



Voluntary Sector Strategy



2025 - 2030

Foreword

I am thrilled to launch Wandsworth's first ever Voluntary and Community Sector strategy alongside the new dedicated Voluntary Sector Team.

Across Wandsworth there are hundreds of amazing charities and enterprises who work tirelessly to provide essential and community-based support, connection, and joy to our residents all year long and this strategy sets out our shared vision and values towards a strong Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS).

Together, we have co-developed this strategy with the purpose of setting out new ways of working in order to support our communities and our commitment to developing a true partnership with each other. Our shared values and seven strategic outcomes demonstrate the council's commitment to the sector and provides a guideline for delivering a framework to ensure our VCS is strengthened, can thrive and grow.

Finally, I want to thank everyone who has been involved in the development of the strategy. This is the start of an ongoing conversation, which I hope will continue for many years to come as we ensure our VCS is heard, supported and valued.

**Councillor Akinola,
Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member
for Voluntary Sector, Business Engagement and Culture**



Introduction

Wandsworth has a thriving, diverse and dynamic voluntary and community sector providing voice, leadership, connection and support to the many different communities across our borough.

The council is committed to working in close partnership with the voluntary and community sector in a way that amplifies and celebrates its contribution and impact. This strategy sets out the council's and local voluntary and community sector's shared vision and values for working together, to achieve the very best for our communities.

In 2022 the council launched an ambitious programme of engagement with the voluntary and community sector, with a strong emphasis on building trust and dialogue. This would lay the path for the council to deepen its understanding of the local voluntary sector whilst creating new ways that the voluntary and community sector can continue to thrive.

It is vital for the council and its wider partners to understand all the different strengths, knowledge, experiences, perspectives, capabilities, insight and skills that the local voluntary and community sector offer to community life.

The council is committed to working in partnership with the sector and carrying out a connector, enabler and coordinator role; ensuring the diverse range of local organisations are recognised, supported and celebrated across the Wandsworth community.

The council is committed to ensuring there are multiple different ways in which these organisations can come together with other key partners to have a space to listen, learn and reflect with one another.





What we have achieved so far... together

In 2022 the council provided additional investment and launched a new and exciting approach to working with the local voluntary and community sector.

Through a dedicated team the council has been able to:

- Champion and celebrate the sector
- Work across the council with different teams, and with the South West London Integrated Care Board to strengthen and align partnership and corporate working.
- Listen to the sector and capture the voices and experiences of community groups and co-develop local support for the sector.
- Deliver Voluntary and Community Sector partnership events, bringing organisations together to connect, share insights and identify ways we can all work better together.
- Launch the bi-monthly Voluntary and Community Sector Network meetings providing a regular space for the sector to connect with each other and different council departments to share updates.
- Launch a monthly voluntary and community sector newsletter, created from feedback from the sector on key support areas, opportunities and updates.
- Connect with and visit a wide range of organisations and be present in the community.
- Launched a voluntary and community sector partnership working group, to support the coordination of community projects, sharing of knowledge and strengthening joint working with local partners and the voluntary and community sector. Placing co-development and co-design at the heart of our approach.

Developing the Voluntary Sector Strategy

In 2023 the council published a needs analysis of the local voluntary and community sector which it commissioned from an independent research body.

The report included the findings from an extensive programme of engagement and consultation events with organisations and wider partners, as well as describing the profile of the sector.

This has given further insight into understanding the needs of the sector and the environment we all need to create locally, to ensure the sector can continue evolving as strong, vibrant and sustainable organisations embedded across our communities.

The needs analysis was focussed around five key themes – Leadership & Advocacy, Partnerships & Collaboration, Volunteering, Organisational Development and Funding & Resources.



These themes are described on the [National Association for Voluntary and Community Action website](#).



A copy of the VCS needs analysis report can be found here: [Voluntary Sector Needs Analysis Report](#).

The report identified that Wandsworth has key strengths including a breadth of local knowledge and experience, strong local partnerships and proven responsiveness and diversity. However, there were some challenges for the VCS such as lack of capacity to engage at a strategic level and inconsistent communication channels between partners.

A key recommendation from the report was to co-produce a Voluntary and Community Sector Civil Society strategy for Wandsworth which sets out the vision and shared commitments of all partners. This strategy reflects on the findings of the needs assessment and the feedback from across the voluntary sector and wider partners to create a set of outcomes and deliverables which we can commit to collectively and with purpose.



Alongside the strategy, the council has led on the commissioning of a new voluntary and community sector infrastructure and capacity building support service. This will respond to the needs of the VCS and be a key enabler in the achievement of the outcomes contained in this strategy.

We are excited to continue this positive journey together, with this new strategy underpinning how we all work in partnership together, to achieve the very best for our residents.

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

Advancing equality, promoting diversity and facilitating inclusion is central to the work of the council, VCS and our wider partners. We are committed to ensuring everyone in Wandsworth is treated fairly and has access to the same opportunities, activities, and support regardless of their background and personal circumstances.

This includes, but is not restricted to, a focus on the nine protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation). These are the guiding principles which sit at the heart of this strategy.

We recognise the fundamental role that the voluntary and community sector plays in supporting those most vulnerable in our community and removing barriers for these groups and individuals. Most of those organisations are small, operating at a hyper local level, reaching and responding to local need and addressing inequalities.

The empathy, trust and compassion shared across the sector enables communities to access support, build networks and facilitate activities. It is only through this partnership working between the sector, council, and ICB have we been able to deliver essential post-pandemic support, provide on-going cost of living support and in 2024 achieved Borough of Sanctuary status. We will continue to greatly strengthen our partnership working and respond to community needs collectively.

This focus on equality, diversity and inclusion underpins this strategy: our vision, values and how we will achieve our strategic outcomes, as a collective, for our Wandsworth community.

The VCS Needs assessment and co-production work with the voluntary sector has identified a set of outcomes and deliverables to drive forward a positive step change in the relationship between the council, the voluntary sector and wider stakeholders. This strategy helps to structure those findings and provide some practical steps towards achieving our vision.

Vision

Wandsworth has a vibrant and thriving Voluntary and Community Sector, that fosters collaboration, celebrates diversity, and listens and acts to empower people.

We aspire to always be an inclusive and kind community, where trust is paramount, and knowledge is freely shared.

Shared Values

Collaborative - Wandsworth is a place where all partners are valued, connected and work together and with the communities they serve, to provide the best support possible. Knowledge, skills and advice are shared, and partners regularly come together to learn and reflect.

Diverse - Wandsworth is a place that celebrates, champions, and supports its diverse - communities, especially those who are most vulnerable. Different ways of thinking, backgrounds, abilities, cultures, traditions, faiths, music, food, arts and heritage make our communities thrive.

Inclusive - Wandsworth is a place where people are free and safe to be themselves. The community provides open and accessible opportunities for all, continuing to learn and grow from one another on championing inclusivity.

Dynamic - Wandsworth is a place of open-ness, that evolves and grows with its community. Communities spark off each other, excited by and embracing new ideas and innovative ways to provide opportunities and support.

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Our shared vision is underpinned by 7 strategic outcomes and encourages action from all key partners to ensure the Wandsworth Voluntary Community Sector is:

1 A sector that is independent, thriving and sustainable, providing advice, support, activities, and a voice for all residents all year round.

How we will achieve this

Council commitments

- Fund an effective, inclusive and responsive VCS infrastructure and capacity building support service that is co-designed with the local VCS to meet local needs.
- Ensure an outcome of this support service is to establish a mentoring/buddy scheme within voluntary and community sector organisations, where larger, more established organisations can share knowledge, experience and advice with new or smaller organisations.
- Recognise the strong work and expertise of the local voluntary and community sector, and ensure this is consistently supported, enabled and championed through the council's own range of services and activities, including communications, training and funding.

- Create, embed and embody a culture of openness, listening to and responding to the questions, ideas, and needs of the voluntary and community sector and the residents they serve in a timely manner
- Deliver and facilitate opportunities such as partnership boards, training, and networking events that enable local organisations and relevant stakeholders to come together regularly to share knowledge, resources, advice and insight, and to shape local priorities and co-develop community solutions.

VCS commitments

- Create and embed a culture of openness, sharing knowledge, insight and resources, particularly larger organisations with smaller ones.
- Champion and uphold service user participation in service planning and delivery. Where needed, provide voice and representation for service users on partnerships boards and at events.



- Provide inclusive and accessible opportunities and support for Wandsworth residents, regularly seeking feedback on services.
- Commit to good organisational practice around safeguarding, health and safety, and equality, diversity and inclusion.

Wider stakeholders

- Collaborate with the council to identify and explore opportunities to bring together a wide range of partners across the borough to build cross-organisational relationships to support and raise the profile of the local VCS.
- Commit to good organisational practice around safeguarding, health and safety, and equality,
- Explore opportunities with the council and VCS sector to encourage all partners to share local knowledge, resources and take on volunteering opportunities.

2 A sector that is well connected and informed, with clear, consistent and open communication with each other and key stakeholders in the community.

How we will achieve this

Council commitments:

- Produce informative, accessible and concise VCS Newsletters and updates, and organise wider partnership events where information can be shared, making sure these complement other communications and events taking place across the borough.
- Organise and deliver partnership boards and meetings, and support other partners to do the same, embedding a culture of sharing information across organisations, services and within the community.
- Communicate key messages clearly and consistently on upcoming priorities and commissioning intentions.
- Work with local VCS on understanding community channels, platforms, and preferences of communication and collaborate to co-design communications and share key messages.
- Seek feedback from local VCS throughout the year on how communications are being received, take on board feedback and utilise learning and sharing skills with one another.

VCS commitments

- Advise the Council and other key partners on the most effective communication methods to use across the community, particularly for residents with disabilities and those who don't use English as their first language, and ensuring information is culturally sensitive.
- Share case studies on positive stories demonstrating how local organisations work, projects being delivered and support available.
- Explore how the VCS, council and wider partners can better connect their communications to complement and promote each other, providing a more centralised approach for residents.
- Participate where possible in meetings and events to share key information and give feedback on how messages are being received within the community.

Wider stakeholders

- Support the promotion of local voluntary and community sector organisations across the borough, the impact they make on community life and different ways to connect with them.
- Commit to attending wider partnership events to build relationships with the local VCS, understand their needs and explore sharing and exchanging resources.



3 A sector that represents, advocates and celebrates everyone across our community, continuously learning from the residents they serve.

How we will achieve this

Council commitments

- Commit to advancing equality, promoting diversity and facilitating inclusion across all areas of the council and the wider community, ensuring that we continuously reach and support our most vulnerable residents.
- Commit to learning and development around equality, diversity and inclusion; seeking insight and experience from local organisations and partners and facilitating training opportunities for all.
- Provide opportunities and events to champion and celebrate everyone across our community, recognising awareness days and highlighting local heroes, through delivering events such as the Civic Awards and supporting partners to run their own events.
- Produce regular communication articles that highlight and celebrate the work and impact of the local VCS and the many volunteers in the community.
- With the VCS support service create an equalities advisory board that can support local organisations to embed advocacy and participation, in their service planning and delivery. This could include advice on resources, training, setting up networks and leading on a person-centred approach to support planning.
- Ensure events delivered across the community are in different venues, during different times and are accessible and inclusive to all.

VCS commitments

- Provide spaces, projects and platforms for communities across Wandsworth to be recognised, supported and celebrated.
- Continuously champion equality, diversity and inclusion and advocate for and represent community groups at partnerships events and meetings.
- Provide opportunities to celebrate everyone across our Wandsworth community in communications, projects or events.
- Share stories to highlight our diverse communities and develop local knowledge on different cultures, backgrounds and perspectives.

Wider stakeholders

- Explore opportunities for collaboration between wider stakeholders and the VCS to enhance VCS skills through capacity building, learning and development and resourcing needs.
- Work with the council to ensure that wider partners in the borough have a diverse workforce, reflective of the diversity that can be found in our local communities, which seeks to champion and advance equality, promote diversity and facilitate inclusion on a long-term basis.



Image: Nick Cornwall

4 A sector that is embedded in decision-making in the borough and equipped and empowered to have an active role in shaping local priorities.

How we will achieve this

Council commitments:

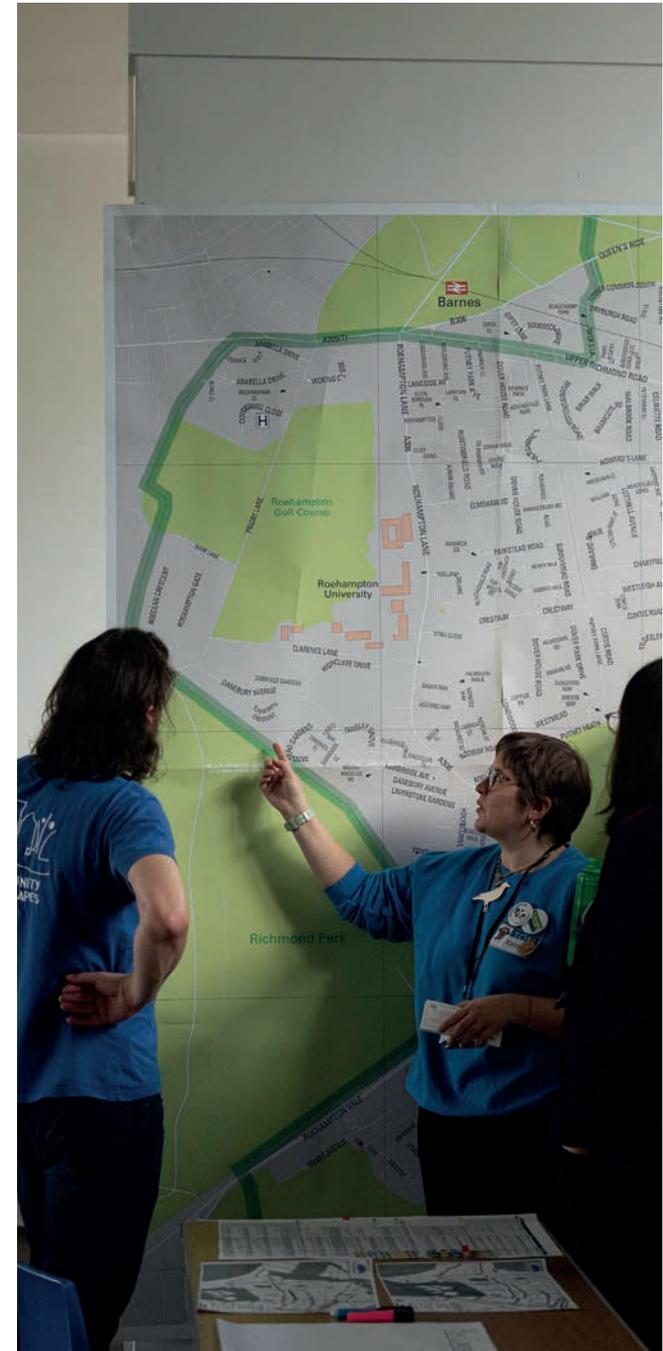
- Ensure, through close collaboration and monitoring, that the new support service delivers accessible training and development opportunities across the borough and represents the sector where needed.
- Proactively promote the council's own training offer to VCS organisations and respond to feedback on the offer.
- Communicate upcoming priorities and plans in advance, and explain the different ways in which VCS organisations and communities can shape and respond to these.
- Establish accessible processes that enable the sector to shape and respond to local priorities and decision-making procedures.
- Communicate the impact the local VCS and communities have had on shaping and delivering local priorities and the importance of this partnership working.

VCS commitments

- Act as a critical friend with the council and key partners, providing a different perspective and local knowledge, insight and experience to help shape and deliver local priorities.
- Share experience on the most effective methods to communicate and promote the importance of communities and the organisations becoming involved in decision making processes.
- Advise on gaps in knowledge or training needs, where the council and local partners can best understand how to support and demystify services.
- Collaborate with the council and key partners on shaping local priorities, by attending partnership boards where possible and giving feedback on the delivery of services on the ground.

Wider stakeholders

- Support the council to explore opportunities to integrate VCS participation into strategic planning for local economic and social development.
- Continue to foster long-term partnerships between the council, local partners and VCS to ensure sustained involvement in policy implementation and delivery to enhance community cohesion and wellbeing.



5 A sector that is financially stable and actively attracts investment to the borough, creating innovative opportunities for growth.

How we will achieve this

Council commitments:

- Support and monitor the new support service in delivering its capacity building workstream, providing on-going support with bid writing, fundraising and connecting with local and national funders.
- Rethink language and approach, a shift from 'funding' to 'investing' in local organisations and demonstrate and champion the importance of sharing time, skills, local resources and assets.
- Promote, support and embed social investment as a standard approach including maximising the use of incoming social value commitments.
- Facilitate platforms and partnership events for local and national funders to connect with Wandsworth organisations and understand our local landscape, needs and priorities.
- Continue to deliver and promote the Wandsworth Grant Fund and other council grants for the sector, as well as procurement activity, providing support on accessing these and seeking feedback on the process.

VCS commitments

- To access support and opportunities for financial management, bid writing and fundraising skills.
- To give feedback on these areas, highlighting any gaps and areas where additional support is needed.
- To connect with local and national funders, attending partnership meetings and events where possible.
- To partner with local organisations where it's of equal benefit, to apply for joint funding and share resources.
- To support other local organisations with sharing best practice on bid writing and communicating the work and impact of the sector to local and national funders.

Wider stakeholders

- Collaborate with the council to support council-led initiatives by offering skills, goods and/or services to VSC organisations to enable resource reallocation and promote long-term, sustainable growth.
- Collaborate with the VCS sector to explore opportunities for training and capacity building programmes to improve financial management and long-term strategic planning capabilities.



6 A sector that actively shares knowledge, skills, advice and insight with each other, creating on-going opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and accessible sharing of resources across the borough.

How we will achieve this

Council commitments:

- Establish local networks, meetings and events where all partners can continuously learn, develop and reflect with one another, providing opportunities to embed critical friends and mentoring opportunities.
- Support the creation of an accessible database that provides details of local resources, contacts and venues that can be utilised by VCS organisations.
- Utilise the new VCS Hub to facilitate learning and development opportunities amongst local groups and organise events on areas such as training, bid writing and using data tools as well as an affordable co-working office space.
- Collaborate with different departments to map which other council buildings could be utilised for local VCS activities, for example, clubrooms, youth clubs and Family Hubs and streamline the process for making these available.
- Encourage and uphold a culture of collaboration with and between neighbourhoods, community representatives, statutory partners, businesses and the education sector.

VCS commitments

- Actively seek out and connect with other local organisations, attending network meetings and partnership events where possible.
- Share knowledge with other local organisations, providing opportunities for peer-to-peer learning, collaboration and the sharing of skills and resources.
- Champion and embed collaborative working and connecting with other local organisations to support each other and provide feedback to the council and other key partners on how they can enhance this further.

Wider stakeholders

- Collaborate with the council to consider further opportunities for shared learning such as a reciprocal mentoring scheme between wider partners and the VCS to enhance collaboration, encourage mutual learning, foster trust and promote inclusion.
- Support the council with the creation of an accessible database that provides details of local resources, contacts and venues that can be utilised by VCS organisations.



7 A sector that is rooted in our different communities, pro-actively listening and responding to residents' needs and shaped by lived experience.

How we will achieve this

Council commitments:

- Embed a place-based approach across the borough, recognising and utilising local assets and ensuring these are used for community benefit.
- Create and champion a culture of giving back, showing the importance of connecting with local communities to understand the impact of sharing skills, time and resources.
- Continue to strengthen being an open and listening council, seeking out and responding to resident and VCS feedback and demonstrating how their experiences shape local priorities.
- Work collaboratively with the sector on communicating the and impact of the sector and the different ways residents can get involved with local organisations

VCS commitments

- Continue to support, advise, connect, represent and celebrate the different local communities across Wandsworth.
- Continue to develop and champion a person-centred approach to services and embedding service user participation in planning and delivery.
- Work collaboratively with other key partners on communicating the impact of the sector and the different ways residents can get involved with local organisations.

- Continue to respond and evolve with the different local communities and deliver feedback where needed to the council and key partners on how support can be adapted.

Wider stakeholders

- Support the council in embedding partnership working across the borough to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to have influence and a voice in shaping local priorities in Wandsworth.
- Collaborate with the sector to explore place-based opportunities for development and sustained community engagement across the borough.



Delivery of the strategy

This new strategy focuses on seven strategic outcomes that have been co-developed with the sector from extensive engagement and consultations.

The council's Stronger and Safer Communities Team will be the key contact for coordinating the delivery and monitoring of the shared commitments for these outcomes and ensure the strategy is an active working document, that evolves over time with the sector.

The VCS team, VCS Partnership Working Group (12 council departments and the SWL ICB) and the new VCS infrastructure support service will monitor and review the action plan for this strategy, working across the sector to refresh the strategic priorities and support the actions being carried out.

This is a shared journey, VCS organisations and particularly the VCS infrastructure support service will work collaboratively with partners on creating an action plan for each theme and champion everyone's role within that. This action plan will also help the VCS understand which partnership boards and networks take place across the borough, where knowledge, resources and insight can be shared and utilised.

The strategic outcomes reflect the need for the Wandsworth community to take a more connected and collaborative approach to its development. Creating a strong, well-informed network where knowledge and resources are shared in the community. With the council, Integrated Care Partnership and other key stakeholders playing a key role in this, supporting, encouraging and enabling strong communications and coordination.

March 2025

**Please get in touch with the VCS team for updates:
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