



Safer & Stronger Communities Board

Agenda

Thursday, 22 September 2022
11.00 am

Hybrid Meeting - 18 Smith Square and
Online

There will be a meeting of the Safer & Stronger Communities Board at **11.00 am on Thursday, 22 September 2022** Hybrid Meeting - 18 Smith Square and Online.

LGA Hybrid Meetings

All of our meetings are available to join in person at [18 Smith Square](#) or remotely via videoconference as part of our hybrid approach. We will ask you to confirm in advance if you will be joining each meeting in person or remotely so we can plan accordingly, if you wish to attend the meeting in person, please also remember to confirm whether you have any dietary/accessibility requirements. 18 Smith Square is a Covid-19 secure venue and measures are in place to keep you safe when you attend a meeting or visit the building in person.

[Please see guidance for Members and Visitors to 18 Smith Square here](#)

Catering and Refreshments:

If the meeting is scheduled to take place at lunchtime, a sandwich lunch will be available.

Political Group meetings and pre-meetings for Lead Members:

Please contact your political group as outlined below for further details.

Apologies:

Please notify your political group office (see contact telephone numbers below) if you are unable to attend this meeting.

Conservative:	Group Office: 020 7664 3223	email: lgaconservatives@local.gov.uk
Labour:	Group Office: 020 7664 3263	email: labgp@lga.gov.uk
Independent:	Group Office: 020 7664 3224	email: independent.grouplga@local.gov.uk
Liberal Democrat:	Group Office: 020 7664 3235	email: libdem@local.gov.uk

Attendance:

Your attendance, whether it be in person or virtual, will be noted by the clerk at the meeting.

LGA Contact:

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Carers' Allowance

As part of the LGA Members' Allowances Scheme a Carer's Allowance of £9.00 per hour or £10.55 if receiving London living wage is available to cover the cost of dependants (i.e. children, elderly people or people with disabilities) incurred as a result of attending this meeting.

Safer & Stronger Communities Board – Membership

[Click here for accessible information on membership](#)

Councillor	Authority
Conservative (7)	
Cllr Lewis Cocking (Vice-Chair)	Broxbourne Borough Council
Cllr Eric Allen	Sutton London Borough Council
Cllr Bill Borrett	Norfolk County Council
Cllr Louise McKinlay	Essex County Council
Cllr Julia Lepoidevin	Coventry City Council
Cllr Lois Samuel	West Devon Borough Council
Cllr Arnold Saunders	Salford City Council
Substitutes	
Cllr John Riley	Hillingdon London Borough Council
Cllr Paul Findlow	Cheshire East Council
Cllr James Gartside	Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council
Labour (7)	
Cllr Nesil Caliskan (Chair)	Enfield Council
Cllr Jas Athwal	Redbridge London Borough Council
Cllr Tracey Dixon	South Tyneside Council
Cllr Jeanie Bell	St Helens Council
Cllr Amanda Chadderton	Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council
Cllr Asher Craig	Bristol City Council
Cllr James Dawson	Erewash Borough Council
Substitutes	
Cllr James Swindlehurst	Slough Borough Council
Liberal Democrat (2)	
Cllr Heather Kidd (Deputy Chair)	Shropshire Council
Cllr Jon Ball	Ealing Council
Substitutes	
Cllr Kris Brown	Liverpool City Council
Independent (2)	
Cllr Clive Woodbridge (Deputy Chair)	Epsom and Ewell Borough Council
Cllr Karen Lucioni	Isle of Wight Council
Substitutes	
Cllr Paul Hilliard	Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council
Cllr Chidi Nweke	Epping Forest District Council
Cllr Patricia Patterson-Vanegas	Wealden District Council

Agenda

Safer & Stronger Communities Board

Thursday, 22 September 2022

11.00 am

Hybrid Meeting - 18 Smith Square and Online

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Date of Next Meeting: Thursday, 10 November 2022, 11.00 am, Hybrid Meeting - 18 Smith Square and Online

Note of the last Safer and Stronger Communities Board

Title:	Safer and Stronger Communities Board
Date and time:	Thursday 16 June 2022
Location:	Hybrid via Microsoft Teams and 18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

Attendance

An attendance list is attached as **Appendix A** to this note.

Item	Decisions and actions
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1. Welcome, Apologies and Substitutes, Declarations of Interest

The Chair welcomed members to the Safer and Stronger Communities Board meeting.

Apologies were received from Mayor Damien Egan. Cllr Philip Evans had retired at the recent election, with Cllr Karen Lucioni in attendance as a substitute.

The Chair mentioned that Cllr Mohan Iyengar was no longer a member of the board as he had stood down as a Conservative councillor. She thanked Cllr Iyengar for his time on the board and the work he had contributed as a lead member.

Cllr Lewis Cocking would be the Conservative Lead member for this meeting and the remainder of the Board cycle. Cllr Paul Findlow was in attendance as a substitute.

Declarations of interest were made by Cllr Lewis Cocking, who informed the Board he was Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire and Cllr Jeanie Bell, who works with a charity that receives funding from the local violence reduction unit.

2. Notes of previous meeting

Members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 24 March 2022.

Members requested an amendment be made to item 3 which did not capture Dr Harris' comments during the meeting that there was an underlying trend towards no ideological extremism.

The Chair informed the board that item 4 would be taken next due to speaker availability for item 3.

3. (Item 4) Safer and Stronger Communities issues in the Queen's Speech

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The Chair introduced the report which provided an overview of the items relevant to the Safer and Stronger Communities Board's portfolio within the Queen's Speech.

Ellie Greenwood, Senior Adviser highlighted the following key points from the report:

- Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill – The Local Government Association (LGA) had secured improvements to the existing, temporary pavement licensing regime, introduced during COVID. The temporary regime would be extended for a further year while the permanent system under the Levelling Up Bill was introduced. The Bill also includes proposals that pre-empt the outcome of a consultation on new controls on changing street names.
- Transport Bill – although not referenced in the Queen's Speech itself, Minister Baroness Vere had made a commitment in Parliament that the Bill would include limited number of taxi provisions to introduced national enforcement powers and national standards.
- Draft Digital Markets, Competition and Consumer Bill – This Bill may have implications for trading standards and the LGA would look to keep in touch with trading standards organisations.
- Protect duty – this Bill is intended to strengthen preparedness against terror attacks but we are still waiting on details on what the requirements will look like.
- Modern slavery bill –this will put into statute the requirement for public authorities to comply with rules on transparency in supply chains, which many councils already do on voluntary basis, and enshrine victim support under international conventions in domestic legislation.
- Draft victims bill –the Bill will enshrine the victims code in law and is expected to introduce a new duty for councils to collaborate in commissioning support for victims.
- Public order bill – the Bill will ensure the police have the tools they need to better manage and tackle dangerous and highly disruptive tactics.

Following the discussion, members made the following comments:

- Members welcomed the extension of modern slavery supply chain requirements to public authorities.
- Members raised that having referendums on street naming was not the right approach and that the approach to this should stay as it was. The Chair agreed and felt that it was an unnecessary burden on councils.
- Further clarity around taxi licensing was needed and whether the measures in the Transport Bill would only apply to councils which already have taxi licensing responsibilities, or whether this would extend toto include combined authorities, as per the discussion at the previous Board meeting. Ellie replied that the Transport Bill measures would apply to the existing regime, but that Government is expecting in future to consult on changing the tier that taxi licensing is managed at.
- Members noted that we are reliant on regulatory services and licensing for much of the work being discussed and that we needed to monitor additional funding to support these services.
- In the context of the Victims Bill, members raised concerns there is a piecemeal approach to child on parent abuse Parents who were subjected to their children being abusive were not seen as victims, and this was something that it would be good to look at, in terms of what support there is and how it is being addressed. The Chair noted the cross over into areas of responsibility for other Boards but added that

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she felt it right that the board pick up on this and asked officers to include this as part of board priorities.

- Clarity was needed on the new provisions set out within the Draft Digital Markets, Competition and Consumer Bill, as there was a risk of making it confusing for consumers in terms of where issues are currently dealt with by trading standards in primary authorities. Ellie responded that officers would need to come back to members on this.
- Members commented that more was needed to be done to encourage younger people into the Trading Standards profession; in one council the average age of officers was 56 years of age. This was important with cyber crime increasing.
- Members welcomed the increased fee for pavement licensing and additional enforcement powers.

Decision:

Members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board noted the report.

Actions:

- Officers to include child on parent abuse as part of board priorities.
- Officers to circulate a note to members on the implications of the Digital Markets Bill for Trading Standards.

4. (Item 5) Police and Crime Panels and PCC complaints 11.20 – 11.50

The Chair introduced the report which sought agreement from members on a set of principles to inform the LGA's future work in relation to Police and Crime Panels' handling of complaints, and also sought agreement to raise a number of practical points which would assist police and crime panels in their work.

The Chair invited Mark Norris, Principal Policy Adviser, to introduce the item. Mark highlighted the following key points:

- Dealing with complaints against PCCs is a secondary but important function of panels. The issue had been raised recently in the quarterly meetings between the chairs of the APCC and LGA; APCC Chair Mark Jones had raised a case of a PCC who had been through the PCC complaints process based on a complaint from an MP, where the case had been referred to the Independent Office of Police Conduct before the PCC was notified. The APCC had requested guidance on complaints handling for PCPs.
- Management of PCC complaints is split between the Independent Office of Police Conduct (IOPC), which oversees criminal issues, and panels, whose role is more akin to a standards committee looking at conduct issues. There is a clear issue of misunderstanding amongst the public as to what complaints panels deal with as opposed to the PCC and IOPC.
- Some panels have had a lot of experience of managing PCC complaints, while others haven't, and there are different views regarding whether panels should maintain their role.
- Following the conclusion of the Part 2 Review the Home Office committed to giving further consideration to the processes for how complaints of misconduct against police and crime commissioners (PCC) are handled; the paper sought the Board's

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views on this. A set of proposed principles for managing complaints was outlined in the paper, with a broad objective of simplifying a complex process.

- Mark asked whether if PCPs maintain this role, there would be agreement with aligning the process of dealing with PCC complaints with that already in place for standards committees in local authorities.

Following the discussion, members made the following comments:

- Members raised concerns over public confusion emphasising that more clarity is needed and that it was important to outline who did what when it came to complaints panels, IOPC and PCC. It is difficult to help people understand that the panels cannot come to conclusions when they cannot investigate a matter.
- Members felt that the LGA should have a view on the next steps, or at the least comment on processes. The Chair added it was important for processes to fulfil public expectation and have teeth.
- Members on panels should be provided with complaints training to they have the background on the process to deal with complaints properly, as with licensing committee members.
- Concerns were raised that if panels were to receive greater powers around complaints, the people making the complaints may subsequently complain about panels too.
- Members commented that there should be consistency Across panels regarding what is treated as a serious matter band what is not.

The Chair concluded that the key message to take away was the importance of the structure, integrity and faith of the process.

Decision:

Members agreed the principles for reforming the system for resolving non-serious complaints against PCCs set out in paragraph 11 with further work required to look at the practical proposals set out in paragraph 12.

5. (Item 6) Safer and Stronger Communities End of Year Report 2021/22 and 2022/23 work plan 11.50 – 12.00

The Chair introduced the item which set out the Safer and Stronger Communities end of year report, including initial proposals for the 2022/23 work plan, and noted Cllr Iyengar's contribution to developing a clear forward plan.

Mark highlighted the following key proposed themes for the 2022/23 work priorities which were as followed:

- Prevent, counterextremism and cohesion
- Community safety
- Blue light services and civil resilience
- Licencing and regulations
- Building safety
- Crematoria, coroners and registrars

Following the discussion, members made the following comments:

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- Members commented whether the Government's preferred model of having a single, elected person governing fire and rescue services government policy would be mandatorily imposed and the existing FRA abolished. Mark replied that there was no mandatory transfer of fire governance mentioned in the Fire Reform White Paper. However, the government and Home Office were clear on a preference for a single point of contact. Fire Services Management Committee (FSMC) and the Fire Commission would be submitting a response when the consultation closes at the end of July. Mark stressed that the response would focus on ensuring that if any changes in governance were made that they should be voluntary and a matter for those in the locality to make decisions.
- Special Interest Groups (SIG) formed a large part of the report and members felt that it would be better to have a separate report setting out what SIGs had done as distinct to the board.
- Recruitment and retention in regulatory services should be made a higher priority the work plan as it is a growing problem across the country.
- Members mentioned that they would like to see some work around hate crime.
- Members thanked officers for work they have done in the past year particularly around water safety and licencing.

Decision:

Members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board noted the end of year report and considered the Board's work priorities for 2022/23.

Action:

- Officers to clarify the importance of regulatory services recruitment and retention within the board priorities.

6. (Item 7) Update Paper 12.00 – 12.10

The Chair introduced the report which outlined issues of interest to the Board not covered under the other items on the agenda.

Mark highlighted that the Chair would be giving evidence to the Bill committee regarding the Draft Victims Bill. The LGA had been speaking closely with the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC) to look at and highlight issues from a local authority perspective on victim services, and there is overlap with . the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act. The Home Office has written to PCCs and chief constables about the commence timetable for the PCSC Act, but particular sections within the Act will also have an impact from a local authority perspective.

Lastly, the drug strategy framework published by the Home Office and Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), proposed local partners should put in place a combating drugs partnership at upper tier authority level, with a single point of contact who would be responsible for delivering against framework target. The proposed timetable for this is onerous.

Following the brief discussion, members noted that Cllr Alan Rhodes had recently spoken at an APPG on modern slavery regarding licencing of some high risk sectors such as car washes.

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Decision:

Members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board noted the update paper.

7. (Item 8) Building Safety update 12.10 – 12.25

The Chair introduced the report which updated members on the LGA's building safety-related work since the last Board meeting.

The Chair introduced Georgia Goddard, who informed the board that since the last board meeting the Building Safety Bill had received Royal Assent, the Fire Safety Act had commenced and the LGA had continued to support remediation.

Georgia highlighted the following key points:

- The DLUHC-led group Remediation Partners continued to work on a framework to support remediation across the country, alongside discussions with National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) to support a coordinated audit of risk within medium-rise residential buildings.
- The Joint Inspection Team had secured funding for the next two years which would triple its capacity by the end of the financial year.
- There were also a number of questions remaining over the Building Safety Act, particularly the provisions protecting leaseholders from the requirement to pay for remediation and concerns over whether the Act could leave councils liable for the costs of buildings on their land.
- The funding for councils and NFCC to expand building control and fire service competence and capacity to meet the requirements of the new regime had been agreed at £41 million.
- The commencement of the Fire Safety Act was followed by regulations implementing most of the recommendations made by phase one of the Grenfell Tower inquiry, which would come into effect January 2023. This does not include measures on PEEPs: the LGA is calling for appropriate guidance on this and working with the evacuation and fire safety working group on this issue.
- The LGA is making progress in communicating to councils and schools risks around Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC).

Following the discussion, members made the following comments:

- Members commented that there weren't many local authority maintained schools but there would be a number of academies affected by Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) and asked how would this be addressed. Georgia responded that DfE (Department for Education) were in charge of academies, and they had received a 30% survey response rate from academies who were aware of RAAC.
- Members commented if remediation costs were only covered for tenants who had not yet spent money on remediation, that would be unfair for those who had already paid towards costs. Georgia replied that residents who had already paid would not get their money back. Charles Loft, Senior Adviser added that the LGA is focusing on lobbying for the cost of remediation not to fall on the housing revenue account.
- It would be vital that the responsible person for each building had a requirement to plan for evacuating disabled people; it would not be acceptable to fall back on the fire service.

Decision:

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Members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board noted the Building Safety update paper.

8. (Item 3) Spiking incidents: current picture and activity 12.25 – 13.00

The Chair introduced the report which updated the board on the LGA's activity in response to reports of an increase in the prevalence of spiking incidents, accompanying an update to the Board from Gabby Chamberlain, spiking lead at the Home Office.

The Chair introduced Gabby, who informed the board that spiking by needles was a new phenomenon that had got the attention of media and subsequently the government. In response the Home Secretary had asked the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) to review the scale and extent of the issue. A range of actions had been taken including; developing a forensic strategy, including developing rapid testing kits; joining up work with the Crown Prosecution Service and others to improve the response to victims, and communication campaigns in specific locations. The government was also supporting the role of pilot initiatives to improve the safety of women in public spaces. The Home Office were committed to considering a case for spiking as a specific criminal offence, working alongside the police and other stakeholders to build evidence. The work would inform a statutory report which the Home Office would present before Parliament by the end of April 2023.

The Government would shortly be responding to the Home Affairs Select Committee report on spiking. Much of the work identified by the committee is already in train, with a strong focus on partnership working nationally and locally. In relation to the local recommendations, the view is that current legislation and the Licensing Act section 182 guidance are broadly sufficient to encourage local areas what they can to tackle and support this locally. The Minister recently wrote to licensing committees on this but is looking at what more could be done, so the Board's local experience on this would be very useful.

Cllr Bell was invited to follow up Gabby's remarks as one of the Board's licensing champion and following her evidence to the HASC earlier this year; then members subsequently made the following comments:

- Cllr Bell added that there were issues around gathering evidence and the motives behind instances of spiking (as there is no strong link between spiking and additional crime and it would require in-depth medical knowledge needed to spike someone with a needle). There are issues with reporting and low public confidence, as victims often felt shame to admit being associated with the incident and in some cases, by the time they come forward it could no longer be proved.
- Cllr Bell raised concerns that within the licensing regime, premises that have had their licence revoked can continue to operate until the appeal was heard, if they opted to appeal. A poorly run premises in St Helen's had continued to operate for a further three months after having its licence revoked, and only then voluntarily surrendered it after a serious rape on the premises rather than because the appeal had been heard.
- Gabby responded that research was being done specifically around the offence and broader work. Some areas were using dip stick tests, but whilst she agreed that they

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provide reassurance they weren't able to test a full range of drugs, so should be used with caution. The Home Office were looking at how they could help speed up the process of testing and current kits on the market. As for the motive, Gabby commented that there is limited understanding around the motivation, particularly when it came down to needle spiking as there was no secondary offence, but work is ongoing with the National Crime Agency to try to understand perpetrator behaviour.

- Members commented that there was a shortage qualified of door staff and the lack of female security staff and asked what conversations there had been between the Home Office and the hospitality industry to help tackle the issue. Gabby replied that the data held by the Home Office suggested that there was a year-on-year increase in people who have obtained Security Industry Authority (SIA) licence, both male and female, but low wages and the effects of the pandemic had led to job changes.
- Members highlighted that spiking was largely a crime perpetrated against young people: the police data provided in the Parliamentary report noted that 73% of victims were 18- to 21-year-olds. The response needed to be targeted to premises that young people would go to, for example student bars and festivals. Gabby responded that festivals organisers were being asked to be prepared for incidents, and that work and communications were being targeted.
- Members added that buying someone double drinks without their knowledge would count as spiking and there was a link between alcohol consumption. The Chair added that she felt they were separate issues and was a wider piece of work that should be considered.
- Members discussed whether it was appropriate to think about this issue as part of a wider issue where we need to build community resilience, as alongside some spiking being undertaken with an ulterior motive, there are also numerous cases of opportunistic advantage being taken of people who are drunk. Some members felt that there is a risk that by looking at spiking in isolation we miss a wider issue.

The Chair thanked Gabby for attending the meeting and taking time to provide an insightful discussion amongst board members.

Decision:

Members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board noted the report.

Date of Next Meeting: Thursday, 22 September 2022, Hybrid Meeting - 18 Smith Square and Online

Appendix A – Attendance

Position	Authority	
Chair	Cllr Nesil Caliskan	London Borough of Enfield
Vice Chairman	Cllr Lewis Cocking	Broxbourne Borough Council
Deputy Chair	Cllr Heather Kidd	Shropshire Council
Deputy Chair	Cllr Clive Woodbridge	Epsom and Ewell Borough Council

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Committee Member	<p>Cllr Eric Allen Cllr Bill Borrett Cllr Julia Lepoidevin Cllr Lois Samuel Cllr Arnold Saunders Cllr Asher Craig Cllr James Beckles Cllr James Dawson Cllr Jon Ball Cllr Alan Rhodes Cllr Jeanie Bell</p>	<p>London Borough of Sutton Norfolk County Council Coventry City Council West Devon Borough Council Salford City Council Bristol City Council Newham London Borough Council Erewash Borough Council Ealing Council Bassetlaw District Council St Helens Council</p>
Apologies	<p>Mayor Damien Egan Cllr Philip Evans JP</p>	
Substitutes	<p>Cllr Paul Findlow Cllr Kris Brown Cllr Karen Lucioni</p>	
In attendance	<p>Gabby Chamberlain</p>	<p>Home Office</p>
LGA Officers	<p>Mark Norris Ellie Greenwood Lucy Ellender Charles Loft Rachel Duke Rachel Phelps Georgia Goddard Amelia Sutton Tahmina Akther Caroline Horner</p>	



Meeting: Safer and Stronger Communities Board

Date: 22 September 2022

Safer and Stronger Communities Board 2022/23: Terms of Reference, Membership and Board Champions

Purpose of report

For information and approval.

Summary

This report sets out how the Safer and Stronger Communities Board operates and how the LGA works to support the objectives and work of its member authorities.

Members are asked to note the Board's membership, agree its Terms of Reference, member champions and Equalities Advocate for the 2022/23 year.

Recommendations

That the Safer and Stronger Communities Board:

- i. agrees its Terms of Reference (**Appendix A**);
- ii. formally notes the membership for 2022/23 (**Appendix B**);
- iii. notes the dates of the future meetings (**Appendix C**);
- iv. reviews and notes the member champions role description (**Appendix D**); and
- v. nominate members for the champions roles set out in paragraph 17.

Action

Any actions will be undertaken, as directed by Members.

Contact officer: Tahmina Akther
Position: Member Services Assistant
Phone no: 020 7072 7444
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Meeting: Safer and Stronger Communities Board

Date: 22 September 2022

Safer and Stronger Communities Board 2022/23: Terms of Reference, Membership and Member Champions

Background

1. The LGA's Boards seek to lead the agenda for local government on the key challenges and issues within their remit and support the overall objectives of the organisation as set out in the [LGA's Business Plan](#).
2. They take an active role in helping to shape the Association's business plan through extensive engagement with councils and oversight of the programmes of work that deliver these strategic priorities.

2022/23 Terms of reference and membership

3. The Safer and Stronger Communities Board's Terms of Reference, Membership and future meetings dates are set out at **Appendixes A, B and C** respectively for agreement and noting.

Safer and Stronger Communities Board Lead Members

4. The LGA seeks where possible to work on the basis of consensus across all four groups. The Safer and Stronger Communities Board is politically balanced, and led by the Chair and three Vice/Deputy Chairs, drawn from each of the four political groups. This grouping of members – known as Lead Members – meet in between Board meetings, shape future meeting agendas, provide clearance on time sensitive matters, represent the Board at external events, meetings and in the media, as well as engaging with the wider Board to ensure your views are represented.
5. The Lead Members for 2022/23 are:
 - 5.1 Cllr Nesil Caliskan, Chair
 - 5.2 Cllr Lewis Cocking, Vice-Chairman
 - 5.3 Cllr Heather Kidd, Deputy Chair
 - 5.4 Cllr Clive Woodbridge, Deputy Chair

The Safer and Stronger Communities team

6. The Board is supported by a cross cutting team of LGA officers, with policy colleagues and a designated Member Services Officer being those who you are likely to have regular contact with.

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7. The Safer and Stronger Communities team supports the LGA's work on the Board's priorities, and also a number of other issues which are within the Board's remit. The team works with Board Members, the LGA media team and political groups to maintain local government's reputation on community safety issues in the media; directs our lobbying work (according to Members' steer) in conjunction with the Parliamentary affairs team, and works collaboratively with other Boards across relevant cross cutting policy and improvement issues.
8. The team supports Members in person or by briefing when they represent the LGA on external speaking platforms or at Ministerial or Whitehall events. We will provide briefing notes and/or suggested speaking notes as required in advance of each engagement.
9. The team also participate in a number of officer working groups and programme boards, representing the sector's interests and putting forward the LGA's agreed policy positions.

Communications and Events

10. There are a number of internal and external communications channels available to help the Safer and Stronger Communities Board promote the work it is doing and to seek views from our member authorities.
11. The team arranges regular conferences (currently in webinar format), with the following sessions currently planned and are others likely to be scheduled over the course of the year:
 - 11.1 27 September 2022 – Police and Crime Panel webinar
 - 11.2 18 October 2022 – Modern slavery webinar
 - 11.3 8 February 2023 – Annual Licensing conference
 - 11.4 6-8 March 2023 – Annual Fire conference
12. Alongside this, the team arranges training and learning events in partnership with the LGA's improvement team. Current planned events are as follows:
 - 12.1 18 October/14 December 2022, 1 February/15 March 2023 – Special Interest Group on Countering Extremism (SIGCE) practitioner roundtables
 - 12.2 19-20 October – Licensing Leadership Essentials
 - 12.3 9-10 November – Fire Leadership Essentials
13. We also have a dedicated section on the LGA website, monthly e-bulletins, outside speaking engagements and interviews, advisory networks, features and news items in First magazine as well as twitter accounts which are used to keep in touch with our members.

Safer and Stronger Communities Board outside body appointments

Meeting: Safer and Stronger Communities Board**Date:** 22 September 2022

14. The LGA benefits from a wide network of member representatives on outside bodies. These appointments are reviewed on an annual basis across the Association to ensure that the aims and objectives of the outside bodies remain pertinent to the LGA and accurately reflect its priorities. Appointments should as far as possible be made in proportion with political representation across the LGA; as an LGA representative. Members appointed to these roles should speak for the Association, and not one particular political Group.
15. At the current time, there are no standing outside body appointments for the Board to appoint to, although some individual champion roles may include participation in task and finish pieces of work or one-off meetings.
16. In the event that a Board member is required to represent the LGA on an outside body, officers will liaise with lead members to ensure a nominee from the Board is identified. In these circumstances, Members appointed to represent the LGA on an outside body are asked to provide regular feedback, either through the Board meetings, or alternative mechanisms.

Member Champions

17. For 2022/2023 the following member champion roles have been submitted to lead members for approval. Political groups are asked to agree their nominations for these roles in their pre-meetings:

- 17.1 Domestic abuse/Violence Against Women and Girls
- 17.2 Licensing and regulatory services
- 17.3 Modern slavery
- 17.4 Water safety
- 17.5 Anti-social behaviour
- 17.6 Civil resilience

18. A role description for member champions is set out at **Appendix D**.

19. As the Board's work programme develops through the year, there will of course be scope to bring in members to specific aspects of this as required and to create new champion roles if needed as work progresses.

Financial Implications

20. There are no substantial financial implications arising directly from this report. Reasonable travel and subsistence costs will be paid by the LGA for expenses incurred by a member appointee, whilst carrying out a representative role on an outside body on behalf of the LGA.

Meeting: Safer and Stronger Communities Board**Date: 22 September 2022****Appendix A – Terms of Reference for the Safer and Stronger Communities Board**

1. The purpose of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board is to provide strategic oversight of all the LGA's policy, regulatory and improvement activity in the promotion of the safety of local communities, including issues of crime and anti-social behaviour, policing, licensing, and emergency planning – in line with LGA priorities. The board will also have strategic oversight of LGA activity in relation to the voluntary and community sector in line with LGA priorities to promote stronger and more inclusive communities.
2. The Board will also have responsibility for LGA activity in relation to fire and rescue authority issues where the issues are of a cross-cutting nature or involve the setting of a new LGA policy. On such matters the Board may choose to seek recommendations or guidance from the Fire Services Management Committee, and from time to time may be requested by the Committee to consider recommendations on such matters.
3. Boards should seek to involve councillors in supporting the delivery of these priorities (through task groups, Special Interest Groups (SIGs), regional networks and other means of wider engagement); essentially operating as the centre of a network connecting to all councils and drawing on the expertise of key advisors from the sector.
4. The Safer and Stronger Communities Board will be responsible for:
 - 4.1 Ensuring the priorities of councils are fed into the business planning process.
 - 4.2 Developing a work programme to deliver their brief, covering lobbying, campaigns, research, improvement support in the context of the strategic framework set by Improvement & Innovation Board and events and linking with other boards where appropriate.
 - 4.3 Sharing good practice and ideas to stimulate innovation and improvement.
 - 4.4 Representing and lobbying on behalf of the LGA, including making public statements on its areas of responsibility.
 - 4.5 Building and maintaining relationships with key stakeholders.
 - 4.6 Involving representatives from councils in its work, through task groups, SIGs, regional networks and mechanisms.
 - 4.7 Responding to specific issues referred to the Board by one or more member councils or groupings of councils.
5. The Safer and Stronger Communities Board may:

Meeting: Safer and Stronger Communities Board**Date: 22 September 2022**

5.1 Appoint members to relevant outside bodies in accordance with the Political Conventions.

5.2 Appoint member champions from the Board to lead on key issues.

Quorum

6. One third of the members, provided that representatives of at least 2 political groups represented on the body are present.

Political Composition

Conservative group	7 members
Labour group:	7 members
Liberal Democrat group	2 members
Independent group	2 members

7. Substitute members from each political group may also be appointed.

Frequency per year

8. Meetings to be held five times per annum.

Reporting Accountabilities

9. The LGA Executive provides oversight of the Board. The Board may report periodically to the LGA Executive as required, and will submit an annual report to the Executive's July meeting.

Meeting: Safer and Stronger Communities Board

Date: 22 September 2022

Appendix B – Safer and Stronger Communities Board Membership 2022/23

Councillor	Authority
Conservative (7)	
Cllr Lewis Cocking (Vice-Chairman)	Broxbourne Borough Council
Cllr Eric Allen	London Borough of Sutton
Cllr Bill Borrett	Norfolk County Council
Cllr Louise McKinlay *	Essex County Council
Cllr Julia Lepoidevin	Coventry City Council
Cllr Lois Samuel	West Devon Borough Council
Cllr Arnold Saunders	City of Salford
Substitutes	
Cllr John Riley **	London Borough of Hillingdon
Cllr James Gartside	Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council
Cllr Paul Findlow	Cheshire East Council
Labour (7)	
Cllr Nesil Caliskan (Chair)	London Borough of Enfield
Cllr Jas Athwal *	Redbridge London Borough Council
Cllr Tracey Dixon*	South Tyneside Council
Cllr Jeanie Bell	St Helens Council
Cllr Amanda Chadderton *	Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council
Cllr Asher Craig	Bristol City Council
Cllr James Dawson	Erewash Borough Council
Substitutes	
Cllr James Swindlehurst **	Slough Borough Council

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Cllr Carleene Lee-Phakoe**	Newham London Borough
Cllr Tamoor Tariq**	Bury Metropolitan Borough Council
Liberal Democrat (2)	
Cllr Heather Kidd (Deputy Chair)	Shropshire Council
Cllr Jon Ball	Ealing Council
Substitute	
Cllr Kris Brown	Liverpool City Council
Independent (2)	
Cllr Clive Woodbridge (Deputy Chair)	Epsom and Ewell Borough Council
Cllr Karen Lucioni	Isle of Wight Council
Substitutes	
Cllr Chidi Nweke **	Epping Forest District Council
Cllr Paul Hillard	Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole Council
Cllr Patricia Paterson-Vanegas **	Wealden District Council

*New Member

**New Substitute

Meeting: Safer and Stronger Communities Board

Date: 22 September 2022

Appendix C – List of Future Safer and Stronger Communities Board Meetings for 2022/23

1. Future meetings of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board will be held on:
 - 1.1 Thursday 22 September 2022;
 - 1.2 Thursday 10 November 2022;
 - 1.3 Thursday 19 January 2023;
 - 1.4 Thursday 23 March 2023; and
 - 1.5 Thursday 15 June 2023.
2. All Board meetings will be held at 11am at 18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ and online via Microsoft Teams. You are welcome to attend Board meetings in person or virtually.

Meeting: Safer and Stronger Communities Board**Date: 22 September 2022****Appendix D - Board Member Champions Role Description**

1. Board member champions, and support member champions, where required, take responsibility for a specified subject area or programme and act as spokesperson. This is in addition to any formal role representing the LGA on outside bodies.

Accountabilities

2. Subject to the role of lead members, to be the main spokesperson for the LGA Safer and Stronger Communities Board (SSCB) in relation to a specified subject area or programme, including writing articles and making speeches at appropriate events.
3. To keep abreast of developments locally and nationally in relation to a specified subject area or programme.
4. To attend residential conferences and other events initiated by the board, leading and chairing sessions as required.
5. To engage actively with councils and groupings of councils to secure the views and involvement of the wider membership to inform the board's specific policy line on the specialist subject.
6. To communicate back to the wider membership the work and successes of the board in relation to the specified subject or programme area.
7. To lead/participate in task and finish groups set up to look in more detail at the specific areas of policy.
8. To be the principal representative of the Board on that subject area or programme at meetings with partner bodies and other key decision-makers.

Knowledge and Experience

9. Member champions may be portfolio holders for that policy area in their home authorities or have experience/knowledge of, and special interest and commitment to, the policy area.

Appointment and support

10. The expectation is that the Board will review these roles at the start of the Board cycle every September, along with formal appointments to outside bodies.



Meeting: Safer and Stronger Communities Board

Date: Thursday 22 September 2022

SSCB overview and policy priorities: 2022-23

Purpose of report

For direction.

Summary

This paper provides an overview of the issues the board has focused on in recent years, alongside proposals for the Safer and Stronger Communities Board's (SSCB) work programme for 2022/23. The proposals are based on corporate LGA priorities and proposals for broader work based on a continuation of ongoing work (including responding to recent policy announcements by Government) and areas of interest previously indicated by board members.

Recommendation/s

The board agree the priorities and work programme, subject to any agreed amendments.

Contact details

Contact officer: Ellie Greenwood

Position: Senior Adviser

Phone no: 07795 413660

Email: ellie.greenwood@local.gov.uk

SSCB overview and policy priorities: 2022-23

Background

1. At the first meeting of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board (SSCB), members are asked to consider the policy priorities for the work programme for the coming year.
2. This paper provides an overview of the current status of the key issues that the Board's work programme has focused on in recent years, along with the proposed high-level priorities for each of the key thematic work areas for the Board for 2022/23. The work programme takes account of feedback and suggestions provided by Board members at the meeting in June 2022.
3. The LGA's 2019-22 business plan previously set out a range of cross-cutting priorities with the work programmes of individual board should contribute to:
 - Funding for local government
 - Adult social care, health and wellbeing
 - Narrowing inequalities and protecting communities
 - Children, education and schools
 - Places to live and work
 - Strong local democracy
 - Sustainability and climate action
 - Supporting councils.
4. The business plan is currently being updated and at the current time, it is not clear what the new priorities will be or where safer communities work will fit within them. We therefore plan on the basis of the broad headings of work which came under the narrowing inequalities and protecting communities/places to live and work headings in the previous plan:
 - Councils lead the way in shaping communities where people feel safe
 - Councils continue to play a leading role in the design and delivery of blue light and other services that help protect local government
 - Councils support strong communities through risk-based business friendly regulatory services.
5. It is proposed that the SSCB work programme should focus on the following six areas of activity:
 - Counter-terrorism, counter-extremism and cohesion
 - Community safety

- Blue light services, civil resilience and water safety
 - Regulatory services and licensing
 - Crematoria, funerals, coroners and registrars
 - Voluntary and community sector (VCS).
6. There are two proposed changes to last year's priorities, with the addition of the VCS and removal of building safety work. The VCS is an existing area of LGA policy work which it has been agreed corporately best fits within the remit of the SSCB. Conversely, although the team will continue to lead work on building safety, having undertaken this since the Grenfell Fire, it has been proposed to lead members that responsibility for this work will in future be overseen at board level by the Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board and Fire Services Management Committee, with day to day responsibility lying with the LGA's Grenfell Working Group.
7. The following sections of this report summarise current issues in these six areas of activity, and propose suggested areas of work for 2022/23, building on the discussion with the board in June 2022.

Counter-terrorism, counter-extremism and cohesion

8. This strand of the Board's work covers counter-terrorism, including councils' role in delivering elements of the national CONTEST strategy – principally Prevent (stopping people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism) and Protect (ensuring infrastructure and public places are less vulnerable to attack) – alongside wider efforts to tackle extremism, and build community cohesion and resilience. These can be particularly sensitive areas of work, and present a range of cross-cutting issues for local government.
9. The last few years have seen a number of different extremism and cohesion challenges coming to the fore and we expect that the anticipated economic downturn and cost of living pressures will provide further opportunities for extremists to exploit. Much of our work to support councils in response to and anticipation of future extremism and cohesion issues has been coordinated in partnership with the Special Interest Group on Countering Extremism (SIGCE); a local authority network that enables the development of guidance, support and sharing of good practice in countering extremism across councils in England and Wales. The LGA has been funding the SIGCE's work since autumn 2020, and has agreed to continue to fund the network's work programme until March 2023, comprising a series of events, workshops, supporting the SIGCE's online Knowledge Hub portal, and the development of a number of resources.
10. In the counter-terrorism space, an independent review of Prevent has been ongoing since 2019. The outcomes, and government response, were originally anticipated last year, however we expect to see their publication this year. This

is likely to have implications for councils in terms of future delivery of the Prevent duty.

11. Legislation on a new Protect duty was announced as part of the Queen's speech in May 2022, which aims to introduce new security requirements for certain public locations and venues to ensure preparedness for and protection from terrorist attacks. This follows a consultation in 2021 on the scope of the duty, which the LGA fed into. We expect further details on the duty in the coming months, but it is likely to have a number of implications for councils beyond their existing role in the safety and security space; as owners and operators of venues in their own right; as employers of large organisations; and potentially a wider role in enforcing compliance. A pilot running with local authorities in the North East on security measures in Publicly Accessible Locations (PALs), although separate from the Protect duty, could also inform the development of its delivery model. We will continue to feed in sector views on the development of the duty, and monitor the progress of the PALs pilot.
12. Alongside the above, we are also expecting a refresh of the government's overarching CONTEST strategy and will look to feed into its review.
13. Dame Sara Khan was appointed as Independent Reviewer of Social Cohesion and Resilience last year, whose remit includes exploring the experiences of those targeted by extremists and other divisive actors; understanding the role of local authorities and public bodies in promoting cohesion and countering extremism; and supporting local communities and civil society to challenge extremism, develop community resilience and promote cohesion. The LGA responded to Dame Sara's call for evidence earlier this year, which is expected to inform recommendations to government. We will continue to work with Dame Sara's team, and reflect sector views as necessary, as the outcomes of this work are developed.
14. A refreshed hate crime action plan was anticipated last year but as yet has not been published. The current plan was published in 2016, with a further update in 2018 and covers the themes of prevention, responding to hate crime, increasing reporting, improving support to victims and building understanding. We will continue to work with officials to ensure sector views are fed into any further development and dissemination of a new hate crime plan or strategy.
15. In May 2021 the Government released a draft Online Safety Bill. The Bill covers a range of online harms, with a focus on illegal content and content that is harmful to children and proposes establishing a new regulatory framework for technology companies to impose a legal duty of care to improve the safety of their users. As the Bill continues its passage through the parliamentary process, we will continue to contribute to the LGA's lobbying activity.

Community safety

16. Our community workstream, incorporates a wide range of community safety issues including anti-social behaviour, domestic abuse and violence against women and girls and wider serious violence and crime issues, including modern slavery and organised crime. This is an always busy workstream, with several pieces of related legislation brought to Parliament in recent years.
17. The [Government's Levelling Up White Paper](#) identified a key milestone of reducing homicide, serious violence and neighbourhood crime, focused on the worst-affected areas, by 2030. The White Paper outlined some wider funding commitments including, an expected additional round of Safer Streets funding, with bids focused on the prevention of neighbourhood crimes like burglary, robbery and vehicle theft, anti-social behaviour and violence against women and girls as its primary objectives. Community safety partnerships have been able to bid into subsequent funds, in collaboration with Police and Crime Commissioners, and are expected to be able to bid into the future funding rounds.
18. The Government also made a commitment to publish a new plan for anti-social behaviour and quality of life issues. [The Beating Crime Plan](#) set out that the Government wants to ensure that the flexible measures and powers available to local areas under the [Anti-social Behaviour \(ASB\), Crime and Policing Act 2014](#), including the community trigger, are being used swiftly and properly to stop those who cause the persistent anti-social behaviour that blights neighbourhoods. The LGA is a member of the Home Office's anti-social behaviour advisory board and will continue to engage with Government and partners on the forthcoming ASB plan.
19. The Levelling Up White Paper also announced that police in England and Wales will have the same powers to deal with noise complaints as are already available in Scotland. Legislation is expected to be brought forward when parliamentary time allows, but the provisions may have an impact on how councils currently investigate these complaints.
20. In terms of the wider community safety landscape, councils will be anticipating the Government's proposed in-depth review of Community Safety Partnerships in England and Wales, initially announced in [Part 2 of the Police and Crime Commissioner Review](#). The LGA hosted a set of workshops with local government officers to gather their initial views on a potential review, and there was widespread agreement that local government would be keen to engage and for the LGA to make the case for investment and support for Community Safety Partnerships. The review is expected to be published in the Autumn 2022, but a date is still to be confirmed.
21. Councils will also be involved in the new drug partnerships, proposed in the Government's [10 Year Drug Strategy](#) which aims to prevent nearly 1,000 deaths, close over 2,000 county lines and contribute to preventing three-quarters

of a million crimes by the end of 2024-25. Areas have been asked to identify a senior responsible officer, and [guidance](#) has been issued to local areas on effective partnerships.

22. The serious violence duty, as outlined in the [Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022](#), is expected to commence from January 2023. This is dependent upon whether the Parliamentary timetable allows for the necessary statutory instrument to be passed in Autumn, but the expectation is for the duty to commence within the coming months. The LGA has attended the first Ministerial Oversight Group for the duty and will continue to provide feedback and engage on behalf of local authorities. We have held a number of workshops with local government officers to help shape the Government's statutory guidance, which is expected to be published in the Autumn 2022. The funding for the serious violence duty is still to be announced.
23. Councils continue to deliver the Part 4 [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) statutory duty to commission domestic abuse accommodation-based support and services for victims. The third year of new burdens funding (2023 – 2024) is still to be announced, and many councils will need to make funding decisions about the longevity of services in the coming months. The LGA will continue to hold best practice workshops with local authorities and press for the year three funding announcement to be made as soon as possible. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has also received the first data monitoring form on how the first year of funding has been allocated and spent. The Ministerial Oversight Group, of which the LGA is a member, will consider the results of the data monitoring form and will continue to share best practice.
24. The [draft Victims Bill](#) has completed its pre-legislative scrutiny stages and the Justice Committee is expected to publish its report and recommendations in the coming weeks. Following this, the Government will issue their response and there may be some amendments to the draft Bill as a result. The draft Bill will be introduced into Parliament and begin the process of Parliamentary scrutiny. Of most interest to councils is the proposed statutory duty for councils, Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs), and Integrated Care Boards, to collaborate on victim support services. We have highlighted the importance of this forthcoming duty aligning with the domestic abuse duty and the serious violence duty, in addition to any proposed reforms identified by the Community Safety Partnership Review.
25. On modern slavery, our work has been split between promoting awareness and understanding of modern slavery in councils, and supporting councils to strengthen and coordinate their work on this; and lobbying government to ensure councils are sufficiently resourced to support victims of modern slavery. We will shortly complete an overhaul and update of the council guidance on modern slavery which we originally developed with the Office of the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, with whom we work closely; this will be supported by a maturity matrix sending out how councils can develop their work on this issue.

26. The Queen's Speech announced that the Government would bring forward a Modern Slavery Bill. This is expected to bring councils within the scope of the existing requirement to produce a transparency in supply chains (TISC) statement setting out the measures organisations have taken to tackle modern slavery risks in their supply chains. It is also due to clarify in domestic law the support victims of modern slavery are entitled to, something that the LGA will need to take a close interest in. Councils have never received dedicated funding to support victims of modern slavery, and there can be challenges in providing support through already stretched services such as housing and social care, sometimes leading to criticism of councils by anti-trafficking organisations.
27. The LGA's new guidance aims to set out best practice work on modern slavery in all council services, as well as highlighting the importance of coordinating work on this issue given that it cuts across different council services.

Blue light services, civil resilience and water safety

28. On civil resilience matters, in previous years the LGA's work has centred on developing councillor guidance and training materials outlining the role of elected members in preparing for and responding to emergencies. We have also contributed to the Government's Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, as well as the combined consultation on the new national resilience strategy and post-implementation review (PIR) of the Civil Contingencies Act (CCA).
29. Given the commitments made in the CCA PIR, we expect the new resilience strategy (originally due out in July) to cover issues including the accountability and assurance of multi-agency resilience activity at the local level. It will also focus on the role of Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) and LRF chairs, following recent concern that the Government is tasking LRFs with activity that extends beyond the responsibilities set out in the CCA and accompanying guidance, and Government pilots of funding LRFs directly to bolster their capacity. We do not expect the CCA will be amended for several years, with officials previously stating that the Government will initially focus on piloting new approaches, before making any legislative changes, to implement the strategy.
30. The Levelling Up White Paper set out an ambition to empower local leaders and communities and ensure all combined authorities have a clear role for them in local resilience, and we therefore anticipate that one area of focus will be democratic accountability in resilience issues, an issue that the LGA made clear should be a priority in our response to the resilience strategy consultation. Following two councillor roundtables we held to contribute to work on resilience, we have recently commissioned a series of case studies of member engagement in resilience work.
31. We also expect the resilience strategy to consider societal resilience, an issue that many resilience partners are focusing on. The LGA has supported the National Consortium for Societal Resilience, a group of LRFs, VCS partners and

academics looking at the steps that can be taken to build community resilience in the context of preparing for and responding to emergencies.

32. On fire, the Government's recent white paper on reforming the fire service, including a greater role for executive leaders such as Mayors, Police, Fire and Crime Commissioners or county leaders in the fire service, will form a key part of the work of the Fire Services Management Committee (FSMC) over the coming year. The FSMC meets on 23 September to agree its priorities for the forthcoming year and it is likely that the White Paper priorities of people, professionalism and governance will continue to be key themes for the FSMC.
33. The White Paper also contained proposals around entry requirements, and minimum standards, the creation of a Fire College, the introduction of a new oath, and a statutory Code of Ethics for the sector, amongst others. The FSMC responded to the White Paper consultation on behalf of the LGA. It is expected that the Government will respond in the Autumn. The potential impact on Police and Crime Panels will be of particular interest to the Board, with the possible expansion of their remit to include fire.
34. It is expected that there will also continue to be a particular focus on equality, diversity and inclusion by the FSMC, following His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Service's (HMICFRS) inspection results that have found instances of poor practice within the sector, including two services that they say have got "toxic cultures". The third tranche of inspection will be published later this year or early next, as well as another expected State of Fire Report from the Chief Inspectorate.
35. The wildfires over the Summer once again highlighted the real-life impact of climate change and associated extreme weather events on the fire and rescue service. This incorporates not only wildfires but also flooding, winter storms and coastal erosion.
36. Industrial relations within the sector will continue to be a key issue, against the backdrop of the cost of living crisis, which might have an impact on the number of incidents that the service attends as well as the possibility of extreme weather events such as flooding.
37. On water safety, we are waiting on the publication of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency's review into the responsibility for beach safety. We will respond to the review when it is published, working alongside the LGA's coastal special interest group. Additionally, we will continue to support the annual world drowning prevention day campaign and continue to highlight the importance of water safety knowledge.

Regulatory services and licensing

38. In licensing, we have a number of long standing policy asks which have risen up the agenda again in recent months.

39. Our submission to the currently delayed Gambling Act Review White Paper focused on our call for greater powers for councils to be able to approve, or reject, applications for local premises, as well as raising concerns about the aim to permit gambling premises. With a number of board members in previous years raising concern about gambling related harm, we have also previously focused on this issue, developing [guidance on taking a whole council approach to tackling gambling related harms](#) which we will shortly be updating.
40. On taxi and private hire vehicle (PHV) licensing, the LGA has for many years called for a comprehensive reform Bill to modernise outdated legislation which hasn't kept pace with developments in the taxi and PHV market. Although the government is in theory committed to introducing a reform bill when Parliamentary time allows, there has to date been no indication that this is likely to happen. In recent years we have seen some improvements to the existing framework through changes including statutory safeguarding standards for drivers; consultation on best practice guidance; and a successful private members' Bill which mandated use of a database the LGA had set up to enabling cross-boundary sharing of licence revocations and refusals. We are now expecting that the planned Transport Bill may include provisions on national minimum standards, national enforcement powers and a national licensing database, although we have some concern that these piecemeal changes may make it less likely that the Government will introduce wholesale reform. Of immediate concern is the fact that the Levelling Up White Paper contained a proposal to consult on transferring control of taxi and PHV licensing to both combined authorities and upper-tier authorities, something SSCB indicated it was firmly opposed to. We will continue to engage with officials at the Department for Transport on their plans for bringing forward this consultation.
41. In recent years, an area of focus has been pavement licensing, following the Government's introduction of a temporary pavement licensing regime to promote outdoor hospitality during Covid. The Government subsequently announced that it intended to make the new approach permanent, and the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill includes provisions to do so. The LGA has worked closely with officials at the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to ensure the Bill includes provisions which increase the licence fee cap, have a longer consultation and determination period, and strengthen enforcement powers for licensing authorities, following feedback from councils about issues with the temporary regime. The Bill will be before the Bill Committee shortly after Parliament returns from recess and we will be engaging with this Bill as it completes its parliamentary stages.
42. On alcohol licensing, our long standing asks are for a public health objective and localised licensing fees. Covid boosted the case for a public health objective, and this is something LGA officials have recently discussed with DLUHC and Department of Health and Social Care officials; we continue to lobby the Home Office on this pending confirmation of Ministerial appointments. We are also anticipating that the Home Office will review the Section 182 guidance which

accompanies the Licensing Act 2003 in the coming months. Through this work, we will make the case for localised licensing fees to tackle the fee deficit licensing authorities incur through administering the Licensing Act.

43. Councillor licensing training has been a priority following a House of Lords select committee report that was critical of the operation and decisions of some licensing committees and called for a more consistent approach (as well as to merge planning and licensing committees, although the Government rejected this). During the previous Board cycle, LGA officers worked on a package of measures to support officers with the process of inducting new members onto licensing committees. We plan on launching our new licensing e-learning module and our licensing scenario videos in the coming weeks, as well as running two licensing leadership essentials courses in this Board cycle.
44. The LGA has been warning for several years of the risks to wider regulatory services capacity (specifically environmental health and trading standards) arising from cuts to local government funding. The prominent role these services played during Covid helped highlight this within Government, although disappointingly the recommendations of the its task and finish group on regulatory services (including for dedicated apprenticeship funding) were not taken forward. LGA and other survey data continues to highlight the challenges in recruiting skilled professionals, as well as the limited pipeline of officers coming through. We are continuing to engage with the LGA workforce team and relevant professional bodies to highlight the risks of this issue and need for central funding, as well as to identify what steps councils can take to try to mitigate the issues themselves. We have recently developed a councillor handbook on public protection, and also plan on producing guidance on lessons learnt on bringing regulatory services into a unitary authority or shared service, and on the different enforcement structures in regulatory services.

Crematoria, funerals, coroners and registrars

45. The work around crematoria, funerals, coroners and registrars has been mainly dominated by responding to media inquiries and providing support to coroners managers and registrars when necessary.
46. In July 2022 the Law Commission responded to their consultation on overhauling weddings law. The consultation took place during Winter 2020, and the Board responded to the consultation, working with the National Panel for Registrars. The submission stated that the board wanted to universal civil marriage but failing that the Board were supportive of the proposals around universal civil preliminaries. The Board expressed concerns regarding the use of the test of “dignity” for a wedding venue, and objected to its inclusion. In responding to the consultation the Law Commission is not supporting universal civil preliminaries and has continued to say that wedding venues should be “safe and dignified”. We will continue to work with the National Panel for Registrars to respond to engage in this work further.

47. Research into the of the provision of Public Health Funerals was last conducted by the LGA in 2011. The issue of public health funerals has been picked up by the media in the past, with criticisms of councils' practices. This is an issue it would be helpful to revisit to gain a greater picture of the impact of the pandemic etc on public health funeral provision.

Voluntary and community sector

48. From the September 2022 Board cycle, the SSCB will provide the strategic oversight of all the LGA's policy and improvement activity in the promotion of stronger and more inclusive communities through improving strategic relationships with the voluntary sector and community groups – in line with LGA priorities. Successful partnerships between councils and their local voluntary and community sector (the "VCS") are the bedrock of successful places. Voluntary and community sector organisations not only deliver key local public services, but they also strengthen community cohesion and increase civic participation.
49. We have prioritised three policy areas to focus on for the financial year 2022/23. The first is improving strategic relationships between councils and their local VCS, the second is supporting councils to embed more innovative community engagement practices, and the third is addressing funding and resources pressures faced by local VCS and council partners. The research and evidence gathered through these workstreams will be used shape the LGA's position on the community spaces and relationship strategy currently being developed by DHLUC as well as other relevant community-based policy.

Proposal

50. A proposed work programme is set out in the table at annex one.
51. Board members' views on the proposed programme, and any gaps, would be very welcome.
52. Alongside the proposals in the work programme, the team will continue to support other core areas of work, detailed below.

Legislation and parliamentary work

53. There are a number of pieces of legislation relevant to the Board's priorities which the team will brief on, including the Victim's Bill, expected Modern Slavery Bill, Protect Duty Bill, elements of the Transport, Levelling Up and Regeneration and Public Order Bills, as well as the Kept Animals Bill and Digital Markets, Competition and Consumer Bill.
54. We will continue our engagement with relevant select committee inquiries as they are announced and with All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) who are active on safer communities issues.

Conferences, events and media

55. Since the transition to virtual events, the team has put on a wide programme of webinars, covering domestic abuse issues, county lines, anti-social behaviour and the community trigger, GRT engagement, modern slavery, police and crime panels and fire service issues. We have a number of other webinars being planned for the coming months and are also planning in-person safer community safety, licensing and fire events at the end of 2022/early 2023.
56. The team will continue its work with the media team to produce a wide variety of media content, reflecting both our key lobbying objectives and the newsworthy issues council's protective services deal with.

Implications for Wales

57. We will work with colleagues at the Welsh LGA to identify areas where our work will be applicable to Wales in terms of non-devolved issues. Where work relates to devolved issues our focus will be on English authorities, with the WLGA leading on work in Wales, but we will share our work with WLGA should they wish to use it as a basis for Welsh specific work of their own.

Financial Implications

58. The work priorities identified for 2022/23 will be delivered within the planned staffing budget, which includes dedicated capacity to support work on cohesion, extremism and Prevent.
59. Additional supporting projects may be commissioned subject to funds being available from a small directorate / team budget.

Equalities implications

60. All board papers are now required to outline the equalities implications of the proposals they put forward, to help embed the equalities approaches the LGA's members are also considering.
61. Officers will therefore consider the equalities aspects of individual elements of the work programme as these are developed. Board members are also encouraged to consider this as an issue they may wish to scrutinise.

Next steps

62. Officers to take forward the work programme as approved by the board, reporting on progress at regular intervals through lead members' meetings and board updates.

Proposed SSCB work programme 2022/23
<i>Counter-terrorism, counter-extremism and cohesion</i>
Continue to lobby Government on the importance of retaining investment in measures to prevent extremism and build resilience
Deliver a programme of support to councils on tackling extremism through the Special Interest Group on Countering Extremism, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A series of roundtables and webinars for practitioners to share emerging challenges and facilitate support • Case studies and guidance on tackling extremism and hate crime to capture good practice • Facilitating academic support to councils on tackling extremism
Provide training for elected members on delivering the Prevent duty, tackling extremism and building cohesion
Lobby around the Online Safety and draft Protect Duty Bills, and the CONTEST strategy and hate crime action plan reviews, to ensure they reflect sector views.
<i>Community safety</i>
Publish updated council guidance and maturity matrix and develop a further round of awareness raising events on modern slavery
Influence the development of the Modern Slavery Bill and help support the implementation of the new modern slavery strategy
Continue to support councils on the implementation of their domestic abuse duty (outlined in Part 4 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021)
Lobby on the draft Victims Bill as it passes through Parliament, and provide support to local authorities on any proposed new duties.
Support councils with the implementation of the forthcoming serious violence duty and Offensive Weapons Homicide Reviews, outlined in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022.
Continue to hold best practice sessions on tackling anti-social behaviour, and support 2023 ASB Awareness Week.

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Local Government Association company number 11177145

Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government company number 0367557

Chairman: Councillor James Jamieson OBE **Chief Executive:** Mark Lloyd CBE **President:** Baroness Grey-Thompson

Provide good practice case studies on community safety issues, such as VAWG, domestic abuse, serious violence – to help support councils with the forthcoming duties.
Engage with the Home Office and partners on tackling serious and organised crime – continue working with the APCC on any joint work related to the Government’s SOC strategy.
Respond to the Government’s forthcoming Community Safety Partnership review and ensure local government views are fed-in throughout each stage of the process.
Work with the Department for Health and Social Care on the implementation of the 10 year Drug Strategy, and provide support on the implementation of proposed drug partnership arrangements.
Continue engaging with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on the Travellers Site Fund – making the case for increased funding to help councils improve current transit sites.
<i>Blue light services and civil resilience</i>
Respond to the Fire Reform White Paper and the outcome of inquiries such as those into the Grenfell Tower fire and the attack at Manchester Arena.
Respond to the publication of the national resilience strategy and help shape future pilots and activities on local resilience work
Support members and officers to strengthen council activity on resilience, including approaches to community resilience
<i>Licensing and regulation</i>
Respond to the Gambling Act Review White Paper and update the LGA’s guidance on gambling harms, working with the APCC on joint local work on this issue.
Continue to make the case for localisation of alcohol licence fees.

Work with the Department for Transport on taxi licensing reform and with DLUHC on pavement licensing provisions in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill.
Work with the LGA workforce team and professional bodies to make the case for dedicated support to boost regulatory services capacity and the professional pipeline
Support councils by sharing best practice on a range of issues involving fees and charges, structures and reorganisation
Hold two further leadership essentials in licensing courses
<i>Crematoria, coroners and registrars</i>
Respond to press and related media work related to the death management processes including crematoria and registrars' service.
Conduct further research into the provision of public health funerals
<i>Voluntary and community sector</i>
Influence the development of the Community Spaces and Relationship Strategy currently being drafted by DHLUC
Deliver a programme of support for councils to improve community engagement practices and partnership working with the voluntary and community sector



Meeting: Safer and Stronger Communities Board

Date: 22 September 2022

State of strategic relationships between councils and their local voluntary and community sector

Purpose of report

For information

Summary

This cover report introduces a research report that the Local Government Association (the "LGA") have commissioned from Locality into the state of strategic relationships between councils and their local voluntary and community sector (the "VCS"). The report contains no policy recommendations but sets out findings from the research which councils may find helpful in overcoming barriers to building effective relationships with their local VCS. The first is a typology of relationships between councils and their VCS which can be used as strategic tool by councils, and the second are a set of four principles that underpin effective partnership working.

Is this report confidential?

No

Recommendation/s

Board members are asked to consider and feedback on the research report attached as **Appendix A** into strategic relationships between councils and their VCS organisations.

Contact details

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State of strategic relationships between councils and their local voluntary and community sector

Background

1. The Local Government Association (the “LGA”) commissioned Locality to conduct research into the state of strategic relationships between councils and their local voluntary and community sector (the “VCS”). The report concludes that relationships between councils and the VCS are mixed across the country. Yet there are exemplar areas where councils and local VCS organisations are achieving huge things together – which other areas could strive towards. The research identifies four key principles for both councils and VCS partners can adopt to either maintain or improve partnership working.
2. The research took place over a six-month period, between February – July 2022. Locality took a multi-method approach which included evaluating a cross-section of council strategies, in-depth interviews and four focus groups. In total Locality engaged with **57 councils**, speaking with both elected members and senior officers as well as senior leaders from the voluntary and community sector. This encompassed a representative range of political control, council type, and geography. The findings and suggested principles that underpin effective partnership working are brought to life throughout this report by deep-dive case studies on five different council areas – Calderdale, Derby, Hackney, Malvern Hills, and South Gloucestershire.

Report and Forward Plan

3. This report is the first in-depth analysis the LGA has commissioned on strategic relationships between councils and one of their main stakeholders: the local voluntary and community sector. The research provides an honest reflection of the current state of relationships between councils and their VCS and reflects on the need for strong relationships as the bedrock of successful communities. The strategic tools highlighted in the report can help to create or maintain effective relationships and could prove critical this winter as local partners work together to support residents through unprecedented cost of living pressures.
4. There are two key research outputs which councils can use in order to assess their own relationships with their local VCS and work to improve or maintain these relationships. Within sections 6 and 7 of the report, Locality have created a **typology** of strategic relationships, which identifies the five “key” types of relationships that exist between councils and VCS organisations. Alongside an **asset-mapping exercise**, this typology can be used as a **strategic tool** by both partners to assess their relationships, identify strengths and weaknesses, and plan ways to improve.

5. The second research output is **a set of four principles** with examples of how these principles are being successfully deployed between partners across the country. These four principles are:
 - **Shared foundations:** clarity of purpose, values, and roles, built on shared understanding, knowledge and a commitment to partnership working
 - **Relational culture:** behaviours and ways of working that enable the power of community to flourish, with both sides giving generously to the process and being open to receiving feedback
 - **Effective structures:** systems, mechanisms and processes that are fit for purpose and enable innovation and sustain long-term commitment
 - **Capacity and resources:** having the wherewithal to take action.
6. The report has identified several barriers and challenges to effective partnership working between councils and their local VCS. To address these the LGA will begin several workstreams, focusing on raising awareness with our members on the benefits of improving partnership working with the local voluntary and community sector and ensuring there are the right national policies in place to unlock local partnerships.
7. This will begin with presenting the findings to several local and central government stakeholders. The research outputs will be added to the suite of tools available to corporate peer challenge teams to assess councils voluntary and community engagement.
8. The LGA will create an accessible toolkit for lead members and senior officers to use to assess their relationships with their local VCS, based on a shortened version of this research. We will also continue to improve partnership working between councils and their local VCS during emergencies by sharing best practice via the [cost of living hub](#) and through producing a top tips guide on how councils can support their VCS through the cost of living crisis.

Implications for Wales

9. None

Financial Implications

10. None

Equalities implications

11. This research was undertaken to understand the relationships between the voluntary and community sector and councils. A stipulation of the project was to

gather the views of voluntary and community sector organisations that represent marginalised groups. The LGA wanted to understand if variations in how councils engage with different voluntary and community sector organisations can risk exacerbating inequalities; whether there are particular barriers faced by VCS organisations led by marginalised groups; or how larger, more established VCS organisations interact with and support smaller, more informal community groups in ways that might address or exacerbate inequalities.

12. The research identifies four key principles for partners to deploy to create or maintain strategic relationships, with examples of how these principles are already being successfully deployed across the country. A central thread throughout the report is how councils are practising more collaborative community engagement, to better understand and work with underrepresented and marginalised groups on local issues.
13. The research also highlights several barriers to effective partnership working between councils and the voluntary and community sector, it highlights how particularly smaller voluntary and community groups find it difficult to engage strategically due to capacity or resourcing issues. The report highlights how some councils are responding to this, by funding voluntary partners to participate in strategic meetings or supporting smaller organisations in other ways.
14. The workstreams following on from this research report, as stated in paragraph 7 and 8, should support better engagement with voluntary and community groups for and led by marginalised groups.

Next steps

15. Officers will develop an accessible toolkit for lead members and senior officers to use to assess their relationships with their local VCS, based on a shortened version of this research.

Appendix A: Research report into the state of strategic relationships between councils and their local voluntary and community sector

Commissioned by the Local Government Association, researched and drafted by Locality. September 2022

1. Executive summary

The Local Government Association (the “LGA”) commissioned Locality to conduct research into the state of strategic relationships between councils and their local voluntary and community sector (the “VCS”). Both the LGA and Locality are committed to ensuring local partnerships can be strong and successful in order to build more inclusive, resilient communities. The research concludes that relationships between councils and the VCS are mixed across the country. Yet there are exemplar areas where councils and local VCS organisations are achieving huge things together – which other areas could strive towards.

A key aim of the research project is to uncover the range of **benefits** that are unlocked when councils and the VCS work well together. Not only do better partnerships between the two enable councils to deliver their statutory duties and support their residents, better relationships between these partners also strengthens communities and increases civic participation.

Despite the often shared aims and objectives between councils and their local VCS partners, the research has highlighted many **common barriers** to working in such a strategic way. Between both sides, these include:

- low capacity
- reduced budgets and resources
- a lack of clarity over priorities
- poor senior buy-in
- a failure to plan together
- differences in structure and process.

To help overcome these barriers and maximise the benefits, two key outputs have been generated for councils and their VCS partners to use.

The first is a **typology of strategic relationships**, identifying the five key “types” of relationships that exist between councils and VCS organisations.

Type	Shaping relationships	Ongoing relationships	Neighbourhood relationships	Commissioning relationships	Delivery relationships
Summary	Formalised structures through which councils	Practical mechanisms for working together on a day-to-day basis	Neighbourhood level structures for local engagement and	Working together throughout the commissioning cycle.	Local VCS participating in tenders, winning

	engage VCS on strategic direction		where powers, funds, or service delivery can be devolved	Planning strategically based on local needs, assets, aspirations, and priorities. Co-designing the services to be procured, and the process for doing so. Monitoring and evaluating based on agreed, meaningful, and illustrative metrics.	contracts, and delivering local services
Example	VCS Partnership boards, VCS strategies	CVS and other infrastructure, compacts, Community Foundations	Community councils, Area Arrangements, Place Partnerships, Community Networks	Co-design of commissioning strategies and/or services, being part of a public service framework, community asset transfer	Winning contracts, forming delivery consortiums, participating in alliance contracts

The typology can be used as a **strategic tool** by both councils and VCS organisations to analyse the health of their own relationships, identify strengths and weaknesses, and plan ways forward.

The second research output is a **set of four principles**, which provide the building blocks for successful relationships:

1. **Shared foundations:** clarity of purpose, values, and roles, built on shared understanding, knowledge and a commitment to partnership working
2. **Relational culture:** behaviours and ways of working that enable the power of community to flourish, with both sides giving generously to the process and being open to receiving feedback
3. **Effective structures:** systems, mechanisms and processes that are fit for purpose and enable innovation and sustain long-term commitment
4. **Capacity and resources:** having the wherewithal to take action.

Both Locality and the LGA believe the typology and principles will prove useful assets to help councils self-assess and track progress in relationship-building with the VCS. However, it is important to **understand them in context:** past, present, and future.

This topic cannot be fully understood without exploring how it has been shaped by external factors in **recent history**. While this research has identified strategic relationships in different forms and stages across the country, it also identified the impact of two landmark events: the reduction in most public service budgets that followed the 2008 financial crash, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The former saw the VCS become involved in more competitive – and less collaborative – local service provision. The latter broke down much of the bureaucracy that this approach created. Throughout the pandemic the VCS were often able to respond quickly to community need, sometimes where councils could not. As research participants stated, this led to a re-valuing of voluntary

organisations and community groups, enabling councils and VCS to work with one another more closely to support those most at risk in their communities.

In the **present day**, there are two key factors that shape the scope of any council-VCS relationship. First, the continuing financial pressures faced by both local government and VCS alike and second, the transition from one crisis to another as the challenges of, and responses to, the COVID-19 pandemic fade into the constraints of the cost of living crisis. Both make strategic relationships even more important, though neither make them any easier to manage. This is against the backdrop of rising demand for support services and the complexity of that demand on both councils and VCS alike.

As we look to **the future**, we must note how the same is true of the emerging funding landscape. Local services will cost an additional £8 billion between 2021 and 2024. This is on top of an additional £3.6 billion in costs for councils in 2024/25, caused by rising energy prices, spiralling inflation, and National Living Wage pressures.ⁱ

In such difficult economic times, it is more important than ever that councils and their local VCS understand how to work together as closely and effectively as possible. While government funding that flooded in during the pandemic may not reappear, there are important lessons to be learned from that crisis and the years preceding it. A shared vision, true co-production, close relationships supported by robust structures, and proactive support for local organisations – all are vital.

There will undoubtedly be a need for a longer-term central government strategy to support this approach. However, there is inspiration to be taken from partnerships happening right now across the country. Our findings and suggested principles are brought to life throughout this report by deep-dive case studies on five different council areas – **Calderdale, Derby, Hackney, Malvern Hills, and South Gloucestershire**.

In total, the research engaged 57 councils including a deeper analysis of 18 council VCS strategies. This encompassed a representative range of political control, council type, and geography.

2. Introduction

Strong relationships between councils and the local voluntary and community sector are the bedrock of successful places.

VCS organisations offer huge amounts to local areas. They provide services, generate wealth, and connect, engage, and empower people. They can also be a key means of delivering council strategies. Indeed, in an era of tight budgets, increasing demand for services and complex problems, it is hard to think how public sector priorities could possibly be achieved without working alongside local partners.

For local VCS organisations, councils represent a key partnership. They provide an opportunity to:

- shape the direction of their places
- serve the evolving needs of the community
- generate vital income
- build long-term community power.

Up and down the country, there are exemplar areas where councils and local VCS organisations are achieving huge things together. However, it is not always the case that these relationships are as mutually supportive and productive as they could be.

The LGA has therefore commissioned Locality to conduct this research to understand the state of strategic relationships in different local areas and how they can be built on or maintained. This includes:

- assessing the nature of strategic relationships between councils and the local VCS
- understanding the conditions and structures which enable them to flourish
- developing learning for how to embed strong partnership working across the country.

As this report will show, many councils have different types of relationships with different members of their local VCS. This research, based on existing good practice, dives deeper into the importance of working closely with the local VCS and suggests principles that councils could use to forge better relationships in the future.

3. Methodology

Locality used an iterative approach to this project across a blend of primary and secondary research methods. We engaged 167 individuals from VCS organisations and councils across four workstreams, these were:

1. Understanding the context
2. Gaining new insight
3. Diving deeper
4. Developing principles.

Workstream 1: Understanding the context

To understand the broader context for strategic relationships between councils and their local VCS, we completed a desktop review of relevant literature. This included a cross-section analysis of 58 key documents from various sources.

This was accompanied by interviews with seven key expert stakeholders, representing six organisations, to deepen our understanding of council-VCS relationships and test our initial assumptions. You can find the list of stakeholders interviewed in Appendix B.

The findings from this first stage were synthesised to develop a draft thematic framework, the framework set out 'types' of strategic relationships as well as common barriers and principles that underpin them

Workstream 2: Gaining new insight

In order to test the draft framework and understandings developed in workstream 1, we facilitated a series of workshops with VCS representatives, councillors, and council officers. A total of 121 individuals attended the three workshops.

Those from the VCS represented organisations of varying types and sizes, serving a diverse range of communities. Councils involved represented a range of geographies, council types and political control.

The workshops explored the current state of strategic relationships in the areas represented by attendees. They also involved discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of different types of relationships, the perceived barriers, and what could be done to overcome them.

Workstream 3: Diving deeper

The third workstream involved in-depth interviews with five VCS and council representatives from five areas across England. In total, researchers engaged with 37 senior council officers, councillors and local VCS leaders during these interviews. They sought to showcase best practice and further our understanding of how strategic relationships are working in practice.

The five council areas were chosen based on the research framework to represent a broad range of strategic relationship 'types'. In addition, further considerations such as geographic spread and political control were considered. These were:

- Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council
- Derby City Council
- Hackney London Borough Council
- Malvern Hills District Council
- South Gloucestershire Council.

These deep dives helped to develop a full picture of the strategic relationships, capturing local nuance and colour. Alongside the case study interviews, we looked at data from the Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion's 'Local Insight' platform to produce a summary of the key demographic and socio-economic data for each area.

Workstream 4: Producing findings

This final workstream brought together the findings and analysis from the first three and tested them in a final cross-sector workshop with 15 senior leaders from local VCS organisations and council. From this, we produced a finalised:

- typology of strategic relationships
- set of principles for good partnership working
- established a view of the current national policy and ongoing crisis context, which proved key to how the principles should be understood in practice.

4. Setting the scene

The state of strategic relationships between councils and the VCS in England can be described in one word: mixed.

In some areas, the two work together as true partners. They take shared, structured, and sustainable approaches to tackling local issues by developing the capacity of their communities to act. In others, if a relationship exists at all it is based on assumptions that the local voluntary sector is a 'nice' add-on to have. Here, the VCS is not seen as having the skills or capacity to be a partner in tackling the entrenched problems in a place. These assumptions are usually grounded in misunderstanding. For most, the truth sits somewhere in between.

Understanding how and why this landscape has emerged is key to developing a better vision for its future. Through the literature review and expert interviews conducted as part of this research, two events in recent history were identified as having fundamentally shaped how councils and the VCS interact. The first was the onset of austerity and the effects this had on public service delivery, and the second has been the COVID-19 pandemic.

Governments of all stripes have taken different approaches to building stronger communities by supporting voluntary and community sector organisations. However, a common thread throughout has been the changing nature of these organisations and their relationship with public sector delivery and priorities.

In the early 21st century, the New Labour government rolled out an array of national community development programmes. These created strategic partnerships not only at local government level, but with central government too. This new arrangement between the state and the VCS included increased resources and a supportive wider policy environment.ⁱⁱ

The coalition government of 2010 took a different approach to working with voluntary organisations and communities by implementing the 'Big Society' policy, focussing on three areas:

1. Social action
2. Public service reform
3. Community empowerment

It put a focus on granular community activity, supported by an encouragement of volunteerism. This moved away from larger national structures for local support and placed a greater onus on individual areas developing their own ways of working.

The 'modernisation' of public services developed under the coalition governmentⁱⁱⁱ sought to adapt public services further by, among other things:

- increasing choice for individuals wherever possible
- decentralising services to the lowest appropriate level
- opening services delivery opportunities to a range of providers.

This shifted the role of the VCS significantly. It became even more involved in local service provision, entering into relationships with councils via public service contracts, which often also resulted in a significant reduction in grant funding. Many VCS organisations are now key public service delivery partners for councils, delivering effective, holistic, person-centred, and place-based services. Indeed, Locality have found that many of the examples highlighted in our research are related to commissioning and procurement. This demonstrates just how dominant public service provision has become in the relationship between councils and the VCS.

However, key to this shift has been a competitive approach to providing local services, which occurred in response to the economic turmoil of the time. A reduction in council budgets of almost 27 per cent in some areas^{iv} contributed to this. While this has led to innovation in many areas, research participants thought it had more often than not hindered collaborative partnership working between councils and their local VCS.

Against the backdrop of public sector cuts, a greater onus was also put on the VCS to support residents who were falling through the gaps of the state's safety net. The rapid rise in food banks is just one example – between 2009/10 and 2016/17 the number of food parcels handed out in the UK each year rose by over 2,800 per cent.^v

At the onset of COVID-19, councils and VCS alike provided rapid crisis support to communities with the onset of COVID-19. This period brought both parties into a different, less transactional relationship. They had to work in close partnership to meet a shared challenge. As the country faced lockdown and social distancing to curb the spread of the disease, many residents were left isolated and at risk. It soon became clear that in many places the VCS was able to respond fastest to this crisis.^{vi} The community infrastructure built up over time meant the VCS knew who needed help, what help they needed, and how to get it to them quickly.

To support this, councils were able to direct large amounts of unrestricted central government funding to the neighbourhood level. A survey of Locality members in January 2022 found that 78 per cent had accessed government support (not including the furlough scheme). This was mostly administered through councils and included retail and hospitality grants, small business relief, and local restrictions support.^{vii} The Government also clarified procurement rules to ensure that VCSE organisations could continue to operate with an onus on ensuring suppliers were paid promptly or even in advance which allowed councils to get funding to the VCS much quicker and easier than before.^{viii} This all supported a shared goal of local partners – to support clinically vulnerable residents and those most in need.

Combined, this meant that trust between councils and the VCS grew.^{ix} Overnight, they achieved action that would otherwise have taken years to agree on. It is important to note, however, that this worked much better where existing relationships were strong. A joint response was much easier to coordinate where plans, systems, and channels of communication between councils and the VCS were already in place.

It is difficult to ignore what is often the overarching factor in the facilitation of council-VCS relationships: funding. Trust, flexibility, and agility are much easier to achieve when funding is available to help the cogs turn. This means adequate long-term resources for councils and, in turn, VCS organisations. For the latter, it is important that this is the right kind of funding issued in the right way. This could be flexible grants and contracts based less on measuring key performance indicators and more on supporting long-term resilience and capacity to innovate. Such an approach can help produce more sustainable and impactful services for local people.^x

Pandemic-era relationships are now being embedded in some places. In others, however there is already concern from both sides that relationships are slipping back as emergency funding arrangements end, restrictions cease, and the sense of shared purpose weakens. All while the expectation of peak-pandemic delivery often remains for both. As skilled and driven as the VCS is in responding to crises, it is rarely its primary mission – particularly when it is not funded for it.

During a series of nationwide VCS and council workshops, when asked about the impact of the pandemic on relationships, participants told us things like:

“Community organisations are being trusted to deliver local services (for example, distributing the Household Support Fund direct to residents). But we are now being expected to step up and meet gaps in services, so the boundary between council and community services is often blurred.” – **VCS leader**

“Relationships improved but grants from central government are drying up and leading to tensions emerging.” – **Councillor**

In the wake of the pandemic and as the cost-of-living crisis deepens, there is a clear need for councils and the VCS to continue working closely together. Clearly, funding is an important element in facilitating this collaboration. However, there are many examples of innovative partnership working during these crises that give this research cause for hope – not all of which require such extra resource. Equally, as Integrated Care Systems (ICS) continue to develop, there will be further opportunities for partnership working between the local VCS and public sector.

Our deep dive case studies below and throughout Section 7 highlight how councils are taking practical steps to embed partnership working. They show, among other things, that local partners are innately resilient and with the right conditions these relationships can flourish.

Deep-dive case study: Malvern Hills

Context setting

Malvern Hills district, in Worcestershire, has a largely older, white British, rural demographic. As such, the economically active population is slightly below the English national average at 68 per cent. While most of the district is in the least deprived 50 per cent of areas in England, there are small pockets of deprivation.

Areas with a similar profile often experience issues of isolation, poor connectivity, and limited physical infrastructure. Yet, Malvern Hills bucks this trend with high levels of community and civic infrastructure. The same is true for the presence of accessible community, civic, educational, and cultural assets. The district also has high levels of both VCS engagement and resident engagement in civic and community life. Overall, the district scores 18 per cent higher on the Community Needs Index – which aggregates these metrics – than the English average.^{xi}

The district's success in these areas may well be linked to a trusted relationship between Malvern Hills District Council and the local VCS sector. This has come to the fore in recent crises, including both the COVID-19 pandemic and widespread flooding in 2019 and 2020. The sense of whole-community response – including councillors, community leaders, and residents – triggered a new way of thinking for the council.

The level of localised management and data required to respond effectively could only be achieved by letting communities take the lead. This relationship of trust also helped in the dissemination of large amounts of funding in a “risk mature” way. This involved being realistic and proportionate in weighing the risk of such action against the likely benefits.

Beyond crisis response, the council also has a track record of supporting VCS infrastructure and community assets. It sees its role as facilitating discussion between groups and offering support based on maximising strengths and identifying gaps for better services. For example, the council has also stepped in to keep the Malvern Theatres open, as well as Malvern's Community and Youth Centre, and Malvern Hills College.

Key to the council's partnership with the VCS is its work with several national organisations which have a local presence (Christians against Poverty, Citizens Advice, Age UK, Action for Children). Despite being branches of national charities, these organisations emphasise the local nature of their operations. All run their centres autonomously, train local people, and focus on local issues.

Types of partnership working between the council and local VCS

Inspired by the community response to the crises above, the council developed its new [Connected Communities Strategy](#). This is centred around ‘asset-based community development’ (ABCD). This approach is based on identifying, maximising, and benefitting from the existing resources, skills, and experience within a community; “We recognise what exists rather than trying to change it”.

As part of its ABCD approach, the council has recently launched a £500,000 fund to strengthen and develop the district's communities following the pandemic. The ‘Connected Communities Fund’ is being used to support projects around the themes of places, people, and supporting charities and social enterprises. It will fund a new crowdfunding scheme to continue the council's investment in community projects. It will also provide for a new digital platform to improve engagement with residents in the development of their neighbourhoods.

From a structural perspective, the council have set up the 'District Collaborative' as a place-based partnership supporting the design and delivery of integrated services across localities and neighbourhoods. It involves the council, VCS, NHS, residents, service users and their carers, and representatives of other community partners. Together, they seek to support the health and wellbeing of the population.

The structured partnership holds summit meetings (30-40 people from around 25 organisations) to share experience and knowledge. It is helped by the council, which gives guidance, management, and support to the group. Importantly, it is chaired by VCS leaders. The group meets regularly every six to eight weeks and people can take part depending on their needs (smaller organisations may not have the capacity to attend every meeting). "We don't have to be the big people – no ego involved", says one VCS leader. Building trust and solid relationships face-to-face is seen as key.

The partnership uses these meetings to identify priority areas and agree a focus. From this, an action plan is devised to release funds, decide on the approach to take and the time and the resources it will require. The council asks itself, "who does this well already and who has the reach?" It understands that a council officer for everything is not the answer when significant strengths already exist within communities.

More recently, the Ukraine refugee crisis has resulted in a widespread generous response from the community. Places were found for 273 people to reside in 108 homes in Malvern Hills. The council identified South Worcestershire Citizens Advice (SWCA) as being best placed to provide a welcome payment to each Ukrainian refugee and to help with subsequent benefit claims. The council also funded a part-time officer based in the SWCA. The council agreed the parameters with SWCA at the start beginning, trusting and empowering them to deliver.

Overcoming barriers to strategic partnership working

Common challenges to partnership working exist in Malvern Hills. For example, jointly deciding on priorities requires compromises. As such, the value of the approach must be seen in its ability to generate consensus, even if some parties are disadvantaged. While discomfort still exists in this representative culture, this can be addressed by training in the theory and value of the ABCD approach for all parties.

Cash funding is also required to support the partnership itself with resources and time allocation – capacity and availability are often seen as the biggest barriers. In terms of the council's capacity, this can be addressed by dividing responsibilities between different staff at different levels. However, this is more difficult for VCS organisations with smaller staff bases.

Lessons to take away

Success at Malvern Hills is driven by a specific service area, lead councillors, and the strong relationships they have built with VCS partners. The council recognises the potential weakness of relying on individuals so is seeking to embed the culture corporately so that it becomes "the way we do things around here".

The council has looked across the organisation to identify where opportunities exist to embed the approach across various functions and services. It has also sought to build an understanding amongst all councillors to increase the number of political champions. Strategic structures, such as the District Collaborative, are also important for continuing conversations and workstreams when individuals move on.

Early conversations and genuine dialogue around issues with ongoing communication is seen as key. It is understood that the council should support the VCS when things do not turn out as expected. Rather than criticising the process, this involves asking “what can we do to improve?”, or, as the council puts it, “not pulling out when things go wrong”.

The Council also understands that ABCD is not something that they can do alone. Instead, they see themselves as part of a wider system. This means identifying and working with partners with similar principles who are trying to achieve the same thing.

5. Benefits of councils working with the VCS

Local voluntary and community sectors often encompass an array of organisations whose primary purpose is to create social impact rather than profit.

According to the [UK Civil Society Almanac 2021](#), this sector contributed about £20 billion to the UK’s economy or 0.9 per cent of gross domestic product (“GDP”). However, a more rounded assessment of the impact of this sector also needs to consider the often untold social value these organisations create.

The local VCS is central to both building social fabric and delivering services in a place. But its impact is greater than just the sum of those parts. Councils can support this by investing resources in the VCS to maximise the inherent social value it provides alongside its economic value. This effect is enhanced when the private, public, and voluntary and community sectors work in unison towards shared goals for their place. For example, they each have a role to play and different complementary strengths in driving economic growth, creating jobs, and nourishing healthy, inclusive, and thriving communities.

With regard to the positive impact for councils of working with their local VCS, our research has found two categories of benefits – **direct** and **indirect**.

Direct benefits

Direct benefits are those which have a clear positive impact on the ability of councils to delivery their statutory duties and/or achieve their priorities for their place. These include:

- **Delivering better services** – more often than not the VCS cuts across everything councils do – from health and fitness to employment, housing to transport. Commissioning the local VCS often produces higher quality services that deliver tailored support to residents based on deep-rooted

connections and knowledge. Doing so also helps to build local economic value and sustainability. For example, local organisations often have shorter supply chains and a more locally embedded workforce.^{xii} Examples of this approach in practice include:

- **Innovation partnerships** - these allow contracting authorities and commissioners to establish a long-term partnership for the development and subsequent purchase of a new, innovative product, service or works. This process will be removed via the Procurement Bill, instead there will be a new flexible procedure that allows councils to decide up front how they want to procure. In Oldham, for example, the council has supported a Social Prescribing Innovation Partnership. The network is led by local infrastructure organisation and is comprised of both local and national charities as well the NHS 'collaborative practice' network [Altogether Better](#).
- **Systems thinking for transformational services** – For example, Hackney Council and VCS partners have used a 'systems thinking' approach in a recent review of their debt and advice services. This involved shifting its perspective to understand the range of factors that cause an individual to fall into debt, and how the whole council–VCS system can better support them to manage these. As such, the services have been redesigned collaboratively to ensure that they acknowledge the complexity of people's lives and how to achieve sustainable outcomes, rather than prioritising the achievement of basic standards and targets.^{xiii}

Whilst working with VCS delivery partners on council priorities can ensure value for money, it can also place strain on those partners if funding does not allow for [full cost recovery](#).

- **Increasing reach of services** – particularly for county councils, the VCS are crucial to supporting councils to deliver many services across large geographies and diverse communities. VCS involvement adds to council knowledge, capacity, and resources to maximise the reach of services.
- **Delivering important additional services to support effectiveness of statutory services** – for example, in adult social care it would be impossible to deliver the required level of care in communities without the VCS doing a large amount to support individuals that is beyond statutory services.

In Derby, a more strategic relationship has enabled innovation, despite continuous reductions in council budget. Ongoing relationships and VCS involvement in council policymaking has led to more creative solutions to address emerging needs and public concerns.

- **Unlocking untapped resources within the community itself** – the VCS can mobilise people and resources in a way councils often cannot. The community response to the early stages of the pandemic was a clear example of this. As one interviewee said, "We wouldn't have fed people during Covid without the VCS". Local volunteers were vital to identifying people in need and arranging

delivery of the supplies they needed. However, we heard how this can only happen where a council supports and maintains strong relationships with the local VCS in 'peacetime' to build community resilience. This ensures that the partnership is primed for action when crisis strikes.

In Calderdale, the council told us that working with the VCS has improved their services and increased impact. The council recognises how essential specialist VCS organisations in the local area are. They are able to mobilise more rapidly than the council to respond to some emergencies. This was the case in responses to COVID-19, floods, and urgent refugee resettlement, particularly for those arriving from Ukraine and Afghanistan. Those interviewed suggested that involving the VCS helped the council to respond more effectively to provide shelter, sustenance, and links into other specialised services in these emergency situations.

- **Enhancing places** – if a council's core duty is to create a better place for people to live, the VCS should be involved as they share the same purpose. This is particularly relevant when places need revitalising in the wake of:
 - economic and public health crises
 - public sector spending cuts
 - long-term economic policy resulting in wealth being drawn out of the area by external actors.

For example, community anchor organisations (larger, more established neighbourhood-based organisations) and community businesses “[provide] an opportunity to tackle local skills issues and tailor to the needs of the local economy; develop relationships with new public and private partners that could support the evolving devolution agenda, and; [provide] an additional market for trading expertise amongst small, ambitious businesses”.^{xiv} They also play a particular role in regeneration, acting as local economic multipliers in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

- **Representing diverse communities for tailored service provision** – the VCS can perform a vital function as local connectors. It strengthens links between the council and residents and uses creative methods to ensure that diverse voices are present in local decision-making.^{xv} This means that decisions and their consequences on service provision are more likely to service the actual needs of, and demand from, the community. Councils can therefore achieve their aims more efficiently and avoid unintended negative consequences.

Indirect benefits

Indirect benefits are those which have a broader positive impact on the strength of the local community. This includes in areas which serve as wider determinants of health and wellbeing, thus reducing the need for curative council interventions further down the line. For example:

- **Rebalancing power to increase civic participation** - in partnership with VCS organisations, councils can create the necessary environment for people to be heard by those with power and influence.

This approach creates new connections within communities and provides the time and space to build relationships, fostering understanding, trust, and tolerance. The benefits of this are two-fold. Firstly, underrepresented individuals and groups feel their truth is being valued. Secondly, in doing so they gain an improved understanding and insight of civic institutions, councillors, and those delivering services. Ultimately this improved awareness on both sides strengthens connections, dispels myths, and improves cohesiveness within communities.^{xvi}

For example, many councils will work in partnership with their local VCS to engage communities in decision-making processes. For example, Waltham Forest London Borough council for example worked closely with their VCS to engage residents in their new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion ([EDI\) Making a Living Programme](#). This has produced four resident-led priorities for tackling inequalities and making a living in the borough.

- **Increasing aspiration and enterprise through community ownership** - community ownership can drive aspiration, enterprise, and transform local services. Having the places and spaces where communities come together is also a vital resource for building local capacity and participation. Community ownership offers a route to more direct community responsibility and control by enabling them to take on an asset or play a more active role in running a service.^{xvii}
- **Increasing social capital** – by working with the VCS to develop spaces for the community to come together organically to collaborate on local issues, councils can grow social capital and networks.^{xviii} This leads to greater sharing of norms and values which, in turn, increases trust, cooperation, and reciprocity. Through this, councils can better build engagement and consensus around initiatives for development of people and place. This will be key to the Government's 'levelling up' agenda at a local level. The February 2022 white paper is clear that local government must work with local stakeholders including civil society and communities to improve outcomes in their areas.^{xix}

The nature of many of these benefits means that it can be hard to quantify the true value of a thriving VCS. Although as the report will go onto state some councils are working to understand and benefit from the impact of the VCS locally. What is clear from this research is that councils would certainly miss, and in some case struggle to deliver their core services, if it were to disappear. Failing to properly understand, value, and collaborate with the sector will significantly damage the quality of services available to residents and the longer-term resilience of communities. This valuation and joint working could be critical as councils look to respond to the current cost of living pressures faced by residents up and down the country.

6. A typology of strategic council-VCS relationships

What is a strategic relationship?

Councils and VCS organisations interact with one another in many ways. Some of these are proactive and focused on the big picture – working together to shape a council area’s long-term vision, for example. Others are reactive and more delivery focused – such as was seen across the country to provide emergency support during the pandemic.

To understand the different ways councils and VCS organisations form strategic relationships, this research has sought to define the broad ‘types’ of relationship currently operating between councils and their local VCS. First, this required clarity on what is meant by a ‘strategic’ relationship. There is little in the specific council and VCS literature that addresses this question. However, business management literature provides some common characteristics of a strategic relationship which have application here. According to this, such relationships:

- are set up to achieve well defined common goals
- are undertaken deliberately and willingly
- are often long-term, although doesn’t have to last long
- are usually quite formal, although not as formal as total merger or setting up a new legal entity
- entail sharing resources, knowledge, networks, and markets
- don’t have to be between same types of organisations or equals in term of size
- need nurturing with regular communication.

The research has found that there are no hard rules that make a relationship ‘strategic’ or ‘non-strategic’. Instead, strategic relationships are defined by a set of qualities, which are either present or absent.

Research leads also considered whether ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ provided another useful framework through which to analyse relationships. However, reviewing councils’ strategies^{xx} highlighted that this particular phraseology might be problematic for councils. Formalised partners and/or mechanisms implies all partners have statutory decision-making powers and structures, which often isn’t the case for voluntary and community sector organisations engaging with councils. What’s more, interviewees for this project stressed that “informal” relationships - unstructured, personal relationships between individuals and organisations - are important for making the more structured strategic relationships function better. Concerns, however, were raised around whether “informal” relationships can sometimes lack transparency and rely too heavily on existing relationships. One interviewee highlighted how this can create a perception of some VCS organisations having a “privileged” relationship with the council, sometimes mirroring other aspects of privilege in society.

It is also important to think about scale and the impact of varied and evolving local government geographies. The Levelling Up white paper set out a new devolution

framework for England.^{xxi} This has extended devolution beyond metropolitan areas and set out pathways to a devolution deal for every area of England that wants one. A devolution deal for many areas might mean creating new [combined authorities](#), meaning VCS organisations would need to work across a larger scale.

A more complex spatial picture is developing, with a range of new strategic geographies coming into play. This includes for significant funding like the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the establishment of Integrated Care Systems with the NHS. The local VCS therefore needs to be able to interact at a range of levels and have relationships which can let them interact as partners across geographical levels.

This research does not conclude if one type of relationship is inherently better than the other, and indeed, many local areas will have different types of relationships with their voluntary and community sector.

Common barriers to strategic working

Before setting out what strategic relationships between councils and the VCS look like, it is important to consider what can stand in the way of good partnership working. This research has identified several common barriers, which include:

- **Perceptions about contrasting approaches to working** – councils can be seen as top-down, and VCS organisations more bottom-up, often due to differences in size and bureaucracy. There are also differences in governance, as councils are politically led, with councillors not officers ultimately responsible for policy decisions.
- **A lack of time and resource to invest in relationships** – while this provides particular challenges for VCS organisations, who are comparatively under-resourced, long-term pressure on council budgets makes it a cross-cutting barrier.
- **Commercialisation of relationships between the two parties reducing scope for collaboration** – driven by a reduction in council funding alongside councils' statutory requirements and the overarching policy paradigm.
- **Lack of clarity from the VCS in terms of the support wanted or needed from councils** - this can be broad and numerous and therefore difficult to prioritise.
- **A lack in some instances of senior buy-in within councils for better VCS support** – this includes a reluctance to work in partnership. There can be different approaches at councillor and officer level, with officers sometimes more willing to work collaboratively than councillor and vice versa. There can also be different approaches amongst officers at senior level which can hinder relationship building.
- **Over-reliance on reactive collaboration in times of emergency or on ad hoc pieces of strategy work** – rather than long-term partnership working and planning for the future together.
- **Local historical issues affecting current and future relationships** – such as disquiet within the VCS around past council funding decisions, or perceptions that some organisations are favoured by the council over others.

- **Issues around structures** – VCS organisations often find it difficult to know how and who to engage with within councils. This can be different per council area and can be different across council departments. Similarly, a lack of organisation of the VCS locally can make it hard for councils to know who to approach.

Typology toolkit of strategic relationships

Toolkit for councils and VCS to assess their relationships

It is clear that councils and VCS organisations interact with one another in many different ways. This research has therefore identified five key ‘types’ of relationships. The aim has not been to create an exhaustive list, but to capture the main ways relationships are formed.

The typology is as follows:

Type	Shaping relationships	Ongoing relationships	Neighbourhood relationships	Commissioning relationships	Delivery relationships
Summary	Formalised structures through which councils engage VCS on strategic direction	Practical mechanisms for working together on a day-to-day basis	Neighbourhood level structures for local engagement and where powers, funds, or service delivery can be devolved	Working together throughout the commissioning cycle. Planning strategically based on local needs, assets, aspirations, and priorities. Co-designing the services to be procured, and the process for doing so. Monitoring and evaluating based on agreed, meaningful, and illustrative metrics.	Local VCS participating in tenders, winning contracts, and delivering local services
Example	VCS Partnership boards, VCS strategies	CVS and other infrastructure, compacts, Community Foundations	Community councils, Area Arrangements, Place Partnerships, Community Networks	Co-design of commissioning strategies and/or services, being part of a public service framework, community asset transfer	Winning contracts, forming delivery consortiums, participating in alliance contracts

This typology was tested across four workshops with council officers, VCS organisations and councillors, as outlined in the methodology. It was felt by participants to capture the broad categories of relationships. It was also clear that local areas would not build relationships in one way. Instead, they would have relationships across most, if not all, of these types. Relationships could also blend different aspects of the typology.

The workshops also considered to what extent these types might be placed on a strategic spectrum. This spanned ‘highly strategic’ at one end and more ‘delivery focused’ and ‘transactional’ at the other. This will never be an exact science. Most relationships fall somewhere on a spectrum, for example, commissioning relationships can be highly strategic if they are based around co-production, working

collaboratively to assess needs and strengths, and designing service intervention to address them. However, commissioning relationships that are simply competitive procurement exercises can be much less strategic.

It was therefore felt that the typology would function best as a framework for helping local areas understand their strategic journey, should they wish too. It could then be used by both councils and VCS organisations to analyse the health of their own strategic relationships, identify strengths and weaknesses, and plan ways forward. This exercise could be done by councils and the local VCS separately, together, or both. This would provide a structured framework for both internal and cross-sector conversation.

There are three steps to using this typology as a strategic tool:

1. Evaluate typology

Consider existing relationships between the councils and the VCS. This could include:

- where they sit on the typology
- which departments and service areas they are belong to
- whether they can be considered “strategic” or not, and why.

2. Mapping exercise

There are two ways the typology could be used to map relationships:

a. Mapping relationships against a series of axes:

- strategic-transactional
- proactive-reactive
- financial investment (high-low)
- time investment (high-low).

For councils, this mapping process will enable them to clearly understand the range of ways they interact with their local sector and assess how strategically they do this. This process will be most effective if it involves a range of people from different departments across the council. The key benefit will be the conversations it provokes. Strengths and weaknesses should surface as colleagues share information and compare views on a range of issues relating to strategic relationships.

Likewise, strategic mapping will enable local VCS organisations to assess relationships from their perspective. This should include relationships within the sector, as well as with the council. VCS organisations do not always collaborate effectively with one another or create a mutually supportive infrastructure locally. However, it is clear from our research that supportive partnership working with councils is only one piece of the puzzle for VCS organisations. To maximise capacity and capability, there needs to be better collaboration locally. They may be by working together to form delivery consortiums, or larger community organisations supporting smaller groups.

b. A spatial map of relationships:

The different types of relationships could also be mapped in terms of scale. Some relationships might sit at a 'whole place' level, encompassing the entire local authority area. Others might be more hyperlocal, operating across a range of neighbourhoods. Others still might encompass a whole region, joining up with either combined authorities, ICS or new funding geographies.

This approach would enable councils and communities to think about the local ecosystem. This would include where different types of relationships exist, whom they exist between, and what the specific structures and support are that can help them flourish. This will produce a clear picture of the scope of local relationships, from overarching strategic boards to how VCS organisations support communities.

3. Creating an action plan

This mapping process is something councils and VCS organisations could do separately, to clarify their own perceptions of the strategic journey. Or it could be an exercise done together, to build a shared understanding and agree a collective vision for where they want to be.

However it is done, the final step should be to create a joint action plan. This is an opportunity to clarify the understanding built through the process, define tangible next steps to strengthen strategic working and who is responsible for taking it forward.

7. Four principles underpinning strategic relationships

While there is no blueprint for success, some common principles for what makes successful relationships have emerged from this research.

However, it is important to note the importance of the external policy context for councils and communities. Strategic relationships require the right conditions to flourish. Central government policy is therefore crucial in shaping effective partnership working. But the good practice identified by this research is often at odds with – rather than being actively supported by – key aspects of central government policy. Key barriers we have identified include:

- competitive commissioning that often values economically advantageous (often interpreted as the cheapest) bids over others
- reduction in council budgets
- short-term time horizons
- lack of long-term investment
- highly centralised approach to policymaking.

What's more, the local context in which councils and the VCS are forging these relationships can be hugely challenging. Both have been facing crisis conditions for well over a decade now. As already stated, these have included the financial crash

of 2008 and the subsequent reduction in council, and in turn VCS, budgets, as well as the political instability that followed the EU referendum and the COVID-19 pandemic. As we enter into a new era of instability facing communities these include:

- **The cost of living crisis** – the hardship of the pandemic is now being compounded by a growing cost of living crisis. Both councils and the VCS are having to redouble efforts to support local people worst hit by rising inflation and huge pressure on household bills. However, they are doing so at a time when their own operating costs are reaching unsustainable levels. Locality members have described the impact on their finances as “worse than COVID-19”.^{xxii}
- **The growing impact of the climate emergency** - over recent years, both local VCS organisations and councils have been increasingly active in supporting responses to extreme weather events such as flooding. The heatwave of 2022 has reinforced awareness that the climate emergency will lead to greater frequency of extreme weather, and all local partners will face even greater demands on their capacity to respond.

Both the LGA and Locality therefore suggest the four principles set out below as the core building blocks of successful strategic relationships. They have been identified across the research as foundational concepts on which effective, long-term partnership working can be built. They provide a means by which councils can evaluate the strength of their own relationships with their VCS – along with our typology – and assess what might be missing.

However, while they are general principles, they are not being applied in practice in laboratory conditions. Local context will vary – and, as stressed above, external conditions will often be suboptimal and implementing these principles might require going against the grain of national policy. In discussion of the principles, we therefore seek to consider context throughout and in the ‘Conclusion’ section of this report.

Principle One

Shared foundations: clarity of purpose, values, and roles, built on shared understanding, knowledge and a commitment to partnership working

The research shows that there should be clear understanding on both sides of the purpose and benefits of relationships, what the different roles are, and appreciation of the different knowledge and skills. This requires trust, shared goals and rebalancing of power.

As found within the literature review “Successful collaborations have come about when partners agree on a clear purpose ... and where roles and contributions are identified and defined”^{xxiii}

Key elements:

- **Rebalancing power** - collaborative partnerships, with parity of esteem, trust, and mutual respect.

At present, unsurprisingly the research shows that the power within these relationships is often held predominantly by councils. Whilst there will always be power dynamics within such relationships, without effective power sharing, this creates an unequal starting point. This dynamic needs acknowledging and proactive action taken to rebalance it.

To address this power imbalance, some councils are shifting away from a consultation model – where the VCS is asked to feed in at the end of a decision-making process. Instead, they are moving towards a model of genuine community involvement, with councils and the VCS working hand-in-hand from the outset on key council decisions.

Consultation processes are regularly used by councils to engage with local VCS organisations. They are a core function of council engagement and are an essential democratic check on local decision making. The process of consulting with residents and the VCS works well in some instances, but it can also be seen as a tick-box exercise, conducted when key decisions have already been taken and the parameters of a discussion have already been set. Instead, some councils are seeking to use a partnership approach with a focus on engaging key stakeholders early. Here, the community is not simply consulted at the end of a process but is helping to shape it from the start.

At a high level this might mean ensuring genuine VCS involvement in setting overarching council strategies. This can help to develop a common set of goals together. On a more micro basis, it might mean agreeing meeting agendas together in advance rather than VCS organisations inputting into ones that have been predefined. The key is for the VCS to have a significant role in shaping direction rather than simply receiving information.

It is also important to think about the local VCS eco-system and how effective partnerships and power sharing arrangements can develop between larger and smaller VCS organisations.

This might mean more established community ‘anchor’ organisations supporting smaller community groups in a particular neighbourhood. Or it might mean a large national charity forming a supportive partnership with local organisations to deliver a service contract. But the same principles of trust and mutual respect apply to relationships within the VCS as they do between councils and communities. Through this research, council officers also raised a concern around the ability or sufficiency of larger community anchor relationships to truly represent the views of smaller community groups. If the VCS can be clearly seen to be working effectively together, it strengthens their role as a trusted partner for the public sector and supports the rebalancing of power.

Deep-dive case study: Derby

Context setting

Derby is a multicultural metropolitan area in the East Midlands with an age profile largely akin to the English average. The city has pockets of high deprivation – 37 per cent of the population live in the most deprived 20 per cent of areas in England. There is particular deprivation around health, with nearly double the proportion of people living in health deprivation ‘hotspots’ than the English average. These are clusters of neighbourhoods which have particularly low health outcomes or score low on the health deprivation measure of the [Indices of Multiple Deprivation](#). While the city has a high population density, it is also a green one with a total of 824 hectares of green space, far above the national average.

Overall, the city scores 10 per cent better than the national average for community and civic infrastructure. This is reflected in the levels of VCS engagement and resident engagement in civic and community life. The same is true for resident connectivity to key services, including digital infrastructure. However, a lower civic assets score suggests that some areas of the city may lack access to key community, civic, educational, and cultural assets.^{xxiv}

This varied profile of the community sector is reflected in historically mixed relationships between Derby City Council and the local VCS. These have been shaped by three major factors in the city: austerity, political fluctuation, and more recently, COVID-19.

Despite these challenges, leaders have managed to strengthen co-working thanks, in large part, to COVID-19-related changes. “It really was the pandemic that has done it”, one VCS leader commented on a newer spirit of joint working, “and the new senior staff that has seen things differently.” Overall, a more strategic relationship has enabled Derby to innovate despite very real challenges from cuts to council budgets.

Types of partnership working between the council and local VCS

Five years ago, Derby City Council created a new position – Community Leadership Manager – to develop a stronger working relationship with the VCS. At the time, voluntary organisations in Derby felt ‘frozen out’ of council decisions. Alongside other leaders on the Communities Team, the new manager facilitated a new relationship that moved away from transactional grant funding and towards a transition of power back to the VCS. In part, this related to the limited resources at the council, and its inability to realistically be a robust funder of the VCS. Yet it also signalled a recognition of the ways in which joint working could boost capacity across the city.

The Communities team, in partnership with leading VCS organisations, formed the Stronger Communities Board. This has been described as “a Trojan horse for the voluntary sector to occupy the council house”, as it was designed to be a purely VCS-led board leading policy debate.

Putting the VCS in the driver’s seat in this way has required other, unconventional approaches from new senior leadership. The council has also sought to create space informally for problem-solving, action learning, and open communication. This has been an iterative, ongoing process that has also helped bring the entire local VCS together.

Such informal mechanisms have also supported co-production, often at early stages of project development. This has also provided an opportunity for the council to support the VCS to secure external funding while working alongside the council. As a result, this transformed approach to strategic working has meant that commissioning doesn't always need to go to tender. The approach has also demonstrated how co-production with the VCS can be accomplished not just within the Communities team but across the entire council.

Even before the pandemic, commissioners were making space to experiment through funding VCS projects, like the Derby Youth Alliance. This collaboration of four VCS organisations designed a programme of youth work which was then funded by the council, and match-funded by Sport England. It was the first VCS alliance initiated by the council and formed the model for other alliances on other issues. The Alliance's joint working with the council laid the foundation for continued work, including [This is Derby](#), which has reached over 3,000 young people. The scheme provides opportunities for disadvantaged young people in the city to raise aspirations, have meaningful experiences, and achieve their potential.

The pandemic offered new opportunities for strategic partnership with sectors traditionally kept at arm's length – such as Derby's faith communities. They led the charge in COVID-19 emergency response and were ideally positioned to engage communities traditionally disconnected from council work. For example, the community-led Muslim Burial Council responded to marginalisation of Muslim voices in the COVID-19 response. Its work to harness the power of interfaith networks has continued in Derby's Faith Forum and [Keeping the Faith](#) report

Council officers now work more closely with Derby's Multi-Faith Centre (a faith-based anchor institution). They have seen how the sector is able to adapt, self-organise, and cooperate in ways that uniquely advance strategic priorities.

Overcoming barriers to strategic partnership working

Today, Derby's partnership embodies a relational culture at many levels, even if progress is still required. Where siloed working, clashes of opinion, and hesitance to work alongside the VCS exist, they are addressed on two fronts.

From within, leaders have committed to adopting a community-minded approach and often challenge colleagues to work more closely with the VCS. From without, VCS leaders increasingly shape strategic direction through bodies like the Stronger Communities Board. There is even an informal Community Power Network consisting of Council and VCS leaders committed to shared collaborative principles. This self-described 'motley crew' of individuals operates as a [community of practice](#) to exchange ideas "candidly, but confidentially". Meeting fortnightly, group members share ideas, exchange resources and problem solve together.

Historically, there has also not been as much long-term planning around budgets as would be ideal. Or, where planning processes exist, there have been tight timescales that preclude the VCS from shaping financial decisions. However, this is sometimes beyond the council's control. A key example here are the Levelling Up Fund and UK

Shared Prosperity Fund processes. Due to tight timescales imposed by central government, the quick turnaround on both has made it more difficult to co-design a vision for the funds.

However, leaders in both sectors have been working to overcome these challenges by ensuring that a broad shared vision is easy to understand and access. This vision can then be referred to so that decisions can be made on tight timescales rather than requiring repeated sign-off. This approach has included:

- a recognition in the council plan of the need to work alongside the VCS in designing services and delivering positive social change
- the Community Leadership Manager regularly meeting with internal departments to devise ways their work can be more community-minded and inclusive of VCS voices
- council officers working hard to build up an institutional memory of strategic working with the VCS, embedding it in the identity of the council to better tell Derby's story.

Lessons to take away

Derby City Council's work to place VCS organisations in the drivers' seat has taught council leaders important lessons. This includes the importance of "being there at the point of inception and being part of the conversation" about what's happening in communities. Similarly, one officer noted the importance of not "underestimating very early-stage co-production around new thematic issues or models". The council has also learnt to avoid over-formalising structures for addressing community needs.

The wealth of avenues for true partnership with the VCS at Derby City Council – from formal VCS-led boards to more informal meetings over coffee – has enabled a transformation of institutional culture. It has also solidified partnership working amidst a very challenging financial environment. Crucially, this has proven that old wounds and ways of working do not have to define future relationships between the council and the VCS.

- **Recognition of value** – strategic relationships are based on knowledge and understanding.

The research highlights the importance of councils understanding their local assets and what the VCS offers. Strategic mapping is an important starting point for this, so councils have up to date information about their local sector and clear sight of their strengths and weaknesses.

A consensus has emerged that the experience of the pandemic increased council understanding of, and appreciation for, the work of local VCS organisations.^{xxv} South Gloucestershire Council have sought to build on this positive baseline by quantifying the value of the local VCS to the council. The council calculated that during the pandemic, a £165,000 investment in the local VCSE sector meant that £1.095 million of direct council spending on their own services was not needed. This created a net

saving of at least £935,000 for the council, avoiding £6 in costs for every £1 invested in the VCSE sector.^{xxvi}

Nuanced and detailed knowledge is also important for equality. The VCS can reach parts of the community that councils cannot. But councils' relationships can sometimes be limited to larger VCS organisations or a handful of 'usual suspects'. It is therefore vital that councils are aware of smaller community groups locally. This is particularly true for organisations supporting local ethnic minority populations. Such groups can provide deeper reach into communities and ensure diverse input into decision making.

- **Transparency** – being open and transparent is an important foundation for trusting relationships.

Complex and opaque processes can be hard to navigate. This is often the case for smaller community groups or VCS organisations led by people from ethnic minorities or service users. Lack of transparency can breed mistrust and lead to unequal treatment. What for some organisations might feel like a close working relationship, for others can feel like an exclusive club. Access to grant funding or discretionary tax reliefs, for example, are areas where lack of transparency can damage relationships if not accessible to all.

Information sharing across all areas of engagement between councils and their VCS was highlighted in this research as an important area to get right. For example, in procurement processes often only limited tender information is released and at very short notice. This can make it particularly difficult for smaller VCS organisations to participate in procurement exercises and show what they have to offer. It is understood by VCS organisations that there are barriers to what councils can put in the public domain and why. However, early publication of even limited information is seen as an important way to build trust and transparency.

Information on residents' needs is another area where increased data sharing could be beneficial. While mindful of GDPR requirements, more data could be shared between local agencies and stakeholders to assess community need more effectively and identify gaps in provision.

The Salford Anti-Poverty Taskforce is a good example of this. This is an innovative research and knowledge exchange partnership between University of Salford and Salford City Council. Their anti-poverty strategy is looking at ways to collect and use better data, and how to work better with local partners.^{xxvii}

Another example is the [Norfolk Community Advice Network](#), which was set up as a single referral system between the VCS, faith groups and county council. It connects many advice and community support providers county-wide, to facilitate access to better support for professionals and their service users. It seeks to share knowledge and data among VCS and council partners to better coordinate crisis support and end duplication of services and resources.

- **Consistency** – participants in our research commonly referred to relationships being a "mixed bag".

For example, one department within a council might engage well and work strategically with the local VCS but this doesn't mean this approach is being replicated across the council. Being strategic requires working in a joined-up and coordinated way across the whole council, rather than seeing good relationships flourish only in pockets. Certain policy areas were seen as more likely to facilitate this, for example, 'person-centred' services like social care or domestic abuse support, as opposed to transport or regeneration. Indeed, these departments can often be trailblazers for good practice which then spreads across the council.

Derby City Council has sought to create consistent relationships with the faith sector by supporting them with grant funding and seconded staff. This is done through a Faith Alliance; if the faith community identifies areas of need, a grant comes to the Alliance to decide how it should be used and which subcontractors to employ. A similar model is used with the Food for Thought Alliance and the Disability Alliance in Derby.

The issue of consistency also manifests itself in connection to the council. Some VCS organisations are well networked and appear to have the ear of the council and others do not. This can lead to certain organisations being seen as favoured.

Consistency is also affected by staff churn, where officers move and so VCS organisations have to start again to build relationships. This is an area where cuts to council budgets have had a real impact on strategic relationships. We repeatedly heard the frustrations of VCS organisations that built a good relationship with an officer who "gets it", only for them to move on, be made redundant or have their department reorganised. In some areas, there has been a reliance on interim appointments in senior posts, which means VCS organisations struggle to gain long-term purchase and create continuing relationships.

This can also work both ways, with some councils reporting high levels of staff turnover in parts of the local VCS. This is heightened by overarching recruitment challenges which are particularly impacting VCS organisations unable to offer comparable pay with the private and public sectors.^{xxviii}

Principle Two

Relational culture: behaviours and ways of working that enable the power of community to flourish, with both sides giving generously to the process and being open to receiving feedback

For councils this means seeing their roles as collaborative enablers of action, rather than just providers and commissioners of services. Councils, as well as other public sector bodies, are, understandable, naturally risk averse when it comes to managing the public's money. However, the collaboration seen during the pandemic is an example of where councils realised the benefits of working in a more experimental way with partners, which could set a tone for future collaboration.

At the same time, the VCS must be ready to step up and play a more prominent role in local services, working collaboratively to achieve greater impact. Central to creating a relational culture is early, continued, and widespread engagement. As too is a commitment to the long term, with both sides being prepared to challenge and be challenged.

Key elements:

- **A mindset shift for councils** – rather than seeking to direct and control, councils could show more trust to ‘enable’ VCS organisations to do what they do best.

Reduced council budgets have created challenging conditions for sustaining new ways of working. However, it is clear from our research that ongoing culture change for councils – the drive to become more collaborative with their communities– is a key component of successful strategic relationships. The challenges facing local areas are so great that no one sector can possibly possess all the answers, particularly when resources continue to be severely constrained. Council and VCS participants alike suggested it was important for local authorities to recognise this, with the following qualities seen as key to this mindset:

- creativity and flexibility to try new things
- willingness to work collaboratively
- being more experimental
- seeing the VCS as equals with parity of esteem.

Councils must always be mindful of their statutory responsibilities and requirements to show value for money. But there is scope within the power dynamic between councils and the VCS to show greater willingness and confidence to devolve more responsibility and see the VCS as trusted partners, as seen within the below case study.

Deep-dive case study: Hackney

Context setting

Situated in inner London, Hackney has a young and diverse population. Over 71 per cent of residents are aged 16-64, 9 per cent higher than the English average. Thirty-six per cent of the population are white British, while 45 per cent are from ethnic minorities and 19 per cent are white non-British.

The borough contains a wide-ranging mix of both deprived and affluent areas. For the most deprived within the borough, financial and physical access to housing and services is a significant issue.

Despite, or perhaps because of, this mixed profile, there is strong civic and community infrastructure in Hackney. The areas scores 66 per cent better than the English average in the Community Needs Index for this issue. This is in part due to

the level of VCS engagement, resident engagement in broader community life, and the range and accessibility of community, civic, educational, and cultural assets.^{xxix}

This is not to say that life has always been easy for the council-VCS partnership. Like many councils, Hackney lost considerable funding over the previous decade reducing its ability to support the sector financially. This consolidated a longer-term problem with leadership, finance, and trust. Old funding models had also contributed to an atmosphere of competition within the VCS, pitting groups against one another for limited resources. While budgetary challenges remain, greater recent involvement of the VCS – accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic – means the sector is more able to challenge, influence and counter council policy. It also takes a greater role in the co-production of services.

Types of partnership working between the council and local VCS

The approach to partnership working between the council and the VCS has shifted over the years. Hackney Council, like most local authorities, has taken a [New Public Management](#) approach to delivering services over the last two decades. This has included Key Performance Indicators, best value and benchmarking with the aim of improving efficiency. This way of working is quite deeply embedded into the culture and mindset of local government and in the expectations of the VCS. There is, however, a growing recognition that more collaborative ways of working are needed. Hackney is not alone in testing out partnerships that are more open, relational, and focused on shared outcomes and collective impact.

From a council perspective, the shift in mindset began when leaders realised that VCS groups needed to be actively involved in working through collective problems and finding solutions. This has been key, for example, in tackling key inequalities in communities and meeting growing demand in advice services. It also came in response to the development of the council's [VCS Strategy](#), during which the sector flagged how transactional the relationship had become and the limits this imposed. This approach helps address what are understood to be 'complex' issues, rather than simply 'complicated' ones. Such problems can be treated by an aggregation of simpler solutions, provided by the diversity within the VCS locally.

Rather than see the VCS as one voice, the council's leadership therefore works to recognise the collection of perspectives within the sector and create spaces for them to contribute to agenda shaping. This has been driven by the pandemic – the council had to start working in this way because, as it points out, "VCS partners were the only people who really knew what was going on in communities".

Two VCS organisations – Clapton Commons and Shoreditch Trust – have worked together to re-imagine local VCS commissioning and present that feedback to the council. For their part, council leaders aim to align funding structures with the principles they hope to encourage in Hackney: collaboration, meaningful engagement, and solutions-minded approaches to community challenges. This has involved establishing ongoing dialogue with those in the VCS, including through strategic meetings and regular email correspondence.

As a result of this, VCS leaders say that there is now a definite opportunity to shape strategy within the council. However, structures are less formalised and more focused on informal mobilisation and ongoing contact with specific people at the council. Additionally, there are neighbourhood-level partnerships for specific areas of community engagement, such as Primary Care Networks.

As alluded to above, these grass-roots approaches were particularly impactful during the pandemic. In many cases, the council stepped up by stepping back. For example, at times when access to food proved difficult for many across the borough. Here, the council brought in people skilled in logistics from their events team to set up food hubs across the borough in partnership with the VCS. These hubs were led by VCS organisations – who knew the isolating, clinically vulnerable and at-risk groups – but the council created the space and boosted capacity for this work.

The council now sees its primary duty as supporting the sector as much as possible. This includes funding strategically important organisations – for example, through Community Infrastructure Grants – whose role in their communities extends beyond just the services they deliver. It also works to highlight the importance of these organisations to the wider local system to ensure both their and the risks from losing them are fully appreciated.

Overcoming barriers to strategic partnership working

In general, the move from a transactional to a more co-productive relationship is progressing well but is yet to be fully achieved. Both partners are focusing on understanding the journey and growth of VCS organisations – and the variety of ways to evidence their impact – which is helping to create a more meaningful and equitable dynamic.

Such an understanding is also important for making day-to-day interactions easier. Overly formal structures can fail to capture specific issues that may be affecting a range of stakeholders. For example, several years ago grants were not being paid on time, threatening the viability of smaller organisations reliant on the funding. To remedy this, organisations openly discussed the issue and its impact with council commissioning colleagues. Now, this appears to be less of an issue.

More challenging is the attempt to create space for VCS leaders to co-design council agendas without over-burdening them with meetings they are not paid to attend. New ways of working have produced a keenness to include VCS organisations in council discussions. However, the council is now aware of the need to do so on terms that work for VCS leaders. The answer may lie partly in the adaptable, VCS-led discussions during the pandemic. Local leaders have expressed a hope that things do not “go back to business as usual”. Instead, they see a need for the council to “step away from the framework a bit, shake things up, and come with us on a bit of a journey.”

Lessons to take away

VCS organisations identified space – both figuratively and literally – as key to working more closely with the council. As a result of deep-rooted understanding and

trust between the two parties, this isn't necessarily about creating more formalised frameworks for collaboration. While these are helpful, strategic development can also come from enabling the space for experimentation and innovation. In this vein, successes of smaller projects – as Hackney saw with its food hubs – can build trust to drive forward larger-scale projects involving both the VCS and council.

Hackney's approach to strategic working with the VCS also highlights another important lesson: community work is stronger when leaders acknowledge the different strengths that both parties provide and capitalise on them. They have seen that different skillsets and mindsets do not have to conflict. Instead, people realised that the VCS is powerful because it is adaptable, nimble, and able to mobilise informally. Equally, the Council is powerful due to its consolidated power, wealth of diverse professional skillsets, and access to funding. Because of this joint working, those in the VCS have acknowledged how trust has now grown significantly.

Hackney Council has also been working to connect to organisations individually, on a relational basis, and continue to build trust over time. This reflects an internal realisation summarised by one senior council officer: "we're only as trusted as the organisation that trusts the least."

- **Change within the VCS** – strategic relationships aren't just about councils doing things differently, they require change in the VCS too.

Research participants from councils and the VCS reflected that to make partnerships a success, the VCS needs to be clear that they are ready to step up and play a bigger role locally. This includes showing they have the commitment and capability to be an effective strategic partner. For example, Hackney Council have begun to work in earnest on embedding antiracism across local government. Yet council officers note that this will only be achieved borough-wide if the VCS simultaneously goes on its own journey in achieving equity.

Council officers expressed frustration about not always knowing who to go to within the local VCS sector on particular issues. They also reported that the VCS doesn't always "speak with one voice". In many ways, it is important that the VCS doesn't speak with one voice, given its crucial role in advocacy and equity. The VCS is necessarily diverse, and it is important that all voices within the community are heard. Otherwise, there is a real risk that marginalised groups will continue to be excluded in the search for homogeneity.

It is therefore important that VCS organisations of different sizes and scopes work collaboratively together. This allows the local ecosystem to surface and communicate local issues effectively via effective structures and mechanisms (see Principle Three).

The pandemic response saw VCS organisations finding new ways to work together – and this spirit needs to continue to make the most of the resources we have in our neighbourhoods. This might mean forming new consortiums to take on

commissioning opportunities or forming new alliances to push for proper involvement in council strategic planning.

Creating a culture of enterprise where possible is another important aspect, where organisations earn their own income alongside grant funding and contracts. This can build independence and help redress power imbalances by providing VCS organisations with greater scope to say “no” to grants and contracts which don’t model good partnership working behaviour.

Telling a better story on impact is another way VCS organisations can help build parity of esteem. While councils have a responsibility to do more to understand the value of their VCS, local organisations can make it easier for them by measuring and communicating their impact more effectively. This helps to reinforce the case for a shift in power. For example, Locality has supported community organisations to demonstrate their local economic impact and make the case for greater local procurement, calculating that every £1 invested in a local community organisation generated approximately £2.50 for the local economy.^{xxx}

Principle Three

Effective structures: systems, mechanisms and processes that are fit for purpose and enable innovation and sustain long-term commitment

The research highlights that there needs to be clear and effective structures through which trusting relationships can be built. These must enable good communication, allow for positive personal relationships, and lead to practical action. They must include space for conversations and challenge while allowing for relationships to persist for the long-term and not be overly reliant on particular individuals. They must also allow for the development of a shared approach to understanding local need.

For example, in Barnet voluntary sector partners have formed the **Barnet Together Alliance**, which is a long-term, cross sector partnership with the London Borough of Barnet, which increases development and capacity building support for Barnet’s vital Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector, enabling the borough to strengthen, innovate and thrive. This partnership helps them to create and deliver more borough-wide services and opportunities, based on real partnership and active collaboration. [The council] is a partner in the operation, and although they provide most of the funding this is not viewed as a commission. They describe it as ‘social investment’.^{xxxi}

Key elements:

- **Structures** – clear and consistent forums are needed to support strategic relationships. Otherwise, they can be ad hoc, inconsistent, and more likely short-term.

Whilst relationships are person to person, not institution to institution, we heard throughout this research that a few key people often drive and maintain strategic relationships. If they leave, it can mean starting again. This reliance is a particularly

pressing concern if there are high levels of staff turnover (see discussion of 'consistency' in Principle One). Structures are therefore needed that support personal relationships to flourish. But they must also embed continuity and ensure good relationships aren't solely built between individuals without any wider organisational purchase.

Clear structures are particularly important for smaller VCS organisations. They may not have the historical relationships, capacity, or know-how to navigate council bureaucracy and find the right route to participate in decision-making. Structures are needed to ensure transparency and that a diverse range of voices and organisations are represented, rather than relationships relying on the 'usual suspects'.

Structures and proper governance can also provide proper oversight to ensure strategic goals are achieved and projects are completed, with the officers and VCS leads responsible held accountable. Through our research we heard how energy can often be put into the process of creating strategies, only for these to sit on a shelf and not have any traction in practice.

There is a variety of different structures that might be used to build and maintain strategic relationships between councils and VCS. They may range from strategic boards to provide the VCS with a seat at table at highest levels of council decision making, to neighbourhood-level initiatives. Whatever the structure, they need to reflect the other principles outlined in this report. For example, having clear shared outcomes and goals built in and agreed. This ensures they are built on strong foundations with buy-in from both sides.

Here we set out some examples of structures used by different councils, which align to our relationship typology above:

Shaping relationships:

- Bristol City Council's One City Plan which brings together a wide range of public, private, and third sector partners within Bristol. The plan describes where the city partners want to be by 2050, and how they will work together to create a fair, healthy, and sustainable city.
- Derby City Council's Stronger Communities Board, convened by Derby's Communities team and led by the VCS to inform council policy for the sector.

Neighbourhood relationships:

- Southwark Council's Empowering Communities Programme aims to bring local communities together. It focuses on the issues specific to neighbourhoods and facilitates communication between residents and councillors.
- Kirklees Council's Place Partnerships are led by councillors, working with local people and organisations to find local solutions. These are based on what the participants have learned or experienced. The partnerships work on a key theme each year and they have funding to support local projects, services and activities that will help with this issue.
- Sheffield City Council's Local Area Committees (LAC) promote the involvement of local people in the democratic process and aim to bring

decision making closer to local people. Each LAC has made a community plan, agreed at a public meeting, which explain the community's priorities and how the LAC intends to work on these in the coming year.

- **Mechanisms** – building out from clear structures are the appropriate practical means to ensure relationships can function on a day-to-day basis. Two main areas have emerged through our research as being particularly important:

1. Local infrastructure

Research participants have emphasised that consistent and long-term investment in local infrastructure is critical to maintaining positive working relationships between councils and local voluntary organisations. This includes having a Council for Voluntary Services (CVS) or other such local umbrella body. These have the capacity to engage with the public sector at a range of levels (see discussion of scale below) and coordinate the VCS locally.

Some participants in the research questioned whether local infrastructure focused on larger VCS organisations to the detriment of grassroots groups. This, however, should not be seen as a critique of the concept of local infrastructure. Instead, it recognises that infrastructure arrangements are not always well built or utilised. They require sufficient investment and the ability to constantly evolve to meet changing needs and include new partners. When designed and delivered well in this way, local infrastructure can play a vital role in brokering and cementing strategic relationships.

The National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA) set out four ways local infrastructure facilitates good relationships:

- **Leadership and advocacy** – bringing people together to have a stronger voice and influence
- **Partnerships and collaborations** – bringing together local networks to connect with local systems
- **Community development and practical support** – bringing people together to develop their goals and drive community aspiration
- **Volunteering** – encouraging and nurturing opportunities for people to get involved in their communities.

Cornwall Council's Voluntary Sector Forum is an example of local infrastructure. This was established to coordinate VCS activity and provide a direct route to engage with the council on key issues. The forum is currently engaging with the council on the cost-of-living crisis, providing support and information to help address the challenges faced by increased living costs. This includes information local VCS organisations can share with their communities as well as funding updates to help find funds to pay higher running costs.

Community Foundations are another important means through which ongoing relationships can be built. One example of this we heard in our research involved a council devolving COVID-19 emergency funding to their Community Foundation. This recognised how much better able the Foundation was to distribute funds quickly

and with a clearer understanding of local need. Community Foundations have also been an active partner in supporting both councils and local voluntary and community groups provide effective wraparound support to Ukrainians as they arrive in communities.

2. Collaborative community engagement

Research participants stressed mechanisms for community engagement as another critical area. Councils rely on community engagement to inform and improve policies, programmes, and services, and to increase trust and accountability. Meaningful community engagement should be an opportunity to strengthen VCS and broader community influence. But when done badly or in a tokenistic way, it can reinforce a sense of powerlessness.

One example of collaborative community engagement which could be implemented by councils is the “Power Partnership” approach. This was designed through action research conducted by Locality with four local authorities – Cornwall, Stevenage, Southwark and Wigan.^{xxxii} This action research heard from council officers and community organisations about some of the challenges within the community engagement cycle. It proposed an approach where communities are viewed as equal partners and community engagement is based on:

- early engagement
- using participatory and deliberative methods
- working with existing networks
- addressing barriers to access and participation
- strengthening community capacity and leadership
- building opportunities for community ownership
- creating a role for the community in accountability.

Asset-based approaches are also being increasingly used by councils to engage their communities. Leeds City Council, for example, is working with local and community led organisations to embed an innovative ABCD model. The council worked with 14 pathfinder sites in 2022. Each Pathfinder site has an employed Community Builder who discovers ‘Community Connectors’ - people who are active in community life and bring others together. ‘Small Sparks’ grants are available to community groups to help them kickstart their ideas.^{xxxiii}

- **Senior leadership.** Strategic leadership is an important first step for councils to create the right approach to VCS relationships. Cabinet and senior management team buy-in sets the tone in making partnership working a key part of the council’s identity. This provides a clear direction of travel, an operational framework, and internal permission structures to do things differently and change culture.

Senior drive and leadership are therefore an important first step to developing a ‘whole council’ approach to strategic partnership working with the VCS. As one officer put it, relationships with the VCS “should be everyone’s business, so being strategic is key”. Council participants in the research suggested having a corporate

director and cabinet member responsible for leading the agenda. This demonstrates political and corporate will and helps embed the “mindset shift” discussed previously.

Committed senior leadership is also important for VCS organisations. Relationships between councils and communities can be antagonistic. As noted in the discussion of ‘Change within the VCS’ (Principle Two), local sectors don’t always work effectively together. So, VCS leaders have a role in setting a clear direction of travel. This can demonstrate a willingness to work collaboratively and ensure the local sector is strategically committed to partnership working.

This can be a delicate balance for VCS leaders to strike. Organisations are unlikely to get everything they want. In some cases, they will be seeking to collaborate with councils where delivery relationships form the basis of most interactions between the two. However, it is important to display collaborative behaviours. This may either be by creating effective strategic relationships with councils who are working in this way, or seeking to drive better practice from the bottom up in areas which aren’t.

Deep-Dive Case Study: South Gloucestershire

Context:

South Gloucestershire in the South West of England has a mixture of rural areas, towns, and built-up urban areas on the outskirts of Bristol. The rural areas are sparsely populated with only 9 per cent of the population. Deprivation within South Gloucestershire can be masked by other more affluent parts of the district. One per cent of South Gloucestershire’s population live in the most deprived 20 per cent of areas in the country. However, over the last decade, there has been an increased in the number of areas classed as deprived. As such, the health inequality gap has also risen.

These are now actively being challenged through the Council Plan and a Reducing Inequalities Strategic Board. Despite challenges in the area – including the ageing, rural population – there is strong community and civic infrastructure. The Community Needs Index for the area has a good “Connectedness Score” showing that residents have good connectivity to key services including digital infrastructure, a strong jobs market, and lower than average levels of rural isolation.

For years, South Gloucestershire Council has viewed the VCS as strategic partners, with sector organisations having representation on partnership boards and other bodies. Yet despite this voice, the VCS tended to be relatively siloed or “compartmentalised”. It only carried out certain functions for the council rather than playing its full role. Council officers and VCS representatives agreed that the level of trust and joint-working ethos has grown considerably in the last decade. In this time, VCS organisations have consolidated and increased their influence in strategic decision making. This has included the formation of a ‘VCSE Leaders Board’, led by the local VCS.

Types of partnership working between the council and their local VCS

South Gloucestershire Council has long sought to bring the VCS in as a “genuine partner around the table all the time”. This has meant having both formal and informal conversations regularly. Most important is avoiding “tokenistic engagement” of the sector.

This is especially important for adult social care. The council takes pride in increasingly acknowledging the strengths of the VCS through a [Keep it Local](#) approach to commissioning, amongst other activities. That framework provides a shared vision for the council and VCS organisations and provides a foundation for work to be built on. Over time this has enabled trust to be built between the sectors which has only strengthened the relationship.

In addition to these frameworks or principles for collaboration and genuine partnership, formal structures have been important in South Gloucestershire. The VCSE Leaders Board is the best example of this. The formal VCS-led structure has been the backbone of collaboration across the council area. During the pandemic, it opened new avenues for collaboration as the VCS quickly mobilised.

The Board was revolutionary in its approach. It is not a traditional partnership board where administrative power is held by the council and VCS representatives sit in on meetings. Instead, it has been VCS-led and has brought council leadership into the community. The board meets on a quarterly basis at times most convenient to the VCS partners. Its goal is to have a clear route for open dialogue between the council and the VCS in a way which preserves the sector’s autonomy and voice.

Its success has led to other boards being developed to provide a structure to joint-working. Among them is the South Gloucestershire Disability Network and the South Gloucestershire Race Equality Network. Both have regularly shaped key strategies and policy approaches alongside council officers.

The level at which engagement takes place is also shifting. Historically, there had been a tendency to look at South Gloucestershire as a whole. Now, there is an increasing recognition that focus is needed at a local and neighbourhood level too. The [Priority Neighbourhood Programme](#) illustrates this change. Through it, council and VCS organisations work together to intervene in areas with high levels of deprivation. Here, the council takes an asset-based approach in co-producing neighbourhood innovations alongside the VCS, recognising that:

“Every community has assets – skills and talents of local people, services, activities, buildings, and open spaces which benefit the community and could be further developed...” – **Priority Neighbourhood Programme**

In recognising that “local people know their area”, the council has designed priority neighbourhood interventions to be led by residents, with a community lead group serving as the facilitator. The community lead group, working with council officers and residents, draws up an action plan to identify and outline approaches to local priorities which the council then links in with other departments and agencies.

Barriers to strategic partnership working

While there are pockets of good practice across the council, the progress made in the strategic relationship between the council and local VCS has often been siloed. As Steve Curry, CEO of the local CVS states, the council is a big organisation “with departments that, traditionally, differ” in their approaches.

The council, in their commitment to working more collaboratively with the sector, aims to break down these siloed ways of working. Their shared commitments to inclusivity, transforming local commissioning and working closer to a neighbourhood level have also given officers a sense of direction of travel for this ambition. Yet further transformation is needed, and leaders are working to shift cultures and challenge old mindsets. In recognition of the importance of this work, a new division has been created in the council led by a Service Director for Community Development to build on this and drive the culture and systems change forward.

A further barrier has been the challenge of balancing the increased appetite for VCS-led co-design with the sector’s financial and capacity constraints. To overcome this, council leaders have started micro-funding strategic activity within the VCS. For example, there are now experimental, one-year funds available to VCS leaders for sitting on strategic partnership boards.

The aim of these small pots of money is to ease the burden of participation and provide space in which VCS organisations can jointly shape council priorities. Investment has also been made in developing a ‘VCSE Ecosystem’ with the council and other partners, including the health system. This involves joint commissioning to devolve leadership to the VCS and help them be more involved in strategic conversations.

Lessons for the future

“Trust” was something noted to be of great importance by both council officers, councillors, and VCS leaders. This includes both trust in the council’s commitment to work with the VCS and in VCS organisations’ ability to deliver strong services and that provide value for money. This has not happened overnight but, according to council officers, trust particularly grew through the pandemic “as we worked through things together”. The council has learned from this process and shown the value of building on what already exists. This includes the trust placed in the VCSE Leaders Board to be a vehicle for culture change and a foundation on which to build joint projects.

When it comes to these formal structures, the council has also been clear that this is not the only way of building a strong, strategic relationship. For the council, these formal structures have been incredibly important, but have been complimented by informal means of communication and engagement.

Similarly, the council has not committed itself to working across one scale or geography. By maintaining a strategic, South Gloucestershire-wide view, they have worked closely at a local and neighbourhood level. This all highlights the importance

of flexibility when it comes to strategic relationships and is something the council continues to push out across different departments.

- **The right scale** – strategic relationships need to work at different levels. This is becoming ever more important with the renewed focus on securing devolution deals and collaborating with the NHS.

VCS organisations can find it hard to engage across the required range of changing geographies. For example, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund – the government’s replacement for EU structural funds – is now being led by councils and combined authorities, meaning local VCS partners are having to begin new partnerships with multiple council types. Short timescales to develop plans for UKSPF have meant longer-term stakeholder engagement is still being developed.

The formation of ICPs alongside NHS partners, local authorities, and other providers is another current opportunity and challenge for place-based partnership working. ‘VCSE Alliances’ have now been formed in each of the new 42 ICPs in England to represent the local sector. But how this will work in practice, and whose voice is heard loudest, is still unclear. In places such as Calderdale, the ICP has provided funding for local VCS representatives to attend strategic boards and working groups (see the Calderdale case study, below).

To fully access all available opportunities, VCS organisations need to be able to form relationships with a wide range of partners who might sit at different spatial levels. No longer is it enough to form a relationship with a ward councillor or officer in the council’s Communities department. VCS organisations might be required to form links with, for example:

- other council departments like regeneration adult social care or public health
- combined authorities and metro mayors
- Local Enterprise Partnerships
- the NHS through Integrated Care Partnerships, Health and Wellbeing Boards, or Primary Care Networks.

Clearly, engaging on this scale will be more difficult for smaller VCS organisations than larger ones with greater capacity and resources. This is why having effective structures and mechanisms is so important. Having the right support in place – via local infrastructure for example – can ensure a diverse range of voices are represented at all levels.

It also demonstrates the importance of having a supportive local VCS ecosystem, with good collaboration. There is a particular role here for community anchor organisations. These tend to be the strongest and most successful community organisations, employing staff, delivering services and owning or managing community spaces. They collaborate with and help coordinate smaller local community groups, residents, neighbours, and friends. As such, they can provide a powerful collective voice for their neighbourhood, including by:

- involving the community in decisions
- helping residents navigate their way through services
- informing policy making processes
- advocating on behalf of their area across a range of geographies.^{xxxiv}

Moat House Community Trust, in Coventry, is a good example of a community anchor organisation that has built a strong relationship with their council. These relationships have taken many years to flourish, and to build public sector trust and belief in community delivery.

Moat House's experience in community engagement is now highly valued by local public agencies – including the council, police, public health and the local NHS. This saw them working in close partnership during the COVID-19 pandemic. As CEO Dianne Williams explained in June 2020: "It feels like the work that we've done – and it did feel at times that we were beating our heads till it was bleeding – has all come to fruition. Those relationships we have built up, the trust is the basis of the work that we are doing in response to the crisis."^{xxxv}

Principle Four

Capacity and resources: having the wherewithal to take action.

Not all relationships require financial resources. However, maximising the benefits of strategic relationships for local areas requires the local VCS to have the capacity to play their role to the full. This means councils proactively supporting local organisations.

For example, Wigan Council are proactively supporting their community organisations through their community investment fund, this fund is deliberately branded as an 'investment' and not a grant. The intention is that initial funding should lead to longer-term sustainability and additional social impact.^{xxxvi}

Key elements:

- **Time** – timescales across some council processes can often be perceived to be too tight to facilitate good working relationships with stakeholders engaging in these processes.

For example, lack of time and resource is often given as the reason for taking a consultation approach to community engagement, rather than seeking community involvement from the offset. It's often what drives transactional relationships, where the council sees the VCS as a means to deliver a particular output quickly, rather than as a long-term strategic partner.

These time pressures are in large part beyond individual councils' control. For several years councils have been operating on short-term funding settlements, building short termism into budget cycles across the country. There is also the impact of election cycles, meaning it can be hard to plan over long-term time horizons. This makes relationship building for VCS organisations a cyclical process.

However, having a long-term vision and approach is important for strategic relationships. And some of the concepts outlined in this report can help mitigate the impact of the external drive to short-termism. For example, having the right structures in place can ensure long-term strategic continuity. Having senior buy-in can drive a commitment to work against the grain of the wider system. This can allow for more time to be built into community engagement processes or commissioning exercises. Developing greater knowledge and understanding of the strengths of the local VCS can shift cultural risk aversion and build greater trust and collaboration.

- **Capacity** – this is very stretched for both councils and VCS organisations. This is closely linked to the lack of time discussed above. Pressure on staff capacity can lead to a “heads down” approach, where for reasons of ease or speed people plough on without pausing to work in partnership.

Much like councils, VCS organisations have been under huge pressure for a long time – from austerity to COVID-19 to the cost-of-living crisis. On top of the core work of supporting local people amid rising demand for services, it can feel exhausting to navigate council processes and engage with a wide range of public sector partners. Some areas also do not have a CVS or other local infrastructure organisation. This can mean they lack a suitable mechanism to coordinate engagement and build local capacity.

Our research workshops highlighted that, unlike councils, VCS organisations will often not be funded for their time but will be still expected to attend meetings. This is an important part of the existing power imbalance. However, council officers will be facing huge workload pressures with competing priorities. This will mean there often isn't the capacity to invest the time necessary to build relationships and involve people early. Drafting an agenda for a meeting in advance – rather than taking the additional time and effort co-create it – might not therefore be a signal of a paternalistic cultural mindset, but more straightforwardly the actions of a busy person.

Officers who engaged in this research highlighted the impact of budget cuts, with one saying, “we used to do it well until austerity”. Others noted that the recent re-flourishing of relationships during the pandemic had been enabled by the influx of emergency funding.

The impact of the pandemic on the nation's finances, coupled with the cost-of-living crisis, means it is unlikely the budget pressures will ease in the foreseeable future. However, it is important to recognise that relationships need to be resourced to flourish, whether that's through funding or in other ways.

The deep dive case studies within this research highlight a few ways councils are supporting community capacity beyond providing funding. Derby, for example, has provided opportunities for action learning and problem solving for the whole local VCS sector. Malvern Hills plays an important role facilitating discussion between groups and offering support based on maximising strengths and identifying gaps for better services. The council has also stepped in to keep important local spaces open, such as the local theatre, college, and community and youth centre.

Learning from Locality's [Keep it Local Network](#) has identified various ways councils are seeking to proactively support local organisations, whether through funding or by other means:^{xxxvii}

- **Supporting community ownership** – when community organisations own assets, it gives them independence and the ability to earn their own income. Many councils operate a Community Asset Transfer policy as an example of this.
- **Supportive commissioning** – councils can ensure that their contracting processes are inclusive and remove barriers so that small VCS organisations can bid for them. This means they receive multiple benefits including commissioning a high-quality service, delivered usual by and for local people, whilst also investing into a local organisation that is going to generate additional social value and have a positive impact on the local economy.
- **Supporting local organisations representing marginalised groups** – the pandemic further exposed the stark inequalities which exist in our society. It also showed that additional support is required for those organisations that are led by and represent underrepresented and marginalised groups. These are groups that have seen an unequal distribution of resources and support in the past. Councils can play a role in correcting inequitable distribution of funding and by supporting the capacity of these vital organisations.
- **Capacity and capability building within the local sector** – providing support to ensure the local VCS has the skills and capabilities to play a strong partnership role. These include the skills to take on community assets if available, diversify income streams and take part in commissioning processes.

Deep-dive case study: Calderdale

Context setting

Calderdale in West Yorkshire has a population of just over 211,000 people. Its urban centre is Halifax with most people living there and in towns further up the Calder Valley. Thirty per cent of the population live in the most deprived 20 per cent of areas in the country according to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation. Despite challenges of connectivity to key social and digital infrastructure, the borough has a relatively strong network of community and civic infrastructure. According to the Community Needs Index, the VCS and residents of the borough are highly engaged in the broader civic life of the community.

Calderdale is a small council in comparison with neighbouring city and metropolitan district councils. VCS organisations consider council staff to be accessible and visible and it is considered easy to build relationships and identify relevant people to speak to. Both council officers and VCS staff believe there is a positive political environment within Calderdale, and there are engaged and dynamic councillors. The VCS relationship has been consistent regardless of changes in political leadership and funding pressures over the last decade. The council is committed to sustained funding for their local sector despite the funding environment.

The council has an established relationships with community anchor organisations in the borough. These organisations have managed large council contracts including those for children's services and adult learning. They have also been strategic partners in previous place-based regeneration work. This has established and sustained the relationship and role of the community anchors in service delivery.

The local impact of regular floods in the upper valley and related emergency responses have challenged some risk aversion and processes within the council that previously created barriers to working with the VCS. The response to the situation forged a new level of understanding and trust between the council and local VCS organisations which stepped up to respond to the emergency. Direct relationships on the ground were developed and strengthened as a result.

Types of partnership working between the council and local VCS

Strategic relationships between the council and local VCS in Calderdale are based on collaboration on strategic boards and partnerships. They are clear that the value of the VCS working with the council on a strategic basis is to ensure that the former has a direct influence on decision making, thereby creating parity of esteem. There are several examples where the council's commitment to establishing the VCS as a partner is evident, this includes strategic board and partnerships in economic development, health, climate and culture strategies. Through these forums, there are director and councillor-level working relationships between the sector and council.

The council's Wellbeing Strategy is an example of this. It has been co-produced with the sector through the local health and wellbeing board. There are strategic plans being developed under four core themes: starting well, developing well and living and working, and ageing well. Two of the core theme groups are co-chaired by a council and VCS representative and all are tasked with developing strategic plans. The Starting Well theme has made progress through a strength and needs assessment and reviewed good practice to start process of developing a strategic plan. This will inform how to influence commissioning and investment to reduce health inequalities.

There are also direct commissioning and delivery relationships that show effective strategic working in Calderdale. This includes the Calderdale Voluntary Sector Infrastructure Alliance (VSI Alliance). Using pooled budgets with what was the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), the council decided to use 'alliance contracting' for the VCS Infrastructure Support contract. The Alliance is made up of four support providers, the council, and the CCG. The contract is managed based on shared principles, equality of role and voice, trust, and honesty.

Calderdale Council has a [community anchor policy](#), thought to be the only example in the country. This very public commitment to proactively support the local VCS put the sector at the heart of the council's vision for a more inclusive local economy. In practice, the policy has meant putting in place a Relationship Management approach with established community anchors. This approach provided a commitment from the council and local VCS to establish new ways of working and setting expectations for

joint working. It also ensures that the VCS has access to council officers and practical and proactive support.

Overcoming barriers to strategic partnership working

Calderdale Council and the local VCS consider the biggest barrier to strategic working is the demand on VCS resources, mainly financial and time demands. In recognising this barrier, the council is taking an ongoing and proactive approach to better supporting the sector, whether that is through procurement and social value or through the supporting role of the VSI Alliance. Council officers have worked alongside colleagues from the health system to leverage funding for VCS representatives to attend boards and working groups. The resource, which comes from the West Yorkshire Health and Care Partnership, is directed to the sector through the Alliance.

This innovative approach is still in development and initial uptake has been limited as a result of senior VCS leaders not having enough time to attend boards on top of their 'day jobs'. This is a further barrier which the council is looking to address in the future.

Lessons to take away

Representatives from the council state the importance of developing a strategy, policy and plan for working with the VCS and how this applies to all departments of the council. There is a need to develop culture and working practices so that the council knows corporately how to work with the sector, rather than patches of good practice in the departments where it is well established and understood.

The VSI Alliance is an example of how the council has set out their working practices with the sector and has used their influencing role to draw funding in from other parts of the VCS sector. Time and resource are very so stretched in the sector. The Alliance therefore illustrates how a strategic forum with cross-sector representation can support capacity provide a central point of engagement. This will improve the 'institutional memory' within the authority so that relationships and good practice are not lost when individuals move on.

- **The right approach to funding** – over the past decade, central government policy has driven a major shift in how VCS organisations are funded, away from grant funding towards contracts.^{xxxviii} However, what grant funding there is – from councils as well as trusts and foundations – is often not provided in the optimal way for building strategic relationships.

The research has found that the dominant approach to grant funding remains restricted, project-based funding with tightly defined outputs. Research participants suggested that this approach to funding can be too prescriptive, designed in the image of the grant giver, rather than the needs of the grantee.

Locality heard how restricted project funding doesn't always enable organisations to pay for organisational overheads or management capacity. This prevents them from building up the long-term resilience they need to be true partners.

The pandemic saw a shift starting to take place, with more unrestricted funding.^{xxxix} This was seen from trusts and foundations, as well as central government grants. To meet the huge demand and encouraged by a relaxation of central government rules, councils also showed greater flexibility across contracts and grants.

This approach provides an opportunity to support organisations to build their infrastructure, assets, and financial strength, rather than creating a transactional, delivery relationship.

Participants in this research saw this as an important direction of travel to build on with lessons for the future, rather than being solely a product of the emergency response. The challenge for councils is to strike the right balance between unfettered access to funding with little accountability and overly bureaucratic and unnecessary processes for small pots of money.

Full cost recovery – where grants and contracts meet all the costs of running a project or service, including organisational overheads – was also seen as important. Recent research commissioned by Kent County Council examined the issue of full cost recovery in their VCS commissioning and makes several recommendations.^{xi} These include:

- standardising good practice across council departments
- reviewing training and development needs for anyone that undertakes contract management as part of their work
- developing new models of commissioning where commissioners and providers use their expertise and resources to co-design services that reflect the full cost of delivering them.

There was also discussion about striking the right balance between support for new organisations and existing infrastructure. It is a long-standing complaint that funders prioritise the new and “innovative” at the expense of the tried and tested. The experience of the pandemic highlighted the importance of both, and that innovation can and does still occur through tried and tested methods as well. We saw the power of established VCS organisations harnessing their assets and relationships during the COVID-19 pandemic. This drove innovation as organisations quickly reshaped services and redeployed community buildings.

The pandemic also highlighted the power of new mutual aid groups, who might have deeper reach into different parts of the community than established organisations. The key is to create a supportive local ecosystem which works in close partnership and enhances different strengths. So, it is important for councils to strike a balance which supports new groups as well as organisations with a proven track record of delivery.

8. Conclusion: Strategic relationships in an era of crisis

The four principles for strategic relationships outlined in this report are designed to be “all weather” principles borne out of existing good partnership working between councils and their local VCS sector.

They attempt to distil the key characteristics of good partnership working 'in general'. However, in practice they will be applied in a specific set of circumstances, determined by:

- an external policy environment shaped around shrinking council budgets and competitive commissioning that often values economically advantageous (often interpreted as the cheapest) bids over others
- long-term crisis conditions for VCS organisations at the local level, following a decade of austerity, and the pressures of the pandemic moving into a cost of living crisis.

It is therefore important for local areas to think about the implications of these contextual factors and what they mean for putting these principles into practice. For example, the pandemic has arguably strengthened a key aspect of **'Shared Foundations'** by increasing councils' awareness of, and appreciation for, the work VCS organisations do. This has the potential to build trust and confidence for councils to share power. However, it has also been suggested by research participants that the experience could have reinforced a more transactional relationship, with VCS organisations "boxed off" as emergency delivery partners.

During the pandemic, there has also been evidence of a mindset shift between councils and VCS organisations required to create a **'Relational Culture'**. Several councils are now shaping their identities around unlocking the communities potential and collaborating with communities on shared aims and ambitions for their place. But embedding this way of working requires councils to be proactive and find creative ways to move towards this aim.

The big challenges around **'Capacity and Resources'** run the risk of being heightened by current conditions. Without a comprehensive and long-term financial settlement, councils will always struggle to properly resource strategic relationships. VCS organisations will also struggle to invest the time and capacity in long-term relationship building. With pressure on services growing and finances becoming ever more precarious, there will always be a tendency to focus on firefighting rather than thinking for the long-term.

There are examples throughout this report of how different council areas are overcoming these challenges to put these principles into practice. While it is important to recognise the difficult circumstances within which strategic relationships are seeking to grow, there is a clear consensus from this research that the only way through them is to work together.

Changes within the Procurement Bill, currently making its way through Parliament will enable councils to evaluate bids based on the Most Advantageous Tender (MAT) rather than how they currently have to evaluate bids based on the Most Economically Advantageous Tender (MEAT). This may go some way to ensuring buyers, such as councils, are more aware of other factors such as social value when evaluating bids from VCS organisations. The LGA will shortly be publishing the National Procurement Strategy Toolkit for local government, which provides thorough advice on how to work with and commission more effectively local VCSE

organisations. This toolkit coupled with the findings of this research and the changes coming into effect through the Procurement Bill, makes the LGA hopeful that local partners have more tools to embed high quality commissioning of VCSE organisations.

Creating effective strategic relationships will require give and take, patience when things don't go to plan, and a recognition that the right solutions won't always exist locally. But different places around the country are demonstrating the art of the possible. They highlight what can be achieved when councils and VCS organisations come together in the spirit of partnership to tackle common challenges.

Appendix B: Stakeholder Interviewees – Workstream 1:

- Rebecca Young, Policy Lead, National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)
- Rob MacMillan, Principal Research Fellow, Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (CRESR), Sheffield Hallam University
- Hannah Small, Policy Adviser (Democracy, VCS and Equalities), Local Government Association
- Jonathan Rallings, Senior Policy Officer, County Councils Network
- Maddy Desforges, CEO, National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA)
- Ellie Brodie, Interim Policy Manager, NAVCA
- Yolande Burgess, Strategy Director, London Councils

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Meeting: Safer and Stronger Communities Board

Date: 22 September 2022

Update Paper

Purpose of report

For information.

Summary

The report outlines issues of interest to the Board not covered under the other items on the agenda.

Recommendation/s:

That members of the Board note and comment on the update.

Action/s:

Officers to action any matters arising from the discussion as appropriate.

Contact officer: Mark Norris
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Meeting: Safer and Stronger Communities Board**Date:** 22 September 2022**Update Paper****Background**

1. This report outlines issues of interest to the Board not covered under the other items on the agenda.

Draft Victims Bill

2. Chair of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board, Cllr Nesil Caliskan, gave [oral evidence](#) during the pre-legislative scrutiny stages of the Draft Victims Bill, alongside the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime in London, and Association of Police and Crime Commissioner's Joint Lead for Victims, Sophie Linden.
3. During the evidence session, Cllr Caliskan indicated it was positive to see Government's commitment to improving services and amplifying victims' voices in the criminal justice process through this Bill, but highlighted that it is also important to ensure that the Bill does not lose sight of the need to ensure victims of all crimes are supported effectively. She explained a locally-led approach, which provides areas with the flexibility and resources to identify local priorities and take action, is one of the best ways to improve collaboration but it is essential that any proposed new duties are clarified by government and funded in full.
4. Our full [written evidence](#) to the committee is available here, alongside wider stakeholder evidence submissions. The Justice Committee's inquiry has now closed, and the committee is expected to publish its final report and recommendations in the coming weeks. Following the Government's response to the committee's recommendations, the draft Bill may be amended and is then expected to begin its process through Parliament.

Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act – commencement schedule and serious violence duty

5. The [commencement schedule](#) for the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 has been published. The schedule outlines when each part of the Act is due to come into force. The forthcoming serious violence duty, as outlined in the Act, requires secondary legislation to come into force, and the commencement date will be updated when this has passed. The Government has been [consulting](#) on the draft statutory guidance for the serious violence duty, and is expected to publish an updated version in Autumn 2022.

National Expert Steering Group on Domestic Abuse

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6. The Ministerially-led National Expert Steering Group, which has been convened to oversee the implementation of the Part 4 statutory duty on local authorities to deliver accommodation-based support and services to domestic abuse victims, held its second meeting in June.
7. During the session, LGA officers shared the learning from a series of local government best practice workshops, which included presentations from Imkaan, Women's Aid, and the National Housing Federation, with a focus on supporting "by and for" specialist services. Ahead of the next steering group meeting in November, the LGA plans to hold additional workshops with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Refuge, Mankind, and Galop, to help share best practice.
8. The third year of new burdens funding for the duty is still to be announced, so we will continue to press for an earlier update to help councils build in longer-term planning to their services.

Domestic Abuse Statutory Guidance

9. The Government has published the [statutory guidance](#) for the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. The guidance is aimed at statutory and non-statutory bodies working with victims, perpetrators and commissioning services, including the police, local authorities, and the NHS to increase awareness and inform their response to domestic abuse. The commencement schedule for the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 is also [available here](#).

Tackling the Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) epidemic

10. The Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales, Nicole Jacobs and the National Police Chiefs Council lead for VAWG, DCC Maggie Blyth spoke at the LGA Annual Conference session on tackling violence against women and girls, chaired by the Board's Domestic Abuse Champion Cllr Lois Samuel. The Commissioner touched upon the importance of having funding certainty for community-based support services, which she said many people are reliant upon for support. DCC Blyth explained this was a watershed moment to change the culture on VAWG issues. She highlighted the importance of improving the trust and confidence in policing, and outlined plans for a national policing framework to address this important issue.

Funding to support female offenders

11. On 1 September, the Government [announced](#) £24 million for services that work with women in the justice system to help those whose crimes have been fuelled by addiction, mental health issues and domestic abuse. Almost £21 million is expected to be invested in women's services to tackle the causes of female offending and cut crime. A further £3.6 million will be allocated to help local services, such as mental health support and drug experts, work more closely together to support female offenders.

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12. The Home Office has updated the [Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 statutory guidance](#), to include guidance on expedited Public Spaces Protection Orders, additional information on restorative justice and the community remedy, and updated wording on dispersal powers and community protection notices.

Law Commission report on Weddings Law

13. In July the Law Commission published its final response to their [review of weddings law](#). Members previously discussed the LGA's response to the consultation at the [SSCB in November 2020](#), with the LGA submitting a response calling for universal civil marriage, or at least universal civil preliminaries, as well as expressing concerns regarding the use of the word "dignity" in defining whether or not a location was suitable for a wedding.
14. The Law Commission's final report contains a number of recommendations including that couples will be able to give notice of their intended wedding online, though Anglican preliminaries would still be conducted by the Anglican Church. There are proposals around the contents of wedding ceremonies, including religious elements in civil ceremonies and giving couples greater choice on where they can be married. Though our comments on dignity were picked up, there were many respondents who felt that there should be a definition of dignity and its meaning in the context of weddings, The Law Commission still believe that officiants should approve premises, considering safety and dignity.
15. The Government has not just responded to the Law Commission's final report.

White Paper: "Reforming our fire and rescue service"

16. The LGA [submitted a response](#) to Government's Reforming our Fire and Rescue Service White Paper at the end of July. The response welcomed Government's ambition to improve the Fire and Rescue Service, welcoming reform that is introduced in the most effective and productive way. The response outlined that much could already be achieved without the need for further legislation. The Fire Services Management Committee expressed particular concerns around the proposals on fire governance, which the Committee felt was best determined at a local level, rather than mandating changes to governance without local support. It also outlined views on where proposals need further consideration, such as the balanced leadership model between chief fire officers and their governance, and provided practical solutions on how these could be developed to deliver reform. The response also set out potential barriers to reform and areas where the LGA believe change could be achieved more quickly.

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17. Government is expected to respond although the timeline for this is unknown and is likely to be impacted by the change in ministerial team.

Democratic engagement in resilience case studies

18. The LGA has commissioned a series of case studies on effective democratic engagement in civil resilience, and is seeking examples from councils of how councillors are involved in local resilience activity at each of the planning, response and recovery phases. The recent levelling up white paper and post implementation review of the Civil Contingencies Act highlighted the importance of accountability and assurance of multi-agency local resilience work, and the forthcoming national resilience strategy is expected to explore this issue further.

Responding to disruption to fuel supply: guidance for resilience partners and the care sector

19. Following disruption experienced last Autumn, when media reports and panic buying disrupted access to fuel in some parts of the country, causing significant challenges for home care providers in those areas, officers have worked with the Care Providers Alliance to develop a short guidance note on the national emergency plan for fuel and best practice approaches to business continuity. The guidance is expected to be signed off and published shortly.

Regulatory services

20. With helpful input from members of the board, officers have developed a councillor guide to public protection services. The guide will be published shortly, and the board are encouraged to help share this within their authorities and groups.
21. Officers have also been engaging with the workforce team, who have commissioned work to explore what options are available for addressing the recruitment and pipeline challenges seen in a number of professions including environmental health and trading standards.

Independent inquiry on child sexual exploitation in Telford and Wrekin

22. In April 2018 Telford and Wrekin Council commissioned an [independent inquiry to look at child sexual exploitation](#) (CSE) in the borough during the period from 1989 to the present date. The inquiry looked at the response of the police and a range of council services, including social services and education. There was also a section of the inquiry which focused on taxi/private hire vehicle (PHV) licensing and the night-time economy.
23. On taxi/PHV licensing the inquiry found that, historically, the council's taxi/PHV licensing policies were not robust. This improved over time, and now the council demonstrates good practice and has an effective system of

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licensing. It also found the licensing department had a poor relationship with the trade. This led to allegations of racism and a pause in enforcement activity when CSE perpetrators were active in the area. The inquiry concludes that while the council does now operate an effective system of licensing, it remains hampered by inconsistent standards on regional regulatory requirements and information sharing.

24. On alcohol and entertainment licensing, there were some concerning reports of children experiencing harm in nightclubs. However, the inquiry concluded that licensing officers were effective in tackling this and are taking steps to protect children in the night-time economy. The inquiry praised effective partnership working schemes operating in Telford and Wrekin, and the successful CSE training for staff working in licensed premises and hotels.
25. Within the report, there are many references to perpetrators being linked with takeaways and restaurants, and to associated residential premises being used for exploitation. The inquiry recognised that councils have limited licensing powers to regulate many of these premises, however regarded the lack of information councils had on these premises as a failure of information sharing.
26. The LGA produced a summary of the licensing section of the report. If you would be interested in reading more, please contact jade.hall@local.gov.uk

World cup guidance

27. The LGA has one again co-badged guidance produced by the British Beer and Pub Association for licensees are screening football matches for this year's World Cup.

Pavement licensing

28. Licensing authorities should have received new burdens funding for year two of the temporary pavement licensing regime introduced by the Business and Planning Act 2020. The LGA welcomes this funding, which has followed our lobbying to ensure councils are reimbursed for the costs of administering the regime.
29. The provisions in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill which outline proposals for a permanent pavement licensing regime are before the Bill Committee in the House of Commons. The LGA has worked closely with officials at DLUHC to ensure the Bill includes provisions which increase the licence fee cap, have a longer consultation and determination period, and improved enforcement powers for licensing authorities.
30. The LGA has also supported a Parliamentary amendment to the Bill which would provide councils with alternative enforcement powers, after some

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councils expressed concern that the current enforcement provisions in the Bill – the ability to seize and remove furniture for licence breaches and recoup associated costs from the individuals involved- may create logistical challenges for councils who do not have the means to store or transport the furniture, and concerns that officers may be placed in a confrontational situation with business owners. The amendment would create a specific offence for non-compliance and enable councils to issue a fixed penalty notice.

Member support offer: licensing

31. The LGA is continuing to develop our support offer to assist officers with the process of inducting new members onto licensing committees. We have recently [refreshed our licensing e-learning module](#). We have also produced some scenario-based licensing training videos, which will be launched shortly.
32. In addition, we are holding a licensing leadership essentials course for chairs and vice-chairs of licensing committees 19-20th October. Due to the demand for the course, we plan to run another in March 2023.

Modern slavery event

33. To mark anti-slavery day on 18th October, the LGA is hosting a webinar to launch our refreshed council guide on tackling modern slavery. This webinar, which will be hosted in partnership with the Human Trafficking Foundation, will provide an overview of our updated modern slavery guidance and accompanying maturity index that. The Human Trafficking Foundation will also provide an overview of its recent report on approaches to tackling modern slavery in London. If this event is of interest, [you can book your place on the LGA's website](#).

Street naming legislation

34. As noted in the Board's June update, we responded to a DLUHC technical consultation in May on changes to street naming legislation. Our response argued that the proposals were both unnecessary and presented a number of practical issues. The Levelling Up Bill introduced in May included provisions to amend legislation in accordance with the consultation's proposals. In the [LGA's committee stage briefing on the Bill](#), we continued to express concerns about the proposals and current drafting of the clause.

Counter extremism

35. We have continued to support the SIGCE's programme of events, with practitioner roundtable sessions over the summer period on online misinformation and conspiracy theories, and on handling protest activity. A further interactive workshop was held for councils on responding to anti-

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minority activism, which will inform the production of a toolkit for local authorities and further planned workshops over the coming months.

Police and Crime Panels

36. On 27 September we will be holding our next Police and Crime panels webinar with contributions from the Home Office, the National Association of Police, Fire and Crime Panels and the North Yorkshire PCP.

Implications for Wales

37. Officers to work with the Welsh LGA as necessary.

Financial Implications

38. None.

Equalities implications

39. To be considered in relation to each individual policy area.

Next steps

40. Officers to continue progressing these issues as required.