

Building a voluntary sector alliance in southwest London: what will it look like?

**Feedback from a series of workshops with voluntary
organisations in Croydon, Kingston, Merton,
Richmond, Sutton and Wandsworth**

Lev Pedro, Emma Baylin and Aimie Cole

May 2023

Contents

1.	BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT	3
2.	WHAT THE VCSE SECTOR WANTS FROM THE ALLIANCE.....	4
2.1	<i>Build relationships.....</i>	4
2.2	<i>Build on existing structures.....</i>	5
2.3	<i>Improve navigation.....</i>	6
2.4	<i>Build effective and diverse representation.....</i>	6
2.5	<i>Create relevant and appropriate communications.....</i>	8
2.6	<i>Make better use of data and intelligence.....</i>	9
2.7	<i>Develop digital solutions.....</i>	10
2.8	<i>Be proactive.....</i>	11
3.	EVALUATION	12
4.	NEXT STEPS.....	16

1. Background and purpose of this report

In response to the creation of integrated care systems (ICS) across England, the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector in southwest London is forming itself into a 'VCSE alliance'. The **Southwest London VCSE Alliance** will become a key strategic partner to the NHS and local authorities across the ICS that covers Croydon, Kingston, Merton, Richmond, Sutton and Wandsworth. This development is being led by a partnership of local infrastructure organisations, working closely with colleagues in NHS South West London (integrated care board).

Lev Pedro & Associates was commissioned to plan and deliver a series of engagement workshops with the VCSE sector. These took place from January to April 2023, two in person and four online. Approximately 170 delegates from across the six boroughs took part, and there was active involvement from NHS colleagues in all six events.

The workshops aimed to:

- explain how integrated systems will work and what this means for VCSE organisations in each of the six boroughs of southwest London
- provide an update on work that has been done so far
- offer an opportunity for local sector colleagues to contribute ideas for how the alliance will operate.

Whilst the primary aim of these workshops was to engage and inform the sector in these developments, we gathered insight from the delegates for the purpose of informing and shaping the way the alliance will operate. This brief report summarises the key learning that we gleaned from the six workshops. We also present some examples of some of the things that the delegates discussed, from our knowledge of other ICS areas.

This report is for the use of the six infrastructure organisations, to shape work going forward. We will be happy to prepare a version that provides key points to feed back to workshop delegates and to the wider sector.

2. What the VCSE sector wants from the Alliance

2.1 Build relationships

As highlighted by [previous work](#) that our team has undertaken, the building of good working relationships will be key to the success of the alliance and whole-system working.

Delegates' ideas for building relationships within the VCSE

- Help VCSE organisations to know who else is doing similar work in the area and neighbouring boroughs for collaborative working and potential joint funding bids, referring service users if they are oversubscribed, and getting together to celebrate larger events and building relationships.
- Create thematic VCSE working groups.
- Operational people should have better ways of feeding into ICS governance structures, and vice versa.

Delegates' ideas for building relationships between VCSE and NHS

- Support recruitment of local professionals from voluntary organisations into new NHS roles.
- Hold “getting-to-know-you” sessions and cross-sector working events
- Improve partnership working between VCSE organisations and others like Healthwatch, local authority; consider using the legislative powers of Healthwatch to hold the system to account.
- Create an accessible, easy-read welcome pack available for all ICP members providing a baseline set of information, covering:
 - Training
 - Who's who
 - Resources available/grants
 - How they can engage
 - Contact for feedback.
- Expand on shared training opportunities: NHS training open to VCSE and vice versa.
- Further explore the concept and opportunities of ‘One Workforce’ workstream across NHS, local authorities and VCSE sector.
- Create shadowing and cross-working opportunities between sectors.

Ideas from other areas

- GREATER MANCHESTER has [thematic working groups](#) (click through to ‘accord implementation plan’), which build cross-sector relationships around specific health workstreams or issues.

- System-wide mental health alliances are forming in many areas, for example **BRISTOL, NORTH SOMERSET & SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE, BIRMINGHAM & SOLIHULL**, and **NORTHEAST LONDON**. (They do not yet have web presences, but we can make introductions.)
- **CHESHIRE & MERSEYSIDE** ICB has extended NHS training to VCSE organisations.
- **DEVON** has a buddying scheme where 16 leaders from the voluntary and community sector link with 16 leaders from the wider system including the CCG, local authorities and NHS Trusts. They spend 12 months getting to know each other through phone calls or cups of tea every six weeks and learn how their role fits into the overall care picture for Devon. It has facilitated vital connections that help to reduce the invisible barrier that sometimes occurs between sectors.

2.2 Build on existing structures

There is a strong desire not to create new structures, however delegates want it to be easier to navigate and where possible to add extra value and maximise the potential of existing structures.

Delegates feel very positive about the role of local infrastructure. Many delegates rely on the infrastructure organisations for their communication and information, and they praised what the CVSs are doing.

Delegates' ideas

- Build on and incorporate local structures. Include, not duplicate, local networks.
- Refine existing structures to avoid duplication and make more effective; create a more joined-up approach to meetings discussing the same topics.
- Create better connection between existing groups and forums.
- Create a way for people to feed into meetings even if they cannot attend.
- Recognise the role that the infrastructure organisations play in the system.

Ideas from other areas

- Many systems have built their system-wide VCSE involvement upon what already existed at place level. on place-based structures. **NORTHAMPTONSHIRE** and **CHESHIRE & MERSEYSIDE** gave presentations in a [webinar hosted by NAVCA on 14 March 2023](#).
- **NORTHWEST LONDON** has a [VCSE governance structure](#) that includes senior reps from all the local infrastructure organisations as well as key VCSE delivery partners. This builds on the place-based structures.
- **DEVON**'s [VCSE assembly model](#) supports joint leadership and cross sector partnership working with public sector providers on an equal footing. The concept is one of a broad based inclusive and shared collaborative model, where people, communities and organisations can contribute and engage in the way they want to. They aim to create a fluid pool of people and organisations, with a broad range of skills, expertise, innovative solutions and lived experience that can fully engage in, inform and influence strategic partnership discussions, co-

design of services, policy development, co-commissioning and joint leadership and decision making.

- The infrastructure organisations in **CAMBRIDGESHIRE**, supported by their county council, established [Support Cambridgeshire](#), a collaborative structure for local infrastructure. This includes a [health and wellbeing network](#) that feeds into their county-wide [Health Alliance](#).

2.3 Improve navigation

Delegates want a way to navigate around both VCSE networks and the wider ICS more easily.

Delegates' ideas

- Create a list of borough-based and southwest London meetings, working groups, what they do, who they are for, and so on.
- Create a list of key contacts (e.g. commissioners and workstream leads) working at both southwest London and borough level.
- Create a visual representation of structures.

Information wanted about the system

- How it fits together and how different parts of it work together
- Who does what
- Which boards are which
- Roles and how decisions are made
- Information about meetings (dates, agendas, notes, action points)
- System-wide and local priorities and decisions.

Ideas from other areas

- **NORTH EAST & NORTH CUMBRIA** has a [diagram](#) that shows how the VCSE fits into the ICS governance structure.¹

2.4 Build effective and diverse representation

Participants were excited about new opportunities to engage as VCSE reps but were clear that these roles needed to be properly managed, supported and received fair remuneration.

Delegates' ideas

- Ensure a diversity of reps across multiple boards (not the same people attending multiple boards)

¹ This hyperlink is to 'FutureNHS' a private collaboration workspace managed by NHS England. Anyone working as part of integrated care systems is welcome to join. Email england.voluntarypartnerships@nhs.net

- Ensure clear information is available which clarifies the role of each board, role and responsibilities of the representatives, also where and when meetings are held
- Ensure availability of notes and action points
- Support carers (who have active roles in commissioning decisions) to have a seat at every level (ICB, ICP, Place) - currently have a seat at Place but not Partnership.
- Ensure representatives at place level are heard at system eg youth representatives on Place based partnership and Health & Wellbeing Board but not currently at system level
- Create a remuneration policy for VCSE reps on strategic boards.
- Ensure place based and thematic VCSE information and data is aggregated and fed to appropriate Place based and system level meetings
- VCSE reps should be supported to understand wider VCSE key issues;
 - Data gathering needs to be done early and be ongoing with wider VCSE to keep on top of key issues and feed to reps. Inc needs, impacts etc
 - Quarterly surveys of VCSE to gather insights
 - Use thematic VCSE meetings to enable organisations to decide which meetings they are best placed to attend as well as to elect and support reps.
- Develop a briefing and feedback meeting for all VCSE strategic reps
- Create a proforma for VCSE reps to share feedback and place where others can access
- Develop mechanisms for people with lived experience (particularly of mental health) to feed in their priorities around gaps in services – can help give a targeted voice - are their voices being represented enough on boards and at decision making levels? Eg Could VCSE organisations bring a representative with them to meetings?

Ideas from other areas

- In Hackney, funding was secured to set up and deliver ‘VCSE Enabler’, to solve public health challenges collaboratively. The VCS Leadership Group broadened its membership to include chairs of networks and neighbourhood forums. Acting as an executive for the new Assembly, the VCS Leadership Group takes soundings from networks and statutory sector partners to prioritise issues to be explored through VCS Assembly meetings. Assembly meetings bring together the local sector with health and social care systems partners so that issues can be explored by a wide and diverse group. Critically, whereas in the past these kinds of meetings would have led to recommendations, the Assembly meetings lead to development of proposals, partnerships or business cases to unlock funding. It now provides a mechanism for the ICP to invest directly in activities that are led by local organisations based on co- produced solutions that builds capacity for local organisations.
- Tower Hamlets CVS acquired funding for a pilot project to provide mentoring to new reps from small organisations. Support is also available in the form of

funding to backfill their time in fulfilling the rep role, and it is felt there that this is critical in enabling involvement of very small organisations.

- **CENTRAL LANCASHIRE** (place) [rep request form](#) (FutureNHS)
- **CENTRAL LANCASHIRE** (place) [rep feedback template](#) (FutureNHS). Some areas collate these feedback forms and provide blogs or similar such updates to their VCSE sector through CVS news bulletins, and so on.

2.5 Create relevant and appropriate communications

Delegates asked for communications to be appropriate to size and scale of organisation, easy to navigate and presented in various formats.

Delegates saw the value in developing strong cross sector communication but felt that this needs to be authentic in both directions, with a real willingness from the ICB to hear from the VCSE, including its knowledge, needs and challenges, not just its responses to ICB directives.

Delegates' ideas for communications within the VCSE sector

- Small 'grassroots' organisations want less frequent, less detailed information, unless there is an opportunity to influence on something that will directly affect its service users.
- Training, funding and workshop opportunities need to be cascaded in a timely way to smaller grassroots organisations. If this means they are receiving information less frequently, then it needs to be clear and helpful, including what next steps are required and possibly offering support to engage.
- Use inclusive language.
- Record meetings and webinars and share with links to supplementary information.
- Use video and social media to share information.
- Newsletters should contain clear headings with short summaries and links to further information.

What might be included in a potential newsletter

- Meetings: brief description then link to minutes. Include "You said, we did" style feedback from strategic meetings, so VCSE organisations can see influence of engagement.
- Financial/funding information and resources.
- Promotion of courses and resources.
- Opportunities to engage in workstreams.
- Feedback from reps attending meetings and events.
- ICB updates.
- Information broken down into themes: e.g. mental health, aging issues, cost of living, housing & employment.

Delegates' ideas for cross-sector communications

- VCSE issues should be a standing agenda item on ICB board and ICP meetings.
- Hold themed meetings between NHS and VCSE organisations, with issues discussed feeding into relevant meetings (ICB/ICP).

Ideas from other areas

- Several sites have set up communications channels. We do not have examples to hand, but we can put you in touch with some of these areas.

2.6 Make better use of data and intelligence

Delegates understand the value of data and intelligence and want to ensure better collation and use. There is a frustration that the VCSE holds on to a lot of information that is not routinely gathered or not used routinely and then asked for at short notice and difficult to gather in this way.

Delegates' ideas

- Support the VCSE to routinely gather, share and collate what they know about the needs of communities (geographical and thematic) and identify trends.
- Ensure that collated information is shared within VCSE and wider ICS.
- Ensure we can use the collation of need to help reform services (on the ground in VCSE and influence strategy and commissioning) and ensure maximum impact. E.g. choose where target – notice rising levels of homelessness in xxx and choose to meet growing demand in that area
- Make better use of things that exist e.g. newsletter
- Develop ways to share the stories behind the data e.g. case studies
- Create a continual 'issues log' – for example, using a Click here to 'share' mechanism.
- Approaches such as 'Identify 10 priorities' say each quarter – outlining the problem, the context and the proposed solution.
- Create a resource bank of ideas and knowledge.
- Use digital tools that allow thematic conversations and sharing of best practice
- Map VCSE services and possibly create a directory.
- Use intelligence from social prescribing, where services are overstretched or full, to indicate the need for funding extra service capacity.
- Work with NHS and local authorities to make better use of data that is already collected or submitted from VCSE.
- Negotiate with ICB to consider and include more NON-health metrics or wider determinant metrics
- Use consistent and proportionate impact measures (that also takes account of social as well as medical approaches).
- 'Discord' was cited as a platform that allows thematic conversations and sharing of best practice.

Ideas from other areas

- Various case studies in [our report for the VCSE Health and Wellbeing Alliance](#) (2021)

2.7 Develop digital solutions

Delegates feel that digital solutions should play a big part in improving communications within the VCSE and cross-sector.

Delegates' ideas

- Create a space on ICS website for cross-sector information. This should be linked to individual CVS websites. It should contain both “curated” e.g. digested and interpreted, and “un-curated” e.g. links to minutes from meetings types of information.
- Ensure digital spaces are user-friendly and easy to navigate, for example, type in a key word and quickly find the subject matter that you need to access.
- Explore the possibility of creating a common database or CRM system for the voluntary sector across Southwest London.
- Make ‘Joy’ (social prescribing app platform) available to VCSE by ICS providing licenses for VCSE, so that all are working off same system.
- Create an online discussion platform.
- Create an information exchange where people can post and reply – exchange of asks and offers.

Ideas from other areas

- **WEST YORKSHIRE** – dedicated space on [system website](#).
- **LANCASHIRE AND SOUTH CUMBRIA** – dedicated space on [system website](#).
- **BEDFORDSHIRE** is rolling out a shared data system that was developed by Community Action Milton Keynes (see [Health & Wellbeing Alliance report](#) 2021, page 20)
- In **DEVON**, Torbay Community Development Trust created [a place-based approach that engages citizens and works in partnership to reduce social isolation](#) - an identified leading cause of health inequalities in the area.² Teams of community builders, local citizens and wellbeing coordinators from Age UK Torbay and Brixham Does Care work together to improve wellbeing and reduce loneliness for over 5,600 people. They put a system in place to capture, store and share data. Early on Torbay Community Development Trust recognised that just capturing and sharing data across partners would be a challenge. To address this, they bought in a specialist customer relationship management (CRM) system that is secure but also allows different partners to capture and cross-

² This is also a very interesting case study of innovative working, engaging the community in the solution and asset-based working.

refer information about individuals. Torbay Community Development Trust administers it in the middle. This means that different organisations can report on different cases, adding notes and sharing information. For the CEO, *“investing in the CRM system was a good thing to do, especially for reasons of data confidentiality and privacy. It also helps us overcome some of the challenges that statutory partners have around data sharing and really demonstrate the impact and value.”*

2.8 Be proactive

There is a desire that the VCSE should be more proactive and less reactive, setting its own strategy and agenda, not just reacting to the demands of commissioners and other external parties. For the sector to be a strong strategic partner, it needs to have its own clear agenda and mission within the system.

Delegates’ ideas

- Local leaders should help the sector to think more proactively, lead the sector and tell them what they don’t know.
- Local leaders should support VCSE to identify, collate and present needs, challenges and opportunities.
- Use a broader definition of ‘health’ – use the 5 factors – connected/learning/activity/giving/taking notice – plan around this framework.
- The principle of building local social capital should be embedded in the VCSE Alliances mission and values.
- Ensure voluntary sector delivery is integrated in strategic plans.
- Develop feedback / reporting tool for the above.
- Campaign for greater transparency in decision-making, for example commissioning decisions.

Ideas from other areas

- **NORTH EAST & NORTH CUMBRIA** have created [sub-groups](#) (click through to ‘sub-groups’) based on what the VCSE raises as issues, and then looks to slot these into ICS boards or committees. This is the opposite of the more common ‘reactive’ approach, where issues are expected to fit into pre-defined meeting themes.
- **HUMBER & NORTH YORKSHIRE** have established a [VCSE Collaborative](#) that is a formally constituted entity within the integrated care system. [Videoclip of Gary Sainty describing this.](#)
- In **HUMBER & NORTH YORKSHIRE**, the CEO of one of the local infrastructure organisations co-chairs the ICS workforce board and leads their workforce transformation work. (This is in a personal capacity, rather than as a nominated sector rep.)

3. Evaluation

We asked delegates to complete a short online questionnaire seeking their feedback following the workshop. We received 22 completed questionnaires.

How useful was this event in terms of helping you understand the new NHS-led health and care structure?

The average rating was 4.05 on a scale of 1 to 5, with no delegates responding 1 or 2.

How useful was this event in helping you know about the new VCSE alliance and its purpose?

The rating average was 4.09 on a scale of 1 to 5, with no delegates responding 1 or 2.

What was the most useful thing you learnt from this event?

- Reducing health inequality and developing and delivering innovative solutions with local VCSE organisations.
- I am new to KBS so it was helpful to understand all that was presented.
- I didn't know anything about the VCSE alliance nor understand how the new ICS was going to engage with VCS and statutory partners. This helped my understanding and also to think about how we need to do this in a joined up way, that allows the voices of the community to come to the fore.
- Learning who was involved and finding common ground with other VCSE.
- The way in which the VCSE Alliance will work across the 6 boroughs
- Gave insight as to the progress of the process - which is clearly very early stages.
- of plans to share information, and how/what is already being shared and available
- I felt that I was able to learn more about the voluntary sector in Richmond & i have a better understanding of the VCSE alliance.
- That there is substantial knowledge in the voluntary sector on gaps in services needed to support our most vulnerable people and a desire to share this information to enable a shared response.
- that the work of Richmond's voluntary sector is known of, and that we are seen as a valued partner. This feedback is not always shared especially when stats are sent up the chain of command to contact holders within statutory organisation
- Understanding more about point reached and the opportunity to network and contribute
- National and local plans for ICSs and how the third sector fits into that.
- Seeing there is a new initiative starting up that we need to be part of
- How the alliance works across south west [London]
- The purpose of VCSE alliance
- Good to meet the key players in the alliance, and clear understanding of the stage the alliance is at

- Linking with other organisations interested in partnering with Against Domestic Abuse
- Plans for Alliance to hopefully impact positively on how organisations work together in Croydon
- Realisation that we must find a way to work together, listen to each other, find ways to share resources , cutting down on wastage and reporting progress for health and social care to improve .
- That there will be funding

How much do you feel you could have your say on plans to develop the VCSE alliance?

The rating average was 3.59 on a scale of 1 to 5, with no delegates responding 1.

Having attended the event, what makes you feel positive about integrated care systems?

- Wider VCSE and local people work collaboratively when they make decisions on health inequalities and wellbeing.
- I can't tell yet as I am new to the service.
- Potential of partnership working and getting our own local offers and gaps and opportunities clearly set out.
- Know about it but don't know how it will help us.
- Greater opportunity to work together across the system
- Being noticed as a small voluntary care group and the benefit we make to patients, carers and peoples lives
- I'm hoping that there will be the opportunity to have conversations and better connections with people who understand how the system will look going forwards
- yes
- Good intentions and
- That the existing conduits for information sharing with be utilised and drawn upon.
- Conceptually this is an excellent development and I would love the vision and values to be realised.
- Scope for partnership working and parity of esteem between NHS, local authority and third sector
- A little early to say
- Important that the VCSE has a place at the NHS table.
- Organisations being better involved in making decisions about how the system works
- How to work together
- The opportunity to get involved and give feedback
- Collaborative working of the NHS & the Voluntary Sector
- not really got a strong opinion yet

- Possibly - if it is possible to make the process of working alongside each other in Croydon more coherent.
- Even before attending the meeting I have felt positive about the success of integrated care systems in theory, however the how and commitment to making it work remains a challenge
- That there are communication channels

Having attended the event, what are your main concerns or fears about integrated care systems?

- There was a lack of suggestions or discussions on how to practically communicate with multi-ethnic groups.
- That the larger organisations will be more visible and presented for funding.
- Fears around not doing this in a joined-up way, that is from a whole systems approach. I feel as a statutory partner, that this needs to be done in partnership with us too, and that the local that is represented is the whole system.
- Money not reaching the voluntary sector and little real action.
- Volume of information and keeping up to date with what is happening
- It being too big or too high level for us to have a say, be noticed or heard and that patients voices are still missed.
- that it will take a long time for anything to take shape, including the availability of funding for ongoing services previously funded by the CCG. Whether there will be sufficient understanding of the difference between the voluntary sector and the statutory sector, with monitoring or service delivery demands made of us that is isn't possible to meet
- I'm apprehensive/interested to see the effects on the sectors I work across & what it spells for the future.
- That we build a strong voice of the voluntary sector in each borough and regionally, but as there is only minor representation on the ICB / ICS that the voice won't be heard loudly enough. 2. Physical and mental health systems are still working in separate systems, making it difficult to support vulnerable people in a holistic, integrated way. 3. Social Care is the very underfunded partner, and if the ICB were to take an outcomes-based approach this could motivate shifting of money around the system, but that is only happening (or so it appears) on a very low-level piecemeal basis, e.g. small pots of funding for winter discharge.
- capacity of my organisation against increased demand for services, increased demand on time of staff, the potential for small VSO to get lost in all the hierarchy as well as Richmond based organisations and Richmond priorities being overshadowed by other boroughs
- I remain concerned by the scale of the task and capacity issues.
- That parity esteem will be difficult to achieve, and that the third sector will be expected to do things without funding being made available.
- That it is more about governance structures and bureaucracy and not in touch with the lives on the ground of real people

- It looks complicated and I worry about the VCSE getting lost, even as a medium sized charity it needs time and resource to understand what's going on. And none of us has a lot of leeway.
- It could be very difficult to get local views taken into account
- Challenges facing Croydon now
- The scale is large, and what is the impact on the clients we support
- A lot of talk and no action.
- people being left behind
- The danger is it just introduces another level of bureaucracy and the same people end up speaking to one another again.
- I am still sceptical about how it would work at SW level as it is only now that we are trying to make better sense of it locally. I am not too sure how long the resources we have for it will last before some other system creeps in. Things generally take a long time to happen and will have to wait and see.
- The structure is very complicated

What further information would you like about the VCSE alliance development process?

- Development of innovative and creative solutions. Open and transparent communication on making decisions. It reflects the diversity of the VCSE sector in its development.
- Updates
- How it is engaging and how opportunities to feed in/work together on this.
- Sources of funding and real partnership working, not just words.
- Opportunities that are arising, the influence the Alliance has in the system, trends
- I would like to keep up with the progress of how it develops stage by stage
- How funding to vol sector services will be made available, but I've already had useful feedback on this in the workshop, and offers of support
- yes
- Feedback on how ideas that have come through these meetings are being addressed.
- more lower tiered information relevant to my neighbourhood
- Updates on progress and where to find information as this develops
- What will be the mechanism for checking how it is going and if anything different or additional will need doing to achieve the desired progress
- Updates as work progresses
- Fulfilling the development process
- Opportunities for networking, key decisions made, case stories, good news stories
- How to get some much-needed funding
- about practical ways we can be involved
- To receive the report on feedback and also notice of any future timescales.

- The simple cost-effective things that you are considering to make it work that will include small entities like ours.
- Everything.

Being kept informed

Many delegates provided their email addresses for the purpose of being kept informed about alliance developments, and we are passing these details confidentially to Croydon Voluntary Action.

4. Next steps

We propose that the next steps for the Southwest London VCSE Alliance are:

1. Leadership group to digest this report.
2. Provide summary feedback to delegates.
3. Prioritise actions and incorporate actions as appropriate into the work plan of the Alliance Director.