



Case Study

Developing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in Bury

The Greater Manchester VCFSE Accord sets out a shared commitment between the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector and public sector partners to strengthen collaboration to help deliver better outcomes for communities. In Bury, local partners recognised the need to translate this into practical ways of working that could be embedded locally.



Background

Bury VCFA are Bury's local VCFSE infrastructure organisations. Although they had strong representation across key local boards, there was a shared understanding that stronger relationships, clearer expectations and a more consistent framework for collaboration were needed to fully embed the Accord's ambitions at a local level.

The problem

VCFSE leaders and public sector partners, including Bury Council and the Integrated Delivery Collaborative (IDC), needed a clearer, shared framework to guide commissioning, decision-making and partnership working.

Key challenges included:

- Reliance on individual relationships rather than system-wide agreements.
- Limited opportunities for meaningful engagement outside formal board meetings.
- The need for greater understanding between sectors regarding priorities, pressures and operating environments.
- A desire to create a more collaborative culture that reflected the principles of the Greater Manchester VCFSE Accord.

Developing the MoU

Following the initial discussions, a joint task-and-finish group was established comprising VCFSE and public sector leaders.

The Approach

Bury VCFA played a central convening and facilitation role, bringing together leaders from the VCSE sector and public sector organisations through a series of structured discussions and roundtable events.

The process began with open and exploratory conversations focused on questions such as:

- What are the biggest challenges facing VCSE organisations?
- What would make partnership working easier?
- What does good commissioning look like?

The **creation of dedicated space and time for honest dialogue** proved essential. Alongside formal workshops, informal conversations between sessions enabled trust to develop and encouraged deeper understanding between partners.

Bury VCFA's long-standing relationships with local partners were a significant enabler. Their understanding of local priorities, pressures and ways of working allowed them to act as a trusted facilitator, helping partners move beyond organisational boundaries and work collectively towards a shared vision.

Over time, relationships evolved from primarily meeting in formal governance environments to engaging in more relational and collaborative ways, **creating the conditions for genuine co-design.**



The group worked collaboratively to develop the Memorandum of Understanding, building in substantial opportunities for feedback, amendment and joint ownership.

It was developed through an extended co-design process, formally approved through the Locality Board. As such, the MoU was recognised as a key enabler within borough strategy refresh activity and locality planning.

Like the Greater Manchester VCFSE Accord, the Bury MoU sets out shared principles and commitments to work together more effectively, recognising the vital role of the voluntary sector in delivering services, tackling inequality, and enhancing the wellbeing of Bury's residents.

A stronger and more productive relationship

The development of the MoU has already delivered several important outcomes:

- Stronger and more productive relationships between VCSE and public sector leaders.
- Greater understanding of the role and value of the VCFSE sector within the wider system.
- Increased confidence and commitment towards joint working.
- Early implementation planning underway between the IDC, Integrated Care Board (ICB) partners and the local authority.

Wider Influence

The MoU has begun to influence wider system transformation within Bury.

Most notably, it has helped shape the development of the borough's Live Well approach. As a reflection of the strengthened partnership, the Chief Executive of Bury VCFA became a co-accountable officer for Live Well, demonstrating a genuine shift towards shared leadership between sectors.

Key Learning

One of the strongest lessons from the Bury MoU process is that meaningful partnership working cannot be achieved through documents alone. The success of the MoU was rooted in the **time invested in relationship-building, open dialogue and co-design**. By creating spaces where partners could understand each other's challenges and aspirations, Bury developed not just an agreement, but a stronger foundation for long-term collaboration and system change.

[Read Bury's Memorandum of Understanding.](#)