

From Commitment to Action: Unlocking the Potential of Devolution through the VCFSE Sector

Ten priority actions for the New Mayor from the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) Sector – briefing paper 5th August

Greater Manchester has national reputation for doing things differently and leading the way. Through the [GM VCFSE Accord](#), the [GM VCFSE Manifesto 24–28](#) and [GMCA Fair Funding Protocol](#) and [NHS equivalent](#), alongside the [Greater Manchester Strategy's](#) commitment to increase investment in the VCFSE sector, there is already a strong, cross-sector consensus on many of the key actions needed to unlock our collective potential to tackle inequality, strengthen communities and improve public services.

Greater Manchester is further ahead than much of the country in having a [VCFSE sector that is organised, connected, and ready to act as an equal delivery partner](#) - bringing the reach, insight, trust, and relationships needed to ensure devolved power and resources genuinely reach communities.

The next phase of [our devolution journey](#) must demonstrate that locally held powers and resources can create visible change for residents. The following priorities set out how the Greater Manchester can show what is possible through further devolution **by turning existing commitments into practical action**; investing closer to communities, retaining more value locally and improving outcomes through equitable partnership.

Summary:

1. Invest in community ownership and decision making
2. Make community wealth, co-production & climate resilience core to definition of 'Good Growth'
3. End extraction and bolster social value for local communities by redesigning procurement in GM
4. Reimagine the Purpose of Town Centres
5. Scale VCFSE role in work and skills
6. Maximise VCFSE role in early years, education and pathways to work support for young people
7. Invest in community-led housing and planning
8. Use VCFSE to unlock health and care transformation. Create a Live Well/Neighbourhood health fund to left-shift NHS investment towards prevention.
9. Enact our 10 areas of action for community tensions & invest in plans for community climate adaption preparedness
10. Deliver on the Fair Funding Protocol across GM to create sector stability needed for VCFSE to be a full partner in devolution

1. Involve & Devolve in practice – increase community power, participation & trust in public institutions and democracy

Greater Manchester has already committed, through the Accord, to involving communities in decisions that affect them and going further than commitments made in the Devolution & Community Empowerment Act.

The priority now is to make this the normal way of working across the city region:

- 1.1 Invest in and embed participatory approaches and community-led decision-making, shifting resources away from traditional statutory consultation towards giving local people and VCFSE organisations who represent them real power over public spending, funding models, service design, policy and priorities.
- 1.2 Provide specific financial support for communities to take ownership of local assets, building community wealth in areas that need it most, [so it is not only the most affluent areas benefit from community asset transfers](#).

2. Make community wealth, co-production and climate resilience core to 'Good Growth'

Greater Manchester is already redefining growth, but this can go further. Expand the definition of 'Good Growth' to embed community wealth building, co-production and climate resilience - ensuring wealth, assets and decision-making power are created and retained locally.

- 2.1 **Place community wealth building, co-production with residents, and climate resilience at the heart of all Mayoral Development Corporations and major regeneration programmes** so community ownership, local economic benefit and long-term resilience are baked into development.
- 2.2 **Work with GM anchor institutions, with significant spending power, such as GMCA, local councils, hospitals, and our universities to review supply chain expenditure, identifying realistic opportunities** to grow local markets for social enterprises, co-operatives and VCFSE organisations.
- 2.3 **Harness the untapped potential of the social economy** (including co-operatives and mutuals) as a key partner in delivering Good Growth - expanding recognition of their role beyond traditional service delivery into prosperity, good homes, skills, innovation, sustainable transport and resilience.

3. Increase the public benefit of public contracts and support the VCFSE to take on more

Greater Manchester has already committed to [increasing investment in the VCFSE sector](#) and [strengthening recognition of VCFSE social value in procurement](#). The next step is implementation- to ensure public spending consistently builds local wealth rather than extracting it from communities:

- 3.1 **End extraction in public procurement** (e.g. [social care](#)) by enacting the '[keep it local](#)' principles across public sector commissioning in GM.
- 3.2 **Deliver a VCFSE market development strategy** to grow the sector's capacity in areas where it is under-represented, enabling more charities and social enterprises to compete successfully for public contracts.
- 3.3 **Extend the Good Growth Charter** by requiring organisations awarded large public sector contracts over £1 million to contribute 1% to a community investment fund.
- 3.4 **Create a fairer approach to social value** across Greater Manchester by moving beyond the Social Value Portal and co-designing with us measures that properly recognise the wider contribution of VCFSE – building on the new national social value framework to go further for Greater Manchester.

4. Reimagine the purpose of town centres not just redesign them.

- 4.1 **Support the community ownership and VCFSE use of vacant high street lots** through targeted financial support (e.g. low rents for VCFSE orgs).

5. Scale the VCFSE role of economy, work & skills

- 5.1 **Recognising and extending the role of VCSFE organisations delivering place-based skills and employment services** to reach young people, economically inactive and under employed residents from priority groups and neighbourhoods
- 5.2 Create new routes to good employment e.g. - [inclusive recruitment to enjoyable work](#).

6. Maximize VCFSE role in early years, education and pathways to work support

- 6.1 **Prioritise and invest in early years and [future generations](#)** – including whole-family approaches and multidisciplinary 'team around the child' models e.g. [Dadly Does It](#)
- 6.2 Addressing youth unemployment and economic stability, create pathways for young people tailored to local contexts, **with the VCFSE sector leading where there are gaps in partnership with education, employers, and communities.**
- 6.3 **Formally integrate a 'Civil Society and Social Economy' pathway as a core employer route within the Greater Manchester Baccalaureate (MBacc) and devolved 16–19 education budgets.** This will establish structured, professionalised career pipeline for young people while leveraging regional funding to remove capacity barriers that small community organisations face when hosting learners.
- 6.4 **Support for a joined up, policy informed approach** across GMCA, ICB, VCFSE, Primary Care and Youth and Play Services **that addresses the unique demographics and escalating mental health complexity and acuity of our young people and young adults;** addressing the needs of the "missing

middle”, under the banner of Live Well and with a view to releasing investment via the GM settlement and umbrella of the Prevention Demonstrator.

7. **Good homes that create security and stability**

- 7.1 **Invest in genuine community-led planning to unlock development.** When local people are empowered to shape housing around their needs, [evidence shows](#) they are far more likely to support developments and allocate land rather than oppose them.
- 7.2 **Grow community-led housing as a core strategy** for community wealth building. Greater Manchester should actively back collective ownership models -like community land trusts and co-operatives-to retain social value locally and tackle inequality at its root.

8. **Support everyone to Live Well – use VCFSE to unlock health and social care system transformation**

- 8.1 **Create a Greater Manchester Live Well/Neighbourhood Health Fund to accelerate and enable prevention funding to be directed locally through neighbourhoods and communities.** Through your relationship with a new GM Health Commissioner, champion a measurable shift in NHS investment towards prevention, because the health of residents doesn’t start in hospitals.
- 8.2 **Use our existing VCFSE and Primary Care Partnership** to deliver joint-up health care provision, holding the NHS to account for the ‘left-shift’ to VCFSE organisations as closest to communities.
- 8.3 **Launch a Greater Manchester “[That Counts as Caring](#)” Commitment** ensuring that nobody misses out on support because they don't recognise themselves as a carer. Building on Live Well neighbourhoods, identify unpaid carers earlier to connect them to advice, financial support, respite and wellbeing services.
- 8.4 **Parity of esteem for all age mental health support that recognises and invests in neighbourhood and community solutions** that de-escalates intersectional social, cultural and economic determinants and structural inequity.

9. **Safer, stronger, and more resilient communities**

- 9.1 **Enact our [Ten areas for Action to tackle rising community tensions](#)** to tackle violence, abuse, racism, discrimination and hate crime.
- 9.2 **Provide welcome, justice, safety and support for all marginalised groups** (e.g. refugees & asylum seekers, older and younger people, racialised communities, disabled people, LGBTQIA+ and people of all faiths), building on the insight, trust and reach of VCFSE organisations across GM to strengthen community cohesion.
- 9.3 **Embed community preparedness for extreme weather within neighbourhood planning and invest in climate adaptation resilience measures.** Support high-risk neighbourhoods to develop local-led preparedness plans through trusted community organisations.

10. **Deliver the Fair Funding Protocol across Greater Manchester**

The [GMCA Fair Funding Protocol](#) and the [NHS equivalent](#) represent a **significant public sector commitment to creating a fairer, more sustainable funding environment for the VCFSE sector**. However, these commitments have not yet translated into consistent action.

- 10.1 Fully implementing the GMCA Fair Funding Protocol and NHS Commissioning Principles in practice would be one of the **single biggest opportunities to strengthen the VCFSE sector as a delivery partner in devolution-** creating stability for organisations that work every day with communities, prevent problems escalating, and help public services achieve better outcomes. Use your leadership as Mayor to champion these commitments, promote consistent adoption across Greater Manchester, and strengthen accountability across GMCA and NHS GM for delivering them.
- 10.2 **Appoint permanent lead VCFSE officers** to embed the sector and building of community power as a core part of the integrated system across all policy teams within GMCA.
- 10.3 Ensure **feedback is built into procurement processes** and **increase transparency** of the processes and decision making, **involving communities as default**.