

VS6 – Working together to build a stronger Liverpool City Region

Building Back Better with the VCFSE Sector in Liverpool City Region

A summary of four VS6 assembly events with recommendations and actions for supporting the VCFSE sector and our communities



Foreword

Throughout the coronavirus pandemic, the VS6 Partnership has been committed to supporting the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector to provide a proactive emergency response for our communities across the Liverpool City Region and providing a platform to raise emerging issues and potential solutions.

The sector's response to the pandemic has been fantastic, with many organisations stepping up and adapting services to provide much needed support to some of our most vulnerable residents, as well as supporting those who have found themselves in an entirely unfamiliar situation and have never required support before.

The VCFSE assemblies hosted by the VS6 Partnership were a brilliant way of engaging with the sector virtually to capture how the first few months of the pandemic has impacted both VCFSE organisations and vulnerable communities across the region and to develop recommendations based on lived experience of those hard at work on the frontline.

This report provides an overview of each of the VCFSE assemblies and summarises the common themes and recommendations born out of each event to provide a clear steer as to what is needed for the sector to continue to provide vital services now and in the future.

Crucially, the recommendations from this report will form the foundations for the VS6 VCFSE Manifesto for 2021-2024 which will outline our vision for the city region's voluntary sector in order to influence and shape local policy implementation. Within our manifesto will be key asks to the Liverpool City Region Metro Mayor candidates and a commitment from them to support and champion the VCFSE sector as part of their manifesto for the next three years.



Reverend Canon Dr Ellen Loudon
Director of Social Justice & Canon Chancellor, Diocese of
Liverpool
Independent Chair VS6

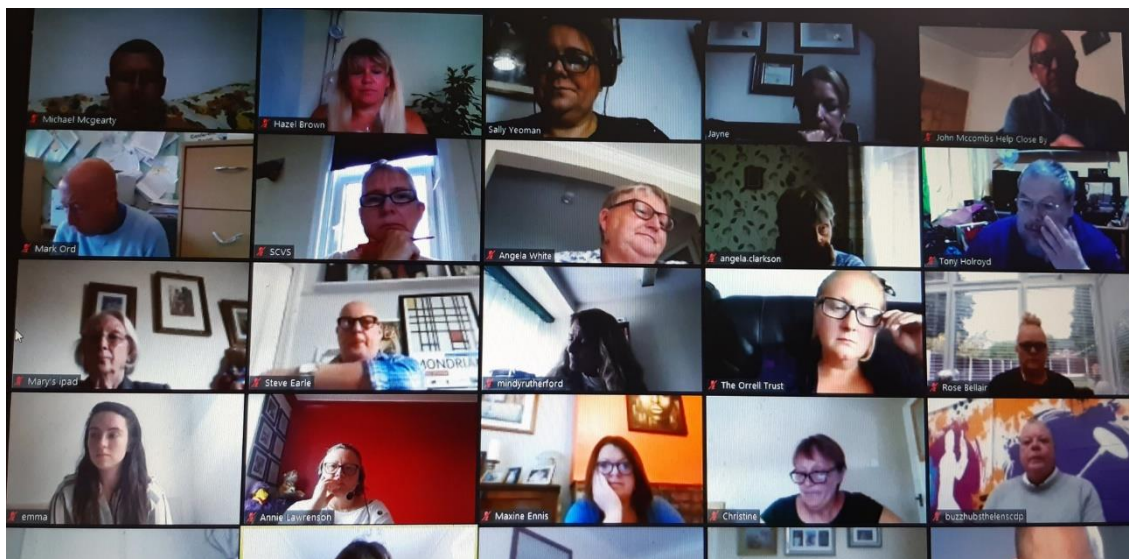
VCFSE Assemblies

As the VCFSE emergency response progressed, it became clear through local feedback and national research that specific communities were at increased risk of the impacts of COVID, with common themes and issues facing organisations and the people they work with. In order to better understand and provide recommendations for managing these issues, through May to July 2020 VS6 hosted a number of virtual assembly events on the following areas:

1. **Children and Young People**
2. **Shielded, Vulnerable People and Carers**
3. **Mental Health and Resilience**
4. **Inequalities Through a BAME Lens**

These events brought together VCFSE organisations from across the whole of the City Region to share their views and experiences of the issues facing our communities through online workshops. Additionally, the assembly events were attended by guest speakers and representatives of the LCR Combined Authority, including Metro Mayor Steve Rotherham who attended the Inequalities Through a BAME Lens Assembly.

Each assembly was followed up with a written report with key recommendations and actions that were published on the VS6 website and shared with key stakeholders. This Summary Report provides an overview of all the VS6 assemblies and summarises the principal recommendations and common themes from each of the assembly reports.





Methodology

As well as understanding the impact of COVID on our communities, at the heart of the VCFSE assemblies was partnership and engagement with our VCFSE sector colleagues who have been working tirelessly throughout the pandemic to provide support for those in need.

To ensure the recommendations from each assembly were co-produced and reflected the discussions held by VCFSE assembly attendees, the following process was carried out for each event:



By ensuring that we consult with our VCFSE colleagues on the recommendations summarised in this report we enable them to own these recommendations and share a strong, unified message across the LCR of what is needed to support our communities.

Key areas and recommendations from the VS6 Assemblies

Improve the resilience of the VCFSE sector

- There needs to be a review of the resilience of the VCFSE sector to understand what strategies and models have and have not worked throughout the pandemic in order to inform resilience planning for the future.
- Learnings from emergency planning and crisis response should be sought and shared throughout the sector.
- Commissioner's and funders should continue to support the sector by being more flexible with contract delivery and the commissioning process should be adapted to address structural inequalities.

Support and guidance for re-opening services

- VCFSE organisations require clear guidance for the safe re-opening of venues and return to service delivery. This should include practical advice such as sanitisation and social distancing but also guidance for adapting service delivery models, carrying out risk assessments and digital working.
- Guidance and support should also be provided to service users to promote confidence in returning to community spaces when it is safe to do so.
- A single, organised, and collective approach to procurement and distribution of PPE for the sector. Carers should be provided with access to PPE as part of hospital and care home discharge planning.

Service accessibility and effective partnership working

- The pandemic has changed the way many VCFSE services operate. We need to understand what services are available for those in need, how service users are accessing these services and how this has changed.
- Increased multi-agency working and collaboration between the VCFSE and the public sector, including improved partnership structures with BAME organisation and infrastructure.
- Develop new ways of offering formal and informal respite care for carers during crises.

Improved communications and engagement

- The VCFSE and public sector to share learnings and examples of good practice across LCR throughout the COVID response and maintain best practice.
- Continued communication between the Combined Authority, local councils, infrastructure organisations and VCFSE organisations.
- Promote good news stories and give platforms to groups such as BAME communities and young people to change negative narratives and perceptions.
- Enable the voices of BAME communities and pro-actively outreach in order to ensure these groups are engaged and are active participants in decision making.

Build a sustainable VCFSE financial model

- Sustainable funding of the sector with more long-term funding to improve resilience of VCFSE organisations to continue to provide vital services within communities.
- An LCR review of investment into VCFSE services including a picture of the impact of lost income within the sector.
- Facilitate access to essential supplies such as PPE through dedicated funding pots.
- Dedicated funding and resources for the development of BAME organisations, with more long term and ringfenced funding with decisions made by BAME communities.

Representation and participation of BAME communities

- Review LCR structures to include BAME involvement at all strategic levels and ensure that BAME organisations and individuals are invited to participate in strategic discussions, decision making and service design.
- Review recruitment practices to ensure that under-represented groups are encouraged to apply for positions within LCR.
- Increase the interest in local and national politics to influence policy and improve the numbers of people voting from under-represented communities.
- Revisit and understand the definition of BAME to ensure that all minority communities are centrally included in this work, such as Irish, Irish Traveller and Gypsy Traveller communities.

Tackling digital exclusion

- Assess and address the impact of digital exclusion on vulnerable groups across LCR and understand how those who are digitally excluded have or have not been able to access services.
- Ensure that all children and young people have access to I.T to support home learning, reduce social isolation and access support online.
- Support for VCFSE organisations to offer services online in addition to face to face services where appropriate.

Workforce and volunteering support

- Enhance and streamline volunteer recruitment and learn from the successes seen during the pandemic.
- A programme of training for all staff to include Mental Health First Aid, Adverse Childhood Experience, and anti-racism training. Leadership should also receive crisis management training. This should be accessible by VCFSE organisations.
- Organisations across LCR should have regular wellbeing check ins with staff and volunteers with clear guidance and pathways for those who require extra support.
- Better understand the impact of the pandemic on unpaid carers and how they should be supported to return to work or carry on caring.

Children and Young People Assembly

There is no doubt that children and young people have been adversely affected by COVID-19. With schools and youth centres closed, access to mental health services limited, children unable to see their friends and a rise in domestic violence to name a few, it is important now more than ever to protect our children and young people and the services that support them.

VCFSE organisations in the Liverpool City Region have been working tirelessly throughout the pandemic to provide this much needed support for CY&P during a time when, out of necessity, society has been largely concerned with focusing resources on those more susceptible to the virus. As a result, many CY&P organisations have been left working with limited resources.

The VS6 Children and Young People Assembly was held on 27th May 2020 to develop a six point recovery plan for building back up our CY&P VCFSE activity in order to protect our VCFSE organisations and ensure that they can continue to support our children and young people now and into the future.

The Assembly was chaired by Gill Bainbridge, Chief Executive of Merseyside Youth Association, and was attended by 44 participants from 39 organisations.



Key Recommendations

1. Children and young people in recovery

- Assess increased mental health support needs of CY&P and increase of domestic violence in LCR alongside statutory services
- Understand what support services are available and the access routes for young people
- Review the impact of the crisis on CY&P including finances, employment issues, housing and food access over the next 12 months

2. Closing the digital divide

- Assess and address the impact of digital exclusion on CY&P
- Ensure all CY&P have access to IT for home learning and reducing isolation
- Review ability for CY&P to connect to support services digitally

3. Delivering the day job

- Support VCFSE organisations to recover with LCR support and guidance on returning to work and adapting delivery models
- Collective procurement of PPE
- Increased multi-agency working between VCFSE and public sector
- Assess potential for LCR Cares to provide larger funding pots for organisations in financial danger

4. Resilience review

- Review what has and hasn't worked throughout the pandemic and improve resilience planning
- Share best practice in digital delivery
- Support from commissioners with flexible contract delivery

5. Young people's press

- Promote good news stories of young people and the value of youth work as part of the emergency response to date

6. Investment and flexibility

- LCR review of investment in CY&P services including CY&P Consortium development, longer term funding and impact of lost income

Key Recommendations

1. Risk assessments

- Risk assessment support for organisations and for carers and shielded people to make their own judgements about risk

2. Support and resources to adapt services

- Immediate resources for frontline and volunteer organisations for a safe return to face to face work including PPE, digital, and income generation advice
- Funding resource for spot purchasing of PPE

3. Promote support offers at an LCR level

- Develop a single portal for carers, shielded and vulnerable people linking wellbeing support and access to economic opportunities e.g. training

4. Better access to respite care

- Find new ways of offering formal and informal respite care to increase confidence in using respite services

5. A single, organised approach to PPE

- CVS to be key to organising a coordinated approach to sourcing PPE
- Carers to be able to access PPE as part of discharge planning

6. Understand impact of reduced unpaid carer and volunteer workforce

- Develop VCFSE ambition of how to build back better support for people who require support of others

7. Review of emergency planning and best practice

- Share learnings and maintain best practice from work done throughout the COVID-19 response
- Provide guidance to the VCFSE sector for adapting service delivery and develop a wider VCFSE communications system
- Enhance and streamline volunteer recruitment

8. Build a sustainable VCFSE Financial Model

- Assess and understand key support as part of a wider review
- Commissioner's to continue to support VCFSE providers

Shielded, Vulnerable People & Carers Assembly

During the initial coronavirus response and national lockdown a large number of individuals who were thought to be at an increased risk of the virus, such as the elderly and those with pre-existing health conditions, were formally notified to “shield”.

1 in 4 working age adults in LCR have a limiting health condition and may be described as “vulnerable”. In addition to those formally asked to shield, many others may have been voluntarily shielding for fear of catching the virus.

Shielded individuals were asked to remain in their homes and avoid going outdoors and have had to rely on the goodwill of carers, family, friends, and volunteers for essential supplies such as food and medication. Unfortunately, those having to shield have also experienced issues such as social isolation, loneliness, and poor mental health.

VCFSE organisations and mutual aid groups have been crucial in supporting vulnerable and shielded people, including the 181,000 carers in LCR.

The Shielded, Vulnerable People & Carers Assembly was held on 16th June 2020 to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on these vulnerable groups and develop key recommendations for building back VCFSE activity to support these groups through the recovery phase and beyond.

The Assembly was chaired by Angela White, Chief Executive of Sefton CVS and was attended by over 60 participants.



Mental Health and Resilience Assembly

Mental health has been an ongoing theme throughout the coronavirus pandemic, with increasing numbers of people reporting that their mental health has worsened due to COVID-19, and those who have not experienced poor mental health before now struggling to cope.

The fear of catching the virus, job losses and financial uncertainty has caused feelings of stress, anxiety, and depression whereas lockdown restrictions and a lack of face-to-face contact has meant many people have struggled with social isolation and loneliness.

The VCFSE sector has been key to supporting people struggling with mental health throughout the pandemic, working closely alongside public sector services to deliver support remotely and face-to-face when safe to do so. As mental health impacts all of us, actions are needed not only to support the public but also to help our staff, leadership and volunteers to enable them to be mentally healthy and resilient to be able to support others.

The Mental Health and Resilience Assembly explored the impact of COVID-19 on VCFSE organisations and service users and developed six key recommendations for mental health organisations to undertake to improve the mental health resilience of the city region.

The assembly was chaired by Rachael Jones, Chief Officer of One Knowsley with representatives from over 50 VCFSE organisations.



Key Recommendations

1. Additional staff training

- Negotiate access to local authority training courses
- Roll-out of training to build mental health resilience including Mental Health First Aid and Adverse Childhood Experience training
- Sector leaders to receive crisis management and leadership training from infrastructure organisations

2. Guidance on safe reopening of venues

- Communication of guidance on returning to work and safely reopening community venues
- Risk assessment models for a variety of activities and space to be shared LCR wide

3. Improve access to PPE and vital supplies

- Bulk purchasing of PPE and other supplies to provide to VCFSE organisations at a lower cost
- Facilitate access to supplies through dedicated funding pots

4. Share national examples of good practice

- Examples of good practice from other areas to be shared with stakeholders in LCR

5. Wellbeing support for staff, volunteers, and service users

- Working as a whole system to tackle mental health
- Remote wellbeing check ins for staff, volunteers, and service users with clear guidance on next steps for those identifying issues
- Increased connection with mental health charities
- “Wellbeing at work” training for managers, staff and volunteers to keep well at work

6. Improved communications

- Continued communication from infrastructure organisations with VCFSE organisations
- Ensure that internal communications reach all within an organisation to share updates, news and funding opportunities

Key Recommendations

1. Improve partnership working and communication

- Closer working with other organisations on issues of race inequality and improved partnership structures across VCFSE and public sector organisations
- Pro-active outreach for minority communities and bespoke support to engage
- Enable the voices of young BAME people
- Change the narrative by celebrating the richness of BAME culture
- Revisit and understand “BAME” to ensure the inclusion of all minority communities in this work.

2. More resources and better support

- Funding and resources to support the development of BAME organisations and staff including long term and ringfenced funding with decisions made by BAME communities
- BAME individuals to be invited to high level discussions and supported to participate and be represented at decision making
- Leadership mentoring programme for BAME communities including reciprocal reverse mentoring for BAME staff and volunteers
- Commissioning process to adapt to address inequalities

3. Culture change

- Training for strategic decision makers
- Integrate equalities into social value practices
- LCR to promote partnership work through funding and commissioning with collaborative approaches
- Evidence based requirement to ensure BAME communities have been invited to participate in strategic discussions impacting on them
- Change recruitment practices and how organisational meetings are planned

4. Better representation

- Changes to city region structures to include BAME involvement at all strategic levels
- Include BAME communities in co-design of services and funding/commissioning opportunities
- BAME as community experts and participants – pay them for this work
- Encourage BAME people into local and national politics

Inequalities Through a BAME Lens Assembly

Research has shown that BAME communities are an increased risk of contracting COVID-19 and suffering serious consequences as a result of structural racism and inequalities.

The events of the past few months have shone a light on BAME inequalities around the world and highlighted that significant work is needed to better understand, address, and change these issues.

It is well documented that Liverpool is home to the oldest black community in the country and the oldest Chinese community in Europe. With such a rich historical and cultural history, the VCFSE sector and LCR Combined Authority must take responsibility for empowering our BAME communities and organisations to break down structural barriers.

The Inequalities Assembly was chaired by Tracey Gore, Director of Steve Biko Housing and Chair of the Race Equality Taskforce. The assembly focused on understanding the issues and concerns of BAME individuals, communities and organisations, the impacts of COVID-19 and how this can change with a recognition of intersectionality.

The assembly was hosted over two dates and was attended by 120 participants from 85 organisations.



VS6 is a partnership of support organisations working with the 8,600 voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) groups operating across our Liverpool City Region

VCFSE in Liverpool City Region

- Over 8,600 VCFSE groups supporting communities across the City Region including 5,500 community groups
- 24,000 plus FTE employees working in the sector
- £918m GVA contribution to the City Region
- 180,000 volunteers contributing over 500,000 hours per week¹

What do we do?

VS6 work together to champion the vital role our sector does and could play in the future of the City Region, while seeking to shape local policy and implementation for the benefit of our communities.

How do we do this?

VCFSE support organisations have collectively engaged with public and private sector partners on a City Region level since 2004. In 2015, we formally launched the VS6 partnership in order to provide a voice, platform and action model for VCFSE participation.

We're focused on driving positive change by connecting the VCFSE sector with our developing city region. Together, we have links to 8,600 organisations across the six boroughs, and aim to support these groups – many integral to our communities - to collectively influence decision making:

- Offering solutions to some of the most challenging economic issues facing our City Region
- Driving community-centred approaches to transforming health and well-being
- Providing a single point of contact for the city's VCFSE sector

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¹ **Source:** *Measuring the size and scope of the VCS in Liverpool City Region (Liverpool John Moores University: 2015)*

