

## Voscur's response to the consultation on the Corporate Strategy 2017/18-2021/22

Voscur represents, supports and develops Bristol's Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector (VCSE). Many of our member organisations are working to tackle inequalities and address unfairness in the city amongst the most vulnerable communities. In addition to being a major employer, harnessing voluntary action, and bringing substantial resources into the city, voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations contribute to building social capital and resilience, and help people to manage in these difficult times. The VCSE sector plays an important role in identifying and responding to emerging needs and bridging the widening gap between inequality in the city and services for people. We welcome the Council's proposal to "support a thriving voluntary sector, seek to enable the growth of local initiatives and encourage social enterprise" and the aim that this will lead to "local providers with unique abilities to reach vulnerable groups are working with local families." (p71)

Voscur recently facilitated VCSE sector input into a discussion of the Mayor Marvin Rees' Big Decisions, Tough Choices. We have also consulted with Voscur members through an online survey and direct discussions. This paper summarises the constructive points raised by representatives of Bristol's diverse VCSE sector. Voscur recognises the difficulties we face as a city, in changing demographics, and the scale and pace of change in this political environment. We understand the impact of six years of austerity and the difficulty of balancing the books while continuing to provide public services. Voscur firmly believes that, by working together to achieve the same aims, we can be resilient, survive, and thrive. We also believe that there are great opportunities to rethink and do things differently and Voscur is fully committed to working with the Mayor and Council to co-design and implement changes.

### Recommendations

Our recommendations, which are grouped into (a) Improve the Strategy and (b) Moving the strategy forward, are as follows, with more detailed commentary below. We have not included suggested timings and would welcome further discussions with Bristol City Council so that we can work collaboratively to find solutions to the challenges ahead.

#### (a) Improve the Strategy

##### Recommendation 1 Doing things differently and cultural change:

Given the scale of the tasks ahead, new capabilities, resilience and focus will be needed. Without strong foundations and a good culture of positive risk taking, any changes are unlikely to release the necessary efficiencies. We recommend, therefore, that focus is given now to getting the right internal culture – and that one way to achieve this might be to undertake a psychologically

informed review<sup>1</sup> of the Council's organisational culture. This review will require input from VCSE sector service providers and those from other sectors and Voscur will participate to support this change. The subsequent plan to address organisational culture will need to include building up the capability, capacity and motivation of all council officers to follow through on the vision and deliver on the targets. Without addressing this matter, expecting such a cultural shift is ambitious and risks failure.

**Recommendation 2 Consultation process, managing the impact of change and risks of challenge:**

Voscur would want to support the Council to manage the change process in the most positive way possible, and it is therefore important that an analysis of the impact of the proposed changes on all Bristol VCSE organisations and the service users that will be directly affected (by loss or reduction of income) is carried out. We request that the analysis includes details of how changes have been/are being actively and directly managed with affected community organisations and their specific services users (and not just the general public in the wider consultation). Where possible, Voscur will work with the council and VCSE organisations to support this process. Our estimate is that 45 VCSE organisations will be directly affected by the proposals.

**Recommendation 3 Equalities impact and cumulative effects of changes:** Voscur recommends the use of existing agreed methods to help assess the impact of change, and to plan for minimising any negative effects on particularly vulnerable groups. We would request therefore that:

- a. full equalities impact assessments are completed with expediency so that they can be considered alongside the consultation responses, prior to decisions.
- b. a cumulative analysis of the impact of changes on those with protected characteristics is prepared and considered, prior to decisions.
- c. a cumulative analysis of the impact of people in specific geographic areas (particularly areas that feature in the Indices of Multiple Deprivation), prior to decisions.

**Recommendation 4 Community Assets:**

- a. Undertake a comprehensive review of the Community Asset Transfer process to describe a strategic approach and make processes more proportionate, accessible and attractive to smaller community organisations.
- b. Consider the provision of a 'dowry' (i.e. capital fund) alongside CATs to enable reparative works so that transferred properties are in good condition (i.e. without ongoing liabilities). Such a fund could be delivered by social investment, which could involve council-VCSE partnership to manage the risks and no net outlay for council. Voscur would work to ensure that such an approach is inclusive, particularly to smaller, community organisations.
- c. Consider other ways to share the management of property-related risks.

**Recommendation 5 Neighbourhood Partnerships:** Undertake a review of Neighbourhood Partnerships that clarifies their remit, role and function, so that their effectiveness can be demonstrated against clear criteria, and/or their independence can be facilitated and supported,

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<sup>1</sup> Psychologically informed environments (PIEs) are required in some commissioned services. A similar approach inside the council may help to address organisational culture.

and different approaches and sustainability plans can be considered. Priority should be given to communities of deprivation, as it is clear that some communities are more asset-rich than others.

## **(b) Moving the strategy forward**

**Recommendation 6 Aspirations:** Voscur would like to work with Bristol City Council to develop specific proposals and plans so that we can facilitate the involvement of the VCSE sector in co-designing services and managing change. We will contribute to turning the ideas into specific plans that involve the VCSE sector in design and in implementation.

**Recommendation 7 “Some services can be taken on by communities or by the voluntary sector”:** Voscur welcomes this openness and believes that VCSE organisations and communities are able to play key roles in delivering public services. Where there are opportunities for communities and/or the voluntary sector to take on services, Bristol City Council to work in partnership with the VCSE sector through Voscur to plan outsourcing and transition of services and ensure that through safe and transparent due diligence these services are well-governed, managed and delivered to the highest standards.

**Recommendation 8 Co-location:** Voscur and Bristol City Council to work together to develop co-location options, after which Voscur would actively support the VCSE sector to take up co-location opportunities.

**Recommendation 9 Community Development:** Voscur and Bristol City Council to continue to work together with partners to develop the community development practitioners’ network in order to share learning and replicate models that bring additional resources to the city.

**Recommendation 10 Commissioning and social value:** Voscur, Bristol City Council and other commissioners to work together to develop a different approach to commissioning and procurement that shifts culture to ‘how can we?’ away from ‘you can’t’. We need to create a commissioning culture in which collaboration is the norm and creativity is actively encouraged. Bristol needs a new approach that recognises expertise exists in the provider market and that commissioners do not need to develop all solutions. Such an approach could implement the following:

- c. review the early stage (aspire) of project and programme development so that commissioners and providers work together to explore resource-efficient options to develop and design services.
- d. develop standard guidance on co-design and co-production so that our collaborative work leads to the best possible solutions for service users. The approach used in the co-design of the VCS Grants Prospectus should be further developed.
- e. use Social Value to require bidders (including business and VCSE sector) to work well with the VCSE sector.
- f. use new regulations (for example, reserved contracts) as a means to secure contracts with VCSE sector organisations that have potential to bring in additional funds (that cannot be secured by public or private sector contract holders).
- g. Voscur works to support the VCSE sector to be better at ‘selling’ or offering its Social Value to other bidders in collaborations. This will help to achieve charitable aims, help bidders win contracts and help city achieve Social Value.

**Recommendation 11 Devolution:** The strategy states that the Council will “work with businesses, neighbouring local authorities and our public sector partners to strengthen Bristol’s devolution bid.” It will also be important to work with Voscur and the West of England Civil Society Partnership, (which has a track record of cross-boundary working and successfully bringing investment into the region) to ensure that the value of the VCSE sector and its role in driving and supporting inclusive community economic development and good growth across the West of England is recognised and supported.

## **(a) Improve the Strategy**

### **1) Doing things differently and cultural change.**

“I am convinced that the wrong approach to manage reductions in funding is to simply keep trimming budgets. We need to develop an understanding of where we want the city to be in four years and beyond and ensure we have the council operating in a way that will get us there. There is a need to be certain about what services we must provide and those we want to keep at all costs. We have to reinvent the role of Bristol City Council in light of the available finances. It must maintain its leadership role and must continue to fight for good outcomes for people from the city. But we will have to work in new ways. This includes taking a strategic approach to identify what can be done better and more cost effectively, while also considering what could be managed or delivered elsewhere.” (page 2)

Voscur and members strongly agree with this statement. We disagree with the ‘salami slicing’ and budget trimming that has been used to manage reductions in some publicly-funded services. We believe that such approaches are not strategic and result in an overall reduction in quality of services, without looking at the bigger picture. We agree with a longer term, strategic approach and will support the Mayor and council in such developments. We believe that there is an imperative to target limited resources to those most vulnerable and that the VCSE sector has a major part to play in fighting for and delivering outcomes for the communities of Bristol.

Although the consultation document mentions new values – “we will endeavour to be bold, caring, enabling, gracious, trustworthy” (page 4) – there is little else about how such important, change-making values will be engendered. People in the council (and other public sector and the VCSE sector) have experienced much change, losses and the prospect of more upheaval. We believe a critical success factor in current/future change is the emotional health of the workforce. Voscur agrees with the values but also believes that leadership skills and attitudes, courage, a trusting culture, an openness to innovation and a commitment to working in partnership are areas that need to be addressed inside Bristol City Council (and other public sector bodies) to offset the risk of retaining existing culture (and fears) and not enabling inclusive change to happen.

Over recent years, there has been much talk of doing things differently, of the council shifting from ‘doing’ to ‘enabling’. Some progress has been made but there are also significant cultural issues within the council that prevent leadership, enabling and empowerment. Examples such as the council’s approach to the High Court case with Missing Link, and recent Compact advocacy cases indicate there is further work to be done on Bristol City Council’s organisational culture.

**Recommendation 1:** Given the scale of the tasks ahead, new capabilities, resilience and focus will be needed. Without strong foundations and a good culture of positive risk taking any changes are unlikely to release the necessary efficiencies. We recommend, therefore that focus is given now

to getting the right internal culture – and that one way might be to undertake a psychologically informed review<sup>2</sup> of the Council’s organisational culture. This review will require input from VCSE sector service providers and those from other sectors and Voscur will participate to support this change. The subsequent plan to address organisational culture will need to include building up the capability, capacity and motivation of all council officers to follow through on the vision and deliver on the targets. Without addressing this matter, expecting such a cultural shift is ambitious and risks failure.

## **2) Consultation process, managing the impact of change and risks of challenge**

Voscur members have raised concerns about the corporate strategy consultation process, for example:

- “The design is complex throughout. The online system also only allows the user to comment on 3 of the proposals for cuts under each of the 3 sections, yet there are around 10 proposals in each section. This is a serious limitation.”
- “General feedback is that the consultation is not accessible – either digitally or via paper format. Of the people who came in today [one of the drop-in sessions] only one was confident taking away the consultation papers and providing a response in writing. This supports our suspicions that it’s simply not fit for purpose for those wishing to express a view.”
- “We are extremely concerned at the style, complexity, and lack of support to facilitate citizen engagement with this consultation. Residents simply do not possess the time or skills to thumb through a 120 page document and 12 page response form.”

In some cases, community hubs have organised their own consultation events so that local people were enabled to respond to proposals that will affect services in the area.

- “Around half the residents [that we engaged] felt that the proposals were quite unclear and at times ambiguous. For example, a level of cuts was often proposed with no reference to the size of that budget, or any indication of a baseline.”

In addition, Voscur is aware that some engagement with community organisations about proposed reductions appears not to have followed established protocols. Examples:

- A community organisation was asked (June 2016) to provide an impact assessment of the loss of 100% funding and alternate council provision of those services. Upon challenge to the fairness of the process, the idea to change funding was subsequently included in the Corporate Strategy consultation.
- An organisation that is directly affected by a proposal (RS6) has had no direct contact with Bristol City Council about that proposal.

Bristol City Council’s standard process for managing change (end or reduction) in funding for community organisations is described in the Decommissioning Policy. Furthermore, the council is committed to the Bristol Compact (which describes managing change) and must follow the government’s Best Value Statutory Guidance. It is noted that, in the above examples, these protocols appear not to have been followed in these ways:

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<sup>2</sup> Psychologically informed environments (PIEs) are required in some commissioned services. A similar approach inside the council may help to address organisational culture.

- Best Value Statutory Guidance requires specific consultation with directly-affected service users prior to any decision to change funding. It then requires at least three months' formal notice of any change.
- Decommissioning Policy requires a 'decommissioning impact assessment' which arises from discussions between community organisations and their contract/relationship manager. Such discussion would lead to a documented understanding of the impact of proposed changes (on service users and workforce) and clearly described mitigations of those risks so that change is effectively managed.

We are concerned about the processing of the proposed changes to funding in the Corporate Strategy consultation, particularly those changes due to take effect in-year or in 2017/18. We are seriously concerned that the changes will affect many community organisations (we estimate at least 45) and will have a detrimental impact on their service users, workforce, ability to effectively manage change and organisational viability. Whilst community organisations understand that changes are needed, there is a need to follow established protocols – this will help to avoid multiple, resource-demanding challenges to funding decisions in the near future.

**Recommendation 2:** Voscur would want to support the Council to manage the change process in the most positive way possible, and it is therefore important that an analysis of the impact of the proposed changes on all Bristol VCSE organisations and the service users that will be directly affected (by loss or reduction of income) is carried out. We request that the analysis includes details of how changes have been/are being actively and directly managed with affected community organisations and their specific services users (and not just the general public in the wider consultation). Where possible, Voscur will work with the council and VCSE organisations to support this process. Our estimate is that 45 VCSE organisations will be directly affected by the proposals.

### **3) Equalities impact and cumulative effects of changes**

Voscur notes that there are no equalities impact assessments associated with the multiple and complex changes proposed in the Corporate Strategy. We are concerned that the impact of changes on people, communities and organisations is not understood and, importantly, is not being considered to inform decisions or implementation.

While we can see that there are many equality impact relevance checks (which indicate the need for full equalities impact assessments in many cases), there appears to be little information available at this stage that could help Bristol City Council understand which proposals will have unacceptable or minimal impact on vulnerable people.

Voscur also notes that there is no mention of the cumulative impact of changes on some communities. The equalities impact assessments should be analysed to assess the cumulative impact of all changes on those with protected characteristics – this is not mentioned in the consultation documents. By reviewing the relevance checks, we can see that specific equalities groups will be directly affected by individual proposals, including these examples that will impact older people:

- CF10 Review of provision of day services to adults
- CF12 Change the way reablement, rehabilitation and intermediate Care Services are provided

- RS2 Reduction of subsidies for bus routes with low numbers of passengers
- RS4 Remove Companion Concessionary bus passes
- RS6 Withdraw reimbursements to Community Transport operators for concessionary travel.

In addition to all of the above, these examples will also impact disabled people:

- CF2 Recommissioning of Homelessness Support Services for Adults and Families
- CF8 Single city-wide Information, Advice and Guidance service
- IN2 Charge for advisory disabled bays and 'keep clear' markings
- RS3 Remove funding for local traffic schemes devolved to Neighbourhood Partnerships
- RS8 Revise operating times for Concessionary Travel.

We are also aware that the combination of some proposals has potential to disproportionately affect some geographic communities. There is no mention of an assessment of the combined impact of changes on specific areas. We are concerned that the cumulative impact will disproportionately affect people in areas of the city that experience more disadvantage than others, as per the Indices of Multiple Deprivation. We know that such communities have access to fewer services and opportunities. If some changes are applied universally across the city, then it follows that people in disadvantaged areas will be more affected by such changes (as a greater proportion of services will be affected). The scant detail provided in the consultation does not allow us to understand if such consideration is being made. For example, people in Hartcliffe may be affected by many changes, including:

- Funding to the CATT Bus: RS6 proposes to end the reimbursement of concessionary fares; general funding of community transport is included in the VCS Grants Prospectus' Bristol Impact Fund – the outcomes of which will not be known until March
- CF1 Hengrove Leisure Centre refinancing – impact on South Bristol residents
- CF13 Review Early Help services (Family Support) mentions closing some buildings – it is not clear if this means Children's Centres or if it is across the city
- RS4 Remove Companion Concessionary bus passes – likely impact on carers especially those on outer areas of Bristol
- RS8 Revise operating times for Concessionary Travel – likely impact on elderly and disabled people especially in outer areas of Bristol
- RS10 Local Crisis and Prevention Fund – adverse impact on homeless people and people living in poverty
- RS13 Centralise Citizen Service Points – closing in Fishponds, Hartcliffe, Southmead and Ridingleaze. Negative impact on areas of deprivation, particularly impacting in combination with changes in transport concessions.
- CF3 Reduce Use of Temporary Accommodation – more likely to impact on areas of high deprivation where homelessness rates are higher.
- CF6 New Ways of Delivering Parks and Green Spaces – deprived areas have fewer assets to participate in this new model.
- RS1 Reduction in funding for ROADS – may impact more in deprived areas where these issues are more prevalent.

Should all of these changes be implemented, the impact on the Hartcliffe community will be comparatively more detrimental than that of less isolated, less disadvantaged communities. The same point applies to other areas of deprivation.

**Recommendation 3:** Voscur recommends the use of existing agreed methods to help assess the impact of change, and to plan for minimising any negative effects on particularly vulnerable groups. We would request therefore that:

- a. full equalities impact assessments are completed with expediency so that they can be considered alongside the consultation responses, prior to decisions.
- b. a cumulative analysis of the impact of changes on those with protected characteristics is prepared and considered, prior to decisions.
- c. a cumulative analysis of the impact of people in specific geographic areas (particularly areas that feature in the Indices of Multiple Deprivation), prior to decisions.

#### **4) Community assets**

Community organisations are interested in working more efficiently. Community Asset Transfer has the potential to support community organisations to be more efficient (spending less on rents for example) and providing hub services in their communities. However, the CAT process and its reputation (of being a way to offset liabilities) are barriers to some community organisations. Voscur believes that the process should be streamlined, a new process promoted and that community organisations should be supported through the process. The governance bodies (normally volunteer trustees) of some organisations are reluctant to take on additional risk of property liabilities – this needs to be addressed. Voscur is keen to be involved in a review and rethink about Community Asset Transfer.

#### **Recommendation 4:**

- a. Undertake a comprehensive review of the Community Asset Transfer process to describe a strategic approach and make processes more proportionate, accessible and attractive to smaller community organisations.
- b. Consider the provision of a 'dowry' (i.e. capital fund) alongside CATs to enable reparative works so that transferred properties are in good condition (i.e. without ongoing liabilities). Such a fund could be delivered by social investment, which could involve council-VCSE partnership to manage the risks and no net outlay for council. Voscur would work to ensure that such an approach is inclusive, particularly to smaller, community organisations.
- c. Consider other ways to share the management of property-related risks.

#### **5) Neighbourhood Partnerships**

Voscur agrees with the proposal (CF7) to reshape the approach to local engagement and democracy. We understand differences across the city require different approaches and we are working closely with Neighbourhood Partnerships to support their operation and development. For example, we are facilitating Greater Bedminster Community Partnership and St George's Neighbourhood Partnerships to establish separate legal entities that allow local governance, economic development, co-ordination of local priorities and bringing in additional funds. We believe that, by increasing the independence of organisations delivering NP functions, the council investment in NPs can be phased out as other funding solutions are achieved.

**Recommendation 5:** Undertake a review of Neighbourhood Partnerships that clarifies their remit, role and function, so that their effectiveness can be demonstrated against clear criteria, and/or their independence can be facilitated and supported, and different approaches and sustainability



plans can be considered. Priority should be given to communities of deprivation, as it is clear that some communities are more asset-rich than others.

## **(b) Moving the strategy forward**

### **6) Aspirations**

In the specific proposals (Appendix 1), which will require more detail to implement and to achieve successful outcomes, there are many instances of general aspirations, such as ‘exploring’, ‘considering’ and ‘encouraging’. We are concerned that, without more firm commitments, detailed rationales and cases for change, the critique of the previous administration (page 2) will continue to be the reality.

**Recommendation 6:** Voscur would like to work with Bristol City Council to develop specific proposals and plans so that we can facilitate the involvement of the VCSE sector in co-designing services and managing change. We will contribute to turning the ideas into specific plans that involve the VCSE sector in design and in implementation.

### **7) “Some services can be taken on by communities or by the voluntary sector”**

Indeed, it is likely that the city will become increasingly dependent on social action and the voluntary sector to deliver services that had previously been considered state provision, or core Council services. To realise the aspiration of increased social action in communities and volunteering in community organisations, more planning and collaborative work will be needed. Voscur believes that social action and volunteering are important solutions. We also believe that such things do not just happen, that support is needed and that quality (of experience and of contribution) is important. Voscur is fully committed to supporting individuals to be active in their communities and to supporting community organisations to provide high quality local services. We do this in several ways:

- Increase the sustainability of the VCSE sector by providing business planning, income generation and fundraising support.
- Facilitate collaboration and partnership working.
- Provide the skills, knowledge and expertise to ensure that local VCSE organisations are well governed, volunteers are well managed and supported, and that compliance issues such as safeguarding, health and safety and equalities are considered.
- Develop and manage specific projects that a) match skilled professional people with community organisations, b) provide support to people to move them into employment and training through volunteering opportunities, and c) link individuals to social action opportunities.

The development of social action needs to play to the strengths of the VCSE sector, including leverage (the sector’s ability to build on public investment and draw in additional funding). Voscur has taken the lead in developing an action plan for this process: we facilitated an initial workshop for VCSE leaders to begin the development of a 10-year citywide VCSE vision linked to a 5-year action plan. Its priorities are likely to include:

- Relationships: working with other sectors more effectively (expectations, protocols) particularly the business sector to agree a mutually beneficial approach
- Social investment: sustainable future finance through prevention, enterprise and using long-term leverage investment from BCC to bring in external funding
- Coordination: better use of data and intelligence to coordinate services and increase impact
- Collaboration: including better coordination of public bodies (BCC, CCG) coordinating clients to use social enterprise services (leading to better outcomes, reduced public spending and improved sustainability) and to avoid competition for volunteers.

**Recommendation 7:** Voscur welcomes this openness and believes that VCSE organisations and communities are able to play key roles in delivering public services. Where there are opportunities for communities and/or the voluntary sector to take on services, Bristol City Council to work in partnership with the VCSE sector through Voscur to plan outsourcing and transition of services and ensure that through safe and transparent due diligence these services are well-governed, managed and delivered to the highest standards.

### **8) Co-location**

The Corporate Strategy includes the idea of co-location of services and mixed uses of council buildings (page 6). Voscur agrees that this is a sensible approach and that many community organisations will be interested in sharing space. We anticipate that organisations with public-facing services delivered in community settings could collaborate with council-run services in the sharing of premises in new community hubs. Such arrangements could support community organisations (for example, with lower rent) and could support council-run buildings to stay open (for example, by sharing reception desks or by sharing opening/closing responsibilities). Co-location of public and VCSE sector services could also result in higher footfall, which would have a beneficial effect on service efficiencies. Voscur has recently worked in partnership with council libraries to develop social action opportunities, including volunteering, active citizenship and community hubs.

**Recommendation 8:** Voscur and Bristol City Council to work together to develop co-location options, after which Voscur would actively support the VCSE sector to take up co-location opportunities.

### **9) Community development**

Voscur welcomes the recent collaborative approaches to community development across the city – for example, the community development event and sharing of training. It is good that efforts are being made to join up peer practitioners – we see that approach as crucial to continuing to deliver outcomes through the tool of community development. Voscur’s members are actively involved in this agenda, often with no public funds. For example, one community organisation in south Bristol has formed a local group of older people supporting each other and making things happen with a small investment from two funders. Examples like this one could be developed further, potentially bringing in other funds and reducing the need for direct council spend.

**Recommendation 9:** Voscur and Bristol City Council and partners to work together to develop the community development practitioners’ network in order to share learning and replicate models that bring additional resources to the city.

## 10) Commissioning and social value

Bristol's VCSE sector has been involved in commissioning and delivering public service contracts for many years. Some organisations thrive in commissioning processes, but others – particularly smaller, local, equalities organisations – report that they are excluded. Voscur believes that such trusted organisations have much to offer in effectively delivering services in their communities.

A recent report<sup>3</sup> states that central and local government are using "shockingly complicated and inappropriate contracting and commissioning processes to secure vital public services" and "the experiences of small charities taking part in commissioning processes reveal a system in crisis which leaves charities threatened with closure and the future of public services, including homelessness, domestic abuse and mental health support, at risk".

Whilst highlighting major challenges faced by charities, the report recognises that commissioners themselves are under pressure operating with smaller budgets and fewer staff. Despite this, and in many cases they claim, it is the commissioning processes themselves adding cost, inefficiency and complexity.

The strategy states (p71) – “we will support a thriving voluntary sector, seek to enable the growth of local initiatives and encourage social enterprise.” To achieve this we will “embed our Social Value Policy in our commissioning and develop good practice examples.” The outcome will be that “local providers with unique abilities to reach vulnerable groups are working with local families.”

Voscur welcomes the Bristol Social Value Policy and recognises the potential to do things differently so that smaller organisations become included and win public service contracts. We also believe that there are other options (for example, reserved contracts; innovation partnerships; negotiations; lot management) available to commissioners that would allow more creative processes and the inclusion of smaller community organisations. Such options, if used in collaborative discussions between commissioners and providers, have the potential to lead to most resource-efficient solutions. It may be, for example, that negotiation takes less time, has less impact on service users and providers and achieves successful solutions, compared with the default competitive tendering process that is most commonly used.

The inclusion of VCSE providers in the delivery of public service contracts will serve the community (by maximising the effectiveness of public funds) and strengthen links between VCSE organisations and contract holders (predominantly business sector). In turn, that will mean VCSE organisations are more sustainable and less reliant on grant funding.

**Recommendation 10:** Voscur, Bristol City Council and other commissioners to work together to develop a different approach to commissioning and procurement that shifts culture to ‘how can we?’ away from ‘you can’t’. We need to create a commissioning culture in which collaboration is the norm and creativity is actively encouraged. Bristol needs a new approach that recognises expertise exists in the provider market and that commissioners do not need to develop all solutions. Such an approach could implement the following:

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<sup>3</sup> ‘Commissioning in Crisis, Lloyds Bank Foundation for England and Wales. December 2016

- c. review the early stage (aspire) of project and programme development so that commissioners and providers work together to explore resource-efficient options to develop and design services.
- d. develop standard guidance on co-design and co-production so that our collaborative work leads to the best possible solutions for service users. The approach used in the co-design of the VCS Grants Prospectus should be further developed.
- e. use Social Value to require bidders (including business and VCSE sector) to work well with the VCSE sector.
- f. use new regulations (for example, reserved contracts) as a means to secure contracts with VCSE sector organisations that have potential to bring in additional funds (that cannot be secured by public or private sector contract holders).
- g. Voscur works to support the VCSE sector to be better at 'selling' or offering its Social Value to other bidders in collaborations. This will help to achieve charitable aims, help bidders win contracts and help city achieve Social Value.

**11) Devolution - Ensure we maximise the opportunity of devolution and the Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA) to enhance and drive the good growth of the city.** The strategy states that the Council will “work with businesses, neighbouring local authorities, and our public sector partners to strengthen Bristol’s devolution bid.” (p.80) It is also important to recognise the value and role of the VCSE sector across the West of England in driving and delivering community economic development and good growth. Voscur, with its partners in the West of England Civil Society Partnership recently secured £5.8m investment into the West of England Works programme. This will enable community organisations to support people furthest from the labour market to access volunteering, training and employment opportunities. Additionally, Voscur is a partner in a West of England EU growth fund initiative (co-designed by local partners) that will support social entrepreneurs and community enterprise.

Local Enterprise Partnerships are accountable for £7.5bn of public funding yet there is little opportunity to involve local people in decision making. LEP boards rarely include VCSE representation or similar independent thinkers, resulting in a traditional approach to economic growth. There is a danger that devolution will also create decision making processes that are lacking accountability. NAVCA and Locality have produced five principles of devolution, the first being that devolution needs to be based on inclusive growth. Others include the need for better involvement of people and communities in decision-making. The VCSE sector can help bring about a shift in power from national and sub-regional decision makers, to grass roots, and plays a vital role in giving people, often those overlooked by the state, a voice.

**Recommendation 11:** The strategy states that the Council will “work with businesses, neighbouring local authorities and our public sector partners to strengthen Bristol’s devolution bid.” It will also be important to work with Voscur and the West of England Civil Society Partnership, (which has a track record of cross-boundary working and successfully bringing investment into the region) to ensure that the value of the VCSE sector and its role in driving and supporting inclusive community economic development and good growth across the West of England is recognised and supported.

**Voscur 5.1.17**