GM VCSE INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

Establishing the Programme

Funded by UK Government

GREATER MANCHESTER
DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY

The Greater Manchester VCSE Infrastructure Development Programme is funded through the The UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and aims to improve the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) locality infrastructure support for community activity. The programme runs until March 2025, and is being delivered by the partnership of Local Infrastructure Organisations (and other organisations with reach) across all 10 boroughs of Greater Manchester.

This report outlines the steps taken to establish the programme, and key learning from this process.

Developing the Programme Proposal and Securing Investment

The VCSE Infrastructure Development Programme came about as a result of **ongoing relationship-building and joint working** with GMCA colleagues through the Accord and other partnership work such as Violence Reduction. GMCA colleagues identified an opportunity through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to progress recommendations made in the VCSE policy paper; and latterly the VCSE Accord priority to 'build on our existing strengths to build the best VCSE ecosystem in England'; to develop a programme to drive forward VCSE infrastructure development across Greater Manchester.

When agreeing UKSPF areas of focus for the VCSE Sector, Volunteering was put forward by the VCSE Sector as an alternate area for investment and development. However, GMCA partners were keen to prioritise strand E11, and so this was selected as the preferred area for investment. In the end, Greater Manchester was one of only a few areas across the country to focus some of their UKSPF allocation on strand E11 'Investment in capacity building and infrastructure support for local civil society and community groups'.

The time period from inception through to signed agreement was lengthy, due to a number of factors including significant delays at central government level; GMCA governance processes; uncertainty of expectations around Subsidy Control; and changing parameters for the key outcome measure. This meant that the agreement between GMCA and 10GM (and subsequent agreements with LIOs) were not in place until March 23 - the end of of the first year of the programme. This effectively reduced the programme lifespan by a third, cutting into locality operational design processes; joint planning activity; and programme delivery time; thereby reducing each partner's ability to plan effectively and realise its required outcomes.

Development of the proposal itself took place over Autumn and Winter of 2022 and 2023. Macc's Chief Executive led on the development of a proposal, building on insights from delivery of a large infrastructure organisation, and work to develop GM Ltd (a joint venture to support the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector in Greater Manchester, founded by Action Together, Bolton CVS, Macc, and Salford CVS).

TO NOTE: In lieu of a commissioned VCSE Infrastructure Organisation in Wigan, the Chief Officers from two key VCSE partners, Groundwork and Wigan and Leigh Community Charity participated in the design of the programme, and agreed locally that Wigan and Leigh Community Charity (WLCC) were best placed to deliver on the programme activity itself. For shorthand, we refer to Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIOs) throughout this report - which includes the work of our Wigan partners.

As with prior pan-GM projects such as the VCSE Accord, it was agreed that the proposal would **incorporate all ten GM localities**, despite not all having a commissioned VCSE Local Infrastructure Organisation. This was on the understanding that all localities had a desire to improve elements of VCSE infrastructure support, regardless of whether they had a commissioned service locally. The proposal also included an allocation of funding to 10GM to provide programme management, and a contingency fund for use across the programme, as required and agreed by all delivery partners.

An emerging LIO Leads Meeting brought together LIO Chief Officers on a regular basis to develop pan-GM strategy and action. This was therefore used as a place to **secure collaboration and consensus** across the ten boroughs to the proposal as it was developed. Additionally, regular sessions with GMCA colleagues helped to shape the proposal that was ultimately successful.

This led to the VCSE sector securing £1.6 million over the period of 2022/23 – 24/25, which would fund Greater Manchester Local Infrastructure Organisations to build up VCSE infrastructure capacity and capability within each borough of Greater Manchester, identifying and addressing gaps and sharing good practice.

Implementation Planning

Detailed programme implementation planning took place between April and June 2023, in readiness for delivery commencing in July 2024.

Initial stages of the programme planning focused on identifying priority areas of activity; agreeing funding allocations; and establishing agreements with each partner. Following this, the focus moved onto establishing a project team; developing implementation and milestone plans; establishing an engagement baseline to meet national reporting requirements; and developing reporting processes.

Priority areas of activity were identified through a process of self-assessment. To support the UK SPF E11 design, in 2022/23, Macc's Chief Executive developed a draft outline of the key functions of a mature VCSE local infrastructure, on behalf of all ten localities. This drew in insight from documents created for the formation of 10GM and leads' experiences of delivering an LIO. This was initially shared and refined with wider locality leads through a series of discussions at the Local Infrastructure Leads meetings in 2022/3; and then further refined following the soft testing and subsequent launch of NAVCA's Local Infrastructure Quality Accreditation, and in particular, Bury VCFA's experience of the pilot assessment process.

The content was drawn together into a **self-assessment** process to be undertaken by each Local Infrastructure Organisation in Quarter 1 of 2023/4, and then following each quarter of delivery. The self assessment guides the Local Infrastructure Organisation to reflect on the maturity of their offer against four key delivery areas of local VCSE Infrastructure:

Leadership and Advocacy	Partnerships and Collaboration	Capacity Building	Volunteering

Organisations score themselves using the following maturity levels:

1. Not fully established: This is not a mature / embedded aspect of our delivery model
2. Essential elements in place: This is an established aspect of our model, but there are areas that need to be developed or strengthened
3. Good: This is securely embedded in our delivery model
4. Enhanced: This is a real strength in our delivery model.

During the development of the proposal, it was agreed by GMCA and Local Infrastructure Organisations that localities would **choose areas of focus relevant to their local development needs**, as opposed to selecting one or two shared areas of development across the city region.

Following the maturity self-assessment, this was agreement was further extended to provide flexibility in terms of self-assessment 'scores' and the selection of priority areas , with localities able to select to areas for development, even if they had already scored these as highly as Enhanced. This decision was taken to reflect the different levels of maturity of each Infrastructure Organisation, and the shared desire to see improvement across Greater Manchester, regardless of the different starting points.

As WLCC are not commissioned to provide a broad Local Infrastructure Organisation offer in Wigan, they worked with partners including Groundwork and Wigan Council to carefully select an area of focus that reflects one of their current roles - that of VCSE Voice and Leadership.

The priority areas of activity for 2023/24 delivery were selected as follows:

Membership Models & Promotion

Reviewing, developing & promoting new membership models for VCSE Locality Infrastructure Organisations, to increase accountability & better tailor support to the sector.

Bolton, Bury, Stockport, Manchester

Website & Information Strategies

Developing information on support offers available to VCSE sector locally, & launching new websites to improve VCSE organisations' access to support offers and opportunities.

Trafford, Bolton

Social Enterprise & Social Investment

Developing a new support and training offer for Social Enterprises, and growing awareness of and access to Social Investment opportunities.

Trafford, Salford

Voice & Influence incl Dispersed Leadership Models

Establishing new voice and influence spaces, roles and networks to increase VCSE interconnectivity, representation, voice and influence locally.

Bolton, Wigan (Manchester)

Training & Development incl Leadership Development

Reviewing existing training offers and developing new training and development offers which are better tailored to local VCSE organisations' needs.

Bolton, Bury, Tameside, Oldham, Rochdale

Carbon Neutral Plans

- Having a plan in place to become Carbon Neutral by 2038
- Having information and support available to VCSE organisations to plan to become Carbon Neutral by 2038

All Localities

Equalities Monitoring & Action

Equalities Monitoring & Action including
- Developing a standard monitoring framework to record work completed & the communities involved in place.
- Developing & implementing plans to address identified gaps

All Localities

Social Value & Social Impact

Measuring & articulating social impact & social value including:
- Policies around local procurement / supply chains
- Policies that promote volunteering
- Being a good employer (incl paying RLW)

All Localities

Funding Allocation also required new system developments for the Local Infrastructure Organisations, as previous pan-GM pieces of work had split funding equally ten ways. In recognition of the difference in sizes of localities and VCSE Sectors and different levels of deprivation, a new funding formula was therefore required for this programme. This piece of work was again led by Macc's Chief Executive and shared for engagement and consensus through the Local Infrastructure Leads meeting.

Previous joint programmes made the process of **establishing agreements** with GMCA and each Local Infrastructure partner relatively straight forward. The only exception to this related to the introduction of Subsidy Control, where the coordinating partner, 10GM, needed to seek legal advice as this was a relatively new concept for all parties. GMCA were helpful in approving early use of the contingency fund (before the year's funding had been allocated) to secure legal advice.

10GM supported the establishment of a **Project Team**; which included central 10GM staff to manage the programme, and officers from each locality that would be leading the work on behalf of their organisation. The project established a monthly project team meeting to oversee design and implementation; developing implementation and milestone plans; and more importantly, share peer learning and collaboratively problem-solve. The project team has proved invaluable in creating new connections between infrastructure organisation staff, leading to new peer support and working relationships happening outside of the project meetings; and ongoing sharing of tools and good practice. As a result, the group's remit has been extended beyond the scope of the E11 programme to include all aspects of Local Infrastructure collaboration, and has been re-branded as the LIO Collaboration Forum.

In order to track progress, impact, spend, risks and issues, the 10GM Team developed a quarterly **reporting process** that both feeds GMCA's reporting requirements; supports communications with partners and the wider sector; and collects case studies and good news sorties to support programme evaluation.

Although reporting itself went smoothly, the process has highlighted that we lack the modern IT infrastructure needed to report, swap, shop and share across the LIOs in the city region - having to rely heavily on email and separate versions of documents. To be efficient in ongoing ambition of increased collaboration across the LIOs, we need to address the IT challenge to support future joint programmes.

Each Local Infrastructure Organisation also needed to establish an **Engagement Baseline** to meet national reporting requirements. This process proved more difficult than expected, with a number of discussions around whether each locality needed to collect the same information and how and where a baseline might be recorded. The work was further complicated by a national change in definition, which moved from reporting on the number of groups engaged, to the number of individuals engaged.

The work flagged up a number of challenges, including that the ten organisations did not have a standardised customer relationship management or recording system, , or a shared approach to recording their work - indeed, not all used a customer relationship management system. The organisations had also committed to undertaking fairly varied types of work, ranging from creating a new membership model, through to provision of direct training and/or to 121 support.

 Ultimately through joint working and conversations with GMCA colleagues, it was agreed that localities would set their own engagement baseline which best tracked the impact of their priority area of action(s), and that these would then be combined into an overall figure for the purposes of programme reporting into GMCA.

Due to delays at Central Government level, the **release of funding** for year one was delayed until the very end of that financial year; and the funding for the first half of year two activity was also significantly delayed. As a number of Local Infrastructure Organisations in GM operate on a policy that avoid working at risk (i.e. before funding is received), this impacted upon the start dates of delivery for a number of localities. The also risked impacting on one of the core elements of the project overall, which was to work collaboratively across GM to deliver improvements.

In recognition of the challenge in year two, GMCA were able to release funds to 10GM before they had received these from central Government, which brought forward activity start dates by over a month.

Whilst many of the localities were able to use the funding to bolster existing in-house roles, several localities needed to **recruit additional or specialist staff.** In instances where specialist skills were sought, recruitment proved particularly challenging, and led to some delays in activity launches. However, the initial delays were overcome by the end of year 2, with plans back on track.

Key Learning Points

1. The Local infrastructure Organisations value a space for all ten to come together regularly to develop strategy, gain consensus on plans, and oversee implementation – external resourcing and management of this reduces the burden on the LIOs themselves.
2. Programme planning and delivery was significantly reduced due to external delays in decision making, impacting on our ability to jointly plan, and leading to reduced delivery time for project partners.
3. There is a willingness and desire to collaborate (swap, shop and share) across the ten areas and a shared desire to see improvement across the city region, regardless of each locality's current level of maturity of offer.
4. The Infrastructure Organisations are comfortable with an approach where one or a small group of LIOs develop a proposal on behalf of all ten areas. However, this can often fall on the same LIO Lead, increasing their workload significantly, for no additional gain.
5. Strong pre-existing working relationships with commissioners, (in this instance GMCA) has proved beneficial when refining and agreeing the programme proposal.
6. Collaborative programmes need different financial allocation methodologies that reflect the needs of the programme, and Infrastructure Organiations are comfortable with the use of different models.
7. There are different levels of maturity of systems for recording and reporting activity across the LIOs in the City region, which will impact on future joint programmes.
8. The challenge of IT / systems to share information across partners in real time has impacted on the efficiency of the programme in sharing tools and learning in real time.

Recommendations to support future joint work

1. Collaborate with the existing VCSE Data and Insight workstream and through other shared programmes to explore the potential for a shared minimum standard for recording and reporting activity across LIOs in the City region.
2. Put in place a more efficient IT system for the swap, shop and sharing of information and reporting across the LIOs in the City region.
3. Ensure future funders are aware of differing policies on working at risk (prior to funding release), to manage expectations on both sides.
4. Utilise outputs from concurrent Workforce Development Programme (namely VCSE Workforce and Recruitment Hubs) to support recruitment and grwoth of specialist skills into the sector.
5. Work toward a self-sustaining model for LIO collaboration at leadership and operational levels, which can continue after current funding (UKSPF and Accord) ends.

To learn more about our work with VCSE Infrastructure partners, or to discuss how we can work together, please get in touch - we'd love to hear from you.