

# Neighbourhood Working – a resource for the local government sector

NAVCA and ACRE have produced this resource as part of a project supporting the VCFSE sector and forming unitary and strategic authorities to work together through devolution and local government reorganisation.

## **Sweeping changes to the structures, boundaries and ways of working in local government are coming to large parts of England.**

There are many potential benefits to these changes, not least operating across wider areas to deliver economies of scale and cost savings. The downside however is that commissioning, knowledge, and service design and delivery could become more remote from the communities you serve.

One potential counterweight to this is a greater emphasis on Neighbourhood Working. Embracing this way of working early on could be a credible way to balance larger operating areas for new local authorities with local communication, knowledge and needs.

## **How to make Neighbourhood Working function for you and the VCFSE sector**

How to make Neighbourhood Working function both for you and your local Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCSFE) Sector with change taking place on this scale and pace there is no real blueprint, and all parties are having to think carefully about how to work together in future.

Neighbourhood Working can, however, be a key part in tying together what might otherwise remain disparate strands of work and service re-design. Developing and embedding neighbourhood working in conjunction with Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), and wider changes to local government, will likely prove easier and more effective than trying to 'retrofit' these ways of working later on.

Local infrastructure organisations (LIOs) can play a particular and helpful role in providing a 'bridge' across sectors and facilitating dialogue and connections.

## Where to start: five ways to embrace Neighbourhood Working in tandem with your local VCFSE sector

1. View this agenda as much as a mindset and cultural shift as a structural one.
2. Accept the importance of local identities and sense of place to people and communities – and that these do not always neatly align to statutory boundaries.
3. Include Neighbourhood Working principles in your place-based plans and services.
4. Learning from early pilots elsewhere: neighbourhood working will need to be different in each location, but insights from early adopters (such as Surrey – case study link) can help.
5. Establish strategic links between Neighbourhood Working and wider public service reform and integration.

## The benefits of engaging the VCFSE sector in your approach to Neighbourhood Working

Based on our analysis of early pilots and previous iterations of Neighbourhood Working, likely benefits of early VCFSE engagement include:

- **Gaining early intelligence** about community needs, trends and preferences;
- **Having an opportunity to sense check decisions**, prioritise and focus investment, through real time information and connections, driving value for money;
- **Enabling a key mechanism to promote civic and democratic engagement**, which could be a challenge for newly forming authorities;
- **Supercharging your efforts to focus on preventative** and early intervention services and initiatives;
- **Leveraging the hidden or under-used skills and knowledge within the VCFSE sector**, informing comprehensive Neighbourhood Working planning for key issues, areas, demographics and inequalities;
- **Readying community outreach, through** the VCSFE sector, which will no doubt be vital to ensuring Neighbourhood Working is a real success.

# Neighbourhood Working – a resource for the local government sector

- **Mitigating the additional challenges of working across rural areas:** a key risk in LGR is that smaller places and rural communities could be left behind, leaving the acute dynamics, assets and needs of these places neglected. Rural areas require some prioritisation, especially through Neighbourhood Working models. Rural VCSFE organisations should be included distinctly, as a meaningful and knowledgeable partner.

## How to ensure the VCSE sector can play its full role in Neighbourhood Working

- **Support your local VCFSE sector in systems navigation** – by spending time to help people understand your new systems, who does what and where decisions will be made. Not only will this help you to establish positive, long term connections, but it could ultimately save a lot of time for all parties;
- **Ensure local partners ‘get a seat at the table’** welcoming them helpful, critical friends with unique local trust, connections and insights. This might include representation on Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) or working groups, as well as more informal conversation and connections;
- **Provide transitional financial support to the VCFSE sector**, ensuring they can mitigate and survive key funding changes so that they can play a strong role in supporting you to build better-quality, more efficient services in the future, realising the value for money benefits LGR seeks to bring about.
- **Engage in honest conversations** about how to collectively balance working at greater scale and across larger areas with local and hyper local connections and dialogue .
- **Think about how new structures particularly at neighbourhood level can be meaningful**, though the delegation of powers and budgets, and not be seen purely as a mechanism for dialogue (important as this is).