

CVF Coming Together Plan

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Introduction

This plan has been developed by Wirral's CVF sector, mainly through the Communities of Practice Group, Sector Leadership Network (formally Chief Officers Group), and Humanitarian, BAME and Faith cells. It is a high level plan that requires more coproduction work along with system partners to further refine; however the pillars and themes identified are based on the opportunities we see and want to shape for Wirral as well as the challenges we believe we face as a sector and Borough.

One of the many strengths of the CVF sector is its agility and therefore we recognise that this plan may adapt over time in harmony with how relationships and communities change; we are willing to review, learn and improve on our journey.

Infrastructure

What do we mean by infrastructure?

The role of local infrastructure organisations takes many shapes and forms, but they generally exist to serve a common purpose - to ensure that voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise organisations get the advice, support and representation they need to improve the circumstances of the people and communities they work with. They generally do this in a number of ways:

- they **identify and fill the gaps in existing provision** by monitoring the services provided by the third sector in its local area and **working with new and existing groups around health creation and address unmet needs** in their communities.
- they raise standards by providing access to **information, advice and support to local groups and organisations** in order that they have the knowledge, skills and resources they need **to support the local community**.
- they **enable communication and collaboration** by encouraging local groups and organisations to **share resources** and to work collaboratively and establish forums for networking where they can **share good practice and form partnerships** through which new activity can be developed.
- they provide a mechanism through which the **diverse views of local groups and organisations can be represented** to local public sector bodies. They also enable two-way communication so that the local sector is involved and can contribute to policy developments and decision-making.

- they **promote strategic involvement** in local policy making and planning, **ensuring that the sector is represented and involved in local decision-making bodies**, and actively work with representatives to ensure they keep on top of key local issues.

Local Architecture of the CVF Sector

Wirral has a number of forums and networks that have been pivotal to the development of this plan and the new coordinating body. These groups and forums serve a purpose in the architecture of infrastructure.

Mobilisation

Integral to a new way of working, is the requirement for an independent, trusted CVF led organisation to provide support, connect, facilitate and to enable the voice of the CVF sector in Wirral to be heard within Liverpool City Region and Cheshire & Merseyside. This new body would act as a flexible coordinating organisation as well as a vehicle for funds to flow through to create pace and agility for local organisations and communities to do more of what they do best.

The CVF sector have already united around this need and the new organisation Wirral CVS has been created.

Wirral CVS would also play an independent critical role in championing the values and benefits of a thriving collaborative CVF sector as an equal partner within the borough. These shared values include:

- a belief in collective action
- social justice and making a positive difference to people's lives
- taking a holistic approach to people's needs
- empowering people and making voices heard
- building social capital and reinvesting financial surpluses for community need
- putting communities first
- promoting health creation and tackling inequalities
- being open, honest, trustworthy and transparent in everything we do
- operating ethically and with the highest standards of integrity.

Threats to these shared values also jeopardise the independence of voluntary organisations and the sector as a whole. These include:

- the 'top-down' nature of the relationship between government and the voluntary sector
- funders preventing legitimate campaigning, lobbying and advocacy either directly or implicitly
- funders influencing the activity and direction of voluntary organisations
- voluntary organisations relying too heavily on one source of funding or contract
- perceived pressures to become more like a business, rather than more business-like.

Individual voluntary organisations, and the sector as a whole, must hold onto their values and continue to operate independently of state. This independence and these values give users and donors confidence in services and advocacy. They enable us to challenge government and speak up for individuals and communities who might not otherwise be heard. In short, the sector's independence and values are vital for democracy (NCVO, 2020).

Wirral CVS would be responsible for facilitation and delivery of the coproduced CVF and communities plan and would be required to provide support in line with the NAVCA performance standards of a local infrastructure organisation:

Development: Working with the local community to create and develop ways to meet the needs and aspirations of people in their area.

Liaison: Bringing people together from all kinds of voluntary and community groups, to make connections, share what they do and support each other.

Support: Encouraging local voluntary organisations and community groups with tools, information, and practical expertise, so they can be the best they can be.

Representation: Making the case for, and speaking as the trusted voice of, the local voluntary community with local councils, NHS, government and others.

Working in partnership: Connecting with local initiatives and partners, and working together on local projects, to share knowledge and resources or the benefit of the local community, voluntary organisations and community groups.

This organisation would be accountable to the CVF sector through its board of Trustees for the organisation, appointed from the membership, who set the strategy and direction. This new organisation would be a key strategic partner within the Borough, supporting with policy changes and translation into local action. It will actively look for and share best practice in Wirral and beyond.

The sector are united in wanting a local infrastructure organisation to ensure connectivity, facilitate collaboration to innovate and secure investment in Wirral; be that attracting new funds or getting the most out of funds already within the borough through the social value agenda.

The new organisation would:

- Work with partners to embed ABCD in the ways in which it designs and delivers
- Be as lean and efficient as possible, using digital technology where possible but not exclusively
- Use data and insight to drive innovation
- Be inclusive
- Champion the CVF Sector in Wirral locally, regionally and nationally
- Build trust in its character and competence
- Be CVF Sector designed, developed and led

CVF and Communities Plan

This plan delivers on four key pillars and four cross cutting themes that will improve CVS and community development:

Four Key Pillars

1. Influence and voice
2. Co-create and working together
3. Health Creation
4. Volunteering

Cross-cutting themes

1. Developing the right culture and conditions for collaboration
2. Improving focus on data and insight
3. Continual learning
4. Knowing our strengths and building capability

Influence and Voice

Wirral's CVF sector is diverse and vibrant; there are many organisations and citizen associations that work with local people and in neighbourhoods attributing to economic, environmental and social sustainability. However they cannot do this alone, they work with communities and with statutory organisations to gather and share insight as well as providing effective and efficient services. This valuable insight helps design local policy that works with communities not against so we must enable and support ways that this can happen and these voices to be heard.

Key areas for development	Why is this important?	How do we make this happen?	How can our partners support?
<p>Creation and facilitation of the coproduced representative mechanism, ensuring the CVF sector have involvement at all levels in planning and policy across the system and wider partners.</p>	<p>It would be impossible to have the entire CVF sector involved in every discussion due to volume of organisations and capacity required. Therefore a mechanism is required to share these roles so the sector has a voice and conduit but without being overburdened. The sector needs to be confident that the mechanism works and communication flows freely to further develop trust and collaboration.</p> <p>The mechanism must be effective but without too much bureaucracy which could exclude smaller organisations. It must be a supportive mechanism to engage and involve organisations of all sizes.</p> <p>Organisations must use their beneficiary groups and networks to ensure citizen voice and reach,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree and communicate new mechanism • Recruitment and ongoing support of representatives. Organisations must support each other smaller/larger • Develop robust and effective two-way communication channels • Regular review involving all and a commitment to quality improvement • A Co-ordinator role to support with coproduction, implementation, ongoing co-ordination and review/improvement • Be mindful of digital 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the CVF to coproduce the mechanism and fully engage with it. • Be clear when it's an organisational representative or a CVF representative required and if the latter go via the mechanism so we can offer these roles to many rather than the few, this develops CVF leadership skills • Consider funding to enable representatives from all size groups to participate. Often only larger groups are able to find ways to spare some time away from their organisation to attend meetings/events.

	<p>adding value and depth through lived experience to the role of representative.</p> <p>We also recognise that not all organisations will want to or have the capacity to represent but we must still ensure that they are connected and well informed of everything that is going on.</p>	<p>exclusion and ensure inclusive ways of working</p>	
<p>Creation of communities of interest, be that a neighbourhood or a thematic group to aid collaboration and gather wider community insight around specific topics.</p>	<p>Gaining a better understanding of who is doing what locally facilitates increased collaboration and better use of skills and resources. Additionally such networks provide peer support, sharing of good practice and relationship building.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These communities of interest would provide additional CVF and community infrastructure in addition to the communities of practice groups (both ABCD champions and CVF senior leaders). • These communities of interest would grow over time and find the best way for them to connect such as email groups or virtual or face to face meetings. The format would be self-determined but support would be provided by the new organisation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support to link people from across the system into these communities of interest groups. • Involvement and recognition in the role they can support with for engagement activities. • The opportunity to collaborate with partners on key initiatives and considerations to investment required within these networks.

Co-creation and Working Together

Co-design is an attempt to define a problem and then define a solution; co-production is the attempt to implement the proposed solution; co-creation is the process by which people do both.

By adopting a co-creation approach to how we work together we can help ensure that resources are used to develop the services that people really want. CVF organisations are able to reach into communities and support people with lived experience to participate in such activities. The CVF sector also play a key role in implementation and through co-production we can use our strengths as a collective and share the risks and successes.

*‘Co-production is simultaneously **an activity, an approach and an ethos** which involves members of professionals and the public working together, sharing control and responsibility across the entirety of a project’*

We also need to develop ways in which the CVF can work together and with external partners; as we know we can achieve more if we work together. We need to work together to define how coproduction would work in practice.

Key areas for development	Why is this important?	How do we make this happen?	How can our partners support?
Develop innovative ways to help colleagues across the system understand the CVF sector , for example create an online induction module for all public sector staff and Cllrs explaining what the CVF sector is and does; what co-production is and why it’s important; introduce volunteering and representation	The CVF sector is fluid as it shifts and moves with communities, this can be difficult to keep up with and understand. Plus partner organisations have a regular turnover of employees, elected members and/or other members/non-executive directors so it’s important that we provide this introduction to the CVF sector regularly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an online module for all Cllr, staff and volunteers to learn about the voluntary sector and vice versa • Make opportunities for partners to have volunteering days with CVF organisations mandatory as part of their 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandatory inclusion within induction training and at all levels within the organisation. • Support for volunteering • Feedback/work with us – what would help you understand the CVF sector?

		development	
<p>Work with commissioners to develop coproduced commissioning which builds on trust, collaboration, openness and transparency rather than traditional methods that are competitive and divisive.</p> <p>Offer grant funding where appropriate.</p> <p>Equally value our sector by providing cost of living rises for contracts in line with statutory rises.</p> <p>Support sustainability and ability to attract additional investment through longer term contract and funding arrangements.</p>	<p>Current commissioning and procurement processes are divisive and have a detrimental effect on our desire to build relationships across the CVF. We have to modernise approaches; we too are very experienced around accountability in relation to public funds and we have to start from a position of trust and build on what's good and works.</p> <p>The CVF sector should be able to influence commissioning decisions by showcasing good practice and raising awareness of existing organisations as well as identifying gaps.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to collaborative bids and provide our skills and strengths • Be open to efficiencies and sharing resources differently • Shift away from a 'look after yourself approach to commissioning' • Build smaller organisations into the supply chains of larger 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A commitment to finding ways to commission and procure differently in a way that is more sensitive to the CVF sector and that complements efforts to build relationships • Working/commissioning/providing grants in a more joined up way and being more fluid will focus effort on what's important and release efficiencies for both organisations and grant/contract managers.
<p>Develop a strategic funding group, uniting system partners in identifying opportunities for investment and putting Wirral on the map using our local assets and skills. This group will lead on bids and applications for Wirral as a collective.</p>	<p>Let's be ambitious for Wirral and build on our skills, strengths and creativity as a whole system to maximise funds into Wirral. A more joined up approach would place us in a much stronger position but at present this lack coordination and happens more</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide leadership around this agenda • Build on the strengths within the borough • Proactively work on equity and wider distribution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate and channel opportunities through this group • Provide tools, data/information and skills to help develop bids and plans

	by chance than design.		
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Health Creation

Through enabling collaboration, reducing duplication of effort, maximising skills and value and sharing best practice we can achieve health creation and tackle health inequalities. Language is important therefore we would rather adopt the term health creation than tackling health inequalities.

Key areas for development	Why is this important?	How do we make this happen?	How can our partners support?
Using systems to dynamically map new organisations and services to understand health creation and share this with connectors and other signposting organisations.	There is a significant amount of activity within the borough looking at health inequalities but we haven't collated this into one place. Until we know what we have, how can we know where the gaps are or what we can build on? Info-bank would act as the starting point for this exercise.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A specific piece of work would be required using connectors, networks and CVF organisations to contribute to our health creation map for Wirral ensuring it covers the wider determinants of health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share these messages • Support with skills to enable this piece of work
Have a CVF catalogue of organisations who wish to collaborate and their area of interest/specialist.	Services and initiatives change frequently and it's difficult to keep track. Infobank provides a useful resource to members of the public but it doesn't contain the relevant information that would support CVF collaborations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage and continually develop the catalogue based on CVF feedback • Link with the new Family Toolbox Website • Use this resource to identify partners and collaborators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity a CVF lead/champion in each organisation/department (depending upon size) who can act as a link to enable collaboration across sectors

<p>Ask our system to adopt the same health creation priorities as their social value framework when commissioning – will give extra support as part of existing expenditure/commitments</p>	<p>Social Value is now very much on the agenda and is a good way to make the most of procurement activities through asking bidders to help us with certain areas around environmental, economic or environmental impact.</p> <p>If system partners adopt the same social value framework we can create bigger impact in fewer areas. If we target areas for health creation then this extra activity also moves us in the right direction.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and facilitate conversations to develop a shared social value framework • Support CVF organisations to help measure social value 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt a system wide social value framework and consistent approach to monitoring • Work with the CVF to explore how partners can also deliver social value such as volunteering schemes, salary sacrifice
<p>More and longer term investment is needed in prevention if we are ever to stop ‘fire fighting’</p> <p>Agree some consistent prevention messages that the CVF can adopt. Together we can have greatest impact.</p>	<p>Let’s start to think longer term and be braver in how we approach prevention.</p> <p>We have had strong messages in the past for example 5 ways to Wellbeing which many organisations continue to use. If we are included within system communication strategies then we can play our part in getting these messages to all parts of our community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A dedicated role to support communication within the CVF sector but also to support CVF organisations to share agreed messages across their communities and networks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The opportunity to be involved in communications planning around health and wellbeing and community activities. • Clear messaging and support to adopt these • Plain language and accessible to all

Volunteering

A central organisation to support volunteering is needed for Wirral to support individuals looking to volunteer and organisation to involve volunteers. Encouraging volunteering within Wirral will improve people’s health and wellbeing, will enable more social action and increase community spirit and feelings of purpose and belonging.

Locally rooted community organisations play a unique role in tackling local unemployment. They are direct providers of jobs and volunteering opportunities in areas facing some of the greatest challenges; they provide tailored and sensitive employment support for their community; and they take a strategic role in supporting local economic development (Locality, communities work report). This is of particular importance in post-covid jobs recovery as neighbourhoods with existing employment problems are more than twice as likely to be at high risk of covid related job losses.

Volunteers are a huge asset to Wirral and they take on varying roles across the CVF sector, some informal that don’t require training, could be one-off or more flexible; and formal where a regular role is taken and training provided.

Key areas for development	Why is this important?	How do we make this happen?	How can our partners support?
Make it everyone’s business to value Volunteers	Volunteering is valuable to both those who volunteer and those who receive support from volunteers so we need ways in which we can recognise people’s individual journey and celebrate this.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree a consistent tool for measuring volunteer outcomes. This tool can help people to understand their journey • Organise a joined up awards ceremony using the categories from the tool above so everyone is recognised 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open up training you have to staff and volunteers within CVF organisations • Support the volunteering Recognition Event through venue, funds or event planning skills
Work smarter around promotion of volunteering in Wirral and enable access to all	CVF organisations can feel at a disadvantage as they cannot compete with larger organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a brand for volunteering in Wirral, almost like an accreditation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sign up to and promote this brand

		<p>'time to give Wirral', create a logo which every organisation that involves volunteers can use. The volume of organisations using it will mean it becomes a beacon for volunteering so people know volunteers are valued here and i</p>	
<p>Further develop 'the volunteer family' approach which provides volunteers with the feeling of a safe family unit; a supportive environment that gets the most out of people in a personalised</p>	<p>Wirral needs a modernised support offer around volunteering that capitalises on the surge in volunteering seen during the pandemic and embraces new approaches that local organisations are taking.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide practical support – DBS, training, an email group for volunteer managers to ask questions and share information • Developmental support – mobility across organisations, working with DWP and training their advisors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support mobility so volunteers can spend time with smaller organisations • Open up training opportunities • Share best practice
<p>Encouraging volunteering with public sector colleagues and facilitate connections.</p>	<p>More local organisations are now encouraging their employees to give something back by volunteering however this can prove to be difficult to coordinate without knowing what's available and how to get the most out of people using their skills and strengths.</p> <p>Some organisations such as DWP</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a one stop shop for people looking to volunteer and broker these discussions between the individual and the organisation based on strengths and impact. • Facilitate regular 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior leaders and Elected Members to spend a day with a local organisation to build understanding and 'get a feel' for what it's like on the ground

	<p>have a key role in supporting people into volunteering but people in receipt of benefits are often worried about volunteering. How can we adopt a consistent message that truly encourages and facilitates.</p>	<p>conversations with key partners such as DWP around volunteering</p>	
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Cross Cutting Themes; our enablers

1. Developing the right culture and conditions for collaboration

Culture and behaviours are fundamental to success but also the most difficult to effect. If we are to truly work together there must be a real commitment to addressing cultural issues and behaviours that have a detrimental impact on relationships. **Trusting relationships are required** and will need to be built over time in a cognisant way. Transparency helps build trust; we may not always agree but at least we understand the rationale or pressures/constraints that people are working in.

System values also need to inform behaviours if we want to move in the same direction. Having a **standardised set of behaviours** will help people understand what is and isn't acceptable and we need to be able to **respectfully challenge behaviours** that sit outside of what has been agreed. This will require real buy in from all systems partners at all levels, through pledges and these pledges brought to life in how they work with CVF organisations both strategically and operationally.

Wirral's CVF sector would like to **lead the coproduction of a charter for the Wirral**, which will set out the necessary agreed behaviours to be adopted across the system and how we manage conflict. This will also be an important element of how we work within our place based partnership.

The CVF sector through the creation of this plan have agreed to work hard at building trusting relationships and 'leaving any cynicism at the door'. **We are committed to working in a way aligned to such a charter**, be brave and be challenged if behaviours are experienced not akin to what we have agreed.

CVF Champions within every department within the Council and wider partners would create new links and foster a better understanding of the CVF Sector and as a result, better working relationships.

2. Improving the focus on data and insight

Over recent years we have made improvements in feeding data collected by the CVF into the Wirral Observatory but there is still more than could be done. This will provide more depth to the Wirral picture and will help design local places and services.

Data and insight gathering collectively with CVF sector organisations can be **used to influence planning and commissioning**, improving the design process and in turn outcomes.

Implementing data collection methods and analysis is a specialist role that often CVF organisations are unable to embed within teams due to funding, the weekly amount of time required and time from the organisation. The only way to facilitate better data collection and analysis across the CVF would be to have **a role that supports across the sector**.

Integral to this plan would be a dedicated role, specialist in data gathering and analytics who can not only support organisations to improve impact measurement but can also collate and demonstrate collective value. This role would sit within the new coordinating organisation Wirral CVS, **working closely with BI colleagues across the system**.

Although the CVF sector are keen to develop ways of evidencing impact/change; this **information/data collection needs to be meaningful and relative**. More flexible approaches were adopted during covid which seems to work well for both commissioners and providers, therefore it would seem sensible to continue with this or be willing to look at new ways of working.

Individually we measure impact, sometimes this can be more focused on the requirements of funders or commissioners and not always based on what organisations actually achieve. We need to get better at measuring real impact and by combining our efforts we can highlight the role and importance of the CVF Sector in Wirral. As part of exploring new approaches the CVF sector are interested in **identifying a methodology for collective impact reporting** for the CVF sector.

3. Continual learning

Often it feels as though we have 'done this before' so it's important that we learn from the past, what worked well and what not so well. **Learning lessons means we don't make the same mistakes again.** By looking at what has been done in Wirral and other areas we can guide our work, for example Wirral Volunteering Standard was created but never fully rolled out/adopted. What can we take from this standard and experience in the next stage of our journey?

We also need to give **permission to fail**; this breeds creativity and shared responsibility; **if we fail, we fail together.**

4. Knowing our strengths and building capability

Wirral has a huge amount of **skills and experience within our combined workforce** across the sectors that we should make every **effort to understand, connect and utilise.** By having a better understanding of how we can work together and make the **best use of our skillsets**, we can be **more effective** at influencing and shaping local plans.

This approach needs to be built into **how we encourage and support volunteering** and other aspects of the plan through shared training and development opportunities such as **networking, mentoring and coaching.**

By providing **system multi-disciplinary training** opportunities some of which CVF organisations can deliver if funding was provided is one way in which we build on our strengths. Could preferential opportunity be given to **Wirral organisations to provide training** so we can retain funds within the borough and further **support our CVF sector and wider economy.**

Budget

It's important that we learn from the past and ensure we provide enough investment to the CVF sector to support delivery of this ambitious plan and that this is sustained. The amount requested has been benchmarked against the investment given by grant in aid from Sefton Council to Sefton CVS, £500k per annum, as well as inclusion of a fund to allow CVF colleagues to represent the sector without their own organisation being disadvantaged. Again, a model used in Greater Manchester with much success.

Recommendations

- Recognition and endorsement of Wirral CVS is requested of system partners from the CVF sector
- Endorsement of the CVF plan and to work together to identify and secure an appropriate level of funding to be allocated
- Commitment to meaningful codesign with the CVF Sector
- A named link/champion within every partner organisation to support the above points