

GMCA Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Date: Thursday 10th December 2025

Subject: Greater Manchester VCFSE Accord

Report of: Councillor Arooj Shah, Portfolio Lead for Equalities and Communities, GMCA
and Jenny Rouse VCFSE Accord Principal Officer, GMCA

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide Overview and Scrutiny Committee opportunity to review an early draft of the updated Greater Manchester VCFSE Accord ahead of formal sign-off processes.

Recommendations:

The GMCA Overview and Scrutiny Committee is requested to:

1. Note the background and development process for the VCFSE Accord;
2. Review the content of the draft Greater Manchester VCFSE Accord;
3. Provide feedback on this draft so this feedback can be considered during development of the final draft.

Contact Officers

Jenny Rouse, VCFSE Accord Principal, GMCA

jennifer.rouse@greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk

1. Introduction/Background

Current VCFSE Accord 2021-2026

1. The VCFSE Accord is 2021-2026 is a three-way agreement between Greater Manchester Combined Authority, NHS GM and the Greater Manchester voluntary, community, faith, and social enterprise sector (VCFSE) represented by the Greater Manchester VCFSE Leadership Group.
2. The purpose of the current Accord was to build on existing VCFSE/public sector relationships already present across Greater in order to improve outcomes for Greater Manchester's communities and citizens.
3. There have been a number of notable successes of the Accord, including:
 - Elevating the profile of the VCFSE sector amongst public sector leaders thus enabling its voice to shape strategic discussions.
 - Strengthening public sector understanding of the sector's contribution to place, prevention, and wellbeing.
 - New models of public service delivery driving innovative approaches within health, care and mental health systems.
 - Flagship initiatives to strengthen VCFSE organisations, such as the GMCA and VCFSE [Fair Funding Protocol](#).
 - The Greater Manchester VCFSE Accord was also a significant influence on the national [Civil Society Covenant](#), and was named as a case study in the Covenant.

Updated VCFSE Accord 2026-2035

1. The current Accord agreement runs until March 2026. In May 2025 a research and engagement process commenced in order to shape an updated Accord which will replace the current Accord on 1 April 2026.
2. The draft updated Accord is in Annex 1 of this paper. Once approved, the updated Accord will run from 2026-2035 to align with the timeline of other key strategies, notably the [Greater Manchester Strategy](#) and [NHS 10 Year Plan for England](#).
3. Engagement to help shape the updated Accord span VCFSE organisations, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, TFGM, GMFRS, and ten local authorities, all of whom will be named signatories in the updated Accord. In total approximately 750 have provided their views on what should be in the new Accord, either individually or in group feedback sessions.

4. Research also identified major locality, regional, and national strategies, as well as policy agendas, that it was important that the Accord reflected.
5. The draft updated Accord is based on this engagement and research. Initial drafting was shared responsibility between officers at Voluntary Sector North West (VSNW) who facilitate the GM VCFSE Leadership Group, GMCA, and NHS GM.

Formal sign off and implementation processes

1. At the time of writing this paper (1 December 2025), the updated draft Accord was due to go to the VCFSE Greater Manchester Accord Refresh Steering Group for review and comment (2 December 2025). The Steering Group is comprised of officers from VCFSE organisations, GMCA, NHS GM, TFGM, and ten local authorities. The make-up of the steering group intentionally reflects the broad range of perspectives of signatory organisations. Full membership can be found in Annex 2
2. The Steering Group input, the input of Scrutiny Committee and broader feedback on the draft sought throughout December will then inform an updated draft which the Steering Group will then see again in early January 2026.
3. The updated Accord will then progress through governance processes at GMCA as follows:
 - **14 January 2026** GMCA Wider Leadership Group
 - **20 January 2026** GMCA Leadership Strategy
 - **13 February 2026** formal GMCA meeting
4. Local authorities, VCFSE organisations and NHS GM will take the Accord through their own parallel approval processes, with final sign-offs scheduled for the end of March 2026.
5. From April 2026 signatories will begin initial discussions on how to implement the Accord, which should result in named officers responsible for implementation.
6. Other organisations are invited to join as additional signatories from April 2026 onwards.

Recommendations

1. Feedback of Scrutiny Committee on any of the content of the draft Accord in Annex 1 is welcomed.
2. However, your feedback on the following things would be particularly valuable:
 - Whether you feel that the framing of the draft Accord appropriately balances the role of people & communities, VCFSE sector, and public sector.
 - Your views on the Values presented in Section 4.

- Whether you feel that Section 6 “demonstrating action” provides enough detail to ensure signatories undertake action aligned with the Accord, whilst recognising different partners have different starting points and contexts so cannot commit to the same specific actions.

2. Annexes

Annex 1- Draft Updated Accord

The Greater Manchester Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) Accord 2026-2035

1. Introduction

We exist to serve the people of Greater Manchester. This means Greater Manchester's residents, the places we all live, and the climate and environment on which all our lives depend. The signatories to this agreement – VCFSE organisations across Greater Manchester, and the public sector - each has a role in making our city region a place where everyone can live a good life: a place of equality, opportunity, and belonging. We can achieve this best by working together, collectively, for the benefit of all our communities.

The VCFSE sector holds a unique power: the trust, relationships, credibility, and insight that come from being rooted in communities. By ensuring the sector can lead boldly, strengthen its own capacity, and work on an equal footing alongside public partners, we will unlock the potential of community-led change.

The Accord sets out the shared values that guide our collaboration, and the commitments we make to one another as partners. The Accord should be used as a common reference point and guiding tool owned across sectors that helps us stay aligned in purpose, valued in our roles, and accountable to the communities we serve.

2. Scope of the Accord

This document has been formally signed and endorsed by:

- **The Greater Manchester VCFSE Leadership Group**, on behalf of Greater Manchester's 17 000+ voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise groups*.
- **Key public sector organisations** that serve the people of Greater Manchester, including the ten local authorities (Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford, Wigan), Greater Manchester Combined Authority, NHS Greater Manchester, Transport for Greater Manchester, and Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service.

***‘VCFSE sector’ (Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise sector) is an umbrella term, which includes, but is not limited to:**

- *Charities and voluntary organisations*
- *Community and informal groups (which make up the largest proportion of ‘VCFSE’)*
- *Faith centres and organisations*
- *Social enterprises, social businesses, co-operatives and “by-and-for” organisations*
- *Local infrastructure organisations*
- *Equalities organisations addressing structural inequity*
- *VCFSE providers of services*
- *Community organising coalitions*
- *Campaign organisations*

Additional signatories

This Accord is grounded in shared values and principles, and we welcome additional partners who align with these commitments and wish to work collectively for the people of Greater Manchester.

Organisations that embrace the spirit and expectations of this Accord are encouraged to sign and support its ongoing development and delivery.

Our Shared Vision

A thriving Greater Manchester where everyone can live a good life: a place of equality, opportunity, and belonging.

3. Our Shared Beliefs

Underpinning our shared vision are our shared beliefs:

- 1. We achieve more together than alone** because our diversity is our strength. The combined size, roles, and approaches of the VCFSE sector and public sector bring depth, resilience, and innovation to our shared work.
- 2. A confident, connected, and well-resourced VCFSE ecosystem benefits everyone.** When the VCFSE sector can lead alongside public partners with equality of voice and status, we move closer to our shared vision of good lives for all.
- 3. The people of Greater Manchester are experts in their own lives.** They must have agency and influence in shaping decisions that affect them. The rich diversity of our

local communities is where we will find the expertise to drive change and justice in society.

4. **When leadership is distributed, decision-making becomes more inclusive and effective.** By sharing power, we build the trust needed to achieve real and lasting change.
5. **Values must be lived, not just stated.** Turning our shared values into everyday practice is how meaningful change happens.

4. Accord Values

Over several decades we have learnt that high quality relationships are essential to us working together in the interests of the common good. We commit to ensuring that our core values of trust, and underpinning values of honesty, bravery and accountability, guide all our work together:

Our Core Value: Trust

Building trust should be at the foundation of everything we do. It creates the conditions for honesty, bravery, and accountability to thrive. We know that without trust, we cannot have authentic conversations, take bold steps, or hold each other to account. We commit to building and maintaining trust between partners, with communities, and within communities in order to create meaningful change.

Honesty

When trust is strong, we can speak openly and honestly, share challenges, and offer constructive challenge without fear of any consequences. We commit to creating spaces where honesty is both welcomed and approached with care and respect. We will identify and address barriers to trust and honesty, such as cultural differences or power imbalances, and remain transparent about decisions, whilst also respecting that sometime respect for confidentiality, legislation and formal responsibilities must be prioritised above full transparency.

Bravery

We know that bravery is only possible when we trust that we have the support from each other we need to shift practice or challenge the way things are. As the world changes rapidly, we must evolve so that we can respond to and anticipate the future needs and experiences of the people of Greater Manchester. This will require us to act boldly to challenge our mindsets, structures, and systems and step into new ways of working. We

commit to collective bravery knowing that even when we disagree, we share a commitment to good lives for all.

Accountability

We define accountability as listening to others' priorities and perspectives, acting when we have committed to act, and being transparent about progress, challenges, and why something has not worked out as planned. We see accountability is essential for trust to thrive between us. We believe that good relationships depend on action, not just words and see accountability as essential to achieving real change. This is particularly important where power imbalances exist, because decisions made by some partners can have greater impact on others. We commit to accountability that is not about control or blame, but instead about clarity and impact.

Ultimately, we recognise that we are all accountable to the people of Greater Manchester, and this framing will guide all our work.

5. Accord Commitments

We recognise the three key areas of change outlined below as our three key priorities for the next decade.

1. *Involve & Devolve*

We will deepen collaboration across sectors by working together to involve the VCFSE sector and devolving power to our communities.

We are committed to building a future where significant power and wealth are in the hands of our communities. This is important for all our communities, but most important where power and wealth is the least accessible. This commitment is built on recognition of the strengths, resilience and potential of the people of Greater Manchester. We must meaningfully involve people in decision making from the earliest possible point. Ultimately, our work, our organisations, and us ourselves must be shaped by the priorities of the people of Greater Manchester.

We will:

- Build **new forms of leadership and distributed power** that facilitate significant power and wealth moving to our communities
- **Put people and communities first**, working from an **asset-based approach** that recognises strengths, resilience and potential.

- **Ensure that participatory approaches including co-production, co-design and co-delivery** underpin our practice. This means that local people are **active participants** in shaping their futures, not passive recipients of services.
- Act with courageous leadership, challenging structures and behaviours that perpetuate inequality.
- **Ensure that people with direct experience of issues and intersectional perspectives** inform governance, policy, commissioning and delivery at every level. We will always ask whether the right people are in the right rooms.

2. *Resource and Capacity*

We will ensure fair, transparent and sustainable resourcing of the VCFSE sector, ensuring every part of the sector is able to play their part.

Together we are committed to ensuring, within the powers and abilities that we have, that we are adequately resourced so that we can play our part in ensuring that everyone can live a good life in Greater Manchester. This means deciding collectively how funding should be distributed across partners to ensure that we all have the resources we need to fulfil our roles and ensuring that this funding is long-term and flexible so that funding worries do not get in the way of our work. We recognise that any financial resource we hold ultimately belongs to the people of Greater Manchester and its people, and we are its custodians. As such we will increase investment in VCFSE organisations that are closest to communities. We recognise that financial resourcing must sit alongside other forms of capacity. We all commit to building this capacity and supporting each other to do so too.

We will:

- **Ensure that partners are resourced to act** with a collective commitment to investment, long-term funding, and shared responsibility for delivery.
- **Shift to greater community control of funding and participation in decision-making** with a **clear framework** to implement this shift.
- **Trust the VCFSE sector to manage funding**, influence commissioning, co-design and co-deliver solutions alongside statutory partners.
- **Jointly identify where new or changed skills and capacity are needed**, such a facilitation, participatory budgeting, and conflict resolution, and working together to ensure that this is put in place.
- **Work together to advocate for sufficient, long-term and flexible resource and capacity** regionally and nationally, recognising that sustainable investment is essential to lasting change.

3. Value & Recognition

We will recognise our multiple distinct and overlapping roles and demonstrate our value of the VCFSE through efforts to improve understanding, involvement, practical support and investment.

We value the commitment of those who work for the common good across Greater Manchester and recognise the wide range of roles played by both the VCFSE and public sectors. While some responsibilities sit firmly with public bodies, and others rely on the independence of the VCFSE sector - including its ability to advocate, organise and challenge - our partnership is strongest when each contributes its distinct strengths. We will honour this balance of collaboration and independence as we work to improve outcomes for our communities.

We will:

- Value the breadth of VCFSE roles¹, including **campaigning, innovation, community organising, leadership, voice, and advocacy for social change.**
- **Recognise the role of infrastructure organisations that support grassroots groups** and bridge community experience with system leadership.
- **Recognise the specialist work and role of equalities and identity-based organisations** in addressing structural inequity, discrimination and exclusion.
- **Support leadership development across the VCFSE sector** and ensure VCFSE voices shape policy, service design, practice and resource allocation.
- **Acknowledge that certain statutory, legal and decision-making functions sit with public bodies.** We commit to widening participation where this strengthens legitimacy and outcomes, while affirming that some public sector responsibilities remain distinct and will be exercised transparently in the public interest.
- Recognise and **value the unique insight, evidence and community-generated data** held by VCFSE organisations and commit to drawing on this intelligence to inform policy, strategy and service design. We will support responsible, proportionate, and ethical sharing of data and insight between sectors while meeting all legal and safeguarding duties.

6. Accord Implementation: demonstrating action

We recognise that each partner will demonstrate the principles and values of the Accord in ways that reflect their own context, stage of development, and capacity. **What will unite us is a shared commitment to translate these values into visible, practical action.**

¹ Appendix 1 – [The Role of the VCFSE sector in Greater Manchester](#) (2025)

This is key to turning the Accord from a strategic agreement into a lived reality that delivers meaningful change.

To make the Accord real, each partner will take responsibility for embedding its principles through the following actions:

1. Each organisation will define **specific, actionable commitments** that align with the Accord's principles and demonstrate how they will contribute to shared goals.
2. Partners will identify **named individuals with clear responsibility** for driving change, ensuring commitments are delivered, and making progress visible.
3. We will make **decision-making processes open and clear**, including where decisions are made and who is making them.
4. Partners will **agree meaningful measures of success**, recognising that progress may look different across sectors and localities. Regular reflection and reporting will show how actions contribute to the Accord's goals and improve outcomes for communities.
5. We will **create spaces defined by the right people being in the right rooms** to share learning, address challenges collectively, and work with accountability, honesty, and bravery.
6. Partners will actively **share what works** and support its adoption across the system to accelerate improvement.
7. **We will ensure the Accord complements other strategies across Greater Manchester and localities**, embedding structured accountability through mechanisms such as job descriptions, governance arrangements, and evidence-based practice.

7. Duration & Signatories

The duration of this Accord will be 9 years, 2026-2035, to align with the Greater Manchester Strategy and the 10-year NHS Long Term Plan.

Signed Date:

Renewal Due Date: April 2035

Signatories:

Annex 2- Full membership of Accord Refresh Steering Group

Member Name	Organisation	Role
1. Warren Escadale	VSNW	VCFSE Leadership Group & Accord Commitment Delivery Group Co-Chair & Grant Lead
2. Liz Windsor-Welsh	10GM & Action Together	VCFSE leadership Group (LIO) & Grant Lead 10GM
3. Jenny Rouse	GMCA	GMCA VCFSE Accord Principal
4. Sarah Harris	NHS GM	NHS GM Strategy Lead
5. Mitch Salter	Local Authority	Local Authority – Trafford- Strategic Partnership Manager
6. Jonathan Kerry	Local Authority -	Local Authority – Wigan NHS Place-Based Lead
7. Jo McGrath / Thad Barker	Local infrastructure organisation / Local authority	LIO/ Local Authority – Stockport
8. Jules Palfreyman	GM=EqAI	VCFSE Leadership Group (Equalities/GM=EqAL)
9. Edna Robinson (Franky Procter deputy)	Alternative Providers Collaborative (APC)	VCFSE Leadership Group (Provider/ APC)
10. Helen Tomlinson	Bury VCFA	VCFSE Leadership Group (LIO) - Bury
11. Karen Parker	Wigan Borough Community First	VCFSE Leadership Group (LIO) - Wigan
12. Anoush Darabi (Jody Smith deputy)	TfGM	TfGM - Senior Policy Manager

