



North Central London
Integrated Care Board

Working with our Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector Strategy 2022/23 to 2025/26

September 2022

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Foreword from the NCL VCSE Alliance

As the VCSE Alliance for North Central London, we are delighted to be asked to write the foreword to the North Central London Integrated Care Board Strategy for working with the sector. Alongside other voluntary sector colleagues from across the five boroughs, we have been heavily involved in the development of this strategy, which we welcome as a positive development for the system.

Sector colleagues will undoubtedly have contrasting experiences from the past when there were five discrete Clinical Commissioning Groups, but there is now a palpable sense of things moving in a uniformly positive direction under the new Integrated Care System. Any work that takes place in the early 2020s will inevitably be informed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and we write this conscious that joint working across the system was both challenged, shaped, and ultimately strengthened by the way all partners worked together to respond to the unprecedented circumstances of 2020 and 2021. That unique period of time fostered new and better ways of working, demonstrated the ability of the sector to pivot quickly to respond to circumstances, and helped system partners to understand the unique strengths of the voluntary sector. Therefore, it feels like an auspicious time for a strategy of this nature to be produced, and there is a real hope that it will help to preserve the flexible, trusted, and productive partnership working that emerged through COVID-19.

Inevitably, there will be challenges. A real question, which systems up and down the country are currently grappling with, is how do we create truly equal partnership when money and power are distributed unequally between system partners? There are no simple answers to this, but we would urge our statutory sector partners to be ambitious in terms of involving and working with the voluntary sector. Through COVID-19, we demonstrated our reach into communities and our ability to add value, expanding the sense of what is possible. If all of us can hold onto that experience, and be genuinely open to more equal and innovative ways of working, we will all be able to play our part in transforming the offer to the citizens of North Central London.



Caroline Collier, Chief Executive Inclusion Barnet and Chair of the NCL VCSE Alliance.

1. Context

There are many thousands of Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector organisations in North Central London (NCL), ranging from large national charities to much smaller local organisations, and with an incredible breadth of focus.

Collectively, the sector plays a crucial role in understanding, supporting and championing the needs of our communities. VCSE partners work closely with statutory health and care organisations across NCL to help shape plans, decisions and services, as well as providing a range of innovative local services and solutions themselves.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of many residents living in our boroughs, and has exacerbated health inequalities in under-served communities. It has also underlined the unique and vital role that VCSE organisations play in reaching diverse communities; providing information, support and services, particularly to those who are under-represented in accessing statutory services and who experience the greatest health inequalities. The sector has been integral to the design and delivery of the COVID-19 vaccination programme, and led local activity to build trust to support equitable access and uptake. There is significant learning we can take forward from this in terms of how the health system works with VCSE.

As we form the North Central London Integrated Care Board (NCL ICB), working as part of the NCL Integrated Care System (NCL ICS), it is vital we build on existing strong relationships with the VCSE sector and on best practice approaches to partnership working, particularly harnessing the experience of local authority colleagues.

We must also look to remove some of the barriers that currently make it difficult for VCSE organisations to collaborate with us as strategic partners. Doing so will ensure the sector's unique capabilities are an integral part of how the new health and care system operates, and will allow us to work together to tackle health inequalities in a way that is meaningful for our communities.

2. Introduction

This strategy has been co-designed with the NCL VCSE Alliance and the commitments included have received significant support from VCSE organisations across north central London. The ideas and approaches described are based on learning and best practice from across NCL ICS partners, in particular local authority colleagues. There has been involvement and input from ICB colleagues, joint commissioners in our councils, borough teams and VCSE organisations, to develop the strategy.

This strategy will support both the new NCL ICB and our system partners (including the VCSE sector) to set an ambitious vision for the future. It is intended to align with, and build on, the significant work already taking place locally, as well as learn from approaches being taken in other areas of the country.

The strategy will provide a framework for working in partnership with the VCSE on shared objectives to improve population health and tackle inequalities, by:

- Ensuring VCSE organisations can participate as a strategic partner in the ICS.
- Providing best practice principles on working with the sector and individual organisations.
- Taking a strategic approach to resourcing and investing in collaboration with VCSE.
- Ensuring that opportunities for the VCSE can be realised in a very practical way across NCL, at both a borough and neighbourhood level.
- Through delivery of this strategy, we are committed to working together as an ICS to support a strong and thriving VCSE sector whose unique skills and contribution to the health and care system are recognised, respected and resourced appropriately. We recognise that our local VCSE are the conduit to addressing health inequalities, hearing from, supporting and ultimately empowering our most deprived and vulnerable local communities.

Through effective collaboration with our VCSE, we will achieve a greater and stronger reach into local communities, which in turn will amplify the work of local community services. Through better resourced community support and intervention before local people reach the health and social care system, we can ensure a reduction in the numbers of local people falling into crisis. This collaboration supports our local communities to manage their own health and wellbeing, so that they do not have to unnecessarily access services for preventable health and social care concerns. This strategy supports the delivery of the NCL ICS Population Health Improvement Strategy.

The strategy development is the start of the journey; delivering its ambitions will take long-term commitment. As we start to implement the strategy in 2022/23, the five Borough Partnerships (Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Haringey and Islington) will be vital to ensuring that local approaches and plans are mutually supportive.

This strategy should be read alongside our 'Working with our People and Communities' Strategy, recognising that the ambitions set out there will only be achieved through working closely with the VCSE sector.

3. Principles

1. We ensure that the VCSE are a strong, strategic partner in the North Central London Integrated Care System, and that the voice of the VCSE is heard and has impact.
2. We take a strategic approach to VCSE investment, making the best use of funding and resources to support a well-resourced, strong and thriving sector.
3. We support the VCSE to work alongside statutory and mainstream services, to ensure diverse communities have access to care in a way that reflects their needs.
4. We invest in community-led and strengths-based projects.
5. We have effective, scalable contracting and procurement processes, which support and enable the VCSE to work with us – from larger organisations to grassroots community organisations.
6. We ensure sustainable funding for our VCSE so that we develop community programmes that support and empowers local communities and the sector.

4. Approach: our commitments to working with VCSE

The approaches and commitments set out in this section have been co-developed with our VCSE, with input from commissioning and local authority colleagues. They have been identified as key to ensuring a strong and thriving sector with the skills and capabilities to play a strategic role within the NCL ICS. They support a continued focus on building strong partnerships with VCSE and working together to deliver local services, improve diverse communities' access and experience of these, and empower our communities to improve outcomes and tackle inequalities.

The five areas described below are interdependent. We have separated them out for the purpose of this document, in order to clearly demonstrate our commitment to working with the sector and the approaches we will take for each area.

4.1 VCSE as an equal strategic partner

We are committed to the VCSE sector being an equal strategic partner in the ICS. We will ensure their voices are heard and have influence within both the ICS and Borough Partnerships, as these develop.

The thriving VCSE sector in NCL has multiple roles and is heavily localised at place and neighbourhood and targeted at specific groups and communities; this is a huge asset. We must harness this incredible network of knowledge, experience and perspectives to influence and shape NCL and borough priority setting and decision-making.

The NCL VCSE Alliance was formed in 2021/22, comprising the five VCSE umbrella organisations, plus a representative organisation from across the NCL boroughs for homelessness, disability, deprivation and refugee and migrant communities. We are committed to working with the Alliance to ensure the voice of the VCSE is heard within NCL ICS, support us to identify key system priorities and the barriers and blocks for the VCSE to work with ICB and ICS - informing our system development.

The role and place of VCSE is a key element within our governance arrangements for the ICB; this includes VCSE Alliance membership on our key ICB Committees, to ensure their ability to influence plans and priorities. We will also share cross-learning from the development of the GP and Provider Alliances.

We will continue to develop other effective two-way conversation channels, ensuring the VCSE sector is aware of ICB plans and programmes and can be involved in their development. We recognise the variety of the sector and so will continue to explore creative methods of engaging with VCSE. It is crucial we do not expect organisations to come to us but that we reach out to VCSE, ensuring that we can hear from grass roots organisations.

Ensuring the VCSE have a strong voice within the ICB and ICS development, will strengthen the voice of the diverse communities living across our boroughs. Our VCSE organisations provide crucial community insight into our local diverse populations and we want to build on these skills and relationships so that we systematically work with them to raise the voice of local people in the development of services, population health improvement and supporting local communities to live well.

We commit to working with the sector and our wider partners to:

1. Develop the NCL VCSE Alliance, as well as a strong network of VCSE forums in each borough, with two way information and engagement flow, and creative thinking around how grassroots organisations are involved in our work.
2. Ensure there is representation from the voluntary sector at the ICB and other appropriate governance arrangements, e.g. within Borough Partnership Boards.
3. Develop clear and collaborative processes to directly feed the voice and community insights of the VCSE into ICS and ICB and influence decision-making.
4. Co-develop clear outcomes and evaluation criteria for this VCSE Alliance model, which demonstrate what success looks like and can be measured against.

4.2 Working in partnership with VCSE to design and deliver innovative community-focused and strengths-based models of care

There are stark inequalities across NCL around access to and experience of care, and health outcomes, and we recognise that the current configuration of services and solutions could better meet the needs of our diverse communities. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the health inequalities faced by some of our communities, and further highlighted ways in which statutory services sometimes do not equally serve our communities, particularly those facing the highest health inequalities and deprivation.

The pandemic has also highlighted the importance of the relationships and support that exist around communities outside of traditional public sector services. The VCSE have been invaluable in supporting the most vulnerable in our communities through the pandemic, and this work continues. The sector mobilised across NCL to deliver medicines and food; when immediate needs had been met, they used this momentum to address the impact on wellbeing, offering befriending services, online coffee mornings, and WhatsApp groups. They worked to share messaging around staying safe, how to access services and supported the roll-out of the vaccine programme.

VCSE organisations across NCL are well-placed to work with our diverse communities to tackle the issues which matter at a neighbourhood level, through community-focused, strengths-based and place-based models of care. They are the experts in understanding that local people are active participants in their own wellbeing and that of their communities (rather than simply recipients of a service), and working with communities to address their needs and priorities. They have unique skills and perspective and many are part of the communities they work with.

In NCL, our VCSE sector is already integral to the design and provision of a wide range of services and solutions that support population health and wellbeing, and create community connections to statutory services. A range of VCSE-led community programmes already exist, some of which are commissioned through the ICB and local councils. These programmes include in-depth community research work to understand the impact of the pandemic, the NCL Health Inequalities Fund and Public Health investments. Many more are resourced through external funders, public fund-raising and community action.

Transitioning to an ICS and ICB presents a unique opportunity to work towards more strengths-based and community-based solutions and services, and to ensure a greater level of engagement, collaboration and mutual support between statutory and VCSE sectors in delivering these. This work will be informed by well-established approaches to working with and commissioning the sector already used by our local authorities, and also by actively seeking innovation.

Looking forward, as an ICB we will create a strategic investment approach to align the multiple opportunities available, support market development of the sector and champion innovation in how we invest and resource. This must enable working with the wide range of grass roots organisations. With the sector experiencing a high level of demand and with capacity constraints, their value and contribution must be recognised and fairly funded.

The ICB will work collaboratively with local authorities to support and champion the VCSE; developing stronger and more informed relationships with the sector.

We commit to working with the sector and our wider partners to:

1. Align community engagement and empowerment programmes for greater impact, including: NCL Health Inequalities Fund, NCL ICB Community Research & Action Programme, Community Connectors, vaccine community engagement programmes.
2. Help develop the plans of our five Borough Partnerships for community engagement and empowerment programmes, ensuring NHS approaches and investment aligns with local councils' current investment in VCSE.
3. Support the sector to collaborate with statutory and mainstream services to ensure diverse communities have access to care in a way that reflects their needs, recognising there are existing pockets of best practice to build on.
4. Develop innovative NHS investment arrangements which support a more preventative and strengths-based approach to delivering care and services, in collaboration with the statutory sector (building on existing work, such as the Health Inequalities Fund).
5. Be proactive in our collaboration with the VCSE sector, to adopt a system-thinking approach to investment in which we collaborate to develop, learn and improve solutions together, ensuring that the VCSE sector play a vital role in providing feedback on behalf of communities and groups.

4.3 Developing investment, procurement and contracting processes that support a strong and thriving VCSE

To achieve the ICS and ICB ambitions around tackling health inequalities, as a system we need to ensure resources are shared equitably and have the most impact, supporting those who are most vulnerable in our community. We also need to ensure local VCSE organisations are in a position to access the multiple opportunities that are now available within the health and social care system, encouraging community-based asset building and resourcing from external funding.

We can enable this by taking some practical steps to facilitate more effective collaboration around investing between the ICB and VCSE. These steps include ensuring that our commissioning and procurement processes do not act as a barrier to delivering innovatively with the VCSE, and that our tender processes are open and transparent, with sufficient lead-in times. We must also develop ICB colleagues' skills and expertise on working with the VCSE from engagement through to strategic investment.

We commit to working with the sector and our wider partners to:

1. Co-design a VCSE Investment Framework with the VCSE Alliance, which reflects and is aligned to Borough initiatives across NCL.
2. Collaborate across the ICB to develop a revised approach to VCSE procurement and contracting, including:
 - a. Investment in more preventative and strengths-based approach.
 - b. Long-term, sustainable investment for community and strengths-based projects (a minimum of three years) to ensure the work can embed in local communities.
 - c. A well-thought through exit process for when funding is not to be renewed/continued. This should be in line with local councils' best practice.
3. Where appropriate, take a 'VCSE first' approach; investing in local NCL VCSE organisations, rather than external consultancy agencies. Where this is not possible, we will seek to fund in partnership with a VCSE organisation.
4. Developing ICB colleagues' skills and expertise in working with the VCSE, from engagement through to strategic investment. This will include staff training and best practice sharing (through the framework).

4.4 Support building infrastructure, resource and expertise across the sector

We commit to supporting the development of this sector; building on VCSE infrastructure and resources at Borough and Neighbourhood level and working with local authorities to ensure a joined-up approach, which aligns with the work they already do in this field.

We commit to sharing best practice through the VCSE Alliance and Borough networks/forums, and to continuing to embed the voice of the VCSE in the ICB's work programmes and governance structures.

We also commit to working alongside a range of organisations that reflects the diversity of our communities; supporting larger strategic VCSE organisations as well as community-focused and driven grass roots organisations.

As part of this work we will support the development of strong VCSE partnerships and collectives across the ICS, to amplify the voices of diverse communities and share skills and resources to the greatest effect.

Given the breadth of work the VCSE sector in NCL undertake, and the size and diversity of the sector, we appreciate the need for a nuanced approach to how we invest in solutions and services and how we understand impact. We will seek advice from the sector, to ensure we are working with the full range of organisations.

We commit to working with the sector and our wider partners to:

1. Support VCSE infrastructure development: a combination of common approaches/principles across NCL, aligned with Borough capacity building for the sector.
2. Support VCSE collaboration and partnership models in NCL to enable organisations within a borough to work together (coordinated through lead organisations, where appropriate)– making it easier to:
 - a. be an active partner in Borough Partnerships and ICB programmes,
 - b. collaborate on funding bids,
 - c. manage contracting processes and sharing of funds across organisations,
 - d. share skills and expertise across organisations,
 - e. raise the voices of local communities.
3. Deliver annual events / engagement activity with VCSE partnerships to review the investment, priorities and outcomes, to ensure these remain inclusive and aligned to communities' needs.

4.5 Evaluate

We are committed to demonstrating the impact that working with our VCSE has, together with the social value they bring to the health and social care system.

We will establish a shared understanding of the needs of our communities and will continue engaging to measure if the way we are working is supporting a strong and thriving VCSE, and therefore genuinely improving people's experiences of care and supporting our communities to live good quality lives.

We will involve stakeholders such as Healthwatches and VCSE partners, and our local communities to define outcomes and assess our delivery of these. We commit to learning from innovative best practice around community research and evaluation models.

We will study current work underway nationally to develop local ways of measuring the long-term financial (positive) impact of investing in strength-based models and understand that we may need to invest more initially to see outcomes later.

We commit to working with the sector and our wider partners to:

1. Evaluate the impact of our community work, learning from previous projects to continuously improve the reach and impact of our work with local communities.
2. Work across the NCL ICS to share research skills and insights and support VCSE to gather robust data, evidence and evaluation.
3. Establish processes to centrally collect and report on insights to inform ICS and ICB plans, programmes and ultimately decisions, including the development of an Insights Bank.
4. Develop outcomes frameworks which are community-led.

5. Conclusion

Strengthening the way we work in partnership with the VCSE sector will help us achieve the aims of the NCL Population Health Improvement Strategy, to improve local communities' health and wellbeing and tackle inequalities.

This strategy has been developed with input from a wide range of stakeholders and reflects existing best practice, but also barriers identified as critical to tackle, to shape our future working with the VCSE sector. The Strategy build on the strong foundations already in place in each borough and a crucial part of delivery will be through the five Borough Partnerships, working with local VCSE and Councils. Delivering the aims of this Strategy will require resource in both funding and staff, and collaborative approaches across partner organisations.

The ambitions outlined here will require long-term commitment and we will start putting the strategy into action in 2022/23. A delivery plan for 2022/23 will be developed, involving our VCSE, ICS partners, and Borough Partnerships and ICB staff. This delivery plan will be reviewed and refreshed annually.

Work in 2022/23 will include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Developing a strategic approach to ICB investment in the VCSE sector;
- Developing a VCSE Investment Framework with the VCSE Alliance, which incorporates best practice VCSE contracting and procurement processes;
- Building on and developing Borough Partnership's community engagement and VCSE partnership plans, including effective processes to share insight and learning between borough-level VCSE forums and the NCL VCSE Alliance and developing VCSE involvement in priority setting and plans;

- Supporting the development of VCSE collaboration / partnership models in NCL to enable organisations within a borough to work together;
- Training for ICB staff on best community engagement and empowerment practices and on how to work with the VCSE.

If you would like to receive information included in this document in another format, or have any questions on this document, please contact the NCL ICB communications and engagement team via nlicb.communications@nhs.net