Discussion document

Co-designing a Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) Charter for South West London

1. Introduction

Across South West London, NHS, local authority and voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise partners already work together in many different ways to improve health and wellbeing, reduce inequalities and support people closer to home. This work is rooted in our six boroughs - Croydon, Kingston, Merton, Richmond, Sutton and Wandsworth - where local partnerships, VCSE infrastructure organisations, Healthwatch, community networks, COMPACTs, state-of-the-sector work and neighbourhood approaches provide a strong foundation for how we work with local people and communities.

This discussion document is about how we build on that existing borough-level work and bring it together into a shared South West London VCFSE Charter. The Charter is not intended to replace local relationships, local agreements or locally-led plans. Instead, it is an opportunity to bring together the principles and commitments already being developed across our six boroughs into a shared South West London approach.

As health and care services increasingly work across borough boundaries through system-wide commissioning, provider collaboratives and neighbourhood health and care arrangements, there is value in having a consistent set of expectations and principles for how statutory organisations will partner with the VCFSE sector. The Charter aims to provide that shared framework while allowing flexibility for local borough partnerships and priorities.

. The NHS 10 Year Health Plan sets out a clear shift towards more care being delivered in the community with a strong focus on Neighbourhood Health , prevention and digital transformation. Delivering that shift will depend on sustained local partnerships, trusted community relationships and services that understand people’s lives beyond traditional health and care settings.

VCFSE organisations are central to this. They reach communities that statutory services may not always reach, support people with the wider determinants of health, and bring insight, trust and agile, practical solutions that should shape how services are planned, commissioned and delivered. A shared approach will enable a strong, sustainable and impactful strategic and operational partnership with the VCFSE sector across South West London.

A Charter should be more than a statement of good intent. It should help to embed the practical changes needed to support a stronger partnership with the VCFSE sector across South West London. This includes how the sector plays an equitable role in strategy and commissioning, how funding and procurement approaches can better support sustainable community-based work, and how the system can make sure that partnership commitments are followed through in delivery plans, decision-making and investment choices.

This is particularly important as NHS South West London continues to develop its medium-term financial strategy. We recognise that financial pressures are significant, and that any commitments made through the Charter need to be realistic and deliverable. However, if the system is serious

about shifting care closer to home, strengthening prevention and reducing health inequalities, then the VCFSE sector must play a role in shaping how resources, investment and commissioning approaches change over time.

We are therefore seeking views on the proposed commitments in this document. We want to understand whether they reflect what partners across South West London need from a Charter, what are the key barriers currently holding us back, what should be strengthened, and what practical actions would help turn shared commitments into meaningful change.

Why a South West London VCFSE Charter?

The Charter should help us:

- recognise and build on existing borough-level partnerships, COMPACTs, infrastructure work and local VCFSE leadership
- create a consistent set of system-wide commitments across Croydon, Kingston, Merton, Richmond, Sutton and Wandsworth
- support more consistent partnership working as statutory organisations increasingly plan, commission and deliver services across borough boundaries
- strengthen the role of VCFSE partners in strategic commissioning, neighbourhood health and care, prevention and health inequalities work
- describe practical actions that support sustainable partnership working, including earlier involvement, simpler processes and fairer approaches to funding and procurement
- ensure that commitments to partnership are reflected in delivery plans, governance, commissioning decisions and future investment approaches

The Charter is intended to be co-designed with VCFSE partners and wider health and care partners. This discussion document sets out proposed commitments as a starting point for feedback, challenge and further development.

2. Proposal: a VCFSE Charter for South West London

Several ICBs nationally, including South East London ICS, have agreed VCFSE Charters which set out shared commitments between the NHS and VCFSE sector. The Charters set out agreements between the NHS, VCFSE and our partners in health and care, signed off through appropriate governance as a statement of shared intent. As an example from our cluster partners, you can read the South East London VCSE Charter here.

What have our partners told us?

We have heard from our VCSFE partners that while actions are more important than words, a South West London VCFSE Charter could help connect and strengthen our work and that:

- They would like to be more involved in the strategic direction of health and care across the six boroughs.
- Complex procurement and contracting processes can alienate smaller organisations from applying for funding for the work they do to support health and care of residents.
- Longer term funding commitments would lead to greater stability and sustainability across the sector allowing them to plan, retain staff and build the infrastructure they need to work as equal partners.

In response to these key themes from our partnership working, we have developed four commitments that we propose would form the basis of our Charter as outlined for discussion and consideration as follows.

For discussion and consideration

Please see below some draft commitments that NHS South West London is proposing as central to our shared VCFSE Charter:

Commitment 1: Strategic partnership

We will work with the VCSFE sector as a full strategic partner in setting strategic direction and system planning, in addition to its role in delivering services.

What could our approach look like?

- Statutory organisations aiming to work with the VCSE sector as full partners in the development of our system strategy and planning – not only as a delivery partner.
- Continuing to fund leadership roles to enable the VCFSE to take part in our strategic meeting processes and to support the wider engagement of smaller and grassroots organisations.

Commitment 2: fair and sustainable funding

We will increase funding provided for the VCSE sector across our partnership and secure its services in ways that deliver greater social value and support health creation and prevention.

What could our approach look like?

- Increasing the proportion of system funding that reaches the voluntary sector year on year, recognising that this is difficult in times of financial insecurity but always looking to improve investment when possible.
- Encouraging partnership working within the sector to allow smaller, grassroots organisations to bid for neighbourhood health and care contracts in the communities they serve.

Commitment 3: Reducing bureaucracy and supporting innovation

We will ensure proportionate procurement and contract monitoring processes that will reduce the transactional burden for commissioners and providers and ensure a level playing field for VCSFE organisations.

What could our approach look like?

- A proportionate and simpler procurement and contracting process when appropriate for smaller services so that smaller VCSFE providers are not shut out by a complicated process that they are not resourced for.
- Partnership contracting models where these serve communities better than competitive tendering whilst ensuring we continue to work working within NHS procurement requirements.

Commitment 4: Building Supportive infrastructure

We will invest in strengthening the VCSFE sector's infrastructure so that it can play an effective role in the strategic leadership of our system and service delivery.

What could our approach look like?

- Giving the VCFSE sector access to the kind of infrastructure NHS organisations have, including data analytics and support that might support the VCFSE's ability to bid for further external funding to benefit people and communities across our boroughs.
- Developing two-way dialogue through a community outreach programme to amplify the voice of grassroots organisations at the heart of commissioning decisions.
- Access to affordable NHS estate when possible as part of future estate programmes where available.

3. What could the Charter help us to achieve?

- For communities, the Charter could help to:
    - Give communities a stronger voice in shaping services so they better reflect local needs and priorities.
    - Support prevention, neighbourhood-based support, and access to trusted community organisations and services.
    - Foster stronger community connections, cohesion, and resilience.
- For VCFSE organisations, the Charter could help to:
    - Enable earlier and more meaningful involvement in strategy, commissioning, and decision-making.
    - Support fairer and more sustainable approaches to funding, with simpler processes and less bureaucracy.
    - Strengthen the role of the sector as a strategic partner through improved access to information, infrastructure, and collaboration.
- For health and care partners, the Charter could help to:
    - Strengthen access to trusted community relationships and local insight and improve engagement with communities that services may find harder to reach.
    - Support prevention and action on health inequalities through community expertise and assets.
    - Enable more effective and consistent neighbourhood partnerships across South West London.

4. Your feedback

To make sure the Charter reflects a shared understanding of the value of the sector's value, we'd like to hear from partners:

1. What is the most important change you would want a South west London VCFSE Charter to achieve?
2. Do the proposed commitments reflect what is needed? Where do you see the biggest gap between current practice and the ambition set out in the Charter?
3. What plans, strategies or documents already exist in the borough that capture local commitments and the value of strong partnerships?
4. What practical actions would NHS, local authority and VCFSE partners need to take to make these commitments a reality? What might the challenges be?

5. Next steps

We are engaging on the proposals laid out in this discussion document during August and September 2026 – please share with us your views.

NHS South West London and SWL VCSFE Alliance will work together to gather feedback on this proposal through local forums, networks and committees. VCFSE partners, as outlined in the table in appendix A, are asked to share feedback with us by Friday2 October 2026.

We will consider all the feedback we receive in October and finalise a Charter document, asking organisations to sign up to it with the aim of publication later in the autumn of 2026.

18 September 2026