



# Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise

Engagement strategy: 2023-2027

September 2023





Leicestershire Cares

Front cover: St Philip's Centre

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Cllr Mustafa Malik

# Foreword

Leicester's voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector makes a distinctive contribution to the city and has long been a valued partner to Leicester City Council and other public bodies, providing a range of services, many of them on our behalf.

These groups and organisations both enrich our lives and offer much needed support to people, families, communities, and neighbourhoods that experience economic inequalities.

Through promotion of the arts, culture, education, the environment, festivals and events, heritage, sport and tourism; they help make Leicester an attractive, dynamic, and progressive place to live, work, study in and visit.

The challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown restrictions made the number of vulnerable people in the city more evident and showed us just how important our VCSE sector is to our residents for local support and assistance.

Citizens stepped in to help each other, connect with the VCSE and engage in partnership with the council and other bodies and organisations. This experience has taught us much about our reliance on each other.

I believe that the council, the local VCSE sector and those that make up the wider civil society share a responsibility to maintain, channel and direct that sense of engagement, that willingness to get involved. I am glad to say that we address this directly in our new strategy.

Likewise, we must all make the effort to better understand the many pressures this sector faces such as the ongoing impact of government austerity, reduction in public spending, the negative economic impact from Brexit and the current cost of living crisis. This has resulted in a greater number of people seeking assistance from VCSE groups and organisations.

We recognise the need for the council to have a more consider approach on how we engage with the local VCSE sector groups and organisations so that we find ways to reconnect, refocus, and rebuild our relationship.

I have no doubt that by doing all we can to activate and enhance our relations with this sector we will be in a much better position to respond to challenges now and in the future. And we must do that together, by being honest with what can and can't be accomplished, and by making the best use of our respective resources.

## **Cllr Mustafa Malik**

Assistant City Mayor

Communities, adult learning, jobs and skills



Voluntary Action LeicesterShire

# Introduction

The aim of this strategy is for Leicester City Council to reconnect, refocus and rebuild our relationship with the local VCSE sector. It details how the council will engage with organisations and groups in Leicester for mutually beneficial outcomes with a focus on the actions we'll take to establish a strong foundation for long-term gains.



Since the start of Conservative rule in 2010, financial cuts from central government have hit charities hard and placed a huge pressure on local authorities to deliver services with less funding.

As a result, the council continues to have to make tough decisions on how best to respond to the reduction in government grants, rising inflation, and additional support needed for residents because of the cost-of-living crisis.

Unfortunately, this also means the council can no longer provide the same level of financial support as it has in the past to our local VSCE organisations and groups.

Now more than ever we must work together to establish an effective and sustainable local VCSE sector that can survive these challenges as well as utilise new and existing opportunities for a positive future.

Overall, our VCSE sector engagement strategy intends to:



LOROS Hospice



Improve our understanding and awareness of the **issues faced by the VCSE sector**



Clearly **identify the VCSE groups and organisations** we directly work with now and should do in future



**Help us to better understand** the role these groups and organisations play, and services they provide



Broker better relationships **between VCSE groups and businesses** for mutual benefit



Reinforce and uphold the **importance of civil society**



Champion the important **role of the VCSE sector**, both within the council and with external partners



**Improve communication**  
between the council and the  
VCSE sector



**Gather and use data** and  
information about the local,  
regional, and national VCSE sector



Provide **more targeted support**  
to smaller, fledgling, or newly  
established VCSE organisations



Provide tailored and needs-  
based **infrastructure support**



Be more **organised and  
coordinated** across the council in  
engaging with the VCSE sector



**Improve and promote**  
volunteer opportunities

The desired outcome for all involved is that the local VCSE sector becomes resilient, sustainable, and viable within the wider context of civil society and that the council plays its part as one of many principal enablers of that outcome.



# The VCSE sector in Leicester

The VCSE sector plays a crucial role in Leicester and in many cases is a key partner in delivering services to residents and communities across the city.

VCSE groups and organisations differ in size, nature of their work, activities and services they provide. Generally, it includes groups and organisations such as:

- Community associations
- Community groups
- Co-operatives
- 'Friends of' groups
- Faith organisations
- Housing associations
- Grant-making trusts
- Registered charities
- Charitable incorporated organisations
- Tenants' and residents' group
- Social enterprises
- Community/grassroots-based sports clubs and groups
- Environmental, arts and heritage organisations
- Non-constituted groups of residents working together



## How big is the VCSE sector?

Our understanding of the VCSE sector in Leicester is an evolving one, and we are committed to improving our knowledge so we can draw more meaningful insights and better direct our engagement with the local VCSE sector.

We do know that VCSE organisations and groups provide a wide range of services and activities that address a variety of needs in Leicester, enabling it to be a thriving city.

These groups and organisations can be broken down into the following sub-sectors:



Social care



Health



Religion or faith



Philanthropy and volunteering



International aid



Environment



Education



Culture and sport



Community, employment, and housing



Law, advocacy, and politics



Business and professional



# How the strategy was developed

This strategy has been developed by engaging with a range of VCSE organisations in the city. We've taken the time to hear from the sector, then used these findings to set out our pledges and actions for the future. We plan to continue this engagement and fully recognise that this is crucial to ensure we do the best for our residents and communities.



## Dialogue sessions

We held more than a dozen 'open dialogue sessions' in public venues across Leicester. These sessions allowed us to engage face-to-face with people who work for and lead VCSE groups and organisations to learn first-hand what mattered most in their own areas.



## One-to-one interviews

We held a series of one-to-one interviews with individuals from 13 VCSE groups and organisations, seeking their views regarding the potential benefits, outputs and outcome of our intended strategy. The following points came up most frequently:

- Infrastructure support
- Partnerships
- Sources of funding, tendering and contracts
- Attracting younger people into volunteering
- Capacity building, including investing in staff, sharing skills and assets
- Council staff being aware of and valuing the VCSE contribution to Leicester.





Volunteers from Freeths with Leicestershire Cares



## Topic sessions

We held a series of online sessions that were open to all VCSE organisations in Leicester. The five 'focus' topics discussed were based on our previous work and were:

- Finance and funding
- Partnership and collaboration
- Civil society
- Infrastructure support
- Volunteering



## Survey of VCSE groups

We invited all VCSE groups and organisations known to us to take part in the survey, to gather their views on the infrastructure support provided by the council.



## Review of VCSE strategies

We reviewed the strategies from other councils throughout England seeking good practice in how they engage with and support their local VCSE sectors. We focused on strategies from local authorities with similar characteristics to Leicester.



## VCSE support organisations

We gathered information from national agencies and organisations directly involved with the sector, most significantly, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) – of which the council is a public sector member, and also the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA) and Locality.



## Internal discussions with council service leads

We spoke with services and teams in the council that work closely with the sector, to better understand the services and support we commission, the grant-aided work that takes place, as well as other forms of engagement and contact with the VCSE sector that transpires.

# Our priorities

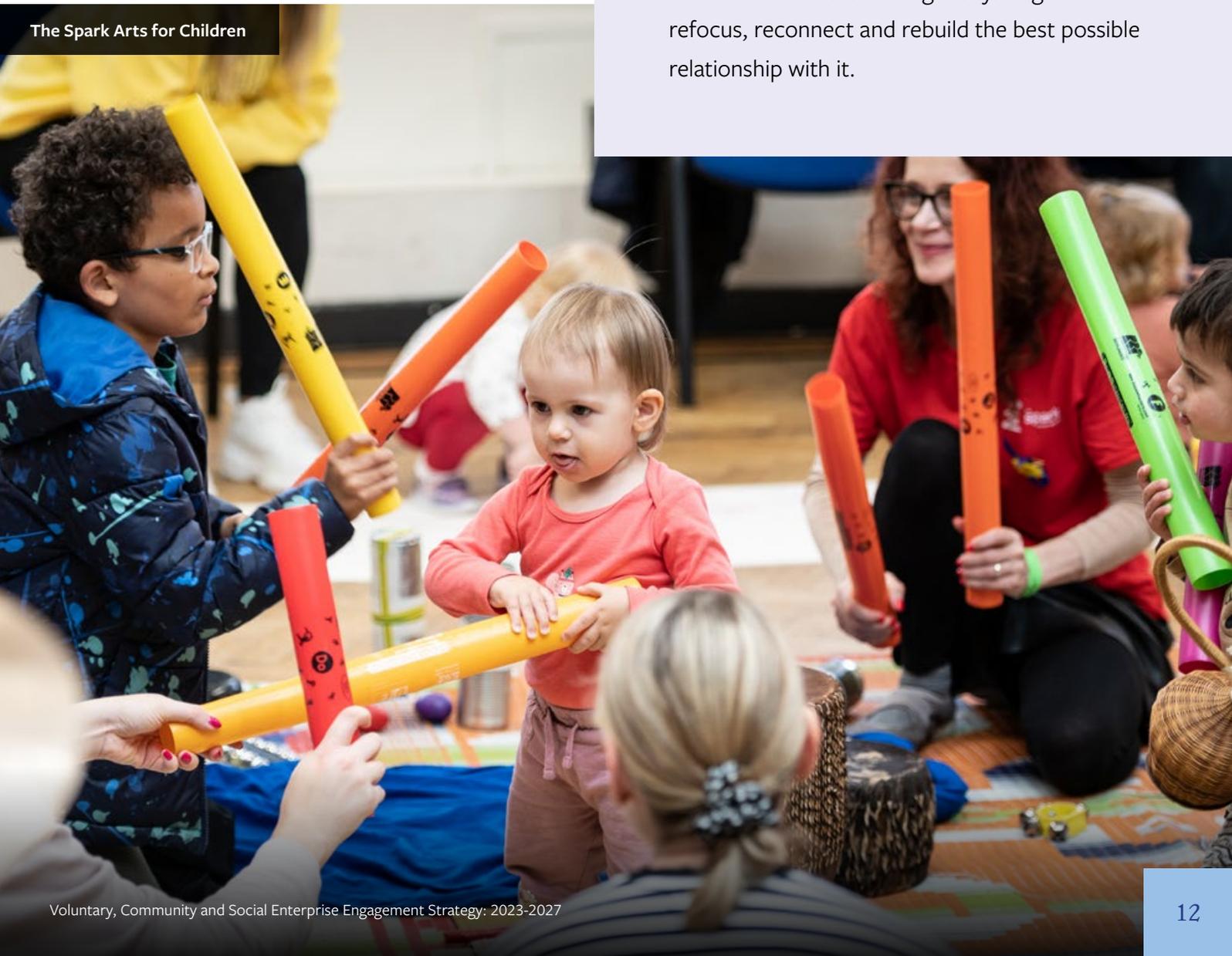
The VCSE sector in Leicester is ever changing with newer, smaller, organisations and groups forming on a weekly basis.

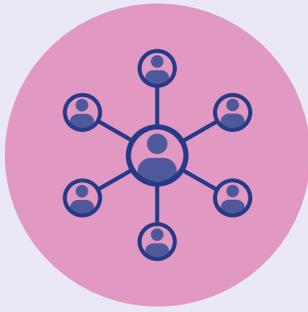
We must be able to support these groups to become sustainable and thrive in our city. And although we can't commit to the level of funding as we have in previous years, it is clear we can support in other ways such as through our business connections, providing needs-based infrastructure support, upskilling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

Following our engagement with the VCSE sector to shape this strategy, it is clear what our priorities for the upcoming years need to be and our pledges to the organisations and groups in the sector.

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

The Spark Arts for Children





**Reconnect**



**Refocus**



**Rebuild**

## VCSE sector priorities at a glance

### — Organisations in our civil society

Nurture a more collaborative civil society

### — Insights, importance, and impact

Understand the sector through better use of data and information

### — Funding

Help the sector to be more financially robust

### — Infrastructure support

Identify the sector needs through peer review and support

### — Volunteering

Develop and help to sustain volunteer opportunities

### — Businesses

Facilitate relationships between the sector and businesses for mutual benefits

# Organisations in our civil society

## Our pledge

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.

## Our actions

- + 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.





# Insights, importance, and impact

## Our pledge

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.

## Our actions

- + 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 the council and the VCSE sector so that we can share relevant information and collaborate more effectively with groups and organisations, where possible, to build meaningful relationships across our city.
- + Develop better ways of working more closely with VCSE organisations, link up more regularly, and work with a variety of representatives from the local VCSE sector and other civil society partners on important matters, and especially when reviewing progress of this strategy.
- + 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.



Let's Get Together

## Funding

### Our pledge

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.

### Our actions

- + 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.

# Infrastructure support

## Our pledge

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.

## Our actions

- + 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.





Leicester Pride

## Volunteering

### Our pledge

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.

### Our actions

- + 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.

# Businesses

## Our pledge

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.

## Our actions

- + 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.



**For further information about  
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