



## **Internet Safety Strategy Green Paper**

### **Voscur's response on behalf of Bristol's voluntary, community and social enterprise sector**

#### **About Voscur**

Voscur supports, develops and represents Bristol's Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector. We empower organisations to increase the impact they create for their service-users. We work with the investors that commission and fund the work of the VCSE sector to ensure they make informed decisions and design effective services. We also build relationships between providers and investors to help them work together to coordinate services and maximise the social value they collectively create. The organisations we work with tackle inequalities and unfairness amongst the most vulnerable communities in the city.

#### **About Bristol's voluntary, community and social enterprise sector**

Bristol's VCSE sector carries a wealth of experience and has a knack for resilience. In addition to being a major employer, harnessing voluntary action, and bringing substantial resources into the city, VCSE organisations contribute to building social capital and helping the people they work with to manage in these difficult times.

The VCSE sector plays an important role in identifying and responding to emerging needs. Its unique relationships of trust with hard to reach communities across the city – including children, young people and families – means it is well placed to help those most at risk of being negatively impacted by technological advances.

#### **Background and principles behind this submission**

As part of its work, Voscur coordinates a network of VCSE organisations that work with children, young people and families in Bristol. Voscur's 'Children and Young People's Network' meets regularly to positively influence services for young people through sharing skills, experience and best practice. Voscur's strategic representation amplifies the voice of the network in key discussions and decision-making.

In response to the Internet Safety Consultation, Voscur asked the Children and Young People's Network about their experiences of working with vulnerable service-users that may be at higher risk online; the ways in which they are kept safe; and the training needs of frontline staff around internet safety.

#### **The respondents**

We received responses from across the city. Geographically, much of the respondents' work is specifically focused in localities that score highly on the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (2015). The organisations that responded work with people of all ages and people with protected characteristics. Whilst the sample size

was relatively small, we believe it could still be considered representative of the broad and diverse work that is carried out by Bristol's VCSE sector.

## Consultation responses and recommendations

### 1. Online training and education for service-users

Most VCSE organisations are not funded to provide training to their service-users around online safety or support service users that have been victims or perpetrators of online bullying, harassment or abuse.

Whilst it seems that many VCSE organisations feel confident that they know where to refer victims of online harm, Voscur believes that if more organisations had the capacity to provide support or advice in-house, it would reduce the need for service-users to be passed onto other agencies that they may not traditionally feel comfortable engaging with. In other words, if advice and support could be provided by a trusted VCSE organisation, we believe there would be a higher chance of preventing harm.

Some VCSE organisations do educate their service users around online safety and/or appropriate use of social media and/or support service-users that have been affected by or are perpetrators of cyber bullying, hate crime, extremism, underage sexting, revenge porn, or exposure to inappropriate content. See Appendix 1 for details of the kind of activities.

#### **Recommendation 1: use a social media levy to fund VCSE organisations to provide online safety training**

We know that there are already specialist VCSE organisations in Bristol that provide emotional and practical support to victims of online abuse, including *Victim Support* and *Stand Against Racism and Inequality* (SARI). Organisations such as *Unique Voice* (see Appendix 2), educate children in schools to help prevent online abuse. Voscur believes there is a strong case for bolstering this kind of work with additional funding and training so that greater numbers of vulnerable service users can be protected from online harm.

Voscur is calling not only for a social media levy to be instated, but for a firm commitment from the government to ensure that a fair portion of this money funds VCSE organisations to provide training and support around online safety. As previously stated, the unique relationships of trust that VCSE organisations are able to build with some of the most vulnerable and hard-to-reach people means that those most at risk from online harm could be empowered to keep themselves and others safe online through their engagement with the VCSE sector.

It is vital that any funding opportunities for this kind of work are transparent, fair and proportionate so that smaller VCSE organisations are able to bid.

## **2. Online training and education for VCSE staff**

Whilst some of Bristol's VCSE organisations do support service-users affected by online harm and/or provide some kind of preventative training, Voscur is aware of a need for workforce development in this area.

### **Recommendation 2: use a social media levy to build capacity in frontline VCSE staff around protecting service-users around online safety**

Voscur is calling for funds from the proposed social media levy to boost capacity in organisations whose frontline staff do not have adequate training around online safety. This will considerably enhance VCSE organisations' overall offer to service-users, enabling them to provide a more holistic service. As an infrastructure organisation that offers affordable training to VCSE organisations, Voscur is well placed to deliver this kind of capacity building in Bristol. Suggestions for the kinds of support or training required include: Training and discussion to raise awareness of issues; guidance and resources to respond to clients' needs; online courses; access to training resources via a local provider; Digital Parenting; and a Development Officer to help work more effectively with the relevant agencies.

## **3. Protective measures for IT equipment and online platforms**

Voscur works with VCSE organisations to ensure they have good governance in place – this includes the correct policies and procedures for keeping staff and service-users safe. Most organisations supervise their service-users on IT equipment and enable parental controls on their browsers. Whilst the majority of respondents felt that reporting and blocking functions and privacy settings are currently effective ways of dealing with online abuse, most believe it is the responsibility of online platforms to remove or reduce inappropriate behaviour or content. Many VCSE organisations feel that educating Internet users is the best way to keep people safe online.

### **Recommendation 3: clear guidelines for staff and a universal, shared responsibility for protecting people from online harm**

Most VCSE organisations have limited capacity and resources. Voscur would like to see universally available, clear and accessible guidance to help VCSE staff understand policy changes and confidently take steps to guarantee maximum safety for colleagues and service users.

Regarding devices that allow Internet access (including games consoles), we would welcome the highest safety blocking settings being enabled as standard, putting the onus on an adult user to disable them, if appropriate.

Voscur believes that greater responsibility must be taken by online platforms to monitor, remove and publicly report statistics around offensive or abusive content and behaviour. As technology continues to evolve rapidly, we feel it is realistic to expect large companies such as Facebook, Snapchat and Twitter to invest in the technology to make such actions possible. Large online platforms must also invest in jobs so that more nuanced cases of online harm can be moderated by properly trained individuals. We recommend consulting equalities and human rights groups to inform policy around what constitutes abusive or harmful content.

## Conclusion

On behalf of Bristol's VCSE sector, Voscur welcomes the government's move to make the Internet safer for all who use it in the UK. We know many VCSE organisations' service-users are at risk of online harm due to their vulnerable or isolated status.

We proudly celebrate the thriving VCSE organisations that are already providing quality support, education and training to help service users protect themselves online. With the help of funding from a social media levy these organisations could roll out such programmes more widely, and help replicate good practice in other areas. We are calling for a social media levy to also fund capacity building in organisations that do not currently hold expertise in Internet safety. It is vital that we make the most of the access VCSE organisations have to hard-to-reach people as well as empowering frontline staff to 'make every contact count' when it comes to Internet safety.

Voscur understands and embraces the role that the VCSE sector has to play in preventing and responding to online harm. We also understand that this work takes place within a broader context, including regulation of the internet by large technology companies and other agencies. We trust that these other sectors are contributing expertise and ideas about how online harm can be prevented. To bring about real change, we will all need to broaden our horizons in terms of the sectors and agencies we engage with. On behalf of Bristol's VCSE sector, Voscur hopes that all interested parties will work together to find a holistic solution to online harm.

