



Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy



Kingston upon Thames

*Making a **Difference** Together*



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“This is an important time for the Voluntary and Community Sector and a great opportunity for a thriving VCS to play its full part in the future of Kingston upon Thames.

It is up to all of us to seize the moment and make clear our support for the Strategy and the Compact that underpins it. We need to translate the vision into reality through the Action Plan. It is vital that, as partners, we lead, engage and drive the Action Plan, supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector to take its rightful place in the mainstream – shaping and delivering services and building stronger, more resilient communities.”

Hilary Garner,
Chief Executive
of Kingston
Voluntary Action

Foreword

Kingston has a long tradition of working with its local neighbourhoods and with Voluntary and Community organisations to improve the quality of life for everyone who lives, works, studies or does business in the borough. This Strategy shows how we can all ‘work better together’ for the benefit of local people and communities.

The Strategy belongs to the whole of the borough and has been jointly developed with partners in the Kingston Strategic Partnership (the Partnership). It demonstrates a commitment to moving local voluntary and community sector organisations ‘from the margins to the mainstream’, in terms of their contribution to shaping and delivering services and building stronger, more resilient, communities.

But its not just about the role of the Voluntary and Community Sector as potential service deliverers. Its also about their other strengths; as advocates for their users, their closeness to communities and what matters to them, their flexibility and creativity and, above all, their role in identifying and dealing with issues as soon as they arise before a more complex and costly solution is needed.

The Strategy development has been led by a core team with representation from statutory and voluntary agencies to build ownership from across both statutory and voluntary sectors.

It is relevant to larger voluntary organisations and to small grassroots community groups, as well as other not-for-profit organisations working under the social enterprise umbrella.

We are committed to developing and supporting local organisations and we recognise the social, economic and environmental benefits to the borough’s residents of investing in the Voluntary and Community Sector. It is anticipated that all our Statutory Partners, including Public Health (now part of the local authority), the newly formed Clinical Commissioning Group and others will see the Strategy and supporting Compact as equally applicable to how they manage their relationships with the Voluntary and Community Sector.

The Strategy sets out our vision for working with the Voluntary and Community Sector: the Action Plan will describe how the vision will be translated into reality. We are all under pressure to deliver high quality services that people want and need, with fewer resources. Our intention is to support and enable Voluntary and Community Sector organisations to play a significant part in this.

Councillor Liz Green
Leader of the Council
Chair of Kingston Strategic Partnership
January 2014



The Voluntary and Community Sector in Kingston

The Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) in Kingston is extremely diverse and focuses on those in particular need, whether they are older people, carers, disabled people, the homeless, refugees and asylum seekers, people with learning disabilities, victims of crime or those living on low incomes. In addition, it includes faith groups, as well as those involved in the arts, leisure, sports, the environment and other activities.

The Voluntary and Community Sector is often taken for granted but its impact in changing the landscape of mainstream services has been considerable. For example there were no attempts to deal with the health needs of Black and Minority Ethnic and Refugee (BME & R) communities until Kingston Race & Equalities Council (KREC) led a campaign to highlight these issues and they are now part of regular service provision. A similar example was around the lack of support for people who could not speak English until various local voluntary organisations campaigned to set up an Interpreting and Translation service.

Kingston Voluntary Action has a membership of more than 600 local voluntary and community organisations, many of whom would not figure in wider surveys. Data from the South London CVS Partnership estimates that there are nearly 300 active registered charities in Kingston

with a total turnover of over £30 million. As employers alone they make a significant contribution to the local economy.

There are also the volunteers, who represent a combined massive number of hours/days across a wide range of activities with an economic value of millions of pounds (for example, Kingston Carers Network estimates the value that carers provide to the borough at around £250 million a year). Volunteers also contribute significant social value through playing an important part in supporting and promoting different activities, whilst the process of volunteering itself can increase a person's confidence or even provide a pathway back to employment.

The VCS is supported through a range of funding mechanisms, including grants from RBK and other Statutory Partners, charitable trusts and fundraising activities. They are also increasingly engaged in providing services under income generating contracts or service level agreements.

The contribution that the VCS makes to Kingston is enormous and this Strategy and Action Plan is intended to recognise this and build on it for the future.



“The strategy aims to recognise and capitalise on the role the Voluntary and Community Sector play in the delivery of services and projects in the community”

1. Why have a Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy?

The Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames has a vibrant and diverse Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) that provides a wide range of services, activities and support to residents in the borough. The Council and its partners also have a long-standing commitment to investing in the local VCS, including capacity building and partnership working.

The development of the Strategy is particularly timely in the light of changes to the economic and political climate which require all public sector organisations to reduce their spending at the same time as there are increasing demands on services. Working together and sharing resources

and expertise has to be the most realistic way to manage these challenges for all of us. In the light of this, it is vital that the Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy is agreed and implemented by all stakeholders and decision makers across the Kingston Strategic Partnership (KSP).

The Vision

The Vision for the Strategy is to have a borough where:

- The Voluntary and Community Sector is robust, recognised and valued for its role and contribution to shaping and delivering services that communities want and need across a diverse range of activities. The contribution can be:
 - financial (various Impact assessments show that a £ invested in the VCS can bring back up to eight times that)
 - social (advocating for those who can't always speak for themselves) and
 - environmental (spreading good practice to all parts of the community)
- There is a clear shared vision around providing and encouraging innovative ways of making the most of limited resources available, improving service outcomes and meeting local needs
- Commissioners from all Statutory Partners are able to benefit from innovative, responsive and accessible local services, knowing that any investment will bring improvements for our communities and our environment and will reach out to the more isolated and marginalised
- A strong and experienced contribution by Voluntary and Community Sector organisations to early intervention and prevention; thus avoiding or reducing the need for more complex and costly interventions and supporting and maintaining independence and a good quality of life for everyone.



2. Working better together – what are the benefits?

There are a number of benefits that arise from Statutory and Voluntary and Community Sectors working together more effectively. These include:

“The Voluntary and Community Sector focus on prevention and early intervention can lead to significant savings in terms of financial and human cost.”

“Investing in the Voluntary and Community Sector can result in better local services that meet the needs of communities.”

- The strong links that VCS organisations have with local communities that encourage co-operation, engagement and active citizenship, including volunteering, which is at the core of self-help and grassroots activism. The economic value of volunteering can be calculated as a financial contribution but the social and wider benefits are equally significant. For example a value attributed to reducing an individual's isolation has been calculated at £2,640 a year
 - The social and environmental benefits that Voluntary and Community organisations can bring, including a culture of co-operation, communication and networking
 - The provision of accessible and flexible services that are user-led and responsive to changing needs and new ideas
 - The VCS focus on prevention and early intervention can lead to significant savings in terms of financial and human cost; although difficult to measure, national research is being undertaken on exploring mechanisms to capture this: for example the quantifiable savings to be made from delaying or preventing older people from going into residential care or the savings made from preventing young people from entering the criminal justice system
 - Enhancing the value of our shared spaces and public realm as places where people can come together and which can promote wellbeing and provide habitat for biodiversity: evaluations show a return on investment of £4 for every £1 spent
 - The independence and lack of potential stigma that the VCS brings: people often prefer to access services in the Voluntary and Community Sector - again this can prevent problems from escalating.
- Investment in VCS organisations is an investment in communities and can lead to additional benefits including:
- Increased involvement of VCS organisations in strategic developments, providing ‘voice’, representation and advocacy within the community and essential intelligence for decision makers and planning bodies resulting in better local services that meet the needs of communities; for example in ensuring that the views of local people and VCS organisations are incorporated into the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment to give a realistic ‘on the ground’ picture of what local needs are that can balance the statistical data available
 - Increased confidence in the competence and professionalism of voluntary organisations to deliver services and engage and represent users from diverse groups; offering commissioners, for example, a wider range of potential local suppliers
 - Increased opportunities for growth, development and sustainability through bringing in funding from external sources (often more than trebling the amount of any investment)
 - The local ‘multiplier’ effect, where the local economy benefits from local spend, increased local employment opportunities and support for a future workforce through the provision of volunteering and training opportunities.



Case Study: Kingston Information and Advice Alliance (kiaa)

The key element of the Strategy is that working together we can make a difference. By sharing ideas and resources we can improve services for clients and cut out duplication. By doing this, we make our working lives more rewarding – it is a 'win-win' situation.

A shining example of this in practice is the Kingston Information and Advice Alliance (kiaa) which has 55 member agencies drawn from the Voluntary, Statutory and Private sectors. It is an online network, which means that members can easily stay in touch with hot topics and work quickly and effectively together without having to leave the office! So it is a high impact, low input solution to better working which, in times of cuts and stringency, has to be the way ahead.

So, how has kiaa made a difference locally?

One initiative that comes to mind is our work on preparing locally for the government's Welfare Reform. Kiaa members have worked on the Council's Welfare Reform Stakeholders group, to make sure that we have a consistent message for local people, to avoid confusion and concern; to make sure that there is a clear understanding about what the changes are and what we are doing to help and how people can get advice and assistance. The Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), a lead member of kiaa, has developed a Powerpoint presentation which they shared with officers at the Council's, so they do not have to spend time creating one from scratch. Council officers set up a project to visit individuals affected by the Benefit Cap and the Under Occupancy Charge, so local charities such as CAB do not have to arrange for home visits to these individuals. With a bit of cooperation and give and take we all have more manageable workloads whilst providing an excellent service to local people.





3. Background to the Strategy

A key element of central government policy is the commitment to encouraging local communities to have greater involvement in the local decision making processes that affect their lives. These include:

- Jointly designing and delivering services between public authorities and users (*co-production*); deciding how money is spent locally (*community budgeting*) and the recognition of the vital role of volunteers in the life of the community
- The Localism Act which includes the 'Right to Bid' and 'The Right to Challenge', both of which focus on empowering communities in relation to community assets and the delivery of public services.

In Kingston, there are also a number of structural and other changes that are affecting the way services are provided that will potentially mean an increased role for the VCS.

These include:

3.1 A changing approach to Commissioning

Overall, the shift to a commissioning approach by public sector bodies reflects an ever-stronger focus on achieving value for money, through a smaller state sector, and greater use of the Private and Voluntary Sectors as service providers. This approach is reflected in the on-going developments towards an integrated approach to joint commissioning between Adult Social Care, Public Health and the Kingston Clinical Commissioning Group as well as through the development of alternative delivery models such as Achieving for Children. There is also a growing focus on shared services across a number of boroughs.

The Council's Place Directorate is also exploring ways in which the VCS can be involved in shaping specifications for services so that the needs of communities are reflected even in substantial contracts such as 'Street Scene' and Highways.

Whilst these kinds of services would be outside the capacity and inclination of the VCS to provide, there are others where they are particularly well placed to provide accessible, flexible and responsive services for example in relation to:

- Supporting vulnerable people to live independently
- Providing support to people who receive Adult Social Care services in the use of Direct Payments and Personal Budgets
- Focusing on early intervention and prevention for both adults and children – one of the great strengths of the VCS - which can save substantial costs in the long run
- Services that support and promote environmental activities.

3.2 A new way of delivering Health Services

The increase in locally controlled NHS services, including the move of Public Health to local authorities, the shift towards GPs undertaking commissioning through the *Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)* and a strong focus on the development of community-based services offer greater potential for involvement of the Voluntary and Community Sector.



Kingston CCG's 'Commissioning Intentions', for example, highlight the importance of keeping people out of hospital and supporting their discharge to independent living where possible.

Prevention and early intervention are also key to many public health initiatives and the VCS is involved in many of the kind of activities identified as having an impact on the wider determinants of health.

Other more mainstream services are increasingly being delivered in the community and the VCS potentially has a significant role to play in providing support and in signposting users to these services.

3.3 Commitment to invest in, and develop, the Voluntary and Community Sector

There is a significant commitment to invest in the local VCS so that organisations are better placed to deal with these challenges. This includes:

- The use of national and local grants for capacity building in the local Voluntary and Community Sector in order to develop their services and overall resilience. This will contribute to prepare the VCS so that they can be ready to take on the challenges of commissioning
- The recent review of the Council's Corporate Grants Programme to make sure that it is fit for purpose and aligns well with local priorities and outcomes. Other Public Sector Partners may be interested in using the revised framework for a grants programme of their own
- The development of the Council's Asset Strategy, which includes how the use of premises can support the VCS in achieving longer-term stability.

3.4 Better and stronger partnership working

A key theme of this Strategy is to meet the significant challenges that we jointly face. The VCS has always played an important role within the Kingston Strategic Partnership. Kingston Voluntary Action worked hard to ensure that VCS organisations are fairly represented in the Partnership, so that their voices are heard when services and strategies are shaped to meet the needs of the community.

This has been supplemented by the development of a network of Voluntary Sector Strategic Leads who are acting as a focus for the wider Voluntary and Community Sector to promote better and stronger communication and partnership working.

The Voluntary Sector Strategic Leads are also members of the Voluntary Sector Board which is a sub-group of the Kingston Strategic Partnership.

3.5 Responding to the wider social, economic and environmental context

It is also important that we recognise that Kingston does not operate in a local vacuum and that we need to build local resilience to respond to major pressures nationally and globally. These pressures include economic hardship, sustainability, demographic changes, migration, climate change and environmental decline. The Voluntary and Community Sector is well represented in this area of activity as well as playing a significant part in raising awareness about these issues among their users and beneficiaries.



“The vision for the Strategy is a thriving local Voluntary and Community Sector whose role and contribution as strategic partners is recognised and valued for its economic, social and environmental contribution to the borough.”

4. Overall aim of the Strategy

The Strategy aims to recognise and capitalise on the role the VCS plays in the delivery of services and projects in the community.

To achieve this we will focus on three main strands:

- **Community Development and Engagement**
- **Commissioning**
- **Communications**

This will be underpinned by capacity building within both the Voluntary and Community Sector and within Statutory Partners and by further developing the local Compact, which focuses on supporting effective working relationships between statutory bodies and the VCS.

Equality and diversity issues are embedded throughout the Strategy with the aim of eliminating discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations with all our communities.

The intention of the Strategy is to provide an over-arching framework to guide how we are going to be working together. An Action Plan is being developed, with input from the consultation on the Strategy. It sets out a range of activities and projects to be undertaken by the Council and its partners (particularly Public Health, the Kingston Clinical Commissioning Group and the VCS). The Action Plan will be reviewed through the Voluntary Sector Board, with the support of all partners, in order to monitor progress and continue to plan ahead, building on the achievements so far.



5. Community Development and Engagement (building stronger communities and advancing equalities)

Community development encompasses a wide range of activities aimed at empowering people and communities to bring about change to improve the quality of life for everyone. It is not a 'top down' approach but is more about removing barriers that prevent people from acting on the issues that affect their lives.

"We are strengthening relationships between local communities and local bodies so that everyone can take part in finding solutions and resolving the issues that affect their lives."

It starts from the principle that there is a wealth of knowledge and experience which, if used in creative ways, can be channelled into action to achieve the communities' desired goals. It also recognises the importance of informal links within communities that already exist. Community development involves strengthening the relationships between local communities and local bodies so that everyone can take part in finding solutions and resolving the issues that affect their lives. A significant challenge is to find ways to shift power from statutory bodies to the community, and a strategic approach to community development across the borough could significantly improve the impact, effectiveness and sustainability of any activity and lead to stronger, more influential communities.

This is not going to happen overnight but effective implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan could result in outcomes including:

- Stronger, more resilient communities, that are able to influence the shape and design of services and contribute to policy and strategy developments
- An environment that encourages proper engagement and empowerment rather than informing and consulting.

This strand focuses on three further areas:

- 5.2 Involving communities: developing the 'voice' of the community
- 5.2 Developing co-production: working together to plan and delivery services
- 5.3 Capacity building for community development and engagement

Community Development and Engagement in Kingston currently involves:

- Approaches to Localism through Neighbourhood Management, Neighbourhood Committees and Neighbourhood Community Plans involving and empowering residents in local decision-making, prioritising services and building communities
- Kingston Voluntary Action's role in providing support for VCS organisations in terms of governance issues, fundraising and capacity building
- The work of the Equalities and Community Engagement Team who use community development and engagement processes to address health inequalities
- Communities leading on projects in all fields e.g. arts, environment, social welfare
- One Norbiton: exploring how to move control to the community in relation to taking direct decisions about what should happen locally.



5.1 Involving communities: developing the 'voice' of the community

This is about involving, engaging and empowering communities and developing the 'voice' of people, whether they are users, carers, voluntary and community groups or residents, who may or may not be receiving support services.

It is about helping people find common cause on issues that affect them and supporting them to work together on issues under their control. It is particularly important that the voices of the more marginalised communities in the wider context are heard and the independence of the Voluntary and Community Sector plays a key role in this. The impact of social media and e-democracy are likely to be significant in this.

Aims include:

- To support the shift in the balance of power down to the grass roots in local communities, by strengthening the links between Neighbourhood Committees, individuals, officers/practitioners, communities and local institutions
- To make sure that community representatives are included in discussions that affect them and that their views are heard
- To develop a mechanism to make sure that the community 'voice' is fed systematically into the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment so that local commissioning decisions for health and social care take this qualitative data into account
- To promote and support community cohesion and tackle inequalities.

Outcomes include:

- All voices are heard (not just the loudest) regarding decisions that affect local communities by making sure that everyone who wants to is given the opportunity to contribute
- Equity, inclusiveness, participation and cohesion among people and their organisations is recognised and valued
- The best information on future trends is incorporated into community decisions
- Influence comes from 'bottom up' as much as 'top down'
- Communities are supported to do what they consider is needed, to identify their own needs and goals and take action to achieve them, building on their skills and capacity
- There is more effective partnership working in sharing community needs and views to inform how policy and plans are developed.

"It is particularly important that the voices of the more marginalised communities are also heard and the independence of the voluntary and community sector plays a key role in this."



5.2 Developing co-production: working together to plan and deliver services

Working together to plan and deliver services requires a co-ordinated approach to sharing information about the needs of local communities and how best to address them. Needs and provision can be mapped, gaps identified and actions for addressing them agreed. This links back to the idea of proper representation so that planning for activities or services as well as delivery is equally important.

Raising awareness about these ways of working and empowering people to seize opportunities to 'co-produce' will develop a greater understanding of how building social capital can contribute to the economic and general wellbeing of residents.

Aims include:

- To work with the VCS to plan and deliver services for the benefit of all ('co-production')
- To support and grow volunteering
- To strengthen people's confidence and capability to take action and support residents to develop their skills to participate ('social capital')
- To develop and build on the concept of social value – the additional benefit to be derived from investment in the community.

Outcomes include:

- Existing and potential assets are 'mapped' including individuals, associations and organisations; as well as physical, economic, environmental and cultural assets to form the basis of action plans, using local people's existing knowledge to design or improve services
- Stakeholders work together more effectively and pro-actively and make more effective use of resources,

reducing the distinction between producers and consumers of services

- Public service agencies are catalysts and facilitators rather than simply providers of services; responsibility, leadership and authority is devolved appropriately
- Ownership remains where it should be – with the community
- People, communities and their organisations are able to influence and help transform public policies and services
- New and further strengthened mechanisms are developed to enable community views to be fed into decision-making and feedback is provided on how views have been acted on
- Increased trust in democracy by improving accountability and democratic renewal.



Case study: Malden Manor Community Project

The Malden Manor Community Project is an innovative research project which aims to improve the lives of people living in Malden Manor, a corner of the borough where some of our most disadvantaged communities live alongside some of our most affluent.

Kingston Council are working together with researchers from Kingston University to get a detailed understanding of issues affecting people's quality of life in Malden Manor through photographs. These issues include things like the local environment, housing, facilities for young people, employment and access to services.

Pinning down exactly what needs to change in an area can be difficult, so we are involving the people who know the area best - the local community. As well as giving their comments online and in paper forms, local residents have been keeping photo diaries to really show us what life is like in the area. Kingston University will use these fascinating insights into local life to identify themes, which will then be

prioritised by the community at events across the area and developed into an action plan for departments across the Council and our partners.



5.3 Capacity building for Community Development

Capacity building is the process of supporting individuals and community organisations to help them to better identify and meet the needs of their areas. This is not just about individual skills but also about the structures, resources and policies that are needed to address issues and take advantage of opportunities that arise.

“Capacity building can mean making sure that organisations are set up properly and have the capability to do what they set out to do. It can also mean making sure that staff, volunteers and trustees have the skills they need to run their organisation (of whatever size) effectively.”

Capacity building is essential to enable individuals as well as Voluntary and Community organisations to engage and to deliver services and to demonstrate impact and value. It covers organisational development as well as staff and volunteer development. It can mean making sure that organisations are set up properly and have the capability to do what they set out to do (governance and infrastructure).

It is important that capacity-building involves all the community. This includes those groups who may be marginalised for a variety of reasons, to enable them to interact with the wider community and build relationships within their neighbourhoods. It is equally important that agencies are prepared to let go of control whilst offering advice and support, both to established groups as well to newly formed ones.

Current support for capacity building includes grants (from Statutory Partners and from charitable trusts) and support and advice from within the Voluntary and Community Sector, particularly from umbrella organisations like Kingston Voluntary Action and Kingston Race and Equalities Council.

Aims include:

- To support local communities to identify their individual and group development needs and find ways to meet them
- To explore the potential for enabling local communities to take on premises through processes such as the Right to Bid, which aims to keep valued land and buildings in community use so that local people have the chance to buy them.
- To develop new partnerships including with businesses and the private sector focusing on employee volunteering or offering services for free (pro bono work).

Outcomes include:

- Support is provided as needed and in a way that suits different groups and approaches
- VCS organisations are supported through information, skills development, resources and advice to be effective, sustainable and prepared for environmental and socio-economic changes
- VCS organisations are in a position to influence at a strategic level
- Community development workers are more proactive in community engagement and development.



Case study: Safeguarding Children Training

Kingston Voluntary Action (KVA) has approximately 134 Voluntary and Community organisations (VCOs) that work with children, young people and families. These range from branches of national organisations such as the YMCA to small local groups which offer specialist support.

Kingston Local Safeguarding Children's Board and KVA recognize that in order to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people, all those working with children and with adults who are parents or carers, must have the knowledge and skills to carry out their roles. As employers and organisations that engage volunteers, the Voluntary and Community organisations in Kingston must ensure that everyone who works with children and young people, adults or carers has mandatory induction in Safeguarding Children at level 1. This training includes familiarisation with child protection responsibilities and policies and procedures to be followed if they have concerns about a child's safety or welfare.

Kingston Voluntary Action (KVA) has developed an e-learning package for the introductory Level 1 Safeguarding Children Training. This module was produced in partnership with the Local Safeguarding Children Board Learning and Development Consultant. It is specifically designed for

Voluntary and Community organisations that work with children, young people and families. It is available online through a link on KVA's website, which means that staff and volunteers can undertake the training at a time most suitable for them.

This e-learning tool is an innovative and practical example of partnership work between KVA and the Council ensuring that VCOs have quick and easy access to good quality safeguarding training.

KVA also runs Safeguarding Children training sessions on Saturday mornings as part of their twice yearly capacity building training programmes for Voluntary and Community organisations. They also run bespoke sessions for groups with particular training needs.



6. Commissioning

As public sector bodies are looking for different ways to deliver their services, many are taking a commissioning approach. Commissioning is not the same as outsourcing but is a process that ensures that, when buying services, the best decisions are made, working in partnership between commissioners, providers and service users.

“In Kingston, commissioning is about ensuring we are able to deliver what works, using tools to gather evidence to support decision-making and ensuring we achieve the best outcomes by deciding what, and how a service is delivered and who is best placed to deliver it”

Kingston Council's Commissioning Framework (2009) defines commissioning as being

'... about achieving the right outcomes by deciding what service is needed, how it should be delivered, and which public, private or third sector organisation should deliver within effective use of resources.'

The Clinical Commissioning Group and Public Health are working towards developing an integrated approach to joint commissioning with the Council's Adult Social Care and it is likely that their overall approach will be aligned to this Framework.

In simple terms the Framework encourages commissioners to look more critically at what difference any service makes to the lives of its users, their family, friends and carers and to the wider community. It involves identifying what the outcomes (the difference made) should be and how these can best be achieved. Most importantly for the Voluntary and Community Sector it widens the discussion from the relatively straightforward notion of unit costs to include ideas of 'social value' as well, so that a good value investment can bring more than economic benefits. A Social Value Toolkit has been developed to support this.

It is important that VCS organisations are in a position to respond to this commissioning approach and are able to influence the design of services, the approach to acquiring services (this could

be a grants process as well as through competitive tendering) and can bid for contracts, whether through formal or more informal processes, if appropriate, so that all the benefits of VCS led services are not lost to the community.

The Council's Commissioning Cycle is based on four principles: Analyse, Plan, Do and Review. The Voluntary and Community Sector is encouraged to play a key role at all stages of the public sector's commissioning cycle.

Examples of social value include:

- Training apprentices and providing employment for marginalised groups
- Improved community cohesion through community involvement in service design and the use of volunteers
- Environmental benefits including recycling
- Local economic multiplier, where money is circulated within the local economy
- Reduced inequalities for example through improving access to employment opportunities for marginalised groups.



Commissioning Cycle

<p>Analyse</p> <p>VCS organisations are close to users and can provide data on what's needed, what works and what doesn't.</p>	<p>Plan</p> <p>VCS organisations should be involved in the planning stage: – this can lead to improved services, including users' views on what is needed and how the service should be delivered.</p>
<p>Do</p> <p>VCS organisations can deliver services that are user-led, flexible, responsive and innovative, focusing on early intervention and prevention and value for money.</p>	<p>Review</p> <p>VCS organisations are able to feed in valuable data about the impact of services and how they might be further improved.</p>

Effective implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan could result in outcomes including:

- Increased recognition by commissioners of the value of involving VCS organisations at all stages of the commissioning process
- Increased understanding by commissioners of the approaches they can use in engaging the VCS in commissioning and an increased commitment to doing so
- Services that are responsive to community need, user led, flexible and accessible
- Processes and documentation revised to make them more accessible to the VCS
- Increase in economic prosperity by keeping the money flowing locally.

This strand focuses on three further areas:

- 6.1 Policy development and planning: involvement and participation
- 6.2 VCS involvement in service delivery
- 6.3 Capacity building for commissioning



6.1 Policy development and planning: involvement and participation

Using the knowledge and understanding that VCS organisations have of the community and the people they work most closely with can make a significant contribution to identifying needs and to service design.

“Social Return on Investment is a way of demonstrating that it is not just financial measures that matter – the social benefits can be a significant addition and can be quantifiable as well.”

This can be particularly helpful in ensuring that the design of services takes into account social and environmental sustainability so that the return on investment is greatly increased.

This knowledge and understanding can also lead to finding innovative ways of delivering services. It can encourage collaboration rather than competition, including consideration of support for the development of groups of organisations working together, pooling their strengths and sharing resources. It can also support the development of social enterprise approaches where not-for-profit organisations re-invest surpluses back into the business to develop further. This can be a particularly attractive and financially viable model for VCS organisations who want to develop their services, whilst retaining their person-centred values and ethos.

Aims include:

- To ensure the effective representation of the VCS early in the commissioning process to provide a VCS perspective

on service planning and shaping

- To highlight the benefits of working together with the VCS in terms of the wider social value that they can add, as a return on investment; including consideration of the role of volunteers
- To encourage co-operation and collaborative working where practicable.

Outcomes include:

- Increased ‘voice’ in influencing local decisions, strategies and plans
- VCS influence on service planning and design (incorporating their particular role and contribution including social and environmental benefits) is an integral part of the commissioning process
- Increased opportunities for co-production of services
- Improved two-way communications between all commissioners and the VCS across the whole commissioning process.

VCS contribution to the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment

The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment describes the current and future health and wellbeing needs of people who live in the borough. It is used to identify the areas where the local authority, NHS and the Voluntary and Community Sector need to focus their efforts to improve the health and

wellbeing of Kingston residents.

As part of this process, mechanisms are being developed to ensure that the ‘community voice’ is heard through appropriate networks and organisations including the voluntary sector Strategic Leads and Health Watch.



6.2 Service delivery

The involvement of VCS organisations in service delivery is well established in Kingston and the Strategy highlights the importance of them being well placed to engage in commissioning processes. This can happen in a range of ways but it is important that VCS organisations are able to engage in bidding for work. This could be through competitive tendering for contracts or through a grants process.

“For VCS organisations to be effectively engaged in commissioning, commissioners themselves need to recognise and value the VCS for its role and contribution.”

“The advantage of having VCS organisations involved in delivering services is not just a ‘good’ thing; it can provide real and tangible benefits.”

For this to work, all commissioners need to recognise and value the VCS for its role and contribution. Because VCS organisations are often quite small and local (even the larger Kingston-based organisations are still relatively small by comparison with many private sector contractors), they may need building support to enable the organisations to further develop their services.

In addition, being realistic about financial requirements and procedures can make a significant difference, as can considering how larger contracts might also be awarded to a local Consortium or include a requirement that there is a community/ VCS component.

Aims include:

- To identify opportunities for the VCS to increase their delivery of public services through tendering
- To support commissioners to engage with more providers.

Outcomes include:

- **Market development** - increased diversity of suppliers particularly amongst the VCS
- Good return on investment; value for money and the additional benefits from social and environmental considerations as set out in the **Social Value Act**
- Improved access for hard to reach groups

- Improved access to early intervention and prevention services
- Increased flexibility and responsiveness of services
- Increased involvement of VCS as sub-contractors in ‘niche’ parts of larger contracts as well as in contracts being awarded to VCS organisations set up as a Consortium
- Services more neatly tailored to the needs of the community.



6.3 Capacity Building for Commissioning

Capacity building is essential to enable VCS organisations to engage and to deliver services and demonstrate impact and value. Building capacity for commissioning is about changing attitudes as well as developing skills and it is as relevant to commissioners as it is to Voluntary Sector organisations.

“Building capacity for commissioning is about changing attitudes as well as developing skills and it is as relevant to commissioners as it is to Voluntary Sector organisations.”

For voluntary organisations, it includes developing the skills of staff, trustees and volunteers, as well as organisational development (strategic and business planning, developing the organisations’ infrastructure and managing change).

Aims include:

- To support VCS organisations to be ‘commissioning ready’
- To raise awareness with commissioners about the role and contribution of the VCS
- To work with commissioners to engage with the Voluntary and Community Sector and understand the role of the Compact.

Outcomes include:

- VCS organisations are ‘contract ready’ (including being able to demonstrate effectiveness/impact and being able to meet any appropriate operating standards)
- VCS organisations and commissioners share expectations about performance management approaches/evidence and monitoring (including approaches such as [Social Return on Investment \(SROI\)](#), full cost recovery and how we measure ‘value’)
- Commissioners recognise and understand the role, contribution, situation and independence of VCS organisations

- Commissioners apply both the spirit and letter of guidance contained in commissioning frameworks aligned to the Strategy (supported by the Compact principles)
- VCS organisations are more sustainable, independent and robust, reducing dependency on grants and moving towards more enterprising and diverse sources of funding – becoming in effect ‘social enterprises’.



7. Communications

Effective communications are vital to the successful implementation of the VCS Strategy and Action Plan.

It is important that all stakeholders are aware of the Strategy and what it is intended to achieve.

An Action Plan (which is being developed) will outline how the Strategy and its achievements will be communicated. This will be done using a range of methods and media to encourage participation and ownership of all stakeholders.

Aims include:

- To ensure that the aims of the Strategy are understood, valued and supported by all partners and stakeholders
- To effectively communicate the Strategy as part of the Action Plan
- To highlight the fact that the Strategy aims to recognise and capitalise on the role the Voluntary and Community Sector plays in the delivery of services and projects in the community
- To reinforce that the partnership approach has the backing and support of the Council, its Partners and political parties.

Outcomes include:

- Partners, the VCS, residents, the community and Council officers are aware of the Strategy and are able to influence and contribute to the Action Plan, its implementation and future updates
- Partners, the VCS, residents, the community and Council officers understand the purpose of the Strategy and how everyone can contribute to its success

- Partners, the VCS, residents, the community and officers understand that the Strategy has the backing of the Kingston Strategic Partnership for its implementation.



8. The Voluntary Sector Compact

The Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy is supported by a revised code of practice. This is called the Voluntary and Community Sector Compact.

The Compact is a code of practice that sets out ways of working between statutory bodies and the Voluntary and Community Sector and underpins the principles within the Strategy.



[Click to download Voluntary Sector Compact](#)

9. Action Plan

The Strategy itself sets out how we can all 'work better together' for the benefit of local people and communities. However, what is really important is how the Strategy will be implemented through the Action Plan.

This will be developed over the next few months, led by the Core Team and involving all stakeholders. Its progress will be reported to the Partnership via the Voluntary Sector Board.

10. Glossary

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)	The process of facilitating people and communities to come together and use their own knowledge, skills and experiences to enable and empower them to make positive changes on the issues that affect their lives. (See Community Assets and Social Capital)
Capacity building	The development of individuals' skills and knowledge so they can run their organisations effectively. It can also refer to the process of developing organisations to be responsive and sustainable in the longer term.
Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)	Groups of GPs in a local area who are responsible for organising and commissioning local healthcare services for their communities (see Commissioning).
Commissioning	The process of identifying outcomes, deciding what service is needed, how it should be delivered and which public, private or voluntary sector organisation should deliver within effective use of resources.
Community Assets	Often refers to community buildings but the term can also describe other resources in the local area including individuals, associations, organisations and open spaces.
Community Budgeting	Transferring some powers to the community so that they can take direct decisions on what should happen locally and influence how public money should be spent.
Community-based services	Services that are located in the community (at health or community centres or in people's homes) rather than in institutions such as hospitals.
Voluntary Sector Compact	A voluntary Code of Good Practice setting out ways of working between statutory organisations and the Voluntary and Community Sector.
Co-Production	Joint working between service users, providers and commissioners to plan and deliver services for the benefit of everyone.
Early Intervention and Prevention	The process of identifying issues at an early stage so that prompt action can be taken to avoid them becoming more difficult (and costly) to solve. The term can also be used to mean taking action at the earliest stage of a child's life to increase their life chances.



e-Democracy	e-Democracy means using Information and Communications Technology (ICT) to increase and enhance citizens' engagement within the democratic process.
Governance	The frameworks that organisations adopt (e.g. Constitutions) to make sure they are operating properly in accordance with legal, financial and other requirements. Governance can also refer to reporting mechanisms within a project or piece of work.
Infrastructure	The infrastructure of an organisation refers to the management structure and systems that enable it to function and deliver and develop its services or activities.
Kingston Strategic Partnership (KSP)	The Kingston Strategic Partnership consists of partners from the Statutory, Voluntary and Business sectors. Its purpose is to set the overall vision and direction for partnership working in Kingston.
Market development	Commissioners refer to the pool of providers who could potentially deliver services as the 'market'. Where there are only a few potential providers (or even just one), 'market development' is needed to encourage a greater number of providers to bid for work so that the procurement process is more competitive.
Mutuals	Mutuals are organisations that are fully or mainly owned by their members and include co-operatives and social enterprises. Recently the term has been used to refer to organisations that have left the public sector but continue to deliver public services (for example Your Healthcare in Kingston).
Organisational development	How an organisation identifies and plans for how it needs to grow, work differently or develop new strategies and structures to meet the challenges it faces (see organisational sustainability).
Organisational Sustainability	This refers to how an organisation thinks about its ability to grow and thrive over time by developing a range of sources of income and planning to adapt and change its services to meet new challenges.
Outcomes	Outcomes are the difference made by any service or activity; what we want to achieve as a result of a project or intervention. Outcomes are increasingly being used to assess the impact of a service rather than focusing on outputs (what it does).
Outsourcing	This is where a public service was previously delivered by a public body (e.g. local authority or health service) but is now to be commissioned from an external provider.

Personal budgets	Personal budgets are a new way of getting social care support. It is a sum of money by the Council offered to people entitled to help so that they can decide what services they need and buy them from providers of their own choosing.
Pro Bono work	This is where people with a particular expertise (often legal or financial) provide their services for free to Voluntary or Community organisations.
Right to Bid	The Community Right to Bid aims to keep valued land and buildings in community use by giving local people the opportunity to bid to buy them, when they come on to the market.
Right to Challenge	The Community Right to Challenge provides residents with the right to challenge who should deliver local services. Expressions of interest can be submitted at set times in April and October and if a persuasive business case is made, the service can be put out to tender.
Social Capital	Social Capital refers to a community/area where people have the confidence and capability to participate in local affairs and have the skills to take action as appropriate.
Social Enterprise	An umbrella term that refers to organisations that re-invest their surpluses back into service delivery and have social and environmental as well as economic objectives.
Social Return on Investment (SROI)	Social Return on Investment (SROI) is a way of measuring and accounting for the value created by the work of an organisation, that is designed to demonstrate the wider social returns generated.
Social Value Act	The Social Value Act requires Public Bodies to have regard to economic, social and environmental wellbeing in the letting of public service contracts. This means that organisations that can offer additional benefits on top of those required by a tender specification may be in a better position to bid successfully.
Stakeholder	A person, group or organisation with an interest in a project or action who may either affect how it works or be affected by it.



The Kingston Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy was produced by a Core Team representing the following organisations:

Addiction and Support Care Agency
Age Concern Kingston
Creative Youth
Enhanceable
Kingston Advocacy Group
Kingston and District WelCare
Kingston CAB Service
Kingston Carers Network
Kingston Centre for Independent Living
Kingston Environment Group
Kingston Race and Equalities Council
Kingston Voluntary Action
Learn English at Home
Refugee Action Kingston
Public Health
Kingston Council