

Greater Manchester Voluntary, Community, Faith & Social Enterprise (VCFSE) Accord

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Background

In November 2021 Greater Manchester (GM) established a VCFSE Accord, which is a collaboration agreement between the public and VCFSE sectors with the aim of improving outcomes for Greater Manchester's residents. It was jointly owned by the VCFSE and public sectors in GM, including NHS GM, Transport for GM, Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and all ten constituent local authorities.

The Accord was supported by an implementation plan and supporting activities at a GM level. At a local level adoption was locally led, with limited accountability or responsibility for reporting to GM on implementation.

During 2025 GMCA has led a process to refresh the Accord and developed the attached draft Accord document for 2026-2035. This has been developed based on engagement with stakeholders across the VCFSE and relevant public sector organisations, reaching 750 people through one-to-one conversations and workshops. In Oldham engagement was led through the VCFSE Leadership Forum and Public Sector and VCFSE Forum. Oldham partners also contributed through discussions at the Greater Manchester VCFSE Forum, 10GM and LA VCFSE leads group.

The refreshed Accord sets out a shared vision, values and commitments. The vision recognises that each partner has a role in improving the lives of the people in GM, and that we can achieve this best by working together for the benefit of our communities. The Accord highlights the unique role of the VCFSE which comes from being rooted in communities and seeks a shared commitment from public sector partners to work together with them on an equal footing.

The Accord is intended to align with and strengthen and place-specific agreements, strategies and shared objectives for collaboration. There is a greater emphasis on accountability at a local level, with each signatory expected to support the commitments of the Accord and take responsibility for transforming the values into visible and practical actions.

Current Position

Oldham Infrastructure

Oldham has a long history of collaborative working with the VCFSE sector and has a well established and thriving Local Infrastructure Organisation (LIO) in Action Together CIO. Over recent years these strong partnerships have delivered tangible and practical impacts through the Covid19 pandemic and Cost of Living crisis, which in turn has provided a foundation for

embedding good practice and continued innovation. For example, both the One Oldham Fund and our partnership with Action Together as the LIO have been highlighted as best practice by GMCA Live Well and the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA) respectively.

During 2025 Oldham has established a VCFSE and Public Sector Forum which includes representation from the VCFSE sector, Oldham Council and ICB. The purpose of the Forum is to bring together public sector service leads and leaders of VCFSE sector organisations delivering activities in Oldham to provide a space for developing and implementing a shared strategy for the VCFSE sector in Oldham, embedding the commitments of GM Accord and Faith Covenant within Oldham and fostering collaboration. The Forum is open to leaders of VCFSE organisations and to Public Sector colleagues who lead on key areas of service delivery, commissioning or strategy development which interface with the VCFSE.

The priorities identified by the Forum are:

- Funding and commissioning
- Co-production and lived experience
- Bringing in more resource to Oldham
- Workforce development
- Connecting with communities
- Sector voice
- Equity and access

In early 2026 the intention is to develop a strategy and action plan aligned to the Forum priorities, and responding to the refreshed GM Accord commitments. It will be important to maintain and encourage wider engagement from Forum members, particularly public sector representatives, to contribute to joint implementation of Forum priorities.

GM VCFSE Accord Commitments

The draft GM Accord sets out three commitments:

1. **Involve & Devolve** - We commit to deepening collaboration across sectors by working together to involve the VCFSE sector and devolving power to our communities.
2. **Resource & Enable** - we commit to increasing investment in, and ensuring fair, transparent and sustainable resourcing of VCFSE organisations.
3. **Recognise & Value** - we commit to recognise and value the contribution of VCFSE organisations through efforts to improve understanding, involvement, practical support and investment.

The sections below set out Oldham's progress and priorities against each of the commitments.

1. Involve & Devolve

The Oldham Plan 2024-2030 recognises that the borough's strength is its people and diverse communities. It is grounded in partnership, bringing together the public sector, VCFSE, local businesses and residents to work together to tackle our challenges.

As a partnership we have developed a resident Engagement Framework, which sets out shared commitments, principles and approaches to involving residents in shaping the work we do and services available to them. We also have an active Engagement Network, made up of colleagues from across the partnership, leading and embedding the framework.

Through work such as Local Motion & Oldham Positive Action Network, the Live Well accelerator and Community Health Champions we have been testing new approaches to valuing the time of local community organisations and residents' to enable meaningful participation.

Action Together have led the development and implementation of a new VCFSE sector voice model. This means there are now more sector leaders involved in key partnership and decision-making spaces than ever before, acting as representatives for the sector as a whole.

Action Together are also a key member of the health and care provider collaborative which is creating stronger and more collaborative relationships between organisations.

2026 Priorities:

- To continue to embed the Engagement Framework, through the launch the Oldham Engagement Toolkit, workforce development, and sharing learning and best practice.
- To embed the VCFSE voice model based on learning from the early stages of implementation and continually review representation on groups and boards.
- To explore further opportunities through the Forum to deepen collaboration and widen involvement aligned with the GM Accord and agree actions to take this forward across the system.

2. Resource & Enable

The Forum has established a task and finish group made up of public sector commissioners and VCFSE leaders from commissioned providers and grassroots organisations. The group is exploring ways to improve transparency, process and practice around funding to the VCFSE. Although increasing investment through existing grants and contracts remains challenging within budget constraints, this work aims to reduce barriers to accessing public sector contracts, improve funding flow and consistency, and make best use of social value to support sustainability and improved workforce retention etc. across the sector as a whole.

Through the Live Well accelerator we have been working with residents and community groups in East Oldham to co-design new approaches to involving residents in decision making about prevention funding in their local area. The mechanism designed by residents has been used to make decisions about the investment of the Live Well Communities Fund in East Oldham.

We have established the Forum which can act as the mechanism for delivering the commitments in the Accord. It currently has informal links to VCFSE Leadership Forum as well as partnership boards including Live Well Sponsorship Group, Integrated Care Partnership, Communities Board and Joint Commissioning Board.

2026 Priorities:

- Through the Commissioning and Funding task and finish group to explore the feasibility of implementing a local Fair Funding Protocol.
- To engage with public sector staff responsible for budgets and procurement around the commitments within the refreshed GM Accord and the priorities of the Forum.
- Through Live Well to roll out participatory approaches to involving residents in decision making about funding in their local area.

3. Recognise & Value

One role of the Forum is to provide opportunities to build a better understanding of roles across the different sectors and how these influence working relationships. It also provides a space for cross sector networking and identification of new and creative opportunities for collaboration.

The commissioning and funding task and finish group have identified Social Value as a priority. They have identified current barriers to valuing the inherent social value of the sector through procurement and is developing proposals for how this could be done differently in future.

Our Live Well Implementation Plan has identified cross sector workforce development as a key enabler for the delivery of the Live Well approach at scale and plans around this are in progress. This includes the development of leadership skills and capacity within the VCFSE sector, led by Action Together.

Through our Engagement Framework we are exploring how we can use our digital insight platform (Big Oldham Convo) to ensure that insight gathered through our VCFSE is valued, and that the infrastructure is in place to capture and utilise it more effectively.

2026 Priorities:

- Through the Forum we will develop an action plan around our workforce development priority, including a focus on improving understanding between sectors.
- To test and implement proposals developed by the commissioning and funding task and finish group for an alternative model to ensure the inherent social value of the VCFSE sector is valued in procurement.

Recommendations

This version of the GM Accord is in draft, however the final version will be shared with Leaders across the public sector partners for initial approval during February, and formal sign off by the GMCA in March. However, given the emphasis on local accountability, it is important that there is awareness of the Accord's commitments and responsibilities amongst public sector leaders prior to becoming signatories. For Oldham it is recommended that:

- All partners to commit to the vision and values of the GM VCFSE Accord.
- An SRO for Accord implementation is identified, along with officers within the Council, ICB and Action Together who are responsible for driving change.
- All partners recognise the VCFSE and Public Sector Forum as the means of delivering on the accord commitments and establish clear lines of accountability and reporting through relevant organisational and Oldham Partnership governance structures.
- The Oldham Partnership set out our local commitments and measures of success, aligned to the GM Accord, through the Oldham VCFSE Strategy and Action Plan (currently in development).
- Public sector leaders to commit to being active participants in the Forum and to supporting the development and delivery of the VCFSE Strategy and Action Plan.