

VSNW Impact Review

2025

VSNW 

vsnw.org.uk

Foreword

I'm delighted to introduce Voluntary Sector North West's Impact Report for 2024/25, a year that's been full of energy, collaboration, challenges but also progress for the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector across our region.

This year, we've seen the sector step up in powerful ways — influencing policy, shaping health and care systems, driving innovation in research, and championing community-led change. Working with our partners and VCFSE infrastructure organisations within each sub-region, we've worked hard to make sure the sector's voice is heard, valued, and supported.

We've also made big strides nationally. Our work with NHS England and the development of Alliance42 has helped connect over 400,000 VCFSE groups across England, ensuring the sector is recognised as a key partner in shaping integrated care. Regionally, we've supported infrastructure partnerships to respond to fast-moving devolution developments, helping them advocate for the sector and influence emerging strategic authorities.

Our new website, the launch of the BRIDGE Research Network, and the first-ever VSNW Funding and Commissioning Awards are just a few examples of how we're continuing to innovate and celebrate the sector's impact.



Warren Escadale

Chief Executive, Voluntary
Sector North West

As we look ahead to our 2025–2030 strategic plan, we remain committed to building a connected, influential, and resilient VCFSE ecosystem with equalities at the heart of everything we do. The groundwork we've laid through our North West Lottery Programme will help us deliver on this vision, with exciting projects like the Centre of Excellence for VCFSE-led Health Creation and the North West Commissioning Panel set to launch in the coming year.

Thank you to our members, partners, funders, and the thousands of community organisations and champions who make this work possible. Together, we're building a stronger, fairer North West and we're proud to be on this journey with you.

About VSNW

As the first regional VCFSE infrastructure organisation in England, we're proud of the unique role we play in amplifying the voice and influence of the VCFSE sector across the North West.

Since we were founded in 1997, we've grown into a membership organisation that connects with the region's VCFSE sector through local and regional infrastructure bodies, equalities networks, and a wide range of providers.

These include large regional and national organisations, but also, and just as importantly, grassroots community groups that are the beating heart of our sector. In fact, through our networks, we aim to support the thousands of smaller organisations that make up the majority of the 50,000 plus VCFSE groups working across the North West.

Our members and partners are at the heart of everything we do. As of September 2025, VSNW is proud to have 243 members including full members and associates.

1

Our mission

To work together to enable the VCFSE sector to positively shape the future of the North West.

2

Our vision

Through the strengths of the VCFSE sector, put communities in charge of driving change.

3

Our values

- Making connections
- Being ingenious
- Creating change
- Adding value
- Challenging inequality

Key areas of work and influence



Devolution

Ensuring that the VCFSE sector is a key partner in our region's devolution journey



Prevention

Emphasising the importance of prevention and early intervention to tackle inequalities, with VCFSE provision and expertise leading the way



Growth

Enhancing and celebrating the VCFSE sector's role in boosting economic growth and supporting people into meaningful work and training

Strategic priority: Increase connectivity within the VCFSE sector

North West VCFSE representation

Our vision is to help build and support strong, connected partnerships that really make a difference for the VCFSE sector in every part of the North West. To make this happen, we focus on creating and nurturing relationships that bring real value and help maximise the sector's impact.

Supporting meaningful partnerships across the region is central to how we work. By working alongside VCFSE infrastructure groups, we help give the sector a strong, united voice at a regional level, one that can influence policy and decision-making in ways that matter.

In 2024/25, VSNW provided support to VCFSE infrastructure partnerships in Cheshire and Warrington, Liverpool City Region, Lancashire, and Greater Manchester. In Cumbria, where Cumbria CVS leads this work, we complemented their efforts by building connections and offering alternative support.

Greater Manchester
VCFSE Leadership Group
The sector's voice in devolution

VS6



Cheshire & Warrington
Infrastructure Partnership



Lancashire and
South Cumbria
VCFSE
Alliance

Connected • Supported • Influential

Communications

We're proud of how much we've improved our communications this year. Since launching our VSNW Regional Roundup newsletter, we've been sharing quarterly updates with our members on key projects, opportunities, and sector news.

We've also been working hard to keep fresh content flowing on our website including original think pieces, briefings, and blogs from our Policy and Influencing Team. These pieces reflect on national policy developments and sector trends, helping highlight what's most relevant for the VCFSE sector.

To help further strengthen our policy and influencing work, keep the sector better connected, and make it easier to access resources and updates, we've also been working on developing our brand-new website – which is now live!

Convening

In 2024–25, we supported 22 strategic VCFSE networks and hosted 148 network meetings including, events, assemblies, roundtables, workshops, and conferences. Through these, we connected with over 1,500 VCFSE leaders from across the North West, alongside public sector partners. It's all part of our commitment to building a vibrant, influential, and well-connected VCFSE sector in the region.

Strategic priority:

Enable influence and be an effective voice for the sector

We continue to support sub-regional partnerships to develop and deliver their collective, sector-led strategies, manifestos and implementation plans.

This includes:

- VS6's VCFSE Manifesto for Liverpool City Region 2024-28
- Greater Manchester VCFSE Leadership Group's Manifesto and Greater Manchester Accord
- Cheshire & Warrington VCFSE Sector Devolution Manifesto
- Lancashire LOCAL Manifesto
- Sharing learning with Cumbria CVS as their Strategic Authority takes shape.

At our metro mayor hustings in Liverpool City Region and Greater Manchester, we welcomed 200 sector leaders. We were thrilled to see Steve Rotheram and Andy Burnham sign their respective VCFSE manifestos. They also confirmed their ongoing commitment to working with us as a trusted partner.

We will be supporting our partners in Cheshire and Warrington, Lancashire and Cumbria CVS with similar events as devolution develops.

Investment

From April 2022 to March 2025, our work with partners to influence and demonstrate the value of the sector has secured £34.3 million of investment into the sector. This includes £15.9 million investment in 2024/25.

This investment has helped boost the sector's impact across a whole range of priority areas from skills and employment to health and social care, community research, tackling poverty, and community-led economic development. It's also supported work around wellbeing and prevention, making sure the VCFSE sector continues to play a vital role in shaping stronger, fairer communities.



Health & wellbeing

- Supporting hospital discharge and healthy living at home
- Advancing mental health and wellbeing initiatives
- Building grassroots health campaigns (e.g. cancer prevention)
- Partnering with primary care beyond social prescribing



Community & inclusion

- Championing community ownership
- Providing warm hubs
- Tackling digital exclusion
- Supporting refugees, asylum seekers, and welcoming communities
- Addressing homelessness



Food & poverty

- Developing food strategies beyond foodbanks



Criminal justice & safety

- Supporting sector involvement in criminal justice



Employment and skills

- Strengthening sector role in employment and skills pathways
- Promoting good employment models



Sector development & partnerships

- Influencing public sector commissioning and procurement
- Ensuring fair funding
- Supporting sector workforce initiatives
- Championing NHS partnerships (e.g. Merseyside, Greater Manchester)
- Developing VCFSE services for children and young people
- Supporting volunteering and access
- Promoting coproduction and sector intelligence
- Improving sector access to data and research



Environment & data

- Advancing net zero initiatives

Liverpool City Region: Beyond Innovation

The Beyond Innovation campaign, launched by the VS6 partnership, is all about challenging the idea that public services must always innovate to be successful. Constant innovation can sometimes lead to a cycle of perpetual change without lasting impact, so this campaign focuses on creating real, long-term change with the VCFSE sector.



To strike the right balance between fresh ideas and building on what already works, we've been sharing blogs that highlight the sector's natural creativity and innovation. We've also hosted events to explore best practice and the sector's role in key areas. So far, these have included:

- An assembly with YMCA on Housing and Homelessness
- An assembly with CHAMPS and Youth Focus NW on Child Poverty

ANSWER CANCER



Bee Seen, Get Screened

The well received Bee Seen, Get Screened campaign, which is part of our Answer Cancer project, encourages employers to pledge paid time off or flexible working so staff can attend NHS cancer screening appointments. And it's making a real difference: as of 31st March 2025, over 143,000 employees in Greater Manchester (that's around 1 in 10 working people) can now take time off for cancer screenings with their employer's full support.

Greater Manchester's sector instability campaign

The increase to employer National Insurance contributions (NIC) in the 2024 budget added increasing financial pressure on the sector. In response, we backed widespread NIC campaigns and helped lead the sector instability campaign in Greater Manchester. We saw some positive engagement with local councils, NHS partners, and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) offering support through commitments, letters, and conversations. It was clear that commissioners want to work more closely with our sector to improve support and care for people across Greater Manchester.

Health and care

Cheshire & Merseyside

The Cheshire & Merseyside VCFSE Health and Care Transformation Programme, delivered in partnership with the C&M Health and Care Leaders Group, VS6, and CWIP, is all about making sure the VCFSE sector has a strong voice and role in shaping health and care across the region.

Here are some of the highlights from 2024/25:

- The sector had a seat at the table in over 200 system meetings, helping influence decisions at strategic boards, forums, and working groups.
- We pushed for better use of social value in procurement, helping build a stronger VCFSE sector and a “Social Value Economy.”
- We expanded the sector’s role in hospital discharge and preventing readmissions.
- A new longer-term place-based partnership model was developed to improve community mental health services — with co-design at the core.
- We supported improvements in services for neurodivergent children and young people.
- And we celebrated an award-winning VCFSE cancer prevention programme with the Cancer Alliance, winner of Community Care Initiative of the Year 2024 at the Health Service Journal Awards!

Greater Manchester

In Greater Manchester, 10GM and the GM Leadership Group have helped bring together Live Well, a partnership between the GM Combined Authority, NHS Greater Manchester, and the VCFSE sector. It’s all about shifting power to communities and building on the sector’s strengths and expertise.

We’re also supporting the sector’s role in the Greater Manchester Trailblazer, focused on boosting local collaboration, testing new ways to support people who are economically inactive into work, and helping shape long-term system reform across work, health, and skills.



Nationwide

Nationally, we’ve built good links with NHS England’s voluntary sector team, and over the past eight years, we’ve successfully pushed for a VCFSE partnership programme that’s now aligned with all 42 Integrated Care Systems (ICS) across England, modelled on the work in Greater Manchester.

Thanks to this, VCSE partnerships or alliances are now up and running in every ICS area, including all four in the North West: Cheshire & Merseyside, Lancashire and South Cumbria, Greater Manchester, and North East and North Cumbria.

This progress has also led to the creation of Alliance42, a national network of local VCFSE Alliances that connects with over 400,000 local VCFSE groups across England. It’s a huge step forward in making sure the sector has a strong, united voice at every level.

Research engagement

We've been leading the Cheshire & Merseyside Research Engagement Network (REN) programme to help raise awareness, build capacity, and get the VCFSE sector more involved in health and care research.

One of the big steps forward has been launching BRIDGE Research Network which is a new online platform designed to connect researchers, academics, and the VCFSE sector at scale.

We've also supported and championed other community-led research initiatives, through this work including:

- Phoenix Way, which brings together 115 Black-led and racially minoritised groups, has set up its own research network and is now working with academic partners.
- Mary Seacole House trained nearly 30 research champions from over 11 countries, speaking languages like Persian, Arabic, Urdu, and Hindi, helping make research more inclusive through programmes like Research for the Future and Be Part of Research.
- Most recently, we've launched a pilot with health economists from Lancashire's two universities to help VCFSE organisations build skills in evaluation techniques and better demonstrate the impact of their work.



Lived experience

Through a member network of VCFSE equalities organisations and champions, GM=EqAI continues to bring expert insight and lived experience to the table. One of the key pieces of work this year was publishing clear principles and guidance around fair pay for lived experience contributions helping to challenge tokenistic engagement and shift power dynamics by making sure lived experience is valued equally in policymaking.

GM=EqAI led the development of a collection of best practice, resources, and information on equitable involvement and fair remuneration for people with lived experience who are co-producing policy.

We're now calling on public sector bodies to adopt the Lived Experience Framework, embed inclusion in policy design, and introduce structured payment processes all through a clear socialisation and implementation plan.

The goal? To make community-led policymaking the norm in Greater Manchester.

Devolution



After the government published its English Devolution White Paper in December 2024, we teamed up with Network for Europe to break down what the new strategic authorities could mean and how they might work, especially for the VCFSE sector in Lancashire, Cumbria, and Cheshire & Warrington where there is not already existing devolution.

We've been working closely with infrastructure partnerships in these areas to help shape their devolution asks, making sure the VCFSE sector has a strong voice in the development of these new authorities.

In Cheshire & Warrington, our support for CWIP helped identify key priorities, leading to the creation of the Cheshire & Warrington VCFSE Devolution Manifesto, which builds on earlier work around the Local Lancashire VCFSE Manifesto.

In Greater Manchester, the sector continues to be seen as a core partner, especially through the GM Leadership Group's strategic advisory roles, and is well placed to champion the sectors role in the delivery of the region's Integrated Single Settlement devolution deal. Meanwhile, in the Liverpool City Region, the Office for Public Service Innovation (OPSI) is driving new approaches to tackle deep-rooted deprivation and improve life chances. Through this programme, the VCFSE sector, via the VS6 Partnership, is helping shape the city region's integrated settlement ask to central government.

Strategic priority: Demonstrate the value of VSNW and the sector as a whole

1 Funding and commissioning awards

In 2024, we launched the very first VSNW Funding and Commissioning Awards giving us a chance to celebrate the commissioners and funders who truly understand and champion the value of our sector.

The awards aren't just about recognition, they also help us gather great examples and case studies of what good funding and commissioning looks like. This feeds directly into our North West Lottery project work, where we're rolling out Fair Funding Principles, setting up a North West Commissioning Review Panel, and developing a Co-Design and Co-Production Framework to support more inclusive and effective funding practices.



2 Maximising social value

In November 2024, we published **Towards a Social Value Economy** with our partners at NHS Cheshire & Merseyside. The report contained recommendations to help all system partners to shift towards a more values-driven way of working. It's all about unlocking the full potential of the Public Services Act 2012 and making social value a core part of how decisions are made.

Following that, NHS Cheshire & Merseyside shared their social value reporting for 2022-2024, produced by Social Value Portal. It included some great insights like how much is being spent with the VCFSE sector, just as we recommended in the report.

4 Sector impact reports

Our teams at VSNW have been working closely with regional infrastructure partnerships to help pull together impact reports that showcase the amazing work being done by the VCFSE sector and VCFSE partnerships. It's all about highlighting the difference the sector makes and making sure that work gets the recognition it deserves.

These include:

- [Cheshire and Merseyside VCFSE Health and Care Transformation Programme Progress Report](#) (2024/25)
- [Cheshire and Merseyside ICS Research Engagement Network \(REN\) Development Programme Impact Report](#) (2024)
- [VS6 Impact Report](#) - (2020/24)
- [Greater Manchester VCFSE Accord Impact Report](#) (2024/25)

3 Fair Funding

At the North West level, our Policy and Influencing Team are developing a set of Fair Funding Principles to help improve how contracts with the VCFSE sector are managed. These principles are all about making funding fairer, more transparent, and more supportive of the sector's strengths.

We're now gearing up to launch a regional Fair Funding Campaign to spread the word and encourage public sector partners to get on board.

5 Answer Cancer

The Greater Manchester Answer Cancer Programme, delivered in partnership with Salford CVS (Programme Lead), BHA for Equality, and Unique Improvements, is a great example of how the VCFSE sector is making a real impact on population health through prevention. What started as a pilot has now been running for seven years, showing just how powerful community-led action can be and the sector's ingenuity in driving prevention.

Using campaign tools, training, and grants, over 250 community organisations and thousands of community champions have helped drive meaningful engagement across Greater Manchester.

Here are some standout outcomes from 2024/25:

- 313 new Answer Cancer Champions signed up, bringing the total to 1,876, an 80% increase from last year.
- 188 champions reported having 8,767 direct conversations about cancer and cancer screening.
- 22% of people committed to taking up their screening invitation as a direct result of talking to a Champion.
- 43 new organisations joined as Organisational Champions, taking the total to 340.
- 45 champions reached 16,918 employees and service users through their work.

And to top it off, Answer Cancer Champions Rona Barbour and David McCallion won a Greater Manchester Health and Care Volunteer Champion Award for both 2024 and 2025 respectively – a huge achievement!

The future

While we're still delivering on our 2022–2025 strategic plan, we're also busy shaping our new plan for 2025–2030. It builds on everything we've achieved so far and focuses on five key areas with equalities running through everything we do:



Over the past 18 months, we've been laying the groundwork for our North West Lottery Programme, and 2025/26 is when it all starts to come to life. We'll be launching exciting projects like the fair funding campaign, the North West Commissioning Panel, and a centre of excellence for VCFSE-led health creation.

Our new VSNW website will play a big role in supporting this work making it easier for members and the wider sector to access updates, resources, and opportunities.

We're also getting ready to launch the BRIDGE Research Network platform, in collaboration with NHS England and NIHR, to improve access and inclusion for the VCFSE sector in health research.

And as devolution continues to move forward nationally, we'll keep supporting our sub-regional infrastructure partners to make sure the VCFSE sector has a strong voice as investment and decision-making powers shift closer to communities.

Join our growing network and become a VSNW member!

At VSNW, we empower the VCFSE sector to reach its full potential and influence decision-making at every level.

As a membership organisation, we prioritise members when consulting the sector for valuable insights to best support and champion its activities.

Your voice and experiences matter, and membership makes you an integral part of driving meaningful change.

Membership with VSNW is free, without formal commitment. We value members who act as communication bridges between VSNW and local community groups, ensuring important information and opportunities are effectively shared, strengthening collective capacity for lasting impacts.

Join VSNW to connect with like-minded organisations, access resources, and help build a collaborative sector. Your involvement shapes strategies and amplifies the voice of the VCFSE community.

The benefits:

- By joining us your organisation will be a part of strategic voluntary sector network in the North West.
- We will provide opportunities to meet voluntary organisations and share good ideas from all over the region.
- Our relationships with VCFSE sector leadership groups and local government bodies provides access to important networks and decision-makers at regional level.
- You can be part of policy debates and help to influence the development of the North West.
- You'll be the first to hear about our regional conferences and assemblies.
- Membership is free.

To find out more about the benefits of VSNW membership and to access the membership application, please visit our website at www.vsnw.org.uk/become-a-member

Thank you to our members for your continued support

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VSNW is the regional voluntary sector network for the North West. Our mission is to enable the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector to positively shape the future of the North West.

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