

# AGENDA ITEM No:



## Children, Adult Public Health and Voluntary Sector Policy and Scrutiny Committee

<b>Date:</b>	12 June 2023
<b>Classification:</b>	General Release
<b>Title:</b>	Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Investment Strategy 2023-2028
<b>Report of:</b>	Serena Simon
<b>Cabinet Member Portfolio</b>	Cllr Nafsika Butler-Thalassis
<b>Wards Involved:</b>	All
<b>Policy Context:</b>	Fairer Communities – Supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector to Thrive
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### 1. Executive Summary

A stable, resilient, and wide-reaching voluntary sector in Westminster is a crucial part of achieving a Fairer Westminster. The VCS plays an essential role in enabling people to live happy and healthy lives in the borough, as well as preventing acute problems from developing in our communities. The council relies on the VCS to achieve an equitable reach of care and support services to all Westminster residents. Westminster's voluntary and community sector has more than 200 organisations actively providing services and activities throughout the city. Without robust and well supported VCS services, there is a risk of further increased health and socio-economic inequalities.

The VCS Investment Strategy (2023-2028) sets a framework from which the council can commit to strengthening its partnerships, policies and resources in a long-term and sustainable way, enabling the VCS to succeed. The strategy frames investment in five principle ways: capacity building, strategic partnerships, impact measurement, processes and systems, and space.

These key priority areas were identified through a series of conversations and engagement sessions with VCS stakeholders.

This report outlines the principles and actions that lie at the centre of each priority area, while seeking discussion from the committee on what elements of the strategy would be most beneficial to prioritise over the first year.

## **2. Key Matters for the Committee's Consideration**

- The VCS Investment Strategy is wide-ranging in its five key areas. What elements of the strategy do committee members think will be of maximum benefit to the sector in the short-term and should therefore be prioritised for the next 12-24 months?

## **3. Background**

As outlined above, the VCS Investment Strategy is structured around five core principles. These are summarised below and can be found in full in the official strategy document.

### **1. Investing in capacity building**

This aims to support small and medium sized organisations to develop and strengthen their skills, abilities and resources. This will help build a stabilised, growing and diversified VCS able to deliver well, build skills and expand reach in our communities. Actions to achieve this include developing a core funding approach that prioritises small to medium sized VCS organisations, in addition to core strategic VCS partnerships, building fundraising capacity and targeted support to such organisations, as well as enhancing training provision through One Westminster and WCC's learning zone. Investment will be in the form of longer term (3 year) core and project funding.

### **2. Investing in strategic partnerships**

This aims to foster relationships with other institutions to boost funds and resources for the VCS. It will support cross-council work to strengthen our own relationships with the VCS beyond grant and contract arrangements. This approach strives to create new collaborations with other funders and increase inclusion of the VCS voice in council policy and service decisions. Actions to achieve these goals include setting up a 'Westminster Funders' network and increase pool-funding opportunities with other VCS funders. They also include encouraging council services to partner up with local VCS organisations on an informal basis or through exploring cross-sector secondment opportunities.

### **3. Investing in impact measurement**

This aims to understand the scope and impact of the council's role as funder and partner to the local VCS, and to evidence the collective impact of the sector in the borough. By doing this, we will be able to rely on high quality and meaningful reporting and impact measurement approaches, as well as being equipped with a rich impact story of the VCS and the council's investment in the sector. Actions to achieve this include investing in qualitative ways to measure the impact of the sector, including evaluation and deep dives into particular funding area

#### 4. Investing in processes and systems

This aims to streamline approaches to awarding funds, including grant applications, project monitoring, due diligence and other related processes.

By doing this we want to achieve clarity and proportionality for VCS and council staff in accessing, navigating and managing funding schemes. Actions to achieve this are underway and have included creating a set of monitoring and reporting, compliance, and application guidelines for council staff responsible for handling grants.

#### 5. Investing in space

This aims to enable local VCS organisations to hire, access or lease spaces in a safe, consistent and affordable way. By improving policies around premises and leases, VCS organisations will be supported to work or deliver services in council properties or other community hubs in a straightforward and cost-effective way. Actions to achieve this include reviewing and agreeing on a consistent approach for longer term rentals for the larger community spaces, as well as exploring options of 'meanwhile' rentals (where a space is not being used for a set period of time) to fill space available on a temporary basis for VCS activity.

#### 4. Next steps

More information and the details for the core funding approach will be available for discussion in September. The strategy, in the background papers, will be published and available on the website from June.

**If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers, please contact the Report Authors:**  
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#### APPENDICES:

Appendix 1 - Westminster City Council VCS Investment Strategy 2023-28

#### BACKGROUND PAPERS

[Grant funding opportunities | Westminster City Council](#)