



10GM



Co-Designing Change: Local Infrastructure Lessons from the Live Well Communities Fund

November 2025



Background

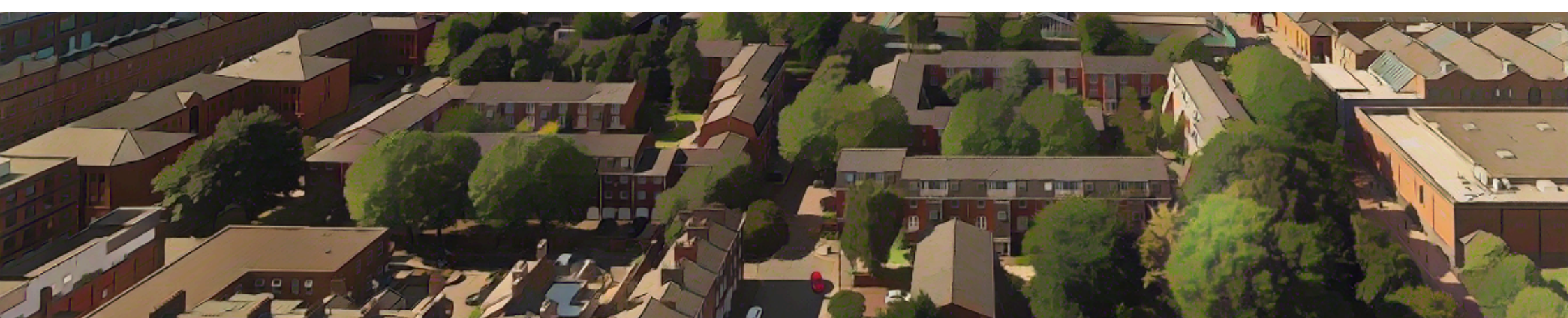
Live Well is Greater Manchester's movement for community-led health and wellbeing, aiming to build healthier, happier, and fairer communities by expanding opportunities for everyone to Live Well. It reflects a shared commitment to ensure:

- People have opportunities to be healthy, happy and connected through a variety of activities, support and information
- People can help make their communities healthier and happier, they are being heard and
- making a difference
- Communities have the resources to make change happen.

The **Greater Manchester Live Well Communities Fund's** aim is to invest in stronger, healthier communities, address health inequalities and attract more resources for communities. Jointly funded by NHS Greater Manchester and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, the fund deployed £1 million in this first year across GM's 10 localities, managed and distributed by Local Infrastructure Organisations. A separate central fund, focused on communities of geography, identity, and experience, is being distributed by the GM Equality Alliance.

Local Infrastructure Organisations have rapidly co-designed and tested innovative approaches to participatory grantmaking, with the aim of shifting power to communities and reducing inequalities. This document shares snapshots from each locality, highlighting new practices and innovations from the fund's first phase. The work is still in progress, and more updates will follow. A full Learning Pack is also being created by funders and community researchers to share what we've learned in the first year.

**Participatory grantmaking is a funding approach where the people and communities who are most affected by the issues being funded are directly involved in making decisions about how grants are awarded.*



Positive Practice Snapshots

 Bolton | Bolton CVS

As partners on the Bolton Live Well Accelerator Site, Bolton CVS and Bolton Public Health have been working to enable community voice to influence decision making in Bolton.

The Live Well Communities Fund aims to empower the local community to make decisions about distributing funding to VCSE sector groups and organisations; reaching minoritised communities and funding projects that support people to live well.

Working together with Bolton at Home (a local housing provider), community venues, the community alliance, and council colleagues, Bolton CVS/Public Health have engaged residents and VCSE organisations in Bolton Central South. Bolton CVS' strong existing relationships supported this initial outreach work.

From May to August 2025, a Design Group and VCSE Collaborative were formed to shape a new community-led funding approach. The Design Group included 20 members - local residents, VCSE representatives, and people working in health, who defined what "Live Well" means in Bolton Central South, identified active VCSE organisations doing good work, and decided how to allocate the first £40,000.

To broaden their reach, surveys were also created and four youth sessions engaged 300 young people. Public Health provided ABCD training and Bolton CVS facilitated sessions, so Design Group participants understood each others' experience and passions, explored their unconscious bias, developed their decision making and managed their conflicts of interest.

Meetings combined learning with decision-making, and vouchers were piloted as a way to recognise participants' time and commitment. The Design Group identified 47 organisations -including schools and unconstituted groups -supporting "Live Well" and chose to fund all of them with small amounts of funding.

Key to the success of the Design Group was an Access Budget which covered interpreters, travel, childcare etc this, alongside the vouchers, enabling a diverse group of people to attend. Anonymous online voting was used for some decisions.

Alongside the Design Group, a VCSE Collaborative, made up of staff and volunteers from VCSE organisations worked together to decide how to use £40,000 to address the gap identified by the Design Group: a lack of activities that develop residents' skills, e.g. communication, family life, life skills (across all ages and communities in Bolton Central South). They proposed an Upskilling Project, where VCSE organisations deliver events, focused on accessibility and engagement and directly addressing barriers and promoting collaboration. This initiative is designed to have a lasting legacy, beyond the funding period.

Participants in the Design Group shared a rich mix of positive experiences and constructive criticism about the experimental, community-led funding process. This group now forms a skilled and enthusiastic base for future initiatives, with some members already becoming involved in grant assessment for other programmes. Offering vouchers, an access fund and providing remuneration for participating organisations supported involvement. This work has created a replicable model for inclusive, community-driven funding processes that Bolton CVS can use in the future work.



Positive Practice Snapshots

 Bury | Bury VCFA

Bury VCFA drew on community feedback around barriers to accessing funding, in order to make changes that increase the accessibility and fairness of funding decision making.

The aim of this work was to shift power to communities and enhance transparency. Grants of up to £5000 were available to VCSE organisations delivering in Bury, to help improve lives of residents by addressing the wider determinants of health, aligned to the priorities of the Anti-Poverty Strategy. Applications that focused on residents experiencing poor mental health and wellbeing, d/Deaf and disabled people, people and communities experiencing racial inequalities, and residents experiencing poverty were prioritised.

A key change has been in relation to the decision-making process for funding allocation and the introduction of a new specification that no more than 50% of panel members can be drawn from the public sector. Bury VCFA worked to bring together a new decision-making panel including one member from Public Health, one member from Bury Hospice, one member from a small VCSE organisation and one young person. Support was put in place for the panel including training and ensuring that expectations were clearly communicated.

A broader and more flexible range of application options were made available – including the option to submit via video proposal. There was also a strong commitment to building relationships with VCSE groups and organisations, in order to support them to apply. Funding was able to be distributed quickly, with grant recipients receiving funding in May 2025.

Learnings from this work have included a greater understanding of the need for more relaxed eligibility criteria, less limited funding and having enough resource to offer tailored support to applicants. The learning from this work will help to inform the design of future funds, to further broaden access and to ensure every voice is heard – particularly those facing multiple or complex barriers.



Positive Practice Snapshots

 Manchester | Manchester Community Central

Manchester Community Central has focused their work in North Manchester, investing significant time in building relationships and developing a deep understanding of the local political and community landscape.

Co-design has been central, and they prioritised the voices of residents themselves by attending local events and connecting with people through VCSE organisations.

Manchester Community Central found that further work was needed to reach residents, so they worked to build relationships with residents' groups and attended local activities. They also reached out to VCSE organisations that hadn't previously had a relationship with Manchester Community Central.

These conversations helped shape a community design panel, bringing together residents who have lived experience and/or an interest in health and racial inequalities from across all areas of North Manchester. The panel is sharing their experience, identifying priorities for the fund, and creating a fair decision-making process.



Manchester Community Central found that using a person-centred approach has helped ensure the panel is inclusive and accessible for individuals. Taking the time to have conversations with panel members and being steered by their preferences in terms of meeting times and locations has supported participation.

Learning and development opportunities – co-designed with the panel – are also being created to help panel members grow in confidence and skills.

Listening to residents and VCSE organisations and community priorities has led to a co-designed fund focused on projects that tackle health and racial inequalities by meeting the specific needs of Global Majority communities.

An important learning for Manchester Community Central has been that power sharing in decision-making needs to be intentional and transparent. Communities respond positively when they can see exactly how their input is shaping the process, which in turn increases engagement and ownership.

Positive Practice

Snapshots

📍 Oldham | Action Together Oldham

Action Together quickly mobilised for a design jam in March, bringing together 80 people from East Oldham to generate ideas that were distilled down into three themes.

Groups were then formed to work on prototypes – including one that has focused solely on developing a blueprint for the distribution of the Live Well Communities Fund.

Key to engaging people has been clearly communicating about the time commitment, the ask and the opportunity, and providing an Action Together staff member to act as a facilitator/coach with each group. Action Together also included remuneration for participants, paying people £20 per hour and adapting internal systems to process payments efficiently, while contributing learning to national discussions with Locomotion and The Poverty Truth Commission on remuneration.



Building on their experience as a Live Well Accelerator site, Action Together Oldham has been able to ensure strong connectivity between this and other workstreams/funding. They have leveraged additional funding, including support from the National Lottery Community Fund's learning partnership programmes, enabling future investment once the funding blueprint has been co-designed with residents.

The approach to this work has seen Action Together challenge its own assumptions about community wants and needs. Staff have also adopted a coaching and facilitation approach, which has encouraged deeper thinking and allowed new perspectives to emerge in the design group, and increased ownership by members. This has represented a cultural shift in ways of working and has seen staff really stretching their coaching and facilitation skills.

By engaging directly with residents through outreach at local organisations and high-footfall areas, Action Together has built stronger, direct relationships with residents, enabling them to hear their voice directly. This has also given staff confidence to advocate more strongly for residents' and community voices to be heard in other projects, and they now have easily accessible tools to support engagement.

Positive Practice Snapshots

 Rochdale | Action Together Rochdale

In Rochdale, Action Together has been working closely with the Anti-Poverty Foundation Group, bringing together nine VCSE leaders and one community activist. The group co-designed a new Communities Fund approach.



They had previous experience of designing priorities for the Household Support Fund under the categories of prevention, food, and other vital needs. Through root cause analysis, they created five priority areas that needed support and investment. Using these as a starting point, they identified opportunities and gaps.

At the cross-sector Anti-Poverty Network in April, they conducted research into ‘what was already happening’ in the borough, drawing on the depth and breadth of experience in the room. They took this away to their foundation group space and went through a ‘design thinking’ process in August to hone their priorities. This approach has been strengthened by what Rochdale already had in place.

The Local Infrastructure Organisation was already deeply embedded within the borough’s anti-poverty work, and its strong connections helped build trust and collaboration to design the Fund.

The Foundation Group set “Helping children and young people to thrive and reach their potential” as one of their five key priorities for the borough. The fund aims to support young people and young adults with life skills development, setting them up for the future.

The fund opened to applications in September 2025, with awards to be made in October 2025.



Positive Practice Snapshots

 Salford | Salford CVS

Salford CVS partnered with Community Little Hulton, a trusted organisation already embedded in the area. Little Hulton had been a Live Well Accelerator site and a Live Well Development Worker was in post, who was able to work closely with groups.

Engagement took place at local events and through outreach to groups, to build interest. A community decision-making panel was established, with members from diverse backgrounds, who were remunerated for their time.

Decision-making power was also placed directly in residents' hands through in-person and online voting, with over 600 people participating. This approach led to different funding outcomes than a traditional model, whilst also bringing the added benefit of creating opportunities for the community to connect.

Flexibility was key: groups were supported to submit video applications, eligibility was widened to include non-members of Salford CVS and unconstituted groups, and there was a commitment to finding practical solutions – for example, enabling Community Little Hulton to hold funds on behalf of an unconstituted group.

Taking a more flexible approach has resulted in a greater diversity of groups applying to the Fund than Salford CVS would usually reach. Four groups work for the benefit of Global Majority communities, two work for the benefit of adults with disabilities, three work for the benefit of older adults, and five work for the benefit of women/girls.

Staff at Salford CVS have also taken a more relational approach to this work, building deeper relationships with groups who have been allocated funding.



Positive Practice Snapshots

📍 Stockport | Sector 3

Sector 3 distributed its Live Well Communities funding by the end of April, awarding grants of up to £5,000.

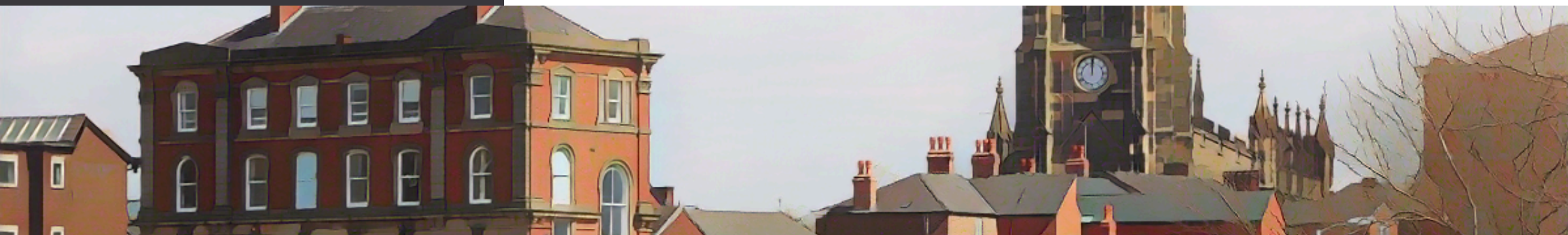
To shape priorities for the fund, they made use of a Community Power event as a consultation space and drew on their existing networks, meet-and-greet sessions, and community events to reach and involve a wide range of local organisations. The fund targeted projects addressing entrenched health inequalities affecting Global Majority communities, socially isolated individuals, and children and young people, with priority given to groups and projects working in areas of deprivation within Stockport.

Sector 3's strong relationships with the Local Authority and Public Health have supported this work. The local authority approached Sector 3 with an offer of additional funds, which meant they were able to extend the reach of the fund, though it still remained oversubscribed. The demand for funding was high, with applications totalling nearly £400,000.

Decision-making was overseen by a balanced funding panel including representatives from public health, Sector 3, the local authority, a VCSE organisation, and a community member with lived experience.

A key strength of the approach was its focus on building broader reach. Sector 3 actively went out to community events and groups, generating discussion and interest, and encouraging applications from smaller hyper-local organisations. By using trusted networks to share information, they were able to engage groups that might not otherwise have been reached.

Applicants also had the option to share applications via video (although this option was not taken up by any groups). Alongside distributing funds, Sector 3 worked to create added value through linking groups with their capacity-building staff. By connecting groups to existing resources such as the Stockport Volunteer Hub, they supported organisations to strengthen their capacity and maximise what was already available locally.



Positive Practice Snapshots

 Tameside | Action Together Tameside

Action Together's approach resulted from a cumulation of genuine cross-sector collaboration and co-design to turn real life stories into Live Well Tameside principles. These formed the basis of the decisions made by VCSE groups about where the funding should be prioritised, alongside their lived experience of inequity and place.

It is important to note the context within Tameside at the time, with two years of disinvestment across the VCSE sector resulting in the removal of small grants available for the sector. Alongside the Live Well Accelerator programme, the main focus of this fund has been to bring a sharper focus on the role of community-led prevention within the system in supporting people to live healthier and happier lives. The LW fund has been the catalyst to influence and advocate for further local investment to strengthen community-led prevention

Through a series of engagement and storytelling workshops, the Live Well Leadership group co-designed seven Community-led Wellbeing Principles, describing the behaviours, hopes and values that are intrinsic to community-led prevention.

Action Together used their April Voluntary Sector Summit in Tameside (with around 130 people from VCSE organisations attending) to test and co-design the Community-led Wellbeing Principles. Once agreed, these became the overarching principles for the Tameside Communities Fund (TCF) and have been used as the foundation for the design, promotion and decision-making of the fund.

Following the Summit, they widened membership for the Live Well Leadership Group, who became the decision-making panel for the fund to make sure communities facing the most inequity were represented. They also commissioned a storytelling toolkit and training for VCSE organisations to share their stories, rather than producing a written application, to increase accessibility for the grant funding.

Action Together has seen the benefits of new relationships and trust, including with members of the panel and leadership group, and there is now a cohort of organisations with whom they have a close working relationship. There are also improved relationships with the Public Health Team as a result of this work.

The Live Well Leadership Group will continue to be the decision-making panel for future rounds of TCF. There is a commitment from within the system (currently from within Population Health) to invest further funds into TCF over the next financial period.



Action Together has developed its monitoring and evaluation processes to include more storytelling through the TCF, gathering stories that bring to life community-led prevention, which will continue to be a tool for influence.



Community Led Wellbeing Principles
How does the local VCSE sector deliver community-led prevention?

One life at a time

We work with people one life at a time - on their terms, at their pace for as long as they need us.



We are trusted

People trust in us, to work along side them consistently with compassion, and without judgement. We don't give up on people.

We are open spaces

We are safe open spaces where everyone can feel connected, and feel they belong.



We are peers and facilitators

We are peers and facilitators within communities who can spot the signs of what is really going on with others and encourage them to make informed choices.

We are the trusted voice

We are the trusted voice within communities and the link to everything else, advocating for the most vulnerable and those in crisis.



We offer positivity and hope

We offer positivity and hope - opportunities for people to gain a sense of purpose and grow their skills, confidence, and resilience.

We are our communities

We are our communities. We grew out of our communities; we are committed to being here for the long term.



Positive Practice Snapshots

Trafford | Thrive Trafford and The Trafford Collective

In Trafford, Thrive Trafford and the Trafford Collective worked closely with colleagues in Public Health and structured the fund around priority areas identified by Fairer Health for Trafford Partnership, through a process of co-design with community representatives.

The areas of focus for the fund were: unpaid carers, people with learning disabilities, and people living with serious mental illness. The fund was advertised through Thrive/Trafford Collective's website, networks and relationships with VCSE groups. The Collective's community hubs model has supported reach into small grassroots groups.

An application process was designed that was light touch and flexible in terms of how applications could be shared. Trafford tested out a Dragons' Den approach where applicants met with a panel, which included people with lived experience and representatives from Trafford Council. Using this format created a space where applicants could present their ideas in innovative and creative ways and foreground the perspective and voice of people with lived experience – for example, one applicant delivered a short creative production.

Applicants fed back that the process removed barriers, for example around literacy. Eight projects were funded in total, with projects working within diverse communities – two were with South Asian communities, one with autistic people, one with disabled young people, and two with people with mental health issues.

A priority has been to build close relationships with grant recipients and create opportunities for connections to form between groups. There has also been an opportunity to access guidance and training to build understanding of Live Well and to support grassroots groups to tell the story of their impact. Two meetings have been held, resulting in groups working more closely together and referring people to each other's activities.

Although time constraints meant Trafford couldn't implement a full participatory budgeting approach to this fund, the work has represented a cultural shift to a more collaborative, inclusive and relational ethos in grant making.



Positive Practice Snapshots

Wigan | Wigan Borough Community First

Wigan Borough Community First is using the Live Well Communities Fund to build capacity to connect with and listen to local communities in a meaningful and reciprocal way.

The borough has faced challenges due to the absence of a local infrastructure organisation (LIO) and a lack of long-term investment, which has limited the number of community-rooted organisations and spaces with the capacity to engage effectively with residents.

To address this, funding will support eight grassroots individuals to take part in a structured training, learning, and listening programme. Each participant will receive a £5,000 bursary to remove barriers to participation, covering costs such as caring responsibilities, equipment, conversation expenses, or rewards and incentives for community involvement.

The programme includes two days of training in Asset-Based Community Development, the art of hosting, powerful questions, and community reporting, followed by monthly two-hour gatherings to practice deep listening and share insights. Participants will also spend half a day learning from the experiences of Northern Heart and Soul, Springfield Beech Hill and Gidlow Community Mutual Aid group, before concluding with two days dedicated to collecting insights and ripple effect mapping.

Alongside this, each participant will hold fortnightly learning conversations in everyday community spaces—from public living rooms to school gates and local shops. They will record insights and then host local gatherings to share what they have learned and reflect on what residents want to see happen next.



**WIGAN BOROUGH
COMMUNITY FIRST**

This approach is designed to build capacity and skills for hosting community conversations, foster community organising, and prepare Wigan Borough for future financial investment into communities at a local level.

The hope is that the second stage of this work will develop from the participants, so their insights will influence what develops and how more funding and resources might be usefully directed.



Want to find out about more examples of how Greater Manchester's Local Infrastructure Organisations are helping our communities Live Well? Check out the [10GM website](https://www.10gm.org.uk) or join the conversation on [LinkedIn](#).

November 2025



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