

Greater Manchester Combined Authority

Date: 27 March 2026

Subject: Greater Manchester VCFSE Accord

Report of: Councillor Arooj Shah, Portfolio Lead for Equalities and Communities, GMCA and Andrew Lightfoot, Deputy Group Chief Executive Officer

Purpose of Report

The paper presents the updated Greater Manchester VCFSE Accord 2026-2035 for approval, and background information including development process and plans for Accord implementation.

Recommendations

The GMCA is requested to:

1. Note Accord background information.
2. Approve and sign the Greater Manchester VCFSE Accord 2026-2035 (Annex 1).

Contact Officers

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Equalities Impact, Carbon and Sustainability Assessment:

Recommendation - Key points for decision-makers		
Insert text		
Impacts Questionnaire		
Impact Indicator	Result	Justification/Mitigation
Equality and Inclusion	G	
Health	G	
Resilience and Adaptation	G	
Housing	G	
Economy	G	
Mobility and Connectivity		
Carbon, Nature and Environment		The Accord specifically committed public sector and VCFSE signatories to work together on climate and environment, but the Accord does not directly relate to the metrics considered in the full assessment of "Carbon, Nature and Environment" .
Consumption and Production		
Contribution to achieving the GM Carbon Neutral 2038 target		The VCFSE Accord commits local authorities, GMCA and 10GM to working alongside VCFSE organisations on climate and environment, so that Greater Manchester is a place of environmental stewardship. The Accord contains a specific commitment to "Acknowledge our shared responsibility to act in ways that protect and restore the environment. We will embed environmental sustainability into decision-making,
Further Assessment(s):	Equalities Impact Assessment	
G Positive impacts overall, whether long or short term.	A Mix of positive and negative impacts. Trade-offs to consider.	R Mostly negative, with at least one positive aspect. Trade-offs to consider.
		RR Negative impacts overall.

Risk Management

Governance and risk management processes are being developed to reflect the content and priorities of the Greater Manchester VCFSE Accord 2026-2035.

Legal Considerations

The Greater Manchester VCFSE Accord is a strategic document and does not circumvent the need for programmes and projects to consider legal implications as part of GMCA's procedures.

Financial Consequences – Revenue

The Greater Manchester VCFSE Accord will be managed within the GMCA Strategy Team. Associated grant funding for the VCFSE sector (grant managed by Voluntary Sector North West) and funded by GMCA and NHS GM is included in the grant budget for

2026 to 2029, with further grant funding anticipated for the duration of the Accord until 2035.

Financial Consequences – Capital

The Greater Manchester VCFSE Accord includes a commitment that public sector partners will *“Take action to support community asset acquisition or development”*.

Number of attachments to the report: 1

Comments/recommendations from Overview & Scrutiny Committee

A draft version of the Accord went to Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting in December 2025 for their comments and input.

Background Papers

The previous Greater Manchester VCFSE Accord 2021-2035 can be found [here](#).

Tracking/ Process

Does this report relate to a major strategic decision, as set out in the GMCA Constitution

No

Exemption from call in

Are there any aspects in this report which means it should be considered to be exempt from call in by the relevant Scrutiny Committee on the grounds of urgency?

No

Bee Network Committee

N/A

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

10th December 2025

1. Introduction/Background

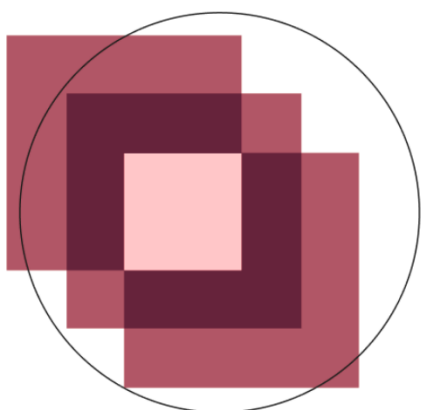
1. The Greater Manchester VCFSE Accord is an agreement between Greater Manchester's ten local authorities, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, NHS GM, and the Greater Manchester voluntary, community, faith, and social enterprise sector (VCFSE) represented by the Greater Manchester VCFSE Leadership Group.
2. The Accord 's mission is *"A thriving, connected, and resilient Greater Manchester VCFSE ecosystem that fully contributes to driving change for Greater Manchester's people, communities, places, and environment, working in trusting collaboration with public sector partners."*
3. The current Accord agreement ran from 2021 and expires at the end of March 2026. There have been 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.
 - 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. 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](#).
2. Engagement to help shape the updated Accord spanned VCFSE organisations, Greater Manchester Combined Authority group, ten local authorities, and NHS GM all of whom will be named signatories to the Accord. In total approximately 750 individuals have contributed to the content of the Accord.
3. The Accord also reflects major locality, regional, and national strategies and policy agendas.
4. The views of the GMCA Oversight & Scrutiny Committee were sought at the December 2025 meeting.
5. Local authorities, NHS GM and the VCFSE sector are taking the Accord through their own parallel approval processes. Other organisations are invited to join as additional signatories from April 2026 onwards.

Implementing the Accord

1. A plan for implementation of the Accord is being developed. This includes but is not limited to:
 - a. Accord launch event in June 2026.
 - b. Accord awareness-raising activity across the public sector and VCFSE sector.
 - c. Governance, including named responsible officers across all public sector signatories.
 - d. Greater Manchester-wide forums for sharing Accord learning and progress.
 - e. Metrics for monitoring and reporting progress.



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

2026 - 2035



Greater Manchester
VCFSE Leadership Group



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The Greater Manchester VCFSE Accord is a commitment to put in place working relationships between the public sector and voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector that will improve outcomes for Greater Manchester’s communities, residents and places. It is based on a relationship of mutual trust, honesty, ambition and accountability and is jointly owned by the public and VCFSE sectors in Greater Manchester – including NHS GM, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), Transport for Greater Manchester, Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service, 10 local authorities, and the Greater Manchester VCFSE sector (represented by the GM VCFSE Leadership Group).

This agreement seeks to align with and strengthen related place-specific agreements, strategies, and shared objectives for collaboration. It also runs alongside the [Greater Manchester Strategy](#), and is our Greater Manchester version of the national [Civil Society Covenant](#). The Accord outlines how signatories will work together to redress power and resource imbalances so that partnership working is as effective as possible.

The Accord seeks to work in conjunction with existing and new equivalents to the Accord that are locally developed and owned. The Accord commitments will be enacted in addition to these local agreements.

From this point on, the words “we”, “our” or “us” refer to all signatories to this Accord - acting with a single voice and shared purpose.

1. Introduction

We all exist to serve all of Greater Manchester's residents in their rich diversity; the places we all live; and the climate and environment on which all our lives depend. Each of the signatories to this agreement – VCFSE organisations across Greater Manchester, and the public sector - has a role in making our city region a sustainable place where everyone can live a good life: a place of equity, opportunity, and belonging. We can achieve this by working together, collectively, for the benefit of the communities we are all part of.

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, increase its own capacity, and work on an equal footing alongside public sector partners, we will unlock the potential of community-led change.

The Accord sets out the shared values that guide collaboration of Greater Manchester's VCFSE and public sectors, 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 be accountable to each other and the communities we serve.

2. Our Shared Vision, Mission & Beliefs

Our Vision

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

Our Mission

A thriving, connected, and resilient Greater Manchester VCFSE ecosystem that fully contributes to driving change for Greater Manchester's people, communities, places, and environment, working in trusting collaboration with public sector partners.

Our Shared Beliefs

Underpinning our shared vision and mission are our shared beliefs:

- 1. We achieve more together than alone.** The combined size, roles, and approaches of the Greater Manchester VCFSE sector and public sector together bring depth, resilience, and innovation to our shared work, adding a value which is more than the sum of its parts.
- 2. An integrated, connected, and well-resourced Greater Manchester 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 a city region where everyone can live a good life.
- 3. The rich diversity of our local communities is where we will find the expertise to drive change and justice in society.** The VCFSE sector is a key route to do this. Greater Manchester's residents must have power, spaces, and opportunity to participate in decisions that affect them.
- 4. Decision-making in partnership enables outcomes to be more inclusive and effective.**

5. **By sharing power, we build the trust needed to achieve real and lasting change.**
6. **Values must be lived, not just stated.** Transforming our shared values into everyday practice is how change happens.

3. Our Shared Values & Behaviours

Over several decades we have learnt that strong relationships are the foundation for us to collaborate effectively in the interests of the common good. We commit to ensuring that our core value of trust, and underpinning values of honesty, ambition and accountability, guide all our work together:

Our Core Value: Trust

We commit to create conditions of mutual trust and understanding.

Building trust must be the foundation of everything we do. Trust is not automatic; it grows over time as our actions make clear our commitments to each other, and the people of Greater Manchester. We know that without trust, we cannot have authentic conversations, take bold steps, or hold each other to account. We recognise that building trust can take time and we should be realistic about the complexities of building trusting relationships. Through consistent action in line with our shared values, understanding, and empathy about the contexts we each work in, we can create the trust across our diverse organisations and communities.

Honesty

We commit to creating spaces where honesty is encouraged alongside reciprocal care and respect.

Trust between partners fosters our ability to speak openly and honestly, share challenges, and offer constructive feedback without fear of negative consequences, both ways. We will identify and address barriers to trust and honesty, such as power imbalances. We will remain transparent about decisions, whilst also respecting that sometimes respect for confidentiality, legislation, and formal responsibilities must be prioritised.

Ambition

We commit to continuously strive for better outcomes, resilient through our shared purpose and ambition.

We know that being bold and ambitious 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 and adapt so that we can respond to, anticipate and act on the future priorities and experiences of the people of Greater Manchester. This will require us to build strong resilient relationships and act boldly and with integrity to challenge our mindsets, structures, and systems and step into new ways of working.

Accountability

We commit to accountability founded on transparency, integrity and positive impact.

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 as 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, as decisions made by some partners can have a greater impact on others. Accountability is not about control or blame; it is about all working to the same standards and behaviours in order to achieve greater 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.

4. Accord Commitments

We recognise the areas of change outlined below as our three key priorities for the next 9 years.

Each area includes a full list of commitments to be progressed over this timeframe, building on the headline commitments.

4.1 Involve & Devolve

We are committed to building a future where significant power and wealth are in the hands of our communities. Achieving this requires a community-centred model - one that is rooted in the people, knowledge and relationships that already exist within our neighbourhoods. This is important for all our communities, but most important where power and wealth is the least accessible. VCFSE groups and organisations are integral in this model, as they are usually the first to understand community strengths and needs. They achieve this through their deep local insight, trusted connections, and work delivering social and climate justice. We commit to building this VCFSE model, and, from the earliest possible point, involving people in the decisions that affect them. We believe that lasting change will depend on trusted VCFSE approaches that elevate community voice, challenge inequality, and strengthen the leadership, participation and infrastructure that enable people to shape their own futures.

We commit to deepening collaboration across sectors by systematically involving the VCFSE sector and working together to devolve more power to communities.

Headline commitments:

- i. Devolve to communities through building stronger participatory approaches (including co-production, co-design, co-commissioning, co-delivery and co-evaluation)** where this is essential to community outcomes. Where we agree that co-production will add value, we will ensure that local people are active participants in shaping their futures, not passive recipients of services. We will enact these approaches to involve local people, and the VCFSE groups and organisations that represent them, at the earliest

point of our work, and consider developing and adopting a charter to assist in embedding this in practice.

ii. Involve the VCFSE sector in more decision making, steering group, programme and formal governance such as public sector boards as standard. Partners should ensure representatives feel supported in these roles and connected with VCFSE networks.

We will:

- a. **Put people and communities first, working from an approach that recognises strengths**, resilience and potential, rather than problems, deficits or need
- b. **Ensure visible and active leadership that challenges structures and behaviours that perpetuate inequalities**. Leadership should be diverse and reflective of local populations to strengthen representation and trust. Leadership that is visible and courageous sets the tone for change, confronting the systems and barriers that sustain inequality and driving progress toward equity.
- c. **Ensure that people with direct experience of issues and intersectional perspectives** influence governance, policy, commissioning and delivery at every level. We will always ask whether the right people are in the right rooms and challenge ourselves and each other on whether we are reaching all communities, particularly the disenfranchised.
- d. **Reduce barriers to participation in our structures** - avoiding models that solely favour specific organisational forms over others. For example, where smaller VCFSE organisations and community groups may face capacity challenges.
- e. **Build forms of collective leadership** that facilitate significant power and wealth moving to our communities, tackling inequalities in the most disadvantaged and discriminated communities.
- f. **Take action to support community asset acquisition or development.**

4.2 Resource & Enable

For the VCFSE sector to fulfil its potential in supporting communities, we recognise that it needs long-term funding as standard and flexibility so that funding worries do not get in the way of its work. We recognise that any financial resources that either VCFSE organisations or Greater Manchester public sector organisations hold ultimately belong to the people of Greater Manchester, and we are its custodians. The public sector signatories commit to increasing the overall proportion of their budgets to Greater Manchester VCFSE organisations as this keeps public value working locally - increasing the wealth retained by our communities and long-term benefit. All signatories recognise that financial resourcing must sit alongside other forms of capacity such as digital and workforce capacity and spaces to meet. We all commit to building this capacity and supporting each other to do so.

We commit to increasing the proportion of fair, transparent, and sustainable funding that public sector signatories invest in VCFSE organisations, working in a spirit of honesty and openness regarding the challenges of resourcing decisions.

Headline commitments:

- i. **Resource the VCFSE sector through increasing the proportion of public sector funding invested in VCFSE groups and organisations**, as this is a direct investment in the people and places of Greater Manchester. By directing public funds through locally rooted, community-led organisations, we keep public money working locally - increasing the wealth retained by our communities and committing to working together to end extraction by external profit driven models.
- ii. **Enable the sector by fully implementing the Greater Manchester Fair Funding Protocol¹ or equivalent agreement such as the NHS GM Commissioning Principles²**. Where no such protocol exists, commit to the development and adoption of a locally or organisationally tailored version that upholds principles of financial fairness, transparency, and shared accountability.

We will:

- a. **Ensure that partners are adequately resourced to act - through funding and other capacity - by working collectively to advocate for sufficient, long-term, and flexible investment in the VCFSE sector at both regional and national levels**, with a shared commitment to long-term funding and responsibility for delivery, recognising that sustainable investment is essential to lasting change.
- b. **Shift to greater community control of funding and participation in decision-making around how public money is spent** with appropriate processes and a clear framework to implement this shift.
- c. Develop robust and transparent mechanisms for the **VCFSE sector to manage more funding, influence commissioning processes focused on shared responsibility and partnership, and to co-design and co-deliver solutions** alongside statutory partners, ensuring that that the driver is community outcomes, rather than shifting the burden of risk from public sector to VCFSE organisations.
- d. **Jointly identify where new or enhanced skills and capacity are needed**. This might include skills such a facilitation, participatory budgeting, conflict resolution, or work to support embracing of new technologies/ways of working e.g. digital. We will work together to ensure that this is put in place.
- e. **Ensure public sector officers with responsibility for budgets and financial strategy within public sector organisations**, (e.g. directors of finance, commissioners, and those with day-to-day budget decision-making powers), **understand the values and commitments in this Accord, and that VCFSE colleagues understand the pressures and responsibilities of these staff**.

4.3 Recognise & Value

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. 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. Sometimes we will need to switch

¹ [GMCA Fair Funding Protocol](#)

² [NHS GM Commissioning Principles](#)

from or blend the roles we traditionally hold to be effective as a partnership. We will honour this balance of collaboration and independence as we work to improve outcomes for our communities. We also recognise the need to ‘rebalance’ across our sectors, with a specific priority to recognise and value the role of the VCFSE sector and ensure that action taken in line with this Accord emphasises this priority.

We commit to recognising and valuing the roles of all those who work for the common good, with specific emphasis the contribution of VCFSE organisations through efforts to improve understanding, transparency, involvement, practical support and investment.

Headline commitments:

i. Recognise the impact of the sector and the breadth of roles VCFSE organisations play³, as set out in ‘[The role of the VCFSE Sector in Greater Manchester](#)’. This includes recognition of the VCFSE sector contribution to economic, social and environmental change; the inherent social value they generate; and their ability to build cohesive, inclusive communities. Roles include campaigning, innovation, community organising, leadership, expert advice, and supporting prevention and early intervention.

ii. Value the unique insight, evidence and community-generated data held by VCFSE organisations by drawing on this intelligence to inform policy, strategy and service design, alongside other forms of insight.

We will:

- a. **Acknowledge that generating ‘social value’ is inherent to the purpose, work and organisational structure of VCFSE organisations**, by working together to ensure public sector funding decisions are reflective of this.
- b. **Support responsible, proportionate, and ethical sharing of data and insight** between sectors while meeting all legal and safeguarding duties and work together support the development of further data and insight.
- c. **Value the VCFSE sector and public sector workforce, including volunteers and unpaid carers** as “one workforce”. We will support VCFSE staff development programmes, broaden access staff support programmes and, where possible, create cross-sector coaching/mentoring opportunities aligned to the standards set out by the Good Employment Charter.
- d. **Acknowledge our shared responsibility to act in ways that protect and restore the environment**. We will embed environmental sustainability into decision-making, resource allocation, and programme delivery.
- e. **Recognise the VCFSE sector’s potential to take on new roles, including in areas where it has not traditionally operated**. We will not only increase the amount of delivery the VCFSE sector leads, but its breadth of involvement. We will generate innovative solutions by working together to scope opportunities that offer clear added value for our people, places, communities and environment.

³ Appendix 1 – [The Role of the VCFSE sector in Greater Manchester](#) (2025)

- f. **Support leadership development across the VCFSE sector** and ensure VCFSE voices shape policy, service design, practice, and resource allocation.
- g. **Acknowledge that certain statutory, legal and decision-making functions sit with public bodies.** We commit to widening participation within the existing framework and challenging where this would lead to better outcomes but is not currently possible. We will also recognise that some public sector responsibilities should always remain distinct and will be exercised transparently in the public interest. We commit to both increased openness and understanding of public sector constraints and statutory responsibilities that impact on the VCFSE sector.
- h. **Ensure VCFSE groups and organisations, as well as public sector staff across Greater Manchester are aware of the Accord,** understand the values and commitments it contains and how they can use it within their own context.

5. Accord Implementation: demonstrating action

Through a shared commitment to transforming values into visible and practical actions, the Accord will become a lived reality and deliver meaningful change.

Each signatory will take responsibility for embedding its values, behaviours and commitments through the following actions:

1. **Identify named individuals with clear responsibility** for driving change, and be specific about the roles, responsibilities and decision-making powers of those involved in change. This is essential to ensuring commitments are delivered and in making progress visible.
2. Signatories will **set and integrate clear formal governance process and structures** accountable for Accord delivery within our organisations. We recognise that there are a large number of commitments and signatories will work through a process of prioritisation to define **specific, actionable initiatives**.
3. 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 ambition.
4. We will make **decision-making processes open and clear**, including where decisions are made and who is making them.
5. 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/or local strategies and priorities and improve outcomes for communities.
6. **We will outline accountability and escalation protocols**, to define the mechanisms to support accountability in case partnership working doesn't go to plan.
7. Partners will actively **share what works, through structured feedback loops** and support its adoption across the system to accelerate improvement.
8. 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**.

6. Deliverables

The below table shows the deliverables that result from our commitments to action. These will be assessed as part of a regular implementation review.

Phase 1 – Established at the point of signing

Phase 2 – By the end of the first year, supporting documentation to be approved and shared with relevant audiences.

Phase 3 - Deliverables to be continuous throughout the course of the agreement.

Phase 1 - Share and keep informed on:
a. Named individuals with clear responsibilities for Accord* - see appendix 3
b. Formal governance processes and structures
c. Decision-making processes and timelines (e.g. commissioning intentions)
d. Routes of escalation and emergency response protocols
Phase 2 - Co-Design and Develop:
a. Effective methods and spaces to develop understanding and sharing learning
b. Mechanisms for continuous improvement and system learning
c. Key delivery metrics for monitoring and reporting
d. Prioritisation and process to enact commitments (e.g. Fair Funding Protocol, Commissioning Principles)
e. Accord Delivery Plan
Phase 3 - Integrate and Embed:
a. Staff awareness and understanding of the Accord Agreement
b. Alignment and integration with wider strategies and plans
c. Evidence through tangible improvements in research findings

**With recognition that each partner will demonstrate the commitments of the Accord in ways that reflect their own context, stage of development, capacity and priorities.*

A list of examples of how partners might demonstrate action through working towards specific outcomes is included in appendix 2.

7. Duration

The duration of this Accord will be nine years, 2026-2035, to align with the Greater Manchester Strategy and the 10-year Health Plan for England.

This will be supported by implementation review and planning every three years to assess our collective progress and set our upcoming priorities.

Signed Date:

Agreement Renewal Due Date: April 2035

- **Implementation Review:** Every three years.
 - **Next review:** Winter 2028, to enact from April 2029
- **Delivery Reporting:** Annual

8. Signatories

This document has been formally signed and endorsed by:

The Greater Manchester VCFSE Leadership Group, on behalf of Greater Manchester's 17,400+ Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise Sector*.

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, grassroots and informal groups (which make up the largest proportion of 'VCFSE')*
- *Community organising coalitions*
- *Campaign organisations*
- *Faith centres and organisations*
- *Social enterprises, social businesses, co-operatives and other models that aim to reinvest profits for social purpose and/or democratise ownership.*

Additional signatories

Grounded in shared values and principles, this Accord is open to welcoming additional signatories whose work aligns with these commitments.

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

Amendments

The Accord commits signatories to act in a way that is aligned with the beliefs, values, and behaviours and commitments it contains and to ensure the ongoing viability of the integrated Greater Manchester system in a changing environment. The Accord will ONLY be amended in the instance that all signatories agree an amendment to be beneficial to the people, communities, places and environment of Greater Manchester.

Signatures: