of achieving our strategic objectives.

3.5 Our strategy embodies our commitment to the VCSE sector and serves as a blueprint for driving organisational engagement with the sector. By aligning pledges with actionable delivery and implementing a robust delivery plan, we are delivering our strategic aims to create value for all stakeholders. We remain committed to transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement, recognising that the success of our strategy relies upon our collective efforts both internally and externally to support the sector in new and innovative ways.

3.6 Following the last commission in September 2023, this report will focus on three key areas: updating on recommendations from the previous Scrutiny commission, reviewing the progress of CrowdFund Leicester, and outlining recommendations; and providing a review and update on Internal Volunteering initiatives.

3.7 The VCSE will be a part of a strategic conversation:

3.7.1 In response to the feedback received, we are extending an opportunity for VCSE members to participate in reviewing the Delivery Plan aligned with the strategy. This inclusive approach aims to incorporate the sector's perspectives, ensuring that the actions and micro-actions outlined in the plan are reflective of the community's needs and aspirations. It is imperative that the sector plays a pivotal role in shaping and influencing the strategic direction.

3.7.2 To facilitate this new collaborative way of working, engagement meetings will be organised to gather input and feedback from VCSE members. These sessions will serve as a platform to discuss and refine the Delivery Plan, to give a sense of ownership within the sector.

3.7.3 Moreover, we intend to identify key members from these engagement meetings to form an External Champions Group these members will be from differing backgrounds and experience in the sector to ensure a voice for all approach. This group will convene quarterly to delve into pertinent topics such as upcoming events, important dates, and sector needs for infrastructure support. The objective is to establish a dynamic and ongoing dialogue mechanism that allows for continuous refinement and adaptation based on the evolving needs of the VCSE sector.

3.8 Opportunities for joint working between LCC and VCSE organisations on funding bids:

3.8.1 Now that LCC cannot be relied on for funding to the sector with the ongoing budget cuts it is important we are looking into varying venues to channel funding into the sector. An example, Leicester City Council's active participation on the "Making Local Lives Better" panel alongside the Community Foundation to direct funding to City groups. Our City of Leicester Education Fund, housed within this panel, offers a valuable resource for education projects designed by VCSE groups.

3.8.2 Despite it not being the largest fund, the City of Leicester Education Fund has made contributions to various initiatives within the VCSE sector. In the current year, this fund has supported projects such as DORCAS's FGM Awareness Project and the St Phillips Centre's interfaith relations project in schools. These endeavours underline

the fund's versatility and commitment to addressing critical issues within the community. This fund is currently sitting at £21k.

3.8.3 Internally, efforts are well underway with VCSE Champions to uncover additional funding streams that various service areas within LCC are aware of, with the goal of additional support for the VCSE sector. The VCSE Energy Efficiency Scheme is one such initiative that is being explored for its potential to provide financial backing to relevant projects, brought to us by the Sustainability Team. And also exploring opportunities with the VRN using the leverage they have along with ours to put in a large-scale bid to the Lottery Fund to support groups that focus on violence reduction in the City.

3.9 Supporting community based VCSE organisations

3.9.1 Our role is evolving into that of facilitators, enabling sector outreach with internal service areas, fostering collaboration within the sector, and establishing partnerships with external stakeholders to provide more impactful support wider than the VCSE Engagement Team offer. Through engagements with the sector, Councillors, and internal colleagues, we are refining our focus on addressing the most critical needs.

3.9.2 Spanning a strategic horizon of three years, this approach underscores the importance of adaptability and attentive listening to the changing needs of the sector. Rather than a reactive stance, we are committed to an approach that is research-oriented and responsive, ensuring that our actions are well-informed and aligned with the identified needs. That we will back up with data from MyCake, ward profiles and our engagements with the VCSE sector.

3.9.3 The needs assessment process is designed to cater to the requirements of newer and smaller organisations within the VCSE sector. By providing longer-term support, particularly in the form of infrastructure support, and creating opportunities for larger, more established organisations to assist smaller counterparts, we aim to encourage these collaboration to help alleviate pressures on LCC.

3.9.4 The primary goal is to nurture a more self-sustaining sector where VCSE organisations, regardless of size, can thrive. Building confidence within VCSE groups is integral to empowering them to effectively support the communities they serve. Through strategic support, collaboration, and a proactive approach, we aspire to create an environment where the VCSE sector can flourish, contributing significantly to the well-being of communities in Leicester.

3.10 Developing the relationship between the VCSE and the Business sector

3.10.1 In the pursuit of fostering meaningful collaboration between the VCSE sector and the business community in Leicester, a business-focused event will be taking place Wednesday 29 May. The primary objective is to provide VCSE groups with insights into effective engagement strategies with the business sector. This initiative aligns with our strategy action to facilitate opportunities that promote interaction and collaboration between these two sectors.

3.10.2 A component of this initiative is the introduction of a business pledge campaign. This campaign aims to underscore the significance of the VCSE sector and emphasise the pivotal role that Business Partners can play in supporting,

celebrating, and collaborating with these groups. The campaign will aim to showcase how such collaborations can make a positive impact on communities, addressing the needs of the most vulnerable.

3.10.3 To ensure the success and widespread reach of this initiative, strategic partnerships have been forged with influential organisations, including Leicestershire Cares and Reaching People. These partners bring valuable knowledge and extensive networks to the table, enabling the maximization of outreach efforts across Leicester.

3.10.4 Inviting key collaborators such as the Chamber of Commerce, Leicestershire Cares and Reaching People will contribute its expertise to enhance the effectiveness of the initiative. Leveraging its established connections within the business sector, these partners can support with introductions between VCSE groups and potential Business Partners. This collaboration is pivotal in bridging the gap and fostering sustainable relationships.

3.11 For the VCSE team to engage more with Ward Councillors in delivering the strategy. Two initial meetings with Councillors were held on January 16 and January 30, with 17 Cllrs attending across both. To understand how we can strengthen ties between elected representatives and the VCSE sector. This meeting serves as a crucial starting point for fostering a more synergistic relationship, where Councillors can actively engage with the sector, and the VCSE Team gains a deeper understanding of the specific needs within their respective wards, as well as the impactful initiatives undertaken by VCSE groups at the localised ward level.

3.12 The key areas of focus from engaging with Councillors will be:

- Informed Decision-Making - by actively engaging with VCSE groups, Councillors can make more informed decisions that align with the needs and aspirations of their constituents.

- Enhanced Support for VCSE Initiatives - a closer working relationship will enable Councillors to provide targeted support to VCSE initiatives, contributing to their success and amplifying their positive impact on local communities.

- Effective Localised Solutions - understanding the localised needs of wards empowers the VCSE Team to design and implement initiatives that resonate with the unique challenges faced by each community, encouraging more meaningful and sustainable outcomes.

Crowdfund Leicester

4.1 CrowdFund Leicester in numbers.

4.1.1 Since the inception of the CrowdFund Leicester platform in 2017, a significant amount of funding has been raised, totalling £431,469 across 32 projects. Among these projects, 27 successfully met their fundraising targets, reflecting the value of the platform in facilitating community-driven initiatives.

4.1.2 Geographically, the projects are distributed across various areas of the city, with notable concentrations in Braunstone, Leicester City, and other neighbourhoods. Specifically, 29 projects were located in Leicester City, 1 in Broughton Astley, 1 in

Birstall and 1 in Glenfield and demonstrating a need from Ward Cllrs to help with reach within the Leicester community.

Community Engagement Fund

5.1 The Community Engagement Fund is a Mayoral fund that was awarded £100,000 and that from which pledges of up to £10,000 could be contributed to projects dependant on size and reach within the community. We have around £40,000 left within this fund. This is not an annual rolling fund.

5.2 The projects CEF looks to fund are those that make a real difference to the quality of life for some of our communities particularly those from underserves and hard to reach communities.

5.3 Additionally, the Community Engagement Fund has played a crucial role in supporting these projects. This fund has supported 20 projects, showcasing its significance in bolstering community-driven endeavours.

5.4 On average, the Community Engagement Fund provides support amounting to between 10- 33% of the total project funding, contribution to project success. In comparison to other council led platforms hosted by SpaceHive Crowdfund Leicester sits below average with pledge funding to projects. But this is due to a smaller fund total this isn't a rolling fun and also to be in line with our VCSE Engagement Strategy of not being relied on for funding and encouraging projects to reach new audiences and diversify their income from other sources.

5.5 Looking ahead, our CFL pipeline and Spring funding round opened on 11th April. With this round hoping to drive more interest and enhance engagement of Leicester community projects driving positive change and innovation through the CrowdFund Leicester platform. There were 43 attendees in the launch webinar.

5.6 There are two funding rounds per year, a Spring and an Autumn round. Each funding round features a launch-style webinar, jointly promoted by SpaceHive and LCC, aimed at expanding outreach. These webinars explain CrowdFund Leicester and the crowdfunding process, share success stories, and provide insights to determine project suitability. Following submission to our Spacetive platform, projects undergo review by SpaceHive. Upon approval, SpaceHive facilitates project launch and offers support and guidance to achieve crowdfunding targets. Projects meeting the eligibility criteria for The City Mayor's Community Engagement Fund can apply for it. The VCSE Engagement Team reviews these applications, with final approval granted by The City Mayor. Approved projects receive a 'pledge' visible on their project page towards their total funding goal.

5.7 We will increase our involvement in the support sessions with SpaceHive, providing localised knowledge, insights, and potential city connections to assist projects in reaching their targets.

5.8 We will work closely with the Comms team to help promote wider than our own network to improve reach and also send comms to Ward Cllrs to share within their wards as and when appropriate.

5.9 Recommendations to Enhance Project Experience for CrowdFund Leicester Project Leads:

- Provide comprehensive guidance and training sessions for project leads on effective crowdfunding strategies, campaign management, and promotion techniques. These sessions should cover aspects such as setting realistic goals, creating compelling campaign narratives, utilising social media effectively, and engaging with potential backers.

- Offer personalised support and guidance from SpaceHive and Leicester City Council representatives throughout the crowdfunding process. This could include regular check-ins, personalised feedback on campaign strategies, and troubleshooting assistance to address any challenges project leads may encounter.

- Curate a repository of crowdfunding resources, including articles, case studies, and tutorials, accessible to project leads. These resources should cover various aspects of crowdfunding, such as campaign planning, communication strategies, and donor engagement, providing valuable insights and tips for success.

- Encourage project leads to leverage existing tools and platforms beyond SpaceHive for campaign promotion and donor engagement. This could include utilising social media platforms, email marketing tools, and community forums to expand reach and attract potential backers.

- Facilitate collaborative promotion efforts among project leads, encouraging cross-promotion of campaigns within the CrowdFund Leicester community. By fostering a spirit of collaboration and support among project leads, campaigns can benefit from increased visibility and engagement.

- Establish feedback mechanisms for project leads to provide input on their experience with the crowdfunding process, including suggestions for improvement. Regular surveys or feedback sessions can help identify areas where additional support or resources may be needed, ensuring continuous refinement of the project experience.

- Recognise and celebrate the achievements of successful projects through our own channels, including social media, newsletters, and events. Highlighting success stories not only provides recognition for project leads but also inspires others within the community to pursue their crowdfunding endeavours.

- Provide ongoing support and resources to project leads beyond the completion of their crowdfunding campaigns. This could include assistance with project implementation, networking opportunities with potential collaborators or funders, and access to additional funding opportunities to sustain project impact in the long term.

- By implementing these recommendations, CrowdFund Leicester project leads can receive enhanced support and guidance throughout their crowdfunding journey, ultimately increasing the success and impact of community-focused projects in Leicester through The CrowdFund Leicester platform.

Enabling Volunteers across Leicester City Council through Assemble: Focus on Volunteering within Tourism, Culture & Inward Investment

6.1 Assemble serves as Leicester City Council's corporate system for managing and supporting volunteers. While pre-configured with global settings for the Council, it offers flexibility for each service to adapt the system according to their specific processes. The system employs a team structure to ensure access to relevant information for each service area. Services can also choose to advertise their volunteering opportunities to existing Council volunteers and the public. Additionally, it facilitates easy identification of individuals volunteering for multiple services.

User Types within Assemble

Volunteer and Non-Volunteer Categories:

Within Assemble, users fall into two categories: volunteers and non-volunteers. Volunteers are individuals engaged in volunteering activities, while non-volunteers typically serve as volunteer coordinators, supervisors, or managers responsible for managing volunteers and activities.

Current User Statistics:

As of now, Assemble hosts 2,510 volunteers and 56 non-volunteers.

Role of Volunteer Coordinator/Manager:

Individuals with the job title of volunteer coordinator/manager are tasked with recruiting and overseeing volunteers. Their responsibilities include creating role descriptions, managing application forms, and engaging volunteers in activities.

Managerial Access and Responsibilities:

Upon approval of volunteers, coordinators/managers gain access to oversee their team's activities. This involves various tasks such as viewing profiles, assigning tasks, providing recognition, sending messages, and creating events.

Dashboard Features:

Managers utilise the dashboard to monitor team activities, including messages, application statuses, tasks, available opportunities, and notifications.

Analytics Function:

The analytics function allows coordinators/managers to assess team performance by filtering records to analyse volunteer hours, training needs, outcomes, and yearly metrics. Data can be exported for reporting purposes.

Volunteer Capabilities

Self-Management Features:

Volunteers have the capability to review and control their personal information, activities, and schedules. They can access training materials, submit expense claims, communicate with supervisors, and participate in events.

Flexibility in Roles:

Volunteers can join multiple teams and undertake various roles, enabling them to contribute autonomously across different areas.

Available Opportunities

Currently, there are 13 advertised opportunities on Assemble, covering a range of areas including Environmental initiatives, Youth Justice, Independent Children's services, Neighbourhood Services, and external VCSE opportunities.

Opportunity Management:

Managers can set minimum and maximum volunteer thresholds for each opportunity, enabling effective management of volunteer cohorts.

Engagement with Partner Organisations

Supporting VCSE Groups:

While prioritizing internal volunteering initiatives, we recognise the importance of collaborating with local VCSE groups, as outlined in the VCSE Engagement Strategy.

Partner Organisation Feature:

Assemble facilitates collaboration with external organisations by allowing them to post opportunities on the platform. We've supported 4 organisations thus far and are committed to enhancing visibility through networking and corporate channels.

Overall, the revisions aim to enhance clarity and readability while maintaining the integrity of the original content.

Appendices:

Appendix 1- VCSE Engagement Strategy PDF VCSE Strategy 2023-27 (leicester.gov.uk)

6. Financial, legal, equalities, climate emergency and other implications

6.1 Financial implications

N/A

6.2 Legal implications

N/A

6.3 Equalities implications

N/A

6.4 Climate Change and Carbon Reduction implications

There are limited climate emergency implications directly associated with this report. As service delivery generally contributes to the council's carbon emissions, any impacts can be managed through measures such as encouraging sustainable staff travel behaviours, using buildings efficiently and following sustainable procurement guidance, as applicable to the service and any changes implemented.

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