

**Sunderland Voluntary
Alliance Strategy
2024 - 2027**

OUR VISION:
**Stronger Sector,
Stronger City**

Charity number 1202811

Foreword

This Strategy 2024-2027 sets out our priorities for supporting the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector across the city of Sunderland. The strategy has been produced using valuable feedback gathered from consultation undertaken with the VCSE sector and our trustees.

The sector has not only shown extraordinary resilience over the decades it continues to be passionate and motivated. As a Local Infrastructure Organisation (LIO) there is more support we can offer to improve the sustainability, growth and investment of the sector. In turn this will support and strengthen our communities and ultimately improve outcomes for our residents across the city.

We recognise the significant contribution the VCSE sector make and this strategy will form the basis of our delivery and support offer for the next three years. We will continue to work with the VCSE sector, communities, partners and anchor institutions to ensure what we meet the needs of the VCSE sector across Sunderland to make a stronger sector creates a stronger city.

As a key partner we will continue to be a member of the City Board and contribute to the transformation, ambitions and priorities of city. We will build on the work we have started with VCSE sector, partners, and anchor institutions to ensure that throughout the implementation of this strategy, the VCSE sector continue be engaged and consulted on delivery and can feedback on progress being made.



Sarah Reid
Chair



Tracy Hassan
Alliance Manager

Introduction

Sunderland Voluntary Sector Alliance (SVSA) is a Local Infrastructure Organisation who gained charitable incorporated status in April 2023.

We've been formed by the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector to increase support, encourage effective partnerships, increase funding and investment and raise the voice of the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector across the city.

We are becoming a recognised route for local commissioners, funding organisations and investors to communicate with the sector.

We are facilitating the delivery of social value and strengthening relationships with the anchor institutes and businesses to maximise Social Corporate Responsibility to strengthen community services.

Our Charitable Purpose

The Sunderland Voluntary Sector Alliance has been developed to support the sustainability and growth of VCSE sector organisations with charitable purpose in Sunderland. It also has a role in attracting additional funding and investment into the city for the sector. It is a conduit between VCSE sector organisations, local commissioners, and national funding organisations to strengthen relationships for public benefit.

Our Charitable Objects

The object of the CIO is:

To promote the voluntary sector for the benefit of the public in Sunderland and surrounding areas by:

- A** Liaising between charities, voluntary organisations, government agencies and other groups on relevant issues.
- B** Providing training, conferences and seminars on subjects relevant to the efficiency of the voluntary sector.
- C** Assisting the administration of funding programmes to charities and voluntary organisations, monitoring for grants, recommending grants, assisting in application for grants.
- D** Providing information to the press and the public on the operation of, or problems encountered by the voluntary sector.

Mission

To create ambition, energy and drive to support communities to bring about social change, grow community wealth and create resilience.

Vision

Stronger Sector, Stronger City

Values

Integrity

Integrity in our workplace is about trust, where honesty and ethical behaviour guide every decision and action, fostering a culture of respect.

Accountability

Taking ownership of our decisions and actions and recognising their impact on each other and the sector. Through this we build confidence and drive, holding ourselves accountable for achieving our goals and upholding our values.

Transparency

We believe in open and honest communication, sharing information freely, and maintaining an environment built on trust.

Inclusivity

Recognising diversity as a strength, we know that each individual brings a unique perspective and value to our team. Creating a culture of respect and empowerment.

Collaboration

Celebrating teamwork, listening to diverse perspectives and encouraging open communication, we embrace collaboration knowing that working together we can achieve more.

Aim

Working with the Sector we aim to:

Build the capacity of Sunderland voluntary and community sector organisations to become more sustainable.

Develop a membership of connected voluntary sector organisations across Sunderland.

Share good practice and respond to local needs.

Develop joint-working and income generation opportunities.

What does this strategy mean?

This strategy details how the SVSA and its partners deliver against their commitment to improving sustaining and strengthening the VCSE sector.

It has been shaped by the voice and experience of VCSE sector to ensure that the priorities for the future are based upon what is important through local communities. It will be underpinned by an action plan of how we will work across the city to sustain, improve and grow over the next 3 years.

WE HAVE GATHERED INFORMATION TO INFORM OUR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES IN A VARIETY OF WAYS INCLUDING:

- Holding a citywide face-to-face event
- Attending and gathering information from VCS area network meetings
- Online 'Lets Communicate' event
- Articles in e-bulletins
- Social media posts
- Online surveys
- Trustee development session
- Sector feedback.

Our Strategic Objectives

1 Offer to support sustainability and growth across VCSE sector organisations to increase public benefit (governance)

FOLLOWING CONSULTATION ACROSS THE CITY THE SECTOR IDENTIFIED CHALLENGES AS FOLLOWS:

- Demand for more services
- Unable to grow due to lack of staff resources
- Growing sustainability
- Increase in core costs
- Recruitment and skills gaps
- Salaries are not as attractive as public and private sector
- Reduced access to specialist services e.g. legal, financial, bid writing as a result of cost
- Not having a business plan
- Unable to forecast income
- Full costs recovery not included when budgeting for a project
- Limited understanding of charity law
- Not having the basics in place e.g. policies and procedures, robust management and governance arrangements.

TO STRENGTHEN THE SUSTAINABILITY AND GROWTH OF THE SECTOR WE WILL:

- Support the design and delivery of successful projects or services
- Build skills and knowledge within teams to support sustainability
- Connect with other organisations to develop effective partnerships
- Undertake community mapping to avoid duplication and identify potential gaps in service delivery.

2 Secure additional funding and investment

FOLLOWING FUNDING SURVEY AND CONSULTATION ACROSS THE CITY CHALLENGES WERE HIGHLIGHTED AS FOLLOWS:

- Reduced funding opportunities
- Issues re short term funding
- Funding doesn't fit with organisational aims and objectives
- Unfair distribution of funding and grants
- Lack of experience, knowledge or capacity to complete funding applications
- Concerns around competition
- Small – medium orgs, staff having very little time not allocated to frontline work, therefore struggle to invest in fundraising/ bid writing/ monitoring
- Pre -eligibility criteria creating a closed shop
- Although more funders are encouraging core/ unrestricted funding applications, many others do not accept full cost recovery or even a small contribution to rent/telephone
- Since cost-of-living crisis – the community foundation (and many other trusts are just funding 'crisis' work) so funding is skewed to 'reactive' work and away from proactive/ growing and thriving work.
- Service delivery often not fully funded organisations are expected to pick up some of the costs of projects from elsewhere.
- Increased volume of competition for funding
- Similar projects
- Tightening of application process & criteria
- Culture of protectionism & not wanting to change.

FOLLOWING THE FUNDING SURVEY (2023) WITH A 100 COMPLETED FROM 200 SURVEYS. IT WAS HIGHLIGHTED AREAS WHERE THERE WAS A NEED FOR ADDITIONAL FUNDING AS FOLLOWS:

- Older people's services
- People with disabilities
- Young people's services
- Veterans
- People affected from the cost-of-living crisis
- People furthest from the jobs market
- Mental health services.

Historically Sunderland has received considerably less funding than other local authorities who are considered comparable in terms of population size and with a similar Index of Multiple of Deprivation (IMD). Sunderland have also attracted less funding than some of our regional neighbours. There's a need to raise the profile of Sunderland in terms of our priorities and ambitions for our residents, our communities and our city.

Table 1 below shows charitable funding which has been secured for Sunderland VCSE sector in comparison to others chosen as comparators with not dissimilar population sizes and rankings on the Index of Multiple of Deprivation (IMD) (snapshot in time 2022-2023).

Table 1

Local Authority	Charitable Grants (£)	No. of grants of £1M+	Population	IMD Rank
Sunderland	7.5million	0	274,200	33
Bolton	235M, 803k	27	288,000	50
Doncaster	396M, 509K	27	158,000	55
Wolverhampton	319M, 220k	57	236,000	24

The above table demonstrates Sunderland has received considerably less funding than comparative local authorities. There were no grants of a million pound or more for this period.

Table 2 below shows Charitable funding which has been secured for Sunderland VCSE sector in comparison to our regional neighbours (snapshot in time 2022-2023)

Table 2

Local Authority	Charitable Grants (£)	Population	IMD Rank	Grant per person
Sunderland	7,540,163	274,200	33	£27.49
Durham	37,855,879	522,100	65	£72.50
Newcastle	31,523,000	300,200	74	£105.00
Northumberland	14M, 251K	320,600	131	£44.45
Middlesborough	1M, 920K	143,900	16	£13.34
South Tyneside	6M, 541K	147,800	26	£44.25
North Tyneside	8M, 245K	209,000	128	£39.44
Hartlepool	3M, 83K	92,300	25	£33.40
Gateshead	14M, 465K	196,200	54	£73.72

Population data source is Census 2021. It is recognised population figures have increased across the North East since this data was produced however it provides a benchmark. Charitable grants data source is 360 Giving.

The above table demonstrates Sunderland has received considerably less funding than other local authorities within the Northeast region. For example, Newcastle with a similar population and who ranks lower on the IMD rankings received £31,523,000 in comparison to Sunderland who received £7,540,163. Sunderland received the 3rd least grant per person out of 9 local authorities.

TO SECURE ADDITIONAL FUNDING AND INVESTMENT WE WILL:

- Support funding applications and bid writing
- Provide bespoke funding searches
- Provide direct access to funders
- Facilitate collaboration
- Access to Social Value opportunities
- Facilitate Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR)
- Develop a fair and transparent process for the distribution of grants.

3 Facilitate effective community and corporate volunteering opportunities

FOLLOWING CONSULTATION WE FOUND:

- Challenges recruiting and retaining volunteers
- Shortages in resources to support recruitment
- Challenges with DBS and reference checks
- Reduction in volunteer capacity resulting in reduced service delivery.
- Shortages in volunteer uptake

TO FACILITATE EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE VOLUNTEERING WE WILL:

- Undertake a community and corporate volunteer needs assessment
- Match corporate volunteering opportunities with voluntary and community sector needs
- Introduce a community volunteer citywide passport scheme
- Facilitate volunteer network to raise standards
- Recruit anchor institutes and businesses for corporate volunteering
- Deliver a volunteer campaign.

4 Have a Strategic Voice working with the sector to influence decision making

FOLLOWING CONSULTATION WE FOUND:

VCSE sector organisations having a voice is vital to share grassroots knowledge and experience when working in partnership with statutory partners and anchor institutes to share local intelligence and insight to influence the following:

- Needs-led services
- Innovation and creativity
- Planning
- Commissioning
- Service delivery
- Campaigns and advocacy

TO ENSURE THE SECTOR INFLUENCES DECISION MAKING WE WILL:

- Represent on strategic boards and committees
- Consult via VCSE sector networks
- Ensure VCSE sector are well represented on our Board of Trustees and our Operations Board.
- Encourage two- communication via our e-bulletin and social media platforms.

What happens next?

In order to implement this strategy an action plan will be developed to monitor progress over the next 3 years.

This strategy has been approved by the Board of Trustees. We will work with the Operational Board as our implementation group who will oversee and review our progress.

The achievements will be reported back to the Board of Trustees on a monthly/quarterly basis to review, monitor outcomes and provide challenge. Impact will be evidenced through the completion of case studies and testimonials.



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