




Somerset Equality Impact Assessment

Before completing this EIA please ensure you have read the EIA guidance notes – available from your Equality Officer or www.somerset.gov.uk/impactassessment

Organisation prepared for (mark as appropriate)	 Somerset Council	x	 NHS Somerset	 NHS Somerset NHS Foundation Trust
Version	V1		Date Completed	30 October 2023
Description of what is being impact assessed				
<p>Award of a contract for up to five years (3 +1 +1) to Spark Somerset to provide voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector infrastructure support and engagement. The contract is jointly funded by Somerset Integrated Care Board (ICB) with Somerset Council as the lead commissioner and due to commence on 1st April 2024.</p> <p>Spark Somerset is Somerset’s council for voluntary service and recognised by the VCFSE sector as the single infrastructure provider. Spark is a member of the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action, the national co-ordinating body for infrastructure organisations.</p> <p>Infrastructure support enables individual VCFSE groups and organisations to develop, improve and sustain their services through the provision of training for staff and volunteers, advising on operational and governance policy and procedures, assisting with funding applications and bid writing, and ensuring safeguarding duties are met. The support also co-ordinates the voice of, and advocates on behalf of, the VCFSE sector in its partnerships with public sector and is key to the implementation of the engagement model with the VCFSE sector signed by Somerset Council and Somerset ICB in September 2023.</p> <p>Following vesting of the new unitary authority there are legacy agreements in place with many VCFSE sector organisations – including Spark - and the Council is committed to review and rationalise them in its first year of operation. Current arrangements for</p>				

delivery of VCFSE infrastructure support by Spark Somerset are disjointed, short term and not coherent. The new contract from April 2024 will bring existing arrangements and resources into a coherent whole and secure and embed the engagement model which underpins the Memorandum of Understanding which the Council recently signed alongside Somerset ICB.

The new contract will draw together the resources previously awarded/granted to Spark by Somerset County Council and the four district councils. A new specification – which reflects the post-pandemic VCFSE sector’s requirements - and single contract will ensure consistency of service provision across the county, coherence in the arrangement and reduce the contract management, monitoring and reporting burden.

Feedback from VCFSE groups and commissioners of support services suggest that many equality communities rely heavily on the support provided by VCFSE organisations which contribute to the preventive and support offer, adding significantly to the capacity and expertise which can be secured through direct public sector funding. These VCFSE organisations in turn – particularly the small and medium sized ones – rely on the support available from Spark to ensure they are compliant with legal and policy requirements, and are linked to, and able to benefit from, the wider sector and its development.

Should this support be reduced removed, we will need to properly understand the impact on equality communities and the stability of the remaining VCFSE sector caused by this reduction. Local authority funding plays a key role in levering in additional funding to the VCFSE sector. It also supports work that would not receive funding from anywhere else but can have a substantial impact on small communities and populations in the area.

A small number of VCFSE sector equality groups in Somerset rely on minimal funding to work with some of our most isolated and vulnerable communities. These are often communities that would not engage with generally delivered or Council-led services for a variety of reasons. A sustainable long-term model of sector-led support and funding from the local authority will help to provide reassurance for VCFSE groups and organisations, and continue to build positive relationships with the communities they serve.

The VCFSE is critical to the delivery of the Council Plan’s four ambitions. Working and collaborating with partners is a recurring theme in the Council Plan and the VCFSE is recognised as a key strategic partner in the shared aim of improving lives in Somerset. Alongside the new infrastructure support contract, Somerset Council is reviewing and rationalising its grants and other arrangements with VCFSE sector organisations.

The Memorandum of Understanding and the associated engagement model embed equity into the relationship between Somerset Council, Somerset NHS and the VCFSE sector, and provide an opportunity to consider collective expectations and requirements for equality and diversity across the system. When fully implemented the engagement model will deliver greater diversity of involvement in shaping services, identifying priorities and decision-making.

The award of the VCFSE infrastructure support contract has the potential to positively impact on protected groups through:

- Advancing equality of opportunity between those who share a protected characteristic and those who don't.
- Fostering good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who don't.

However, VCFSE organisations are affected by the same financial and cost pressures as households – and which drive more people to seek help from charities and voluntary groups - with inflation and cost increases eroding the value of grants and donations to charitable groups and causes. Few donations and grant agreements include scope for inflationary increases, reducing the real value of the funding.

While the new infrastructure contract is funded to the same total as the previous arrangements, the value of the funding is significantly reduced by inflation and the rising cost of goods, services and energy. The new arrangement will reduce the reporting and monitoring burden but will not secure the same level of service as was previously the case. The structure of the new service and deployment of staff and other resources must be carefully planned to maximise the benefit and mitigate the impact of reduced value.

Evidence

What data/information have you used to assess how this policy/service might impact on protected groups? Sources such as the [Office of National Statistics](#), [Somerset Intelligence Partnership](#), [Somerset's Joint Strategic Needs Analysis \(JSNA\)](#), Staff and/ or [area profiles](#),, should be detailed here

Data and information to assess the impact of this new contract has been gathered from:

- 'State of the Sector' reports which detail the position and challenges facing the VCFSE sector
- The Reflect, Recover Renew [research report](#) and resulting working groups which are VCFSE sector-led and focus on positioning the sector for the future
- Feedback from 2023 market engagement activity which included face to face engagement with around 15 VCFSE organisations and a brief survey which garnered 99 responses.
- [Research produced by the Social Market Foundation](#) which underlines the VCFSE role in providing public services with reduced funding from the public sector.
- [Briefing from the Local Government Information Unit](#) which reflects on the essential partnerships between local government and charitable organisations in meeting the needs of disadvantaged communities and population groups

Who have you consulted with to assess possible impact on protected groups and what have they told you? If you have not consulted other people, please explain why?

This equality impact assessment has been developed by Partnerships and Localities officers who have worked with and managed funding agreements with VCFSE organisations and the sector as a whole over many years, and builds on the equality impact assessments produced to support those arrangements.

This assessment has also been informed by officers with Equality lead roles and commissioners responsible for services directly designed to meet the needs of populations with protected characteristics.

Analysis of impact on protected groups

The Public Sector Equality Duty requires us to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations with protected groups. Consider how this policy/service will achieve these aims. In the table below, using the evidence outlined above and your own understanding, detail what considerations and potential impacts against each of the three aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty. Based on this information, make an assessment of the likely outcome, before you have implemented any mitigation.

Protected group	Summary of impact	Negative outcome	Neutral outcome	Positive outcome
Age	Age-related work will be strengthened by the award of the new infrastructure contract: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The inclusion of the co-ordination of the Service Delivery Partnership brings together providers commissioned through the Council’s Community Connect support programme. While the Community Connect programme is not solely targeted at older people it is recognised that many beneficiaries will be elderly and improved co-ordination of the offer across providers will have a positive impact. 	□	□	☒

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spark hosts and supports the Somerset Youth Work Alliance, and while the operational elements are separately-funded, the infrastructure contract secures Spark's core work and enables it to lead the Alliance. • The Youth Work Alliance was developed with dedicated youth work organisations. With the external funding the Alliance will expand its support and enable a broader range of VCFSE groups to engage in and benefit from its activity. This will improve the quality and coherence of the youth offer available through organisations generally focussed on environmental issues and all-age volunteering. 			
Disability	<p>Disability-related work will be strengthened by the award of the new infrastructure contract:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The inclusion of the co-ordination of the Service Delivery Partnership brings together providers commissioned through the Council's Community Connect support programme. While the Community Connect programme is not solely targeted at this protected characteristic, it is recognised that many beneficiaries will have a disability or long term condition, and improved co-ordination of the offer across providers will have a positive impact. 	☐	☐	☒
Gender reassignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration has been made of the impacts on this protected characteristic and no disproportionate impact has been identified. 	☐	☒	☐
Marriage and civil partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration has been made of the impacts on this protected characteristic and no disproportionate impact has been identified. 	☐	☒	☐

Pregnancy and maternity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration has been made of the impacts on this protected characteristic and no disproportionate impact has been identified. 	□	⊗	□
Race and ethnicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other organisations which are directly funded to work with and support race communities are involved in the sector’s development with this work led by Spark. • The Memorandum of Understanding provides opportunity to improve coherence of the overall support offer and narrow the gaps between organisations supporting race communities. Implementation of the MoU is led by Spark and funded through this contract. • Through these arms-length developments, the offer to race communities will be improved, providing a positive impact. 	□	⊗	□
Religion or belief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other organisations which are directly funded to work with and support faith communities are involved in the sector’s development with this work led by Spark. • The Memorandum of Understanding provides opportunity to improve coherence of the overall support offer and narrow the gaps between organisations supporting faith communities. Implementation of the MoU is led by Spark and funded through this contract. • Through these arms-length developments, the offer to faith communities will be improved, providing a positive impact. 	□	⊗	□
Sex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration has been made of the impacts on this protected characteristic and no disproportionate impact has been identified. 	□	□	□

Sexual orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other organisations which are directly funded to work with and support LGBTQ+ communities are involved in the sector's development with this work led by Spark. • The Memorandum of Understanding provides opportunity to improve coherence of the overall support offer and narrow the gaps between organisations supporting LGBTQ+ communities. Implementation of the MoU is led by Spark and funded through this contract. • Through these arms-length developments, the offer to LGBTQ+ communities will be improved, providing a positive impact. 	□	□	☒
Armed Forces (including serving personnel, families and veterans)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established armed forces and service charities are increasingly engaging with 'mainstream' VCFSE groups to broaden the support available to armed forces communities, and much of this engagement is through Spark-supported networks. 	□	□	☒
Other, e.g. carers, low income, rurality/isolation, etc.	<p>Carer-related work will be strengthened by the award of the new infrastructure contract:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The inclusion of the co-ordination of the Service Delivery Partnership brings together providers commissioned through the Council's Community Connect support programme. While the overall Community Connect programme is not solely targeted at this protected characteristic, an element of it is. Improved co-ordination of the offer to carers across providers (including the separately commissioned young carers' service) and the wider VCFSE sector will have a positive impact. 	□	□	☒

Negative outcomes action plan

Where you have ascertained that there will potentially be negative outcomes, you are required to mitigate the impact of these. Please detail below the actions that you intend to take.

Action taken/to be taken	Date	Person responsible	How will it be monitored?	Action complete
Arrangements to be implemented to ensure improvement in coherence of support for race communities. Will require Spark to work closely with groups funded to support race communities, and those groups to actively engage with wider sector developments and support Spark can provide.	Ongoing	P&L Commissioner	Monitoring and reporting Wider sector feedback	<input type="checkbox"/>
Arrangements to be implemented to ensure improvement in coherence of support for faith communities. Will require Spark to work closely with groups funded to support race communities, and those groups to actively engage with wider sector developments and support Spark can provide.	Ongoing	P&L commissioner	Monitoring and reporting Wider sector feedback	<input type="checkbox"/>
Arrangements to be implemented to ensure improvement in coherence of support for carers and their families. Will require Spark to work closely with groups funded to support carers, and those groups to actively engage with wider sector developments and support Spark can provide.	Ongoing	P&L commissioner	Monitoring and reporting Wider sector feedback	<input type="checkbox"/>

If negative impacts remain, please provide an explanation below.

Completed by:	Jeff Brown
Date	30/10/2023
Signed off by:	Chris Phillips
Date	30/10/23
Equality Lead sign off name:	Angela Farmer
Equality Lead sign off date:	30/10/2023
To be reviewed by: (officer name)	Jeff Brown
Review date:	01/04/2023