

# Dorset Council and the Voluntary Community Sector: **Principles For Working Together**



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## **Foreword Cllr Laura Beddow**

Dorset has a strong and vibrant voluntary and community sector (VCS) - one that has evolved over recent years to reflect the changing demands of our local communities.

Through the 'Dorset Together' network, we have collectively developed and delivered vital support to residents and communities through the COVID-19 pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis, refugee resettlement and more. Our VCS continues to offer so much to Dorset residents, through the services they provide, the wealth they generate, and the people they connect, engage, and support.

Dorset Council invests significant resources into working collaboratively with the voluntary and community sector, as do our public sector partners.

'Principles for Working Together' sets out a direction of travel on how we will work with the sector to enable it to thrive, be sustainable and dynamic to support communities in Dorset over the next 5 years. It covers:

- How we currently work with the VCS to support our communities through partnerships and collaborative working including case studies showcasing good practice. Learning from the valuable and impressive partnership working over recent years on responses to, for instance, the COVID pandemic and cost-of-living challenge has been a key element of this current work.
- What the sector and our staff told us needs to be improved to ensure that Dorset Council and the VCS are working as effectively as they can to support stronger, resilient communities.
- The need to take account of new forums and work programmes to further develop the principles into a strategy e.g, Voluntary Community Sector Assembly, Integrated Care Partnership and Council programmes like Our Future Council.

- The proposal for 3 co-developed principles and actions as a direction for travel for future work with the sector namely:
  1. Working together more effectively;
  2. Facilitating community-led solutions; and
  3. The right help, at the right place, at the right time.

## **1.0 Introduction**

Dorset Council is committed to supporting the development of a thriving, sustainable and dynamic Voluntary Community Sector (VCS) helping it to flourish for years to come.

Both Dorset Council and the VCS recognise that fundamental to effective service delivery and support is the need to continually connect with Dorset's communities to understand their needs, tap into their knowledge and work together to deliver positive solutions to local issues.

The VCS offers huge value to local areas. It provides essential services, generates wealth, connects, engages, and empowers people, and can help deliver council strategies. These Dorset Council defining set of principles lay out the clear direction of travel to embed a more effective way for Dorset Council and the VCS to work together, in turn enabling our communities to thrive.

There are many positive developments currently underway across the VCS sector (discussed in 3.0). Each of these will have important impact on how the council and the VCS work together in the longer term. We recognise it is a time of flux and change. In addition to this, with local elections on the near horizon and a national election expected at some point this year, political direction may be subject to change over coming months.

Rather than produce a fully worked up communities' strategy now, we have formalised our direction of travel as a council, setting out key principles for how we work with the VCS. This enables Dorset Council to affirm our commitment to Dorset's VCS and to continue progressing live projects and relationships.

We plan to develop this work into a formalised strategy and action plan once the new administrations, both nationally and locally, are in place.

## **2.0 Background**

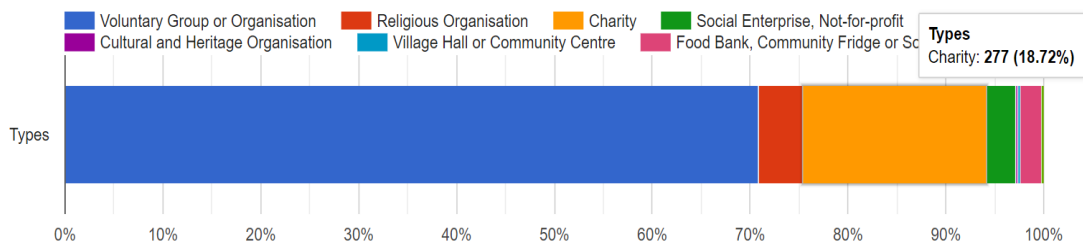
### **2.1 The make-up and role of the VCS**

Historically, registered charities have been associated as the primary VCS organisations but work with the sector over the past few years has shown that the

picture is a lot broader than this. The VCS can take many forms such as social enterprises, community interest companies, community benefit societies, and faith groups. There are also many small and informal community groups and micro providers that do not have formalised structures but are a crucial and active part of the sector that can have a dynamic impact and need to be recognised as an integral part of the holistic picture of Dorset’s VCS.

The following graphic provided by #Helpandkindness December 2023 shows the make-up of Dorset’s VCS:

VCS Organisations by Type on #HelpAndKindness



When we refer to the VCS, we refer to any not-for-profit organisation, group or individual that works for the benefit of society. However, in recognising this much broader definition, the sector becomes larger and significantly more complex.

Community Action Network (CAN), an infrastructure organisation commissioned by Dorset Council supporting the VCS in Dorset, produces an annual State of the Sector report which covers the whole of Dorset. They report that “there are an estimated 7,500 organisations working in the VCS in Dorset” who are involved in many areas of activity, with the sectors with the greatest proportion of organisations working in health, welfare, and social care; education, research, and training; and community development/regeneration.



Source: Cooking lessons at the Friendly Food Club, 2023.

The VCS is also supported by volunteers, and they play a key role in supporting communities. In CAN's most recent report (2022) they estimate that the sector in the county of Dorset is supported by 267,030 volunteers and the estimated value of all hours given by volunteers, and committee/board members is between £640m - £950m a year.

In developing these Principles, we have engaged and involved all aspects of the sector to enhance and improve responsiveness in all communities.

## **2.2 The benefits of local government working with the VCS**

Strong relationships between councils and the local VCS are the heart of successful places. The 2022 Local Government Association (LGA) report on 'The state of strategic relationships between councils and their local voluntary and community sector' outlines the benefits of councils working effectively with the VCS. Like Dorset Council, the local VCS is noted as central to both building social fabric and delivering services in a place. By continuing to invest resources in the VCS, Dorset Council will work alongside the sector to maximise the inherent social value it provides alongside its economic value. This effect is enhanced when the private, public, and voluntary and community sectors work in unison towards shared goals for their place. Each sector has a role to play and different complementary strengths in driving economic growth, creating jobs, and enabling communities to thrive.



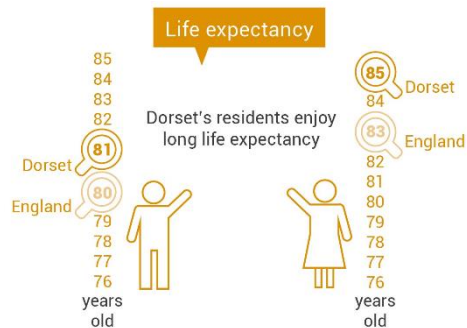
The direct and indirect benefits of Dorset Council working with the sector are further highlighted in more detail in Annex 1.

### 2.3 The national VCS picture

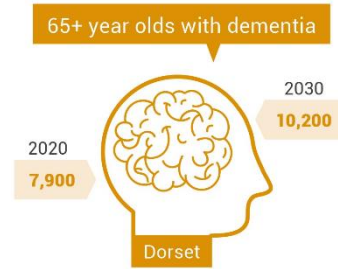
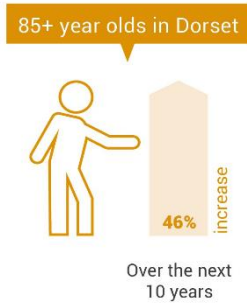
The UK Civil Society Almanac records “that the voluntary sector has a paid workforce of about 952,000, up 3% from 2020. The voluntary sector workforce has grown by 27% since 2011. While substantially smaller than both the public and private sectors, it has seen the fastest workforce growth over the last decade. But it also notes that most of the VCS sector sources of funding were declining, with public income making over 50% of overall income for the first time in 20 years. This, they record, appears to be caused by a gradual decline in local government income (falling from £9.4bn in 2007/08 to £6.9bn (a fall of 26%) in 2019/20) as well as unsteady levels of grant income and a fall in government contracts.

### 2.4 The local VCS picture

The Dorset Council area has a population of 380,000 residents, 29% of whom are aged 65 and older (compared to 19% in England and Wales). Dorset is an attractive place to live, and many people choose to retire here. It has a large population of older people, and relatively low birth rates. Currently there are over 7,000 people in Dorset living with dementia, and the number is increasing. Younger people often move away from the area. The population continues to grow slowly, driven by people moving into the county and longer life expectancy. Dorset’s working age population is expected to see a marginal decline over the next 25 years.







The Dorset rural idyll can conceal hidden deprivation. There are significant areas of deprivation, mostly prevalent in urban areas (mainly Weymouth and Portland) and in Bridport and the east of Dorset in Ferndown, Wimborne, and Verwood. There is deprivation also in rural areas which can be hidden, due to isolation and difficulty accessing housing, transport, and essential services. Crime is generally low in Dorset, although anti-social behaviour and rural crime are an ongoing concern. The population is predominantly white British, with 6.1% of our residents from ethnic minority communities.



All these local issues present challenges to our communities and pressures on services. This is where a stronger working relationship between Dorset Council and the VCS could help to support our communities through more integrated solutions.

In Dorset we have a strong and responsive VCS - one that has positively evolved over recent years to reflect the changing needs and demands of our local communities. It offers much to Dorset residents, through the services the sector provides, the wealth it generates, and the people it helps to connect, engage, and support. One example is the 'Dorset Together' model, where key Dorset Council officers, Councillors and VCS organisations collectively develop and deliver vital support to residents and communities. Since this model was first developed for the

COVID-19 pandemic, it also now has been utilised for the cost-of-living crisis, refugee resettlement and more.



Source: Fontmell Magna community lunch, 2023.

Working together we can collectively meet even the most challenging issues in local communities, building resilience and offering the right help, at the right place, at the right time.

### **3.0 Current ways of working and new opportunities**

#### **3.1 How Dorset Council currently works with the VCS**

Dorset Council engages with the VCS across all its directorates, primarily through commissioning/contracts and delivery of grants, but also through volunteer involvement and other ways of engaging with the sector e.g., partnership working.

In 2022/23, Dorset Council provided approximately £14 million of funding to the VCS and supported and worked with hundreds of VCS organisations ranging from charities like Dorset Youth Association and Livability, to CICs such as the Alacrify Foundation and the Esteem Team, to social enterprises like social supermarkets.

**Annex 2 provides a breakdown of the £14 million spend by Directorate**

**Annex 3 provides several case study examples of our work with the VCS.**

The council interacts with the VCS in several different ways. Many relationships are primarily focused on ‘delivery’ and ‘commissioning’ relationships, where the VCS participate in tenders, winning contracts to deliver local services. Some of the sector

is commissioned by Dorset Council to help co-design services based on local needs. The council also provides several discretionary outcome-based funds which VCS groups can bid for through grants.

Strong relationships are formed through practical working together day-to-day and more formal partnership structures which are reactive to local needs as they arise e.g., through the Dorset Together network and the Connected Communities group.

Sector feedback, January 2024:

*“The working relationship between Dorset Council and Dorset’s VCS is stronger than ever. VCS and council collaboration increasingly covers all parts of the community and includes all kinds of services. Sharing different experiences and perspectives, and linking together different resources, is opening up new ways of working, built on the strengths of our communities. These connections make good things happen and improve the lives and wellbeing of communities together.”*  
Jon Sloper, CEO, Help & Kindness

*“Over these past few years we have worked closely with Dorset Council and our VCS partners to enable people to thrive and be supported. By working together we are able to develop our services and deliver so much more, making a positive difference to our environment and people’s lives.”* Marie Waterman, CEO, Volunteer Centre Dorset

*“Dorset Council has a strong track record of recognising the value of the VCS. We very much value this relationship as it strikes the right balance between maintaining the independence of VCS organisations and harnessing the shared purpose to support Dorset residents at their time of need. This has been recently demonstrated throughout Covid and the Cost of Living Crisis.”* Daniel Cadisch, Chief Officer, Citizens Advice Central Dorset

There is recognition amongst employees that Dorset Council’s work with the VCS is sometimes siloed by service or directorate, resulting in a single VCS organisation having to deal with multiple council teams, attend multiple meetings and duplicate some activity. There is therefore a priority for this strategy to improve our council structures and systems for improved partnership working.

As part of its investment, Dorset Council commissions several VCS infrastructure organisations whose remit is to directly support and grow the broader voluntary and community sector through provision of volunteering infrastructure, organisation development and training provision and, information sharing and networking. This investment continues to require management in an open, transparent, efficient, and effective manner.

In September 2020, following substantial public consultation, Dorset Council finalised a review of its financial provision to the voluntary and community sector. A report built on the findings of the review put forward proposals to “restore the balance and ensure that all localities will receive a baseline level of support services to the Voluntary Community Sector (VCS) and further funds will be available to enable communities at disadvantage to apply for additional funds.”

All proposals in the report were designed so that the overall levels of funding at the time were maintained, and a new harmonised and equitable approach to allocations along with longer term financial commitment that would enable the VCS to support Dorset Council to meet our community priorities for the period 2021- 2026.

### **3.2 New opportunities**

Moving forward there are several developments which offer opportunities for more integrated, joined up working between Dorset Council and the VCS:

#### **External opportunities:**

##### **i) The Dorset Integrated Care System (ICS)**

Replacing the Clinical Commissioning Group structure, joins up care leads to better outcomes for people. When local partners – the NHS, councils, voluntary sector, and others – work together, they can create better services based on local need.

Integrated care systems, (ICSs) have been set up to make this happen. Their aim is to improve health and care services – with a focus on prevention, better outcomes and reducing health inequalities whilst prioritising and placing significance on the local VCS services to benefit local residents.

##### **ii) The Voluntary and Community Sector Assembly (VCSA)**

A new Voluntary and Community Sector Assembly (VCSA) has recently been formed as a mechanism to access local VCS services within the ICS, covering the pan-Dorset area. It aims to represent the whole VCS, facilitating stronger networking and collaboration with partners from other sectors on issues that matter in Dorset.

This presents major opportunities for Dorset Council to engage with the VCS alongside wider system partners and provides a mechanism through which the complex sector and all its many parts can be readily simplified with a single point of entry. There is opportunity here to increase the impact of funding of the VCS with a joined-up approach with other system partners such as NHS Dorset. The Assembly also provides a mechanism to engage and utilise more smaller, localised and specialist VCS organisations.

### **Internal opportunities:**

#### **i) Our Future Council (OFC) transformation programme**

The 'Our Future Council' transformation programme will enable Dorset Council to deliver its council vision and priority to become a more responsive, customer focused council. The OFC programme explores new ways of delivering services to best meet customer needs and achieving financial sustainability, making us more resilient and ready for 2030 and beyond.

#### **ii) Thriving Communities**

Public Health Dorset and Dorset Council have recently started work on the 'Healthy Ageing in Thriving Communities' programme to provide the conditions for healthy ageing in our communities through place-based work in the Dorset Council area. The aim is to develop a plan to grow community support and capacity through the community and voluntary sector, to support older people to continue living well and independently.

#### **iii) 'Families First for Children' pathfinder and localities work**

Following a national review of children's social care, the government has written a new strategy 'Stable Homes Built on Love,' with 6 pillars or themes for transformation. Dorset, along with two other local authorities nationally, has been invited to test out an element of this strategy. Participation in the Pathfinder programme is a huge opportunity for Dorset to shape the national transformation of children and family's strategy and policy.

iv) **Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy 2021-2024**

v) **Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy 2021-2023**

Consideration has also been given to the following:

- the 10 principles for working with people and communities developed by NHS England highlighted here: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/working-in-partnership-with-people-and-comm>
- research which included the Dorset Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.

## **4.0 Principles on how Dorset Council works together with the Voluntary Community Sector**

### **4.1 Stakeholder engagement approach**

These Principles have been developed through engagement internally with Dorset Council employees across all directorates, and externally with the key strategic VCS organisations. Methods for engagement included; 1:1 conversations, webinars, and surveys to seek as broader range of feedback as possible.

**Annex 4 lists a summary of the feedback from our stakeholder engagement work which has been key to the development of this strategy.**

### **4.1 Vision and purpose**

Our vision is to have a local VCS that is thriving, sustainable and dynamic to help support community needs in Dorset.

Dorset Council is focused on learning from and building on the momentum of our closer working relationship with the VCS and ensuring that it is sustainably enabled to work alongside the council as an equal partner. We see our role as supporting and empowering Dorset's VCS to do what they do best, playing a vital role within communities. In doing so, we recognise that we need a whole council approach, and a heightened commitment to collaborating with the sector.

The principles set out how we will work with Dorset's VCS to deliver our council plan and how our partnership approach and creation of system-wide working will help enable stronger sustainable communities.

## 4.2 Priorities and actions

Three priorities have been co-developed with the VCS to build upon the positive work to date, whilst pursuing the new opportunities to work together.

For each priority, the council and the VCS are co-producing several proposed actions which will form the basis of a more detailed SMART action plan which will be developed by the Communities & Partnerships team by 30 April 2024.

### **Priority 1: Working together more effectively.**

#### **Proposed actions:**

**Action 1:** Develop a collaborative 'working together' approach to improve engagement and consistency between Dorset Council and the Voluntary Community Sector (VCS) at all levels.

**Action 2:** Grow our relationship with the VCS Assembly.

**Action 3:** Develop a council-wide approach to co-design and deliver service solutions with the VCS based on 3(I).

#### **Action 1: Develop a collaborative 'working together' approach to improve engagement and consistency between Dorset Council and the Voluntary Community Sector (VCS) at all levels.**

This action focuses on building a strong, consistent 'working together' approach between the council, strategic sector and the whole VCS from larger key infrastructure organisations to smaller charities and community groups so everyone is engaged in the conversation to enable stronger communities. The impact achieved collectively is greater than could be achieved by organisations individually.

We can draw on lessons from other programmes of work such as the Working Together approach developed by the Dorset Association of Parish & Town Councils (DAPTC) and Dorset Council to improve engagement between the council and town and parish councils.



Our engagement has identified there is also a need to improve council structures and systems for working together to avoid silo working by service or directorate and to make it easier for the VCS to work with us efficiently.



Holiday Activity Food Scheme (Summer in Dorset), Friendly Food Club 2023.

### **Action 2: Grow our relationship with the VCS Assembly (VCSA)**

Developing our relationship with the ICS led VCSA offers a great opportunity to collaborate and co-produce work and resources to avoid duplication, build capacity and ensure a more integrated approach to delivering outcomes. This may include activity around jointly agreed themes, with an integrated approach to commissioning arrangements.

### **Action 3: Develop a council-wide approach to co-design and deliver service solutions with the VCS based on 3(I).**

We will embed a council-wide working approach which recognises and utilises the skills, knowledge, connections, and potential of our VCS and Dorset Council employees to embed innovation and creativity in service delivery.

## **Priority 2: Facilitating community-led solutions.**

### **Proposed actions:**

**Action 1:** With the sector's knowledge and strengths-based working, build on the existing evidence base to inform our work.

**Action 2:** Support the drive to increase the capacity and diversity of the VCS workforce including paid professionals and volunteers.

**Action 3:** Co-create a range of community engagement approaches to enable communities to propose solutions for local issues working with Our Dorset Integrated Care System (ICS) Engagement Leads.

**Action 1: With the sector’s knowledge and strengths-based working, build on the existing evidence base to inform our work.**

This includes gathering relevant data on communities to inform service delivery solutions, work on the ‘insight bank’ through the Integrated Care Partnership (ICP), develop skills register, share good practice at community and neighbourhood level, and produce of a trends and risk register for future issues.

We will focus on identifying and building upon our individual communities’ existing strengths, abilities, and resources, rather than focusing on their challenges or areas for development. We believe that strengths-based working can deliver an empowering and positive approach which will enhance well-being, self-esteem, and resilience.

**Action 2: Support the drive to increase the capacity and diversity of the whole VCS workforce including paid professionals and volunteers.**

We understand that people in our communities are incredibly powerful when they are focused on providing support to others. We know that there is a willingness and spirit in communities to help others who are in need. However, we also know that not everyone knows how to volunteer; what to volunteer for; or indeed who in their area needs help. We will support the VCS workforces to become stronger, more diverse, and more sustainable, while also increasing capacity.



Source: Volunteers tree planting at Tumbledown Farm, Weymouth 2023

**Action 3: Create a range of community engagement approaches to enable communities to propose solutions for local issues working with Our Dorset Integrated Care System (ICS) Engagement Leads.**

Our Dorset Integrated Care System (ICS) Engagement Leads are creating a useful resource to highlight good practice community engagement approaches to support community-led solutions to issues. We will provide input into this work and help to promote it locally.

**Priority 3: The right help, at the right place, at the right time.**

**Proposed Actions:**

**Action 1:** Work with the VCS and the VCS Assembly to develop a prioritised approach to supporting communities based on jointly agreed themes and geographical focused areas e.g., areas of deprivation, with higher levels of inequality.

**Action 2:** Develop a more collaborative approach to sharing resources and review the effectiveness and impact of funding models and mechanisms, and the methods for assessing their outcomes at community level.

**Action 3:** Continue infrastructure support for the VCS.

**Action 1: Work with the VCS and the VCS Assembly to develop a prioritised approach to support communities based on jointly agreed themes and geographical areas e.g., areas of deprivation, with higher levels of inequality.**

As stated in section 3.2, the VCSA offers us a whole range of opportunities to integrate our work with communities with the sector.

To be successful we must look beyond the council's organisational physical and metaphoric boundaries and work in a truly collaborative, place-based manner to address the needs of our communities. We need to create effective and sustainable solutions with the VCSA and promote well-being by developing a prioritised approach to supporting individual community solutions based on jointly agreed themes and targeting geographical focused areas or communities.

**Action 2: Develop a more collaborative approach to sharing of resources and review the effectiveness and impact of funding models and mechanisms, and the methods for assessing their outcomes at community level.**

We will continue to work across the system to explore options for joint commissioning to seek better value for money, avoid duplication of commissioned services for common outcomes.

**Action 3: Continue infrastructure support for the VCS.**

Actions 2 and 3 reflect the need to sustain council support for the VCS while also exploring options to share resources and ensure that they are being effective in delivering outcomes at the local level. We will therefore undertake a review of models, mechanisms, and methods for assessment around funding the sector, including commissioning processes.

## **5.0 Delivering the Principles**

The principles are only effective if full commitment is given to it and its implementation plan. To ensure Dorset Council takes responsibility for delivering this prior to the full strategy being developed, we will act now and be transparent about how we are progressing and changing.

The principles will cover a 2-year period from 2024 to 2026 and an action plan supporting the strategy will be developed by 30 April 2024 to enable the new national and local administration to settle. Implementation will be coordinated and monitored by the Communities and Partnerships Team.

We will work with the ICS and VCSA to ensure that effective oversight and monitoring is provided in partnership.

## **Annex 1 – Direct and indirect benefits of Dorset Council working with the VCS**

These benefits have been shaped around those identified in ‘The state of strategic relationships between councils and their local voluntary and community sector’ – Local Government Association (LGA) 2022.

### **Direct benefits**

Direct benefits are those which have a clear positive impact on the ability of councils to delivery their statutory duties and/or achieve their priorities for their place. These include:

- **Delivering better services** – the VCS often cuts across everything Dorset Council does – from health and fitness to employment, housing to community transport. Commissioning the local VCS often produces higher quality services that deliver tailored support to residents based on deep-rooted connections and knowledge. Doing so also helps to build local economic value and sustainability. For example, local organisations often have shorter supply chains and a more locally embedded workforce.
- **Increasing reach of services** – the VCS in Dorset is crucial to supporting the council to deliver many services across a large geography and diverse communities. VCS involvement adds to council knowledge, capacity, and resources to maximise the reach of services.
- **Delivering important additional services to support effectiveness of statutory services** – for example, in adult social care it would be impossible to deliver the required level of care in communities without the VCS doing a large amount to support individuals that is beyond statutory services.
- **Unlocking untapped resources within the community itself** – the VCS can mobilise people and resources in a way Dorset Council may not be able to. The council must support and maintain strong relationships with the local VCS in ‘peacetime’ to build community resilience. This ensures that the partnership is primed for action when crisis strikes.

- **Enhancing places** – many VCS organisations, like Dorset Council, share a core purpose of aiming to create a better place for people to live. This can include playing a vital role in regeneration, acting as local economic multipliers in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.
- **Representing diverse communities for tailored service provision** – the VCS can perform a vital function as local connectors. It strengthens links between the council and residents and uses creative methods to ensure that diverse voices are present in local decision-making. This means that decisions and their consequences on service provision are more likely to meet the actual needs of, and demand from, the community. Dorset Council can therefore achieve its aims more efficiently and avoid unintended negative consequences.

### **Indirect benefits**

Indirect benefits are those which have a broader positive impact on the strength of the local community. This includes in areas which serve as wider determinants of health and wellbeing, thus reducing the need for curative council interventions further down the line.

- **Rebalancing power to increase civic participation** - in partnership with VCS organisations, Dorset Council can create the necessary environment for people to be heard by those with power and influence.  
This approach can create new connections within communities and provides the time and space to build relationships, fostering understanding, trust, and tolerance. Ultimately this improved awareness on both sides, strengthens connections, dispels myths, and improves cohesiveness within communities.
- **Increasing aspiration and enterprise through community ownership** - community ownership can drive aspiration, enterprise, and transform local services. Having the places and spaces where communities come together is also a vital resource for building local capacity and participation.
- **Increasing social capital** – by working with the VCS to develop spaces for the community to come together organically to collaborate on local issues, Dorset

Council can grow social capital and networks. This leads to greater sharing of norms and values which, in turn, increases trust, cooperation, and reciprocity. Through this, Dorset Council can better build engagement and consensus around initiatives for development of people and place.



## **Annex 2 – Breakdown of the £14 million spend for 2022-23 by Directorate**

<b>Directorate</b>	<b>VCS Spend (million)</b>
Corporate Services	<b>£1.42 m</b>
Adults and Housing	<b>£1.42 m</b>
Children’s Services	<b>£9.68 m*</b>
Place	<b>£1.68</b>

- Includes National VCS provider contracts for care provision.

## **Annex 3 - Case studies of Community Projects with the VCS**

The following case studies highlight some of our work with the VCS at community and neighbourhood level:

### **Case Study 1: Ukraine Response**

#### **Main objectives:**

- Provide a warm welcome to Ukrainian refugees arriving in the UK.
- Provide community integration support.
- Provide wellbeing support, activities, mental health support.

**Budget:** The work was supported by government grant funding

#### **Which Voluntary Community Sector organisations did you work with?**

Main organisations

- Help and Kindness
- Citizens Advice Dorset
- Volunteer Centre Dorset
- Dorset Community Foundation (DCF)

Through DCF we launched the Dorset Welcome Fund, this provided opportunity for VCS organisations to apply for funding to support their work. Many amazing groups have come forward and joined up through Dorset Together network.

#### **The process**

Worked in partnership, meeting the needs of people locally. Working to fill gaps in provision and ensure good support is offered.

#### **What were the positive outcomes?**

- Over 900 Ukrainian refugees have been supported.
- Such positive feedback for support from community
- We have applied for further funding to create a project for various refugee and asylum-seeking children and young people to benefit, by working with the VCS to expand the support on offer for this cohort.

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### **Case Study 2 Family Hubs**

#### **Main objectives:**

The DfE (Department for Education) describes Family Hubs as ‘a place-based way of joining up locally in the planning and delivery of family services. They bring services together to improve access, improve the connection between families, professionals, services, and providers, and put relationships at the heart of family support.’

Dorset Council received funding from the DfE Family Hub Transformation Programme 1 (TF1) to develop and deliver a Family Hub approach. In addition to this funding, Dorset has also invested council transformation funding as part of a local commitment to the approach. Dorset has committed to meet specific requirements as defined by the DfE, in addition to ensuring that local needs and strategic priorities underpin the development of our Family Hub approach.

The programme will see a network of Family Hub buildings with associated outreach/satellite points developed in each of the 6 locality areas, enabling information and help for families to be delivered close to home. Additionally, the approach facilitates organisations coming together in the planning and delivery of services with the aim of improving access to and take-up of information and services when and where families need them.

Family Hubs are a significant vehicle in which much of the Strategic Alliance for Children and Young People Plan and Family Help element of the Families First for Children Pathfinder will be delivered. Our Family Hub Network development is built upon an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach, recognising the strengths of community-based assets, service provision and established relationships and building capacity and resource within local areas.

This approach aims to build capacity and resilience in communities, developing provision in the spaces that communities feel comfortable, delivered by those they know and trust.

This approach is leading to a mixed model of delivery with Family Hubs developing from a range of existing places such as children's centres, community centres and libraries with both Dorset Council and the VCS taking on the lead for managing the Family Hubs.

Additionally, we are developing methods to devolve funding to communities to bolster our early support offer to families, where possible, implementing parent and community led approaches to help and support.

### **Who did you engage with internally and externally?**

Dorset has 7 Local Alliance Groups (LAGs) that bring together local partners to understand local needs and develop local plans that make the most of collective resources and address issues that are important to local communities. Local Alliance Groups link directly into the Strategic Alliance for Children and Young People.

Local Alliance Groups enabled partnership contribution to the develop of our Family Hub approach in localities, providing a forum for information sharing, networking, and development of proposed approaches. LAGs also enable mechanisms for families to be involved in the development and ongoing delivery of Family Hubs in local areas.

We have established a partnership Family Hub Steering Group, with representation from strategic leads across statutory partners, VCS organisations and Dorset Council.

## **The process**

Engagement through the Local Alliance Groups facilitated community decision making to determine the Family Hub approach in each locality. This included where the Family Hub would be located and who was best placed to take on the role of lead organisation, responsible for development and ongoing delivery of the Family Hub.

Service level agreements were put in place with identified VCS organisations, with devolved funding to enable development of infrastructure and enable effective delivery of the Family Hub provision locally as determined by the lead organisation (eg. through creation of posts, staff and volunteer training and community engagement activity)

We are continuing to work with our VCS partners to enable increased parent and community led service delivery through our Family Hub Networks through devolution of funding, shared use of community spaces and partnership workforce development opportunities.

## **Positive outcomes**

Family Hubs being developed in places and spaces that families know and feel welcome, with support from those with whom they have trusted relationships.

Local investment in, and ownership of Family Hubs.

Increased awareness of service offer across partnership, enabling practitioners to support families access the right support at the right time.

## **Learning points**

A point of learning is recognition of the benefits of creating sufficient time and space for discussion, sharing and learning. This enables relationships to develop and strengthen, for knowledge and skills to be recognised and shared and for values and principles to be agreed to support effective partnership working.

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## **Case Study 3: Eat a Rainbow**

Eat a Rainbow - Supporting healthier food choices for children on free school meals through work with providers of the Summer in Dorset Programme

### **What were the main objectives?**

The Holiday Activity Food (HAF) programme is a government funded scheme for children on Free School Meals (FSM). In Dorset it is run through the 'Summer In Dorset' scheme. It focuses on food provision and activity during holiday times. Activity providers must incorporate, "helping children to understand more about the benefits of healthy eating and nutrition" into their programme. Many providers have limited knowledge in this field. To support them Dorset Council, Public Health Dorset with the Friendly Food Club developed and piloted a mandatory training programme with a set of relevant resources.



It aligns with one aspect of addressing health inequality around childhood obesity. Obesity rates in children are highest in the most deprived 10% of the population, more than twice that of the least deprived 10% (Childhood obesity: applying All Our Health - GOV.UK [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk))

### Who did you engage with internally and externally?

- The material and training sessions were developed by Friendly Food Club and Public Health Dorset.
- The mandatory training sessions were organised by Dorset Council and run by the Friendly Food Club in conjunction with Public Health Dorset.
- There were 56 activity provider centres with 90% attending; they ranged from corporate organisations to sports clubs and youth clubs as well as other groups from within the voluntary sector.

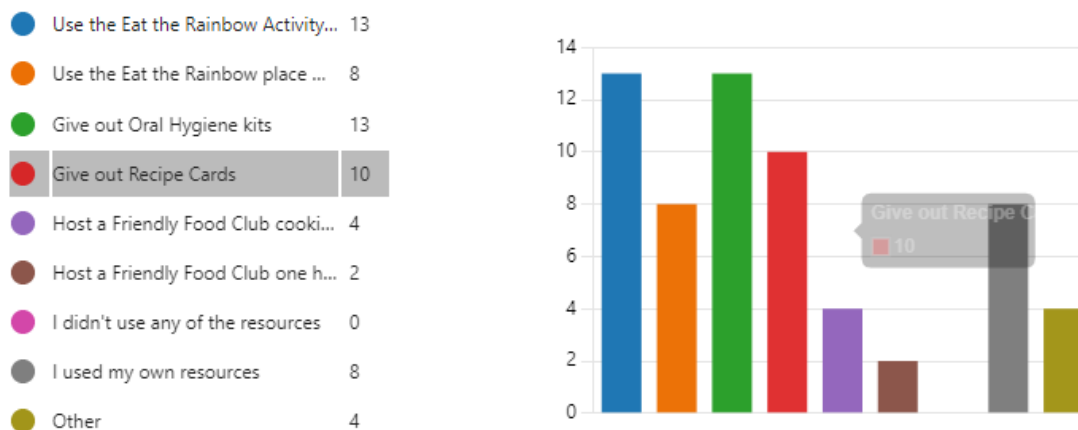
### What did you do? Describe in brief the process. Did you work in partnership?

- The Friendly Food Club (FFC) and Public Health Dorset (PHD) worked in partnership to develop a set of relevant healthy eating/nutrition activity-based resources to support activity providers in this aspect of their work.
- The material (an activity pack around eat a rainbow, for the children and resource booklet for the providers) was piloted with 3 organisations. These were a preschool, youth club and corporate activity provider. Post pilot the material was adapted as necessary.
- FFC and PHD designed and ran 3 mandatory training sessions across Dorset for activity providers.
- Signposting to relevant materials and organisations
- Training sessions for providers included: Background on healthy eating; Alternatives to food as a reward; Modelling behaviour; How to use the resources with practical applications.
- Each child attending in the summer received an activity pack around eat a rainbow.

### What were the positive outcomes?

There was a 90% attendance rate for the training, a vast increase from when it was not mandatory. This is what they said about the training from a slide:

5299 children attended a Summer in Dorset (HAF) programme, of these 2050 of these were on FSM (there were 9452 children on FSM) over the summer 19360 visits were made by children on FSM. The activities were provided by 56 different organisations across multiple venues in Dorset. This is how 23 providers applied the food and nutrition training (n=23).



It was a great experience working in partnership that benefited so many people. It has led to the development of future work that supports Dorset residents to become more food secure.

We cannot measure the change in diets as it is beyond the scope of the project, however research shows that preparing food increases liking and consumption (3). There are associations with nutrition and emotional wellbeing (4) as well as a sense of achievement (5). Previous findings suggest that cooking programs may positively influence children's food-related preferences, attitudes, and behaviours (6).

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#### Case Study 4: EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) Reference Group

**The role of the EDI Reference Group is to:**

- Act as a critical friend to the council (and other statutory bodies as agreed).
- Assist in the delivery of the council's Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Plan/Strategy.
- Support and deliver training in partnership with council officers to develop the knowledge and skills of the workforce.
- Provide valuable feedback and insight on wide ranging Dorset Council consultations, strategies, and service development/improvement.
- Promote inclusion, equality, and the understanding of diversity across the Dorset Council area – working with council officers to promote and deliver identified Equality, Diversity and Inclusion awareness days.
- Share results of consultations and support the council in making direct contact with diverse forums and networks as appropriate.

### **Who did you engage with internally and externally?**

Age UK – North, South and West Dorset, Space Youth Project, Community Action Network, Home-Start West Dorset, Citizens Advice East Dorset & Purbeck, Carers Support Dorset, Dorset Blind Association, Dorset Mental Health Forum, Dorset Race Equality Council, Women’s Action Network Dorset, People First Dorset.

All Dorset Council Directorates.

**The process:** Worked in partnership with VSC organisations and various directorates to sense check and provide feedback on policy changes, new strategies, and service delivery.

### **What were the positive outcomes?**

- very well received by all users with Dorset Council (quotes can be provided)
- positive relationships built with VCS.
- training provided to help VSC organisations comment on Dorset Council policy changes, including contributing to EQIAs (Equality Impact Assessment).
- cohesive, willing, friendly group ready to use their expertise to help shape new initiative.
- one stop shop for consultation with a range of organisations each representing a protected characteristic.
- unique offer – few councils have an EDI Reference Group
- easy to use.
- fulfilled our EDI strategy objectives of working with our communities.



## **Annex 4 – Summary of stakeholder engagement informing the development of the principles**

### **What our VCS told us:**

- There is positive recognition of the range of support provided by Dorset Council to the sector, and examples of the council's commitment to joint working with the VCS to achieve beneficial outcomes for our communities. There are instances of Dorset Council supporting and enabling the VCS, giving them more freedom and autonomy, to be able to use their specialist knowledge and work with communities to solve problems.
- A handful of larger VCS organisations are closely engaged with Dorset Council on a wide range of projects and initiatives. There is a perception that their voices are heard more loudly and that they are supported more readily by the council. Many smaller organisations are not engaged at all with Dorset Council and can find the council hard to approach, navigate or understand.
- There is recognition that Dorset Council works closely with the VCS in many ways. There are pockets of good practice - but there is still significant work to do to achieve a more consistent approach and a more equal relationship with the VCS involving a shared foundation, mutual understanding, shared goals.
- Dorset Council's use of commissioning can result in a culture of competitive fund seeking within the VCS. This, in turn, can undermine desired behaviours of collaboration and partnership working. VCS organisations can also find that they spend a disproportionate amount of time bidding for funds and reporting on performance, and this process can be a barrier for smaller organisations.
- Dorset Council's work with the VCS is often siloed by service or directorate, resulting in a single VCS organisation having to deal with multiple teams, attend multiple meetings and duplicate some activity. Perceptions of need for improved structures and systems for working together.

- VCS organisations report continual struggles for sustainable funding. While there is recognition of the significant financial contribution made by Dorset Council, there is a request for multi-year financial settlements to give stability and enable longer term planning.
- Structure and system for working together needs more work.
- Co-production and collaboration on the strategy work will help to ensure sign off from the sector.
- Direction, priorities, and actions of draft strategy liked and seen as authentic.
- Not a lot on meta data and how we decide on big decisions collectively or individually.
- Offers an opportunity to engage with VCS Assembly to share data as with the Dorset Care Record and influence their priorities.
- Opportunity for more joined up working across council directorates.

#### **What our employees told us:**

- Widespread senior officer commitment and recognition across the council of value of working with the VCS and untapped potential within communities. Less understanding at other levels of the council.
- Some teams are realising the benefits of working with VCS, but equally some are not.
- Need to improve structures and processes for engagement and decision-making when working with VCS.
- Huge opportunity for joint working across the council.
- Look at 'who' our systems impact on collectively across directorates.
- Need an internal forum.
- Need a resource library – who do we work with, who do we fund? who already has relationships? Case studies.

- How can we get the smaller VCS organisations involved in conversations?
- Links made to Integrated Care System community work.
- Make use community infrastructure e.g., libraries, family hubs.