

Memorandum of understanding

Between Somerset Integrated Care Board (ICB), Somerset Council and the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise Sector (VCFSE) in Somerset

Purpose

This document is a written understanding between partners setting out how they will engage and embed the VCFSE sector in system level governance and decision-making arrangements and collaborate with the sector in Somerset to deliver better health and wellbeing outcomes for the people who live here.

“The sector is a key strategic partner with an important contribution to make in shaping, improving, and delivering services, and developing and implementing plans to tackle the wider determinants of health. Partnership should be embedded in how the ICS operates, including through involvement in governance structures in population health management and service redesign work, and in system workforce, leadership and organisational development plans”.

(Building strong integrated care systems everywhere – NHSE September 2021)

When we talk about the VCFSE in Somerset, we mean **V**oluntary sector organisations, **C**ommunity groups, **F**aith groups and **S**ocial Enterprises where profits will be reinvested for their social purpose. Spark Somerset is the recognised VCFSE lead, advocating on behalf of the VCFSE within the Integrated Care System.

When we talk about Somerset Integrated Care System, we mean:

- Somerset Integrated Care Board
- Somerset NHS Foundation Trust
- Somerset Council

In time, we intend to expand this MOU to other Somerset Integrated Care Partners.

Context

The voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector has long been a valued partner to the public sector. This is often related to service delivery but the value and role of the VCFSE sector is wider and includes:

- the delivery of support and services to people and communities, through staff and volunteers
- insight from being embedded in communities
- a mechanism for accessing and hearing stakeholder voices – the VCFSE often has a lobbying and campaigning role and is able to reach into communities to hear voices that the public sector may miss
- experience of taking a holistic, preventative and person-centred approach to supporting community health and wellbeing
- links across and within different communities of interest
- ability to be flexible, adaptable and responsive
- expertise in impact measurement and co-design of services

The complexity of issues and the pace of change in our communities is requiring us all to find ways to work more closely together. Recognising this, the Somerset Group of Charities¹, a group of like-minded charities that support health and wellbeing, have been working together since December 2019. The group originally came together to respond to the opportunity to improve health and wellbeing with the earlier version of changing structures in health and social care, the Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships.

With thousands of VCFSE organisations in Somerset, from the very small to larger county-wide charities and specialist national health charities, it is not straightforward to talk of ‘the sector’ in Somerset. We are all united in our vision for the people of Somerset to live as well as they can for as long as they can, but we all support different people in different ways. Engaging and representing the thousands of VCFSE groups and organisations across Somerset from the outset is extremely challenging, but over time we are seeking to engage as many of these groups as possible. Through this proposed model, we are striving to build awareness and enable more joined discussions.

Our Vision for embedding the VCFSE in the Somerset system

Somerset ICS wishes to build a strong integrated care system across Somerset and recognises that:

- The VCFSE sector is a key strategic partner with an important contribution to make in shaping, improving and delivering services, and developing and implementing plans to tackle the wider determinants of health
- VCFSE partnership should be embedded in how the ICS operates, including through involvement in governance structures in population health management and service redesign work, and in system workforce, leadership and organisational development plans.

ICS implementation guidance on partnerships with the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector– NHSE September 2021



¹ Age UK Somerset, Alzheimer’s Society, British Red Cross, Citizens Advice Sedgemoor, Citizens Advice South Somerset, Citizens Advice Taunton Compass Disability, Community Council for Somerset, Headway Somerset, Macmillan Cancer Support, Mind in Somerset, Somerset Activity & Sports Partnership, Somerset and Wessex Eating Disorders Association, Spark Somerset, Young Somerset

The Somerset system has a shared vision for a diverse, vibrant, sustainable and resilient VCFSE sector.

Our aim is that:

- Every organisation in Somerset has a way, or multiple ways, into the partnership with the ICS, but in a way that feels appropriate to them
- Information flows two-ways and there is a route to disseminate information to the sector from the public sector, but also to pull up information from colleagues to inform public sector activities and services
- Representatives are accountable to the wider sector rather than to their own organisations
- There is intersectionality – with flexibility and peer support between thematic priorities and overall strategic partnership development
- This infrastructure also offers an easier route for the public sector to consult and engage with the sector and tap into expertise on impact measurement, co-design, inequalities etc.

Statement of Intent

Starting with an existing group of the willing – the Somerset Group of Charities – this is our first step in developing collaborative working in the VCFSE across Somerset. However, we are keen to continue with the involvement of other VCFSE organisations in our development discussions. We must also look to remove some of the barriers that make it difficult for VCFSE organisations to collaborate with public sector partners. Doing so will ensure that the sector’s unique strengths are an integral part of how the new ICS operates and will allow us to work together to tackle health inequalities and provide the very best support for the people of Somerset.

The VCFSE sector have developed a proposed model which will create an engagement framework for embedding the VCFSE in the ICS. This model is currently being reviewed and an agreed version will be available in due course.

The proposed partnership model consists of three elements:

- A VCFSE Assembly – open to all organisations working in Somerset
- A VCFSE Strategic Group – that acts as the steering group to the Assembly
- A VCFSE Leaders Group - elected by the strategic group - that act as VCFSE reps to the relevant strategic partnership boards

Shared values and principles

The VCFSE and Public Sector in Somerset both have valuable assets and strengths that will help us achieve our shared goals. Importantly, we agree on shared values and principles that underpin our commitments to the way in which we behave and work, stated below. Building relationships remains key to recognising shared goals, having difficult conversations when required and taking opportunities when they arise – and this work is ongoing. This agreement has been developed through a series of engagement events, conversations and research.

The ICS recognises the Somerset VCFSE sector as an equal and strategic partner. To ensure this strategic partnership continues to flourish the Somerset VCFSE sector (via its Strategic Group, the Somerset Group of Charities), members of the Integrated Care Board and other key stakeholders from Somerset Council have agreed the shared values below. They agreed these values during a facilitated workshop in March 2023.

We are collaborative

We will take a whole system approach to addressing the health and care needs of people in Somerset. We will work to build strong, long-lasting authentic partnerships, supporting each other and sharing knowledge to achieve the greatest impact in our communities.

We are innovative

We proactively seek opportunities to find creative solutions and adapt and evolve so that we can make a real difference to people in need.

We have integrity

We will build trust and act with honesty and transparency. We will listen to and respect each other's views.

We are community-focused

We will work with local communities to design services that are informed by different perspectives, built on the assets of communities and their needs.

We will strive for equity

We are committed to developing a model of shared strategic decision making, planning and impact measurement, in which everyone's expertise, knowledge and insight is valued.

Commitments

From these values and principles, we have agreed the following commitments:

Shared Commitments

- We will hold each other to account, live our values and regularly review our working relationship.
- We will collaborate to maximise on the opportunities and share risks and resources to achieve the best possible outcomes.
- To ensure we work in a trusting relationship we commit to being as transparent as we can be. We will use plain English and remain mindful of our respective 'jargon' and the barriers this can present.
- We will develop engagement structures that enable VCSE organisations to have a voice on issues that matter to them and the communities they work with.
- We see each other as critical friends. We will develop a mutual understanding of different approaches, challenges and ways of working. We will be open, honest and responsive. We will commit to having difficult conversations when required, tackling problems together and taking and adopting an outward mindset approach to challenging situations

VCFSE Commitments

- We will support the strategic vision for Somerset, working alongside system partners. The support we provide will reflect our VCFSE capacity, knowledge, skills and expertise, so that we can add best value at all times.
- We will collaborate within the VCFSE sector to work strategically with the Public Sector; this includes building relationships within the sector, exploring opportunities for joined-up working and sharing information and resources.
- We will adopt a transparent process that will enable us to appoint representatives who have a mandate to be a voice for the VCFSE sector. Representatives will commit to impartiality, reflecting diverse perspectives, clearly articulating our collective messages and being transparent about the limitations of their reach. They will openly share information and opportunities with the VCFSE sector.
- We will participate in problem solving, strategic planning and prioritisation, community engagement and service co-design, including undertaking commissioned work to support local communities.

Public Sector Commitments

- When a need for representation is identified (by either party), we will recognise, respect, and work with the model that will be established for engagement with the VCFSE.
- We value infrastructure for the VCFSE sector and support this where we can, including funding it where relevant and appropriate, with agreements that are meaningful to both sectors. We commit to adopting an agreed model for engagement as a matter of priority.
- We are committed to an ongoing dialogue with the VCFSE sector and respect them as an equal strategic partner. We recognise that sometimes we may have different perspectives. We respect the sector's right to challenge and campaign without this impacting on the funding relationship with us.
- We commit to appropriate and proportionate processes and timescales for VCFSE participation, including those that relate to commissioning. This includes co-production, procurement frameworks, length of contracts/ grants, reporting mechanisms etc. We also recognise the importance of full cost recovery and are committed to commission on this basis.

How we will achieve this together

We propose the following priority activity for the next 12-18 months:

- A model for VCFSE engagement will be agreed, supported by long term sustainable investment into the new partnership structures, and into VCSFE capacity more broadly.
- A commitment to a new way of working that is more inclusive, effective and achieves better outcomes. We will create more opportunities for cross-sector thinking and connections – e.g. more workshop activities and task and finish groups where possible, not just formal Boards and meetings
- VCFSE updates and showcase opportunities to be included in relevant system meetings, as appropriate e.g. ICB and Somerset Board.
- Explore the implementation of a 'buddying' scheme that matches VCFSE leaders with key senior staff within the public sector requiring them to meet regularly, build relationships and share experiences.
- Spark to enable regular open events at VCFSE facilities that can be attended by public sector staff, where key community services and activities can be highlighted.
- Joint conference to be held in March 2024 which will bring system partners together to network and provide an opportunity to showcase positive partnership working and emphasise the culture change we are seeking to effect together.
- A commitment to offer places to the VCFSE on all relevant strategic and partnership boards. New ways of working and values of this MOU will be clearly evident in the terms of reference for all Boards.
- Review of our commissioning processes so that we can move to a more collaborative, effective and informed commissioning environment, which will enable better outcomes for all.
- Identify Public Sector strategic leader(s) embedded in the Somerset system who can work in partnership with Spark Somerset and the wider VCFSE, to champion the sector and advocate on their behalf internally.
- It is important that staff and volunteers understand our commitment to this MOU and why it is important that we are working in this way. An overview of the VCFSE/Public Sector partnership and the value it brings will form part of the induction process for all staff.
- Review of the MOU and further development of the VCFSE engagement model will involve other stakeholders from across the system, ensuring that this work can develop, grow and achieve 'spread'.
- Explore system-wide mechanism for gathering data, measuring impact and establishing social value.