



Annex 3 – Oldham’s Commitment to the GM VCSE Accord 2021

- 1.0 Commitment 1:** *We will work together to achieve a permanent reduction in inequalities and inequity within Greater Manchester, addressing the social, environmental and economic determinants of health and wellbeing.*
- 1.1 In September 2021 we launched our new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy. The "*Building a Fairer Oldham*" strategy aims to expand on the successful work already happening to tackle unfairness across the borough and create a more equal Oldham, where people from all communities can fulfil their potential. The strategy was coproduced with Oldham’s EAG, and the Voluntary, Community, Faith, and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector.
- 1.2 Oldham’s Poverty Action Plan (formally adopted in December 2020) aims to reduce socio-economic inequality across the borough, while also tackling the economic determinants of health and wellbeing. The Action Plan focuses on practical solutions to support people in poverty in Oldham, but more importantly also aims to create steps out of poverty. The Action Plan is a partnership document, owned by the wider system including the VCFSE sector, with the aim of working collaboratively to tackle the wider determinants of poverty.
- 1.3 To ensure our approach to tackling inequality is based on lived experience, in September 2021 we launched Oldham’s Poverty Truth Commission. The Commission brings together people with real experience of hardship with others who have the power, influence and/or authority to do something about it. The aim is to build relationships and trust between local people and civic leaders that increase understanding of poverty and bring about changes in policy and practice that make a real difference. The Commission will meet over 2021 / 2022, developing a series of recommendations that will inform a final report in Autumn 2022.
- 1.4 We are also committed to generating social value, reducing health inequalities through action on the social determinants of health – for example, by improving employment and housing. The Social Value Portal (SVP) toolkit had recently been embedded into the Council’s procurement process to maximise opportunities and measure, monitor and report on social value elements of projects. A working group and the SVP team had produced three sets of TOMS (Themes, Outcomes and Measures) bespoke to Oldham, aligned with the Oldham Model and based on National TOMS. ‘Multipliers’ might be added to the TOMS to focus bidders’ attention on specific measures such as spend through local supply chains and supporting small- and medium-sized enterprises’ (SME) business continuity during the pandemic.
- 2.0 Commitment 2:** *We will embed the VCSE sector as a key delivery partner of services for communities in Greater Manchester.*
- 2.1 Oldham Council has a strong and long-standing relationship with the VCFSE sector, supporting the role of the sector through for example, the Thriving Communities Programme. The Oldham Social Prescribing Innovation Partnership is a pioneering three-year Innovation Partnership on behalf of Oldham Cares (our integrated care

organisation) to a local consortium of voluntary and community organisations. The commissioning model draws power from the social value act and focuses on innovating and iterating the service model through coproduction with partners and residents to get the best service and offer possible to meet resident's needs.



- 2.2 The Partnership is focusing on developing social prescribing – specifically linking in residents/patients who have ‘more than medical’ needs e.g. social isolation, loneliness, low level mental health or physical health (they may want to join a walking group or a coffee morning for depression) or just wanting to better navigate other parts of wider public system such as welfare. The objectives of the partnership are to; improve the health and wellbeing for people in Oldham through ‘more than medical’ care and support, build upon community capacity and reduce pressure on the health and care system.
- 2.2 Oldham’s VCFSE sector has also been integral to tackling inequality across Oldham, especially inequalities caused or exacerbated by the pandemic. In March 2020 the Council was given a statutory duty to coordinate food, self-care, medical supplies and other forms of necessary assistance to vulnerable groups in response to COVID-19. The Community Bronze Group was established with joint leads from the Council and Action Together (representing Oldham’s VCFSE sector) and within days, 5 Hubs were mobilised to coordinate food, medicines, mutual aid, volunteering and community intelligence.
- 2.3 At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic we also established Oldham’s Equality Advisory Group (EAG), bringing together key community representatives (especially those with protected characteristics) to help shape and inform Oldham’s COVID-19 response. The EAG has been represented at all levels of Oldham’s COVID-19 response governance, ensuring that any potential inequalities caused by COVID or by our response can be identified and mitigated. As we start to recover from the impact of the pandemic, the responsibility of the EAG has shifted, focusing on the wider determinants of inequality in Oldham to help shape the design and delivery of services.
- 2.4 In 2021, emergency funding was allocated to charities in Oldham that support victims and survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence to adapt their services while the pandemic continues. Oldham Community Safety and Cohesion Partnership recently awarded £100,000 to 10 projects across the Oldham Borough who are promoting healthy relationships and supporting young people affected by domestic violence and abuse and prevent them from becoming involved in violence themselves.
- 3.0 **Commitment 3:** *We will build a financially resilient VCSE sector that is resourced to address our biggest challenges of ending poverty and inequality in Greater Manchester.*
- 3.1 Our ambition in Oldham is to empower communities to do more for themselves and to develop an asset-based approach to early intervention. This is dependent on a sustainable and thriving VCSFE sector. We aim to develop a strategic approach to investment in the sector, bringing internal and external funding together to invest around shared priorities and outcomes for Oldham. This will be at the heart of a wider approach to supporting the sector from our social value procurement policy, how we use our physical assets, to how we develop a new approach to commissioning.
- 3.2 Oldham’s VCFSE sector has been critical to supporting the local COVID-19 response, helping ensure communities are engaged, providing essential support

(food, medicine, etc) and supporting the wider system. However, COVID-19 will have had a direct and immediate impact on the resilience and sustainability of the VCFSE sector for a variety of reasons, including:



- Reduced ability to fundraise and generate revenue through trading, rental income etc.
 - VCFSE organisations were already operating with historically low levels of financial reserves
 - Existing volunteering capacity reduced as a result of sickness, and self-isolation. Many volunteers fall into groups particularly vulnerable to COVID-19.
 - Demand on their services increasing significantly given additional pressures on already vulnerable groups, as well as many more people needing support due to financial hardship, sickness, bereavement etc.
- 3.3 The infrastructure support to the VCFSE which Action Together provide is key to the development and sustainability of the local sector, as well as providing representation and voice to small groups and organisations. The sector contributes across all six themes of Oldham's COVID-19 recovery plan, in particular Driving Equality and Improving Health & Safeguarding the Most Vulnerable.
- 3.4 We are currently exploring options to create a One Oldham Fund, establishing a single grant investment fund for the VCFSE in Oldham. This would enable us to continue investment in the sector beyond the existing COVID-19 Recovery Fund. This first phase would focus on supporting organisations to remain viable, to continue to deliver the ongoing COVID-19 response and to contribute to the delivery of Oldham's Covid Recovery Strategy priorities within this financial year.
- 3.5 Alongside this initial investment work will continue to explore with DHSC colleagues whether the (Contain Outbreak Management Fund) COMF or other COVID-19 funding could be used for a second phase of the fund which would enable us to make multi-year investments on a larger scale to support the viability and resilience of our VCFSE over the medium-term.
- 4.0 Commitment 4:** *We will grow the role of the VCSE sector as an integral part of a resilient and inclusive economy where social enterprises, co-operatives, community businesses, charities and microsocial business thrive.*
- 4.1 In February 2020 Oldham hosted a conference to explore how the social economy can play a much more central role in the economic and community wellbeing of places across the country. Participants explored key learning and shared experiences about what has worked in different places to shape a future vision for place-based, co-operative and social enterprise innovation. Following the conference, Oldham and the GMCA applied for funding from the Co-operative Councils' Innovation Network to explore how the recommendations from the conference could be put into practice on a GM footprint. This piece of work was delayed due to the pandemic; however, we are now in the process commissioning a delivery partner to undertake research across GM, looking at how the social economy could be further supported, developed and promoted.
- 4.2 In September 2021 Oldham Council launched a new Social Enterprise Programme (funded through the Local Access fund), in partnership with Oldham Enterprise Trust, Upturn Enterprises, First Choice Homes Oldham, Regenda Housing and Action Together. The partnership will see £2 million of funding to support the development



of stronger, more resilient and sustainable social economies in disadvantaged places. The spectrum of support will include:

- Pre-start-up; inspiring people; active engagement through schools, colleges and community organisations; network events facilitating peer mentoring; are you a social entrepreneur and idea development sessions; small 'try it' grants; hosted incubation; and start-up support.
- Development; product/service development; organisational development with emphasis on marketing, digital and financial capability and capacity; professional mentoring; customer engagement and service; social impact measuring; social investment options
- Scale-up; growth planning; product and market diversification; specialist business support; systems upgrades; professional mentoring; social impact reporting; social investment

4.3 The ambition is that the Local Access funding creates the opportunity to prepare and shape a business start-up programme for social entrepreneurs that will:

- Put Social Enterprise into the heart of the matter
- Make Oldham the place for Social Enterprises to emerge and thrive
- Help solve the issues that we need to address in our diverse communities, unlocking and encouraging talent and potential as we go.
- Help organisations and businesses confidently engage with Social Enterprises get what they specify.
- Promote the benefits of a social enterprise business model to new and existing businesses.

5.0 Commitment 5: *We will build on our existing strengths to build the best VCSE ecosystem in England*

5.1 Oldham has a rich community of VCFSE organisations. There is estimated to be a total of 1,231 VCFSE organisations in total, including registered charities and social enterprises. 89% of these organisations are micro or small with income less than a £100k per annum.

5.2 Action Together have a key role in community development and capacity building of voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector which therefore increases the ability of communities to help themselves with reduced dependence upon Council and partner services. They also provide strategic leadership and representation of the sector and therefore provide a key conduit for public sector partners' relationship and communication with the VCFSE sector.

5.3 During the last 18 months Action Together have been integral to Oldham's COVID-19 response. They have provided strategic leadership to the Community Bronze humanitarian aid response as well as providing specific support to the foodbank, recruiting emergency response volunteers, supporting community engagement and delivering the COVID-19 Response Fund. They have also been a key partner and conduit for emergency funds to the sector including the DEFRA Emergency Assistance grant, Community Conversations funding and MHCLG Community Champions Fund. Action Together have continued to convene VCFSE networks, and develop new ones as needed, for example the Food Solutions Network and Community Engagement



Network, and to represent the sector in key forums such as Silver/Strategic Coordination Group and the Equalities Advisory Group.

- 5.4 Through Oldham's Thriving Communities Programme, we have also made Fast Grants available, supporting smaller community groups across Oldham to access funding. There are lots of groups across Oldham who provide essential support to their communities, so Fast Grants aim to support these groups. £60k is made available each year for three years (2018 – 2021), with groups awarded anything between £50 and £500. 130 grants awarded were awarded in 2019 – 2020, with 2020/2021 funds rolled into the Action Together COVID-19 Recovery Fund.
- 6.0 Commitment 6:** *We will put into place meaningful mechanisms to make co-design of local services the norm, including expanding channels for service design to be informed by 'lived experience'.*
- 6.1 Greater Manchester is now working collectively to develop its proposals for the redesign of the GM health and care system to ensure greater levels of integration. In Oldham this means harnessing the combined strengths of our public services, the VCFSE sector and our communities.
- 6.2 Since March 2020 we have been implementing our place-based model of public service delivery, providing services across 5 areas. This has included bringing together Early help, mental health, welfare rights, housing providers, voluntary and community crisis support, and aligning with our COVID-19 hubs to meet the needs and priorities of our residents and communities.
- 6.3 This approach involves working as 'one public service' through system leadership, shared plans, data, systems and outcomes, while developing a new relationship with people and communities and focusing on early intervention and prevention. During the pandemic we have co-designed Oldham's vaccination programme with partners and communities, breaking down the barriers to community engagement through Oldham's Community Champions programme. The Community Champions programme has invested over £300k of funding in grants to VCFSE groups and organisations who are at the heart of the communities who are most at risk from coronavirus, breaking down barriers to vaccination through myth busting and through the use of culturally appropriate and accessible communications channels.
- 6.4 As part of Oldham's Thriving Communities programme and approach to early intervention and prevention, we have also funded 5 three-year projects through the Social Action Fund (totalling £850k over three years), with a focus on addressing social isolation and loneliness alongside wider Oldham Cares outcomes around mental health and long-term conditions which are often connected to loneliness. The projects have had to adapt their models during the pandemic and are increasingly delivering virtual and resource pack-based activities, as well as supporting the humanitarian aid response for Oldham, including:
- BAME consortium – BAME Connect programme of activities e.g. Yoga & Connect, Cook & Connect plus a befriending offer
 - Wellbeing leisure – community based physical activity, working with community partners to deliver exercise opportunities and train volunteers
 - Oldham Play Action Group – intergenerational activities and cooking – virtual activity programmes e.g. families in pre-xmas 'bake off' challenge
 - Groundwork consortium – focusing on food and growing activities



- Street Angels - twice weekly drop-in for food and clothing (outside), as well as on street support to night time economy (when possible)
- 6.5 Oldham's commitment to lived experience is also demonstrated through the recent co-design of Oldham's Domestic Violence Strategy, which involved commissioning The Collective Partnership/Inspire Women to undertake a series of activities and events across Oldham, giving women with lived experience of domestic violence and abuse the opportunity to have their voices heard and included in the new strategy document. This approach is also being taken with Oldham's Poverty Truth Commission, which brings together people from across Oldham who have experienced poverty to share their experiences and help the future design and delivery of services. (Please see section 1.3 for further details).
- 7.0 *Commitment 7: We will fulfil the potential for building productive relationships between the VCSE, public and private sectors to address inequity and build back fairer***
- 7.1 Our VCFSE sector have been supporting those people most impacted by COVID-19 who are often already affected by existing inequality and vulnerability. Action Together have a key role in supporting those organisations to access funding and recruit volunteers as well as convening thematic networks and representing the sector strategically.
- 7.2 Continuing this support to the sector will help to ensure we are able to deliver our recovery plan objectives both by enabling the sector to continue to deliver and providing voice to marginalized groups and communities. Action Together also distribute local grant funding to VCFSE organisations in the borough which enables quick distribution of funds through a route accessible to all local groups who may not be eligible or be disadvantaged in their applications to external funding sources.
- 8.0 *Commitment 8: We will put in place a comprehensive workforce programme to support organisational and workforce development for VCSE employers based on and facilitating a more integrated public facing workforce***
- 8.1 As a local authority we are championing the creation of a more inclusive workforce, The Team Oldham Workforce Strategy ensures that our employment processes and conditions are free from discrimination and that we work towards removing barriers to employment, development and career opportunities for everyone. We are committed to building an inclusive Team Oldham where the workforce reflects the borough we serve and the needs of all citizens, and where colleagues feel confident about being themselves at work.
- 8.2 The profile of the existing Team Oldham workforce does not currently reflect the diversity of our communities and as a partnership we have recognised that we need to accelerate improvements in this area. To increase the pace of change we are setting ambitious targets and actions to ensure our actions match our ambition, detailed in both Oldham's Workforce Strategy and Oldham's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.
- 8.3 The greatest challenges we face to having a diverse workforce is increasing the number of people with disabilities we employ and ensuring good levels of progression for our black and minority ethnic communities. This means we need to have both generic and targeted measures in place to address these challenges. We already ensure that all disabled candidates who meet essential criteria are guaranteed an interview and steps are taken to support people who

need adaptations of any nature but there is still work to do and we have an ambitious Apprenticeship and Kick Start programme which aims specifically to offer new opportunities to those people who may not normally look to find employment across the Oldham Partnership.



- 8.4 We will review and refresh our workforce programme considering the new accord, creating opportunities for peer support and learning for system leaders in the VCFSE sector, exploring how we develop a programme of strategic engagement and development support for the sector.