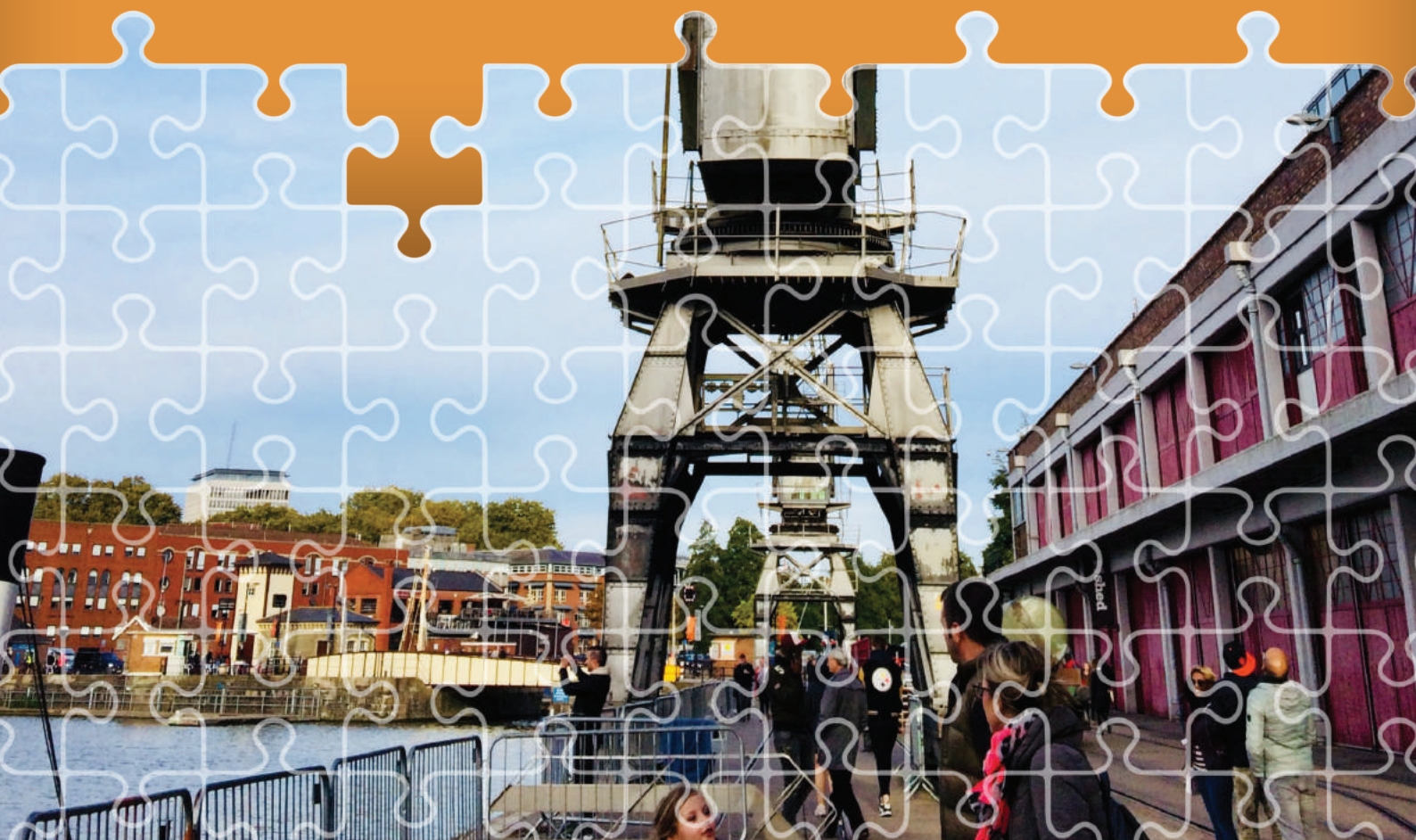


Into a New Era 2019-2029

**A new Vision and Strategy for Bristol's voluntary,
community and social enterprise sector**



Foreword

Sandra Meadows MCMI, CEO of Voscur



Bristol has a remarkable voluntary, community and social enterprise sector, built and sustained over many decades to deliver services that support and enable individuals and communities. Working alongside business and public sector partners, Bristol's VCSE (Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise) organisations are driving the city's expanding social economy.

Maintaining a wide range of high quality, accessible services, protecting the environment and working to ensure equality of opportunity for all, Bristol's VCSE organisations are the vanguard of social change and advancement.

Currently, the sector is going through a period of huge change. The quadruple challenge of less money, increased competition, greater complexity of need and higher demand for services has put a strain on many organisations across Bristol. Despite predictions of an 'Armageddon of organisations', as a result of austerity measures, local organisations remain an essential part of the current and future success of the city.

Bristol's VCSE sector is tenacious, committed, diverse and innovative – thanks to its staff, trustees and volunteers. Passion and vision are their driving forces and because of this, the sector creates solutions to problems no one else can and continues to support vulnerable people and communities, often on shoestring budgets. Such passion and vision must remain. However, it is often these qualities that expose the weaknesses in the sector. Passion can turn to burnout; low costs can lower quality and a focus on 'the cause' can leave gaps in structure and organisation that lead eventually to inefficiency and, at worst, collapse.

This strategy builds on the passion and heart yet acknowledges the need for the sector to change and develop. Greater financial acumen, improved partnership and collaboration and a new approach to leadership are some of the things needed to

grow the sector and make it more resilient.

This strategy sets out a vision and objectives to guide development, investment and priorities for the sector's future. Working together with business and public sector partners, Bristol's VCSE organisations are fully committed to making a difference, to improving lives and to creating a vibrant and truly inclusive city. A city that everyone can contribute to, where individuals and communities fulfil their potential and one that values care and compassion alongside the economy.

This is the spirit in which Voscur is launching, on behalf of the sector and the whole city, the VCSE Strategy, 'Into a New Era' and 'Bristol in Partnership' - a new set of principles outlining how the sector wishes to work together and with others. Both were compiled following extensive consultation with the sector, partners and stakeholders.

Important Note

The aim of the new VCSE Strategy and Bristol in Partnership is to mark a starting point from which the sector can grow and develop. The intention is to review and refresh both documents regularly to (re)capture the views of the sector, partners and stakeholders so that organisations are well informed, able to take advantage of new opportunities and well positioned and resourced to address emerging challenges.

Whilst we are pleased to have facilitated and enabled the creation of the VCSE Strategy and Bristol in Partnership, achieving the vision and objectives must be a shared endeavour; the responsibility is not Voscur's alone. The Bristol's VCSE sector, working with partners and stakeholders, needs to come together to take the steps necessary to secure a sustainable and bright future for all organisations, from the smallest to the largest.

Bristol: A City in Focus

Bristol is famously a very different city compared to others across the UK and has long been a city of choice for both individuals and companies. A city of great innovation and creativity, but also one where inequality still exists. Bristol's often unique approach to meeting challenges and harnessing opportunities has raised its profile and captured the attention of businesses, social investors and the arts and creative industries amongst others.

As a vital part of the city's infrastructure, the VCSE sector must be in a position to take advantage of new opportunities to ensure that all communities benefit from the city's social and economic growth. Opportunities such as the City Funds Initiative (www.bristolcityfunds.co.uk) aim to create positive and lasting change in Bristol through business, VCSE organisations, funders and the public sector coming together to share resources and raise finance to help address city priorities. The VCSE sector is already playing a role in the development of Bristol City Funds and is leading the Community Initiatives Funding Priority Group which seeks to raise new money to support the development of sustainable, thriving community businesses.

The growth and success of Community Anchor Organisations or CAO's in localities across Bristol has also brought focus to the sector. Delivering services that are informed by local people and bring investment and jobs to their communities, CAO's are key to unlocking the power of community and to enabling greater collaboration and partnership with smaller, local organisations. This aligns with Bristol City Council's intentional shift in its approach; encouraging and enabling community empowerment and sustainable development through collaboration with VCSE organisations.

This new approach is illustrated throughout Bristol's One City Plan (www.bristolonecity.com) which sets out a vision for Bristol in 2050 and the One City Approach which aims to promote systems change in order to achieve and deliver the Plan. Bristol's VCSE sector has an important role to play across

the six priority themes; Connectivity, Economy, Environment, Health and Wellbeing, Homes and Communities and Learning and Skills. Key to the sector's engagement with and contribution to the One City Plan will be a fresh approach to VCSE sector leadership. Collectively, we need to ensure the sector plays a full and active role across all priority themes.

The aims contained in the VCSE Strategy and principles outlined in Bristol in Partnership also present VCSE organisations with 'open door' opportunities to work closer with the local authority to deliver on shared objectives and commitments from BCC's Corporate Strategy 2018-23 (www.bristol.gov.uk) such as;

- prioritising community development and enabling people to support their community
- reducing social and economic isolation and helping connect people to people, people to jobs and people to opportunity.
- working with cultural partners to involve citizens in the 'Bristol' story, giving everyone in the city a stake in our long-term strategies and sense of connection.
- embedding health in all policies to improve physical and mental health and wellbeing, reducing inequalities and the demand for acute services.

There is a real sense that Bristol is a city working hard to ensure a bright future for all its citizens. A city where, by working collaboratively across all sectors, the hopes and potential of every individual and community can be realised. Bristol's VCSE sector has a long history of making a difference where it counts and will continue to play a leading role in helping to make Bristol a city of hope and aspiration, where everyone can share in its success.

Introduction

Voscur, the infrastructure support and development organisation for Bristol's Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector, consulted with the sector, its stakeholders and partners to create a vision and strategy for Bristol's VCSE sector. This VCSE Strategy articulates a range of views and aims to outline key strategic objectives for the sector. It also identifies opportunities and possible actions to secure sustainability, development and growth over the next 10 years.

As part of this work, Voscur has also undertaken a review of the existing Bristol Compact, which will now be known as Bristol in Partnership, and will describe how VCSE organisations want to act in relationships with others. Bristol in Partnership is fully outlined in a separate document but is aligned with the VCSE Strategy.

The importance, effectiveness and impact of the Bristol VCSE sector should not be under-estimated nor under-valued (See Appendix: Bristol VCSE's contribution to the local economy). It is clear from discussions with stakeholders that the city's ability to help fulfil the potential of all individuals and communities - particularly the most vulnerable and disadvantaged - relies on effective partnership with the VCSE sector. However, whilst holding onto the values and principles that make the sector unique, change is needed:

- The ability to compete and win in the face of increasing competition for funding, investment and resources.
- A change in attitude to partnership and collaboration and to be deeply embedded in Bristol and the West of England as effective strategic partners in the short and long term.

- To not only ensure survival but to set the foundations for thriving and sustainable organisations.

Discussions during the consultation showed the sector at a critical point in its history: a moment where the choices made today will define the sector's future ability to survive, grow and develop as an essential part of Bristol's social and economic future.

The Vision

“A strong and empowered sector in charge of its own future: well-resourced, sustainable and focused on the success of an aspirational city. A sector working collaboratively to support and enable individuals and communities to fulfil their full potential.”

The Vision is underpinned by six aims that link the Vision and strategic objectives together and encourages action to ensure Bristol's VCSE is:

1. A sector where independence, sustainable growth and development are 'business as usual'.
2. A diverse and commercially aware sector that is independent of local authority funding. A sector that actively attracts investment to the city, creating opportunities and leading solutions.
3. A sector where leadership is distributed, not just top-down, and infrastructure support is provided and received at community level.

4. A sector that is embedded in decision making at strategic and community levels across the city and region, and effectively engages with others.
5. A sector that is comfortable with competition and intentional about generating income, whilst holding onto the values and principles of civil society and social action.
6. A sector that continuously works to share knowledge and increase the skills and capacity that promote and embed sustainability, innovation, enterprise and collaboration.

Values & Principles

Proud - intentional about celebrating and sharing our history and achievements, built on people's passion, commitment and dedication.

Inclusive and Enabling - ensuring the principles of a fair and equal society underpin activity; continually striving to make all voices heard; helping people and communities to find their own solutions; fostering grassroots action.

Bold - willing to take risks and be confident and courageous in the pursuit of growth and sustainability.

Ambitious - for service users, each other, the sector and the city.

Delivery of the Strategy

This first version of the Vision and Strategy focuses on six strategic objectives, and their achievement. As a shared endeavour, the VCSE sector will work collaboratively with partners and stakeholders to create an action plan for each of the objectives.



Distributed Leadership

Effective collaborative leaders at all levels, citywide



Financial Independence – A More Commercial Approach

Acting socially, thinking commercially



Facilitating Access to Data and Information

Improving access for service improvement and to demonstrate value and impact



Independent Voice

Greater unity, shared goals and making all voices heard



Increased Collaboration, Partnership and Cohesion

Working together to attract investment and improve efficiency



Greater Resilience and Adaptability

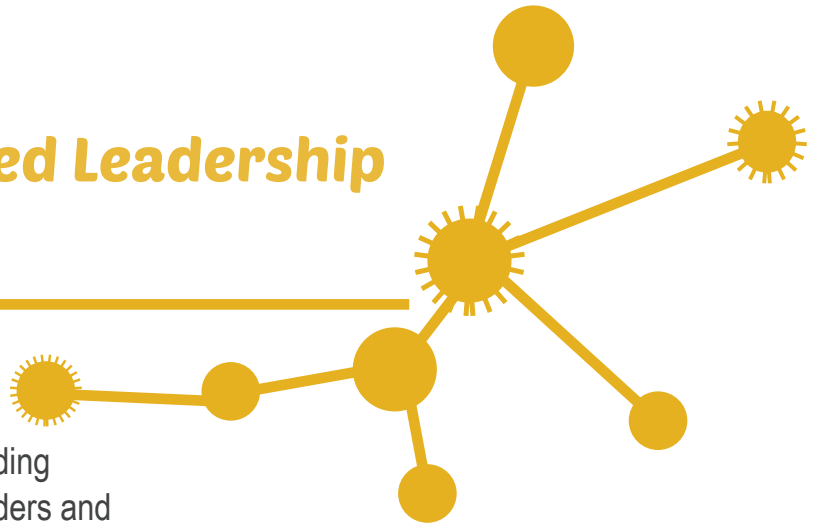
Adapting our response to new challenges or emerging needs

These connected and interdependent objectives reflect the need for Bristol's VCSE sector to take a more goal-driven view of its development.

The following sections will look at the six strategic objectives and describe the difference that achieving them could make to the city.



Distributed Leadership



Distributed leadership means spreading decision-making from traditional leaders and a top-down structure to smaller teams or individuals with a shared purpose.

Sharing responsibility, information, learning, skills and knowledge, encourages growth and sustainability in the VCSE sector and creates the best possible outcomes for individuals and communities. With distributed leadership, everyone has a voice and can create change, if supported to do so.

Strong leadership needs to apply within organisations at both operational and strategic levels in order to effect lasting change.

Sector leadership, i.e. leading 'beyond the organisation', is essential if the sector is to have a seat at strategic tables, helping to shape timely responses to local and citywide challenges.

Collaborative and flexible leadership will also play a key role; working with partners, VCSE organisations and service users to strengthen the voice of communities and expand the reach and impact of the VCSE sector across Bristol.

There are many opportunities to build on good practice and share successful ways of working and leading across the city.

**Making best use
of the knowledge
and expertise in
the sector through
strong, distributed
leadership**



How this could be achieved



Introduce a new model of distributed leadership to identify, recruit and support a coordinated network of community-based leaders.



Create a pipeline for the future through a new coordinated leadership programme that could offer internships, work experience, coaching and mentoring.

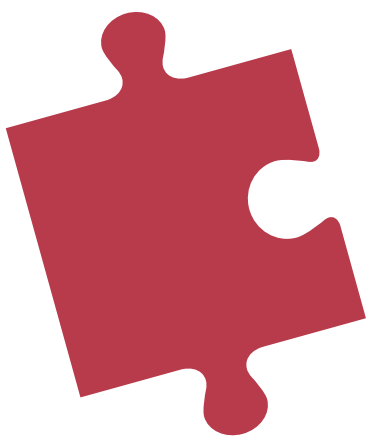


Create a new role of VCSE Strategic Navigator to work with the sector and strategic partners and identify opportunities to widen the sector's work. This role could give the sector a greater awareness of the strategic objectives of others, which will generate new and exciting opportunities.

The difference this could make

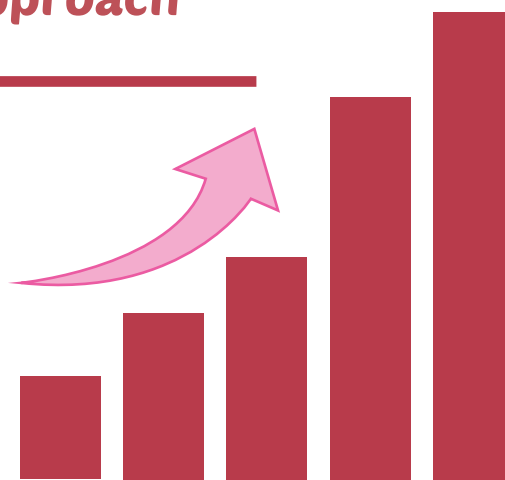


These actions could strengthen the voice and influence of Bristol's VCSE sector, which will in turn lead to a better integrated sector that is known, valued and understood for its contribution.



Financial Independence – A Commercial Approach

Whilst financial independence is universally accepted as a goal for the VCSE sector, how we get there is still debated. Some VCSE organisations already use a mixed income approach for financial independence, while a significant number of organisations rely on grant funding, posing a risk to the organisation and the overall stability of the sector.



Taking a more commercial approach to generating income, 'acting socially and thinking commercially', is a hotly-debated concept in the sector and faces some opposition. However, as social enterprises forge their own paths, unaffected by the ins and outs of public funding, their successes show how a change in mind-set can lead to great things.

Essentially, the sector must make a shift from asking to earning.

Although Bristol is fortunate and unusual in that the Council continues to invest in grants for the VCSE sector, ongoing budget reductions mean that this will not last forever. Organisations must develop financial resilience if the sector is to be effective and sustainable in the long-term. The choice is stark and ultimate: find new ways of funding core costs and service delivery or move to an exit strategy.

Key to this cultural change is increased skill and knowledge in generating income from, for example, trading goods and services, social investment and making effective use of organisational assets and resources.

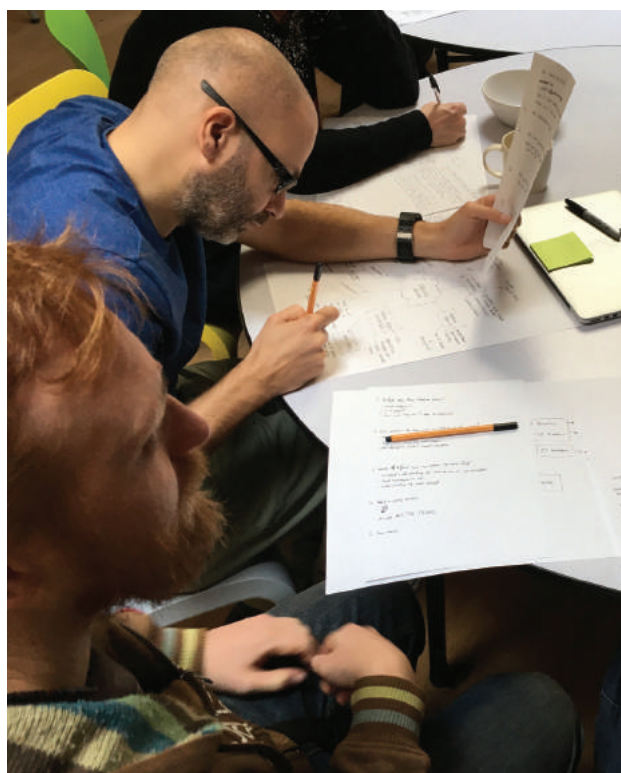


Photo credit: Adaricio CC BY 2.0

How this could be achieved



Rethink language and approach: think more about making a surplus, profit, service charges and recovering all costs. For some organisations, this will involve a significant change and will require support.



Promote, support and embed social investment as a standard approach.

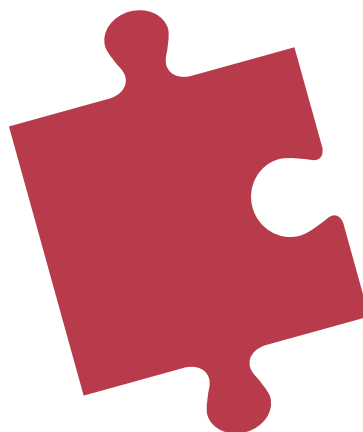


Think about how community assets, such as libraries, community centres and land owned by the local authority can be used for community benefit. Sustainable and viable business proposals are needed to attract social investment and generate unrestricted income through trading or the provision of paid-for services.

The difference this could make



By working together to embed a different approach to finance and income, the sector will reduce reliance on local authority or public funding and increase independence, sustainability and growth.



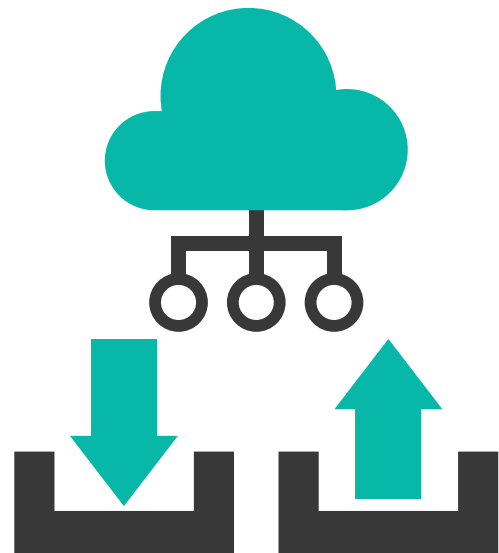


Improved Access to Data and Information

The Bristol VCSE sector is rich in data and information. Many organisations hold quantitative and qualitative information relating to contracts, prospects, services and service users. Increasingly, VCSE organisations recognise the need to collect and interpret data and information to improve businesses and services and also provide evidence of outcomes and impact.

Whilst diversity, creativity and adaptability are proudly held VCSE attributes, some strategic partners see complexity, a lack of cohesion and inconsistency in the sector. Misinterpretation of the VCSE sector and a lack of a shared understanding are age-old problems.

It is crucial that the VCSE sector finds ways to overcome these barriers by translating impact and outcomes in ways that clearly demonstrate value and attracts potential partners and investment. The challenge is to find innovative and viable ways to gather, interpret, use and share VCSE data and information intelligently.



“It is crucial that the VCSE sector finds ways to translate its impact and outcomes in a way that attracts potential partners and social investment.”



Photo credit: Franki Chamaki via Unsplash

How this could be achieved



Create a citywide VCSE Data and Information Service that provides access to research and data.



Renew, refresh and widen the annual Future of the Sector survey through the West of England Civil Society Partnership*, to improve local and regional intelligence about the sector.



Work with the city's universities who are increasingly involving VCSE groups in their research, helping them develop the skills to use public evidence and data to increase their impact and achieve the One City Plan's long-term goals.

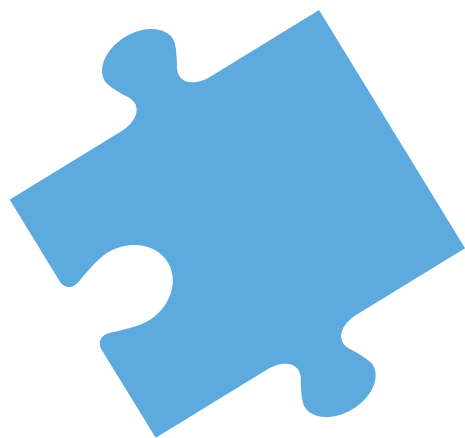
The difference this could make



The VCSE sector will be able to clearly demonstrate social and economic value and impact. Ensuring work and services are underpinned by good data will make it easier for partners to understand how and where organisations can add value and help them meet their own objectives.

*** = West of England
Civil Society Partnership:
goo.gl/VMxrSE**





Independent Voice



It is vital that the voice of the sector is strong and independent.

The principles set out in Bristol in Partnership (formerly the Bristol Compact) are key to supporting this. Away from contractual and business arrangements, the sector also needs to become more unified, sharing solutions to resolve community and sector challenges.

Whilst there is strong support for the VCSE sector to remain diverse, there is a growing need for the sector to come together, particularly at strategic levels. The growing gap between small and large VCSE organisations and increased competition risks fragmentation in the sector, which could have a negative impact on service users.

Enabling a robust and independent voice through new approaches to leadership, influencing and representation will ensure all individuals and communities have their views and needs heard. It will also fully recognise and support the contribution of smaller organisations who are often unable to contribute staff or time.



Photo credit: UN Women Gallery CC BY NC ND 2.0

“There needs to be a shift in the balance of power back down to the grassroots, so that all voices are heard.”

How this could be achieved



Review the role of VCSE advocates and shift to a model of distributed leadership which can help sector leaders* to:

- Share knowledge and experience with each other
- Ensure the sector has a seat at the tables that matter
- Agree and disseminate messages across the sector and to others.



Establish a mentoring system where organisations of all sizes can exchange knowledge, skills and information.



Identify and create processes to ensure that the sector's voice at community level is systematically fed into decisions that affect those communities.



Facilitate collaboration with and between neighbourhoods, community representatives, and officers from public service organisations, community businesses and local institutions.

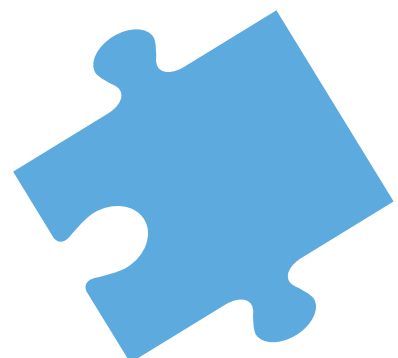
The difference this could make



VCSE organisations become recognised as vital to ensure the voices of local communities are heard at planning, delivery and implementation stages. With new approaches to leadership and representation, there must be space for smaller grassroots organisations to contribute views and ideas.

*** = Sector Leaders:**

<https://www.voscur.org/services/influence/advocacy>






Increased Collaboration, Partnership and Cohesion

Another strong theme emerging from consultation is the need for effective, honest collaboration within the VCSE sector. Standard guidance and principles are called for if organisations are to build trust, work together effectively and actively share information, data, good practice and skills.

Good collaboration and partnership work can improve links between organisations, support the sustainability of smaller organisations and inform the approach and practice of larger organisations, particularly in lead partner/prime bidder collaborations.

Bristol in Partnership (formerly the Bristol Compact) is key to developing partnerships that work effectively, attract additional funding and deliver high quality services. Bristol in Partnership includes guidance on good practice, and Voscur and its partners will continue to support organisations to develop and establish partnerships and collaborations.



“We need standard guidance and principles if we are to actively develop and share information, good practice and skills.”



Photo credit: BCPSOC CC BY-NC-ND

How this could be achieved



Establish a network of 'Collaboration Champions' – experienced people from the sector who will mentor others to share learning, practices and insights.



Ensure that smaller and equalities led organisations, who experience barriers to collaboration, are actively supported to develop partnerships with others.



Support the development of geographically clustered service delivery and locality based partnerships and/or federations.



Work to eliminate 'bid candy' (i.e. where smaller organisations are exploited by larger concerns who use their knowledge and information without giving them credit or financial benefit).



Develop a 'Bristol Approach' to effective collaboration and partnership; creating guidance and an expectation that organisations new to service delivery in Bristol add value to local communities through their work.

The difference this could make



Increased collaboration and partnership is key to future sustainability and growth in the sector. This will also promote greater cohesion, helping organisations to work effectively with each other and with strategic partners.





Greater resilience and adaptability

The Bristol VCSE sector is helping to deliver The Mayor's One City Plan and Approach* and plays a vital role in strengthening communities and improving citizens' health and wellbeing.

However, the sector as a whole and individual organisations now operate in an increasingly challenging social and economic environment. Reliance on grant funding to support service delivery is now a greater risk than ever to the micro and small organisations that make up the majority of Bristol's VCSE sector. Resilience is essential if organisations are able to withstand the shocks and changes within our city and communities.

This is about more than survival – VCSE organisations need to be able to react and adapt whilst remaining strong and, wherever possible, increasing their sustainability.

To achieve this, the VCSE sector must find solutions to current and future uncertainty. Building stronger, more resilient and adaptable organisations with distributed leadership will help ensure VCSE organisations can continue making a positive impact on people and the city.



Building resilience is about helping organisations develop stronger governance, achieve lasting social impact, diversify funding and create robust processes to ensure their survival.

*** = The One City Approach:**
<https://www.bristolonecity.com>



Photo credit: Elijah O'Donnell via Unsplash

How this could be achieved



Work with VCSE Sector Leaders to explore opportunities, improve risk management and share new ways of working.



Encourage leaders and organisations to reflect on their own work, its impact and contribution to citywide challenges.



Share learning from other sectors around enterprise and entrepreneurship.

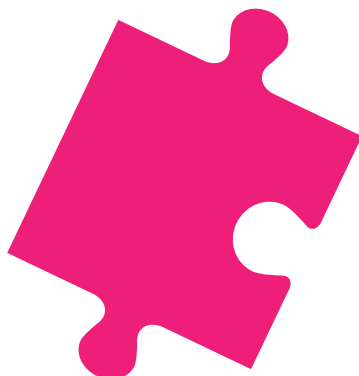


Encourage a more distributed approach to leadership in organisations by creating a culture where people are trusted to take the lead on key areas, based on their knowledge and expertise rather than their job title.

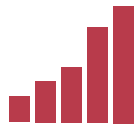
The difference this could make



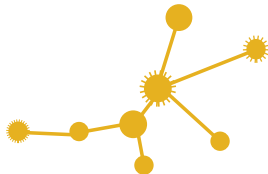
Taking action to build resilience and adaptability within organisations will support planning and development in the sector, and help organisations better understand and mitigate short, medium and long-term risks. It will also reduce 'crisis' management and the loss of services.



Appendix: Bristol VCSE's contribution to the local economy



1. Income of Bristol's charities:
£436m per year (excluding private schools)
£457m per year (including housing associations)



2. Number of registered charities: 1,493
3. Number of social enterprises: 316
(Community Interest Companies)



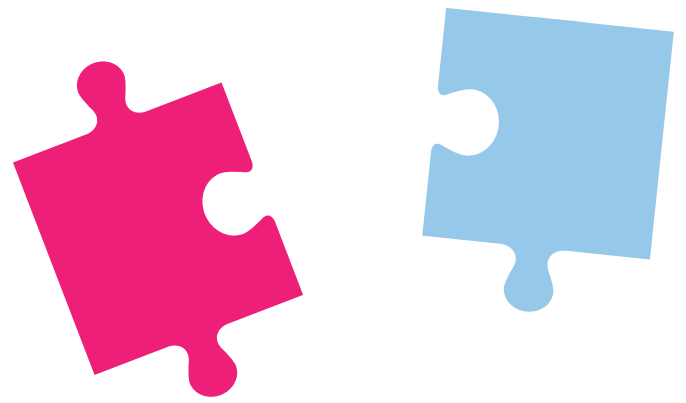
4. Number of employed staff: 5,868 full-time equivalents
5. Number of volunteers:
100,953 adults volunteer at least once a month
160,777 adults volunteer at least once a year



6. Value of volunteers: £137 million per year
7. Economic value (GVA): £292m per year

Sources of information:

- Charity Commission (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission>)
- Charity Base (<https://charitybase.uk>)
- NCVO/TSRC Workforce Almanac (<http://www.3rdsectorworkforce.org.uk/how-many-people-work-in-the-voluntary-sector>)
- Bristol City Council: Population of Bristol 2018 (<https://www.bristol.gov.uk/documents/20182/33904/Population+of+Bristol+December+2018.pdf/e65be8b1-93a7-153d-da6d-62fbef265a04>)
- NCVO/TSRC Workforce Almanac: How Many People Volunteer in the UK (<http://www.3rdsectorworkforce.org.uk/how-many-people-volunteer-in-the-uk>)
- NCVO Almanac 2018 (<https://data.ncvo.org.uk/a/almanac18/volunteer-profiles-2015-16-2>)
- Timebank (<http://timebank.org.uk/key-facts>)
- Living Wage Foundation (<https://www.livingwage.org.uk>)



Launching the Strategy

We look forward to officially launching the VCSE Strategy and Bristol in Partnership in early 2019.

Strategy Review

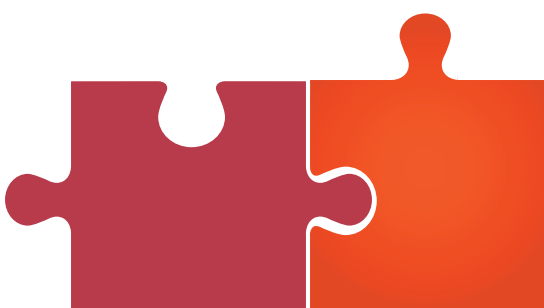
The VCSE Strategy will be reviewed and refreshed periodically to make it as relevant and up to date as possible.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the many sector individuals and organisations - micro, small and large - whose insight feedback and comments fed into this strategy and ensured it truly represents the aims of Bristol's VCSE sector.

We also wish to thank VCSE sector partners and stakeholders from the public and private sectors for their insight and contributions.

Finally, our thanks to Mayor Marvin Rees, Deputy Mayor Asher Craig, and Bristol City Council's Neighbourhoods and Communities Team for their ongoing support, both to Voscur and the wider VCSE sector.



Join the conversation:

#BristolVCSE

We welcome your feedback via:



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Registered charity number 1148403.