

Voscur's offer – Corporate Strategy and Budget Consultation 2018-2023

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.

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 seven 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.

In the previous consultation about the 5-year Corporate Strategy, we made several offers – to work with the council and the VCSE to help manage changes so that impact on people and communities is minimised. We make these offers again in the following areas of work, in which we believe the VCSE sector has most interest and enthusiasm to be involved.

1) VCSE sector and Voscur offer to manage community spaces and assets

Relating to the proposals for parks, open spaces and other assets (buildings), we know that 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 can be reluctant to take on additional risk of property liabilities – this needs to be addressed. Voscur is ready to work with Locality in the development of the Community Asset Transfer Strategy for Bristol, to be involved in the overall review and reconfiguration of Community Asset Transfer, and to articulate the VCSE sector's offer to do things differently.

Recommendation 1:

- a) Establish a collaborative approach to reviewing existing practice and barriers and developing an enabling approach to the community management of assets.
- b) Undertake a comprehensive review of the Community Asset Transfer process to describe a strategic approach and make processes proportionate, accessible and attractive to smaller community organisations.
- c) Consider the transfer of assets to collaborations of local community organisations that may then share the responsibility, risks and opportunities of managing such assets. Such collaborative approaches could serve to make asset transfers more attractive to community organisations and sustainable.
- d) 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.

2) Local services provided differently

While it is not explicitly stated in the consultation, Voscur believes that the VCSE sector and communities will have a large part to play in the continuation of services in local areas. It is likely that the city will become increasingly dependent on social action and the VCSE 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 is needed. Voscur believes that social action and volunteering are important solutions that can be secured through effective partnership and collaboration.

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.
- Lead and facilitate collaborations 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's work on the VCSE Strategy and other discussions indicates some potential priorities, including:



- 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 2: Voscur welcomes the invitation to participate in discussions to develop new ways of working. We believe 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, we offer to work with Bristol City Council in partnership with the VCSE sector to plan the transition of services and ensure that such services are well-governed, managed and delivered to the highest standards.

3) Co-location

Bristol VCSE organisations believe that the co-location of services and mixed uses of council buildings could be developed further. Although this is not explicitly included in the current consultation, we believe that co-location could reduce costs and therefore be beneficial to community organisations, small businesses and public services. 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 overheads) 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 worked in partnership with council libraries to develop social action opportunities, including volunteering, active citizenship and community hubs.

Recommendation 3: 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.

4) Our local collaboration offer in communities

Voscur recognises the importance of community development and welcomes the recent collaborative approaches across the city. We recognise the important role of community development and its close links to complementary organisational development services offered by Voscur.

In South Bristol, for example, we have developed a programme of activity, including

- tackling the rise in hate crime in Hartcliffe, working with in partnership with SARI and Hartcliffe and Withywood Community Partnership), and involving council teams (community development and public health teams), local organisations and residents.
- brokering some changes to funding and facilitating local organisations to develop their pitches and proposals.



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- supporting Hartcliffe and Withywood Community Partnership to develop the Hartcliffe Expression of Interest to the Big Lottery's Place-Based Social Action programme.

Recommendation 4: Voscur will continue to support such activities and work with Bristol City Council and partners to further develop and replicate models that bring additional resources to the city and make a difference in priority communities.

Although there are clearly no easy answers, Voscur is clear in its intention to work in partnership with Bristol City Council to minimise the impact of cuts across the VCSE and within communities. The Bristol VCSE sector will continue to offer innovative solutions to the challenges we face as a city, however, involvement of the sector in early stage planning and discussion will help to ensure wider participation and engagement with the sector as we work, in partnership, to meet the many challenges ahead.

It is our hope the information and recommendations above act as a catalyst for further discussions and action to ensure that the VCSE sector is able to play a full and meaningful role in shaping the future of our city and its citizens.

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