

---

# Voluntary and Charitable Sector Memorandum of Understanding

---

<b>Committee considering report:</b>	Executive
<b>Date of Committee:</b>	3 July 2025
<b>Portfolio Member:</b>	Councillor Jeff Brooks
<b>Report Author:</b>	Paul Coe
<b>Forward Plan Ref:</b>	EX4653

---

## 1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report provides an update on progress to develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between West Berkshire Council (WBC) and the Voluntary and Charitable Sector (VCS) and to recommend its adoption.
- 1.2 The MOU has been developed in consultation with key VCS stakeholders.

## 2 Recommendation

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Executive agrees to the adoption of the MOU by the Council and invites the VCS bodies named within to do the same.

## 3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
<b>Financial:</b>	No direct costs are anticipated. Indirect costs relate to officer time.
<b>Human Resource:</b>	Officer time will be spent on the delivery of the actions outlined in the MOU.
<b>Legal:</b>	The MOU consists of a voluntary agreement. This has been made explicit in the MOU on the advice of the Legal team.
<b>Risk Management:</b>	The MOU sets out some commitments and consequently there is a degree of relationship and reputational risk if those commitments are not properly met.

<b>Property:</b>	No property impacts identified.			
<b>Policy:</b>	No policy issues identified.			
	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
<b>Equalities Impact:</b>				
<b>A</b> Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?	x			The MOU should facilitate effective joint working to support the community and improve support to vulnerable groups.
<b>B</b> Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?	x			The MOU should facilitate effective joint working to support the community and improve support to vulnerable groups.
<b>Environmental Impact:</b>		x		
<b>Health Impact:</b>	x			The MOU should facilitate effective joint working to support the community and improve support to vulnerable groups.
<b>ICT Impact:</b>		x		
<b>Digital Services Impact:</b>		x		
<b>Council Strategy Priorities:</b>	x			The MOU should support the delivery of the Council's priorities.

<b>Core Business:</b>	x			The MOU should support operational delivery.
<b>Data Impact:</b>		x		
<b>Consultation and Engagement:</b>	<p>The draft MOU has been developed in collaboration with the following organisations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer Centre West Berkshire</li> <li>• Connecting Communities in Berkshire</li> </ul> <p>There has also been wider engagement with a range of VCS organisations.</p> <p>Advice and support have also been gratefully received from Greenham Trust and the Berkshire Community Foundation.</p> <p>The work has also been supported by officers from the Place Directorate and Children's Services.</p>			

## 4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 The February 2024 Corporate Peer Challenge of WBC identified a Recommendation to develop a strategic MOU with the VCS.
- 4.2 Meetings have taken place with organisations who play a key role in the sector locally.
- 4.3 A draft MOU was developed in collaboration with those organisations in anticipation that they will form an interface between the council and the wider sector.
- 4.4 Executive agreed the initial draft and that there would be further engagement with the wider VCS. That has now taken place. Some changes have been made to the MOU based on the feedback.
- 4.5 The wider sector expressed broad support for the MOU. They also expressed the view that meaningful commitment from the council would be the key determinant of its success.
- 4.6 Officers from across the council have stepped up their level of engagement with the sector.

## 5 Supporting Information

### Background

5.1 The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge conducted in February 2024 identified the following recommendation:

Recommendation 11 - Build on strong and positive operational relationships between the council and partners, including contractors, and develop strategic relationships that create opportunities to deliver activity that will support wider council and partner objectives (e.g. apprenticeships, social value). As part of this, develop a strategic Memorandum of Understanding with the Voluntary and Community Sector.

5.2 A series of meetings have been held between council officers and stakeholders including:

- Volunteer Centre West Berkshire
- Greenham Trust
- Connecting Communities in Berkshire
- Berkshire Community Foundation

5.3 Examples of existing MoUs were reviewed in order to borrow from best practice models.

5.4 VCS organisations can be sensitive to the approach of statutory partners and the mode of approach is therefore important. The development of an MOU creates an opportunity to improve the way that we work together.

5.5 The MOU focuses on more structured, earlier communication between key representatives of the council to support better outcomes.

5.6 During the course of the work it has been noted that there is already a significant amount of collaborative work notably in the various subgroups of the Health and Wellbeing Board and in forums convened by the VCWB.

### Proposals

5.7 It is recommended that the MOU is adopted.

## 6 Other options considered

A more expansive co-productive model was considered but rejected due to the time and resource required with such a large and diverse sector.

## 7 Conclusion

The Peer Challenge gave the recommendation to develop an MOU with the Charitable sector. An MOU has now been developed by a small group of stakeholders. It has been shared with a wider group of Voluntary and Charitable sector organisations who expressed broad support for the approach.

## 8 Appendices

### Appendix A – Memorandum of Understanding between West Berkshire Council and the Voluntary and Charitable sector in West Berkshire

---

#### Subject to Call-In:

Yes: ☒ No: ☐

- |   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council                              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Considered or reviewed by Scrutiny Commission or associated Committees, Task Groups within preceding six months | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Item is Urgent Key Decision   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Report is to note only  | <input type="checkbox"/> |

#### Officer details:

Name: Paul Coe  
Job Title: Executive Director  
Tel No: 01635 503386  
E-mail: paul.coe@westberks.gov.uk

---

## Appendix A

**Date:**

### **Memorandum of Understanding between West Berkshire Council and the Voluntary and Charitable sector in West Berkshire<sup>1</sup>**

#### **Purpose of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)**

This document is a written understanding between partners setting out principles to support effective collaborative working between West Berkshire Council (WBC) and partners within the Voluntary and Charitable Sector within West Berkshire.

Voluntary and Charitable sector signatories to the MoU will act as an interface between WBC and the wider sector.

The MOU is not intended to be legally binding but is rather a statement of understanding and cooperation.

#### **Objectives**

The Objectives of the MOU are to:

- support information sharing for the purposes of strategic discussions between WBC and representative organisations from the Voluntary and Charitable sector.
- support the identification of additional capacity and resources to deliver better outcomes for the residents of West Berkshire.
- support better and earlier communication between partners, providing early notice of new initiatives or plans, creating opportunities to shape early thinking and/ or co-produce solutions, and identify potential for collaboration.
- enable charitable sector organisations to provide feedback to the council and impact the way it operates.
- influence the way that commissioning activities are undertaken.

Working together in a way that demonstrates parity of esteem for partners to identify, develop and deliver shared priorities will result in better outcomes for local people.

#### **Contribution of the Voluntary and Charitable Sector**

We recognise the voluntary and charitable sector is a vital cornerstone of effective local provision across a multitude of areas.

Voluntary and charitable partners provide important services and hold expert professional intelligence.

---

<sup>1</sup> With acknowledgement to North East and North Cumbria (NENC) Integrated Care Board (ICB) and the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector (VCSE) in the North East and North Cumbria (NENC)

They play a particularly important role in complementing the services provided to the local population through statutory provision. Support can also reduce the impact of structural inequalities by providing a non-stigmatising support offer.

The voluntary and charitable sector also plays an important role in delivering services where there is a shortfall in available provision.

The voluntary and charitable sector employs many people and represents a very significant part of the local economy.

### **Function of the Local Authority**

West Berkshire Council provides over 700 statutory services for our residents and businesses. Our residents rely on us to:

- ensure older people and vulnerable adults are looked after and supported to live independently
- maintain our roads and transport infrastructure, parks, open spaces and buildings
- offer housing services
- support education, early years and children with special educational needs
- keep children safe and families together
- encourage economic development
- provide planning services
- support culture, museums and libraries
- provide benefits and collect council taxes and business rates
- collect bins and provide recycling services
- work with communities to support public health and wellbeing
- undertake public protection functions

### **Shared values**

All partners agree to act in accordance with a set of shared values that will underpin all work we carry out together as a system:

**Trust** - We will create the space and time needed to develop trusting relationships between our sectors at all levels and will always act with honesty and integrity.

**Impact** - The actions we take will be guided by the needs of the people who live in our district, and will make a substantive and positive difference to our community.

**Collaboration** - We will work in partnership from the outset, assuming good intent, supporting each other, recognising and utilising our skills and talents and analysing problems together as the first step towards taking action.

**Inclusivity** - We will actively listen to all parts of our system including our people and communities, valuing and respecting their expertise, ensuring that we are guided by their input and that information is accessible to all.

**Equity** - We will ensure time to understand each other, that decisions, power, and responsibility are shared by all partners, and that all contributions are meaningful and valued.

**Transparency** - We will be open about our processes, planning, reasoning, and restrictions across all sectors, and will respond positively to challenges.

### **Definition of Voluntary or Charitable organisations**

A charity's aims have to fall into categories that the law says are charitable. These are things like preventing or relieving poverty, or advancing the arts, culture, heritage or science.

It has to be established exclusively for what is known as public benefit. That means its only purpose must be charitable.

Charities can't make profits. All the money they raise must go towards achieving their aims. A charity can't have owners or shareholders who benefit from it.

Charities have to state what their charitable objectives are in order to be registered with the Charity Commission, and then explain how they are meeting them in their annual reports, which are publicly available.

There are further organisations within the sector who do not conform to the specific parameters of charitable status but nonetheless operate for the public good. The MOU seeks to take an inclusive and pragmatic approach to the wider sector.

### **Our Vision for the Voluntary and Charitable sector in West Berkshire**

Our vision is a vibrant, sustainable, and resilient Voluntary and Charitable sector operating within the district, working in partnership with the council to support each other's strategic intent.

### **Practical delivery**

- We will meet regularly as a Steering Group every two months (more frequently in the initial stages of the partnership). Deputies/ substitutes will be acceptable.
- The agenda will be agreed collaboratively.
- The Chair will rotate between member organisations.
- The Steering Group will be supported by relevant data and intelligence, e.g. public health indices of deprivation.
- We will discuss new initiatives and opportunities openly to support collaborative design.
- We will share feedback and intelligence openly.
- We will provide a clear and accessible explanation of our shared and individual governance structures.
- We will develop communications structures throughout our system to increase reach.
- We will review our MOU regularly to ensure it remains relevant and fit for purpose.

### **Data Sharing**

Work relating to the MOU will primarily be at a strategic level and consequently does not require an explicit information sharing agreement/ data protection impact assessment.

Where there is further work undertaken by partners, they will ensure that information-sharing agreements are in place as required.



## **Commercially sensitive information**

- The council must not seek to shape its requirements to benefit one provider, whilst at the same time ensuring that the solution to meet its requirement is deliverable by the market.

It is understood that, as a result of working together, it is possible that requirements, scope and/or specifications may be developed as a result of working with voluntary and charitable organisations.

- The council has an obligation under the Public Contract Regulations 2015 to ensure that competition is not distorted and to mitigate any advantage gained by a provider in working with the council to develop, design or refine requirements. It will do so by ensuring that information shared during the scoping phase will be shared with all potential bidders during the procurement. In addition, by virtue of the fact a broad range of organisations are being represented, this will assist with such mitigation.

The aim of such processes will be to enable voluntary and charitable organisations to input into a process which delivers better services to residents.

To achieve this, all parties must feel able to contribute and share information. The council understands that voluntary and charitable organisations may have concerns about sharing confidential information, therefore rules will be established regarding the use of information obtained during such discussions, to encourage inclusive and open dialogue.

## **Funding**

There is no funding explicitly attached to the MoU.

## **Resolution of disagreement**

Where there is disagreement between members, this should be resolved in the first instance at working level. If this is not possible, it may be referred through those responsible for the management of this MoU, up to and including the Chief Executive, who will then be jointly responsible for ensuring a mutually satisfactory resolution.

## **Duration and review**

This MoU commences on the date of the signatures below. It is not time-limited and will continue to have effect unless the principles described above need to be altered and/or cease to be relevant.

The Steering Group may change through the addition of further members, or the withdrawal of a party with notice of 2 months.

This MoU will be reviewed every two to three years but may be reviewed at any time at the request of any party. Any alterations to the MoU will require all parties to agree.

All organisations have identified a person responsible for the management of this MoU and these 'Relationship Leads' will liaise as required to ensure:

- a. This MoU is kept up to date.
- b. They identify any emerging issues in the working relationship between the organisations.
- c. They resolve any questions that arise regarding the interpretation of this MoU.

### **Signatories**

This document is adopted under the authority of:

West Berkshire Council:

Volunteer Centre West Berkshire:

Connecting Communities in Berkshire:

*(Signatures will be inserted here)*