

# Principles in practice

## Lessons and examples from the Keep it Local Network

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LLOYDS BANK  
FOUNDATION  
England & Wales



locality  
the power of community



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# Executive summary

**Keep it Local is Locality's campaign to build long-term partnerships between councils and communities.**

In partnership with Lloyds Bank Foundation for England and Wales, we have established an active Network of 17 Keep it Local councils, who are committed to unlocking the power of community.

This report brings together the key things we've learned about how to embed and sustain Keep it Local in local authorities.

It is split into two parts. The first draws out some overarching lessons about Keep it Local for campaigners and practitioners working with, and within, councils. The second uses our six Keep it Local principles as a framework to provide tips, advice, and good practice case studies for making Keep it Local a reality.

Alongside this report, we have also produced a Keep it Local Guide to Commissioning to give council commissioners and procurement officers the practical tools to Keep it Local.



## What we've learned about Keep it Local

▼ Lesson	▼ Summary
<b>Building the foundations</b>	
<b>Be realistic: it takes time</b>	There is growing impetus behind Keep it Local – but establishing new ways of working is a long-term process
<b>Don't forget this is about people</b>	There are wide benefits to the local economy and public sector budgets – but the core of Keep it Local is better services for local people
<b>Start small</b>	It is important to work quickly to turn high-level endorsement into something meaningful and visible to build momentum
<b>Procurement can be the blockers – but also the champions</b>	Risk averse processes continue to stifle innovation, but some procurement teams are driving change
<b>Putting principles into practice</b>	
<b>Strategic leadership is the crucial first step</b>	Senior political and corporate commitment is needed to create space for officers to do things differently
<b>You need “passionate persuaders” at all levels to win the argument</b>	A group of around 10 core champions across different departments can have huge impact in embedding the approach across the council
<b>Build an asset map to understand local capacity</b>	It is important to have an accurate knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the local VCSE
<b>Going further to embed transformation</b>	
<b>Support large and small organisations to work together</b>	Different types of organisations have different strengths, which can be unlocked by working in partnership
<b>Make Keep it Local an explicit part of recruitment to key positions</b>	Individuals with the right skills and mindset are key to driving system transformation
<b>Broker conversations between VCS and procurement</b>	Regular communications can surface challenges, identify ‘quick wins’ and build understanding around longer-term challenges
<b>Put social value at the centre of service contracts</b>	Using quantitative measurement where appropriate to measure additional social value, while seeking to make social value inherent to the quality element of tenders for person-centred services
<b>Take a Keep it Local approach to Integrated Care System commissioning</b>	Keep it Local principles can shape a broader local shift towards transformational services in health, wellbeing, and care



## Lesson

## Summary

### Overcoming external challenges

<b>Broad internal support can help mitigate the wider policy environment</b>	Pressure on staff capacity and staff churn, driven by fiscal pressures, is the biggest barrier for Keep it Local. Wide participation is therefore needed to sustain momentum
<b>Keep It Local can help embed pandemic partnership progress</b>	The Covid-19 crisis inspired new partnerships and built understanding of the VCSE sector – Keep it Local can help make this a permanent shift rather than only an emergency response
<b>Show how Keep it Local can be key means of achieving government's levelling up ambitions</b>	To achieve its aims, levelling up needs to support the local innovation that's spreading across the country, rather than standing in its way

### Lessons for community organisations

<b>Keep it Local places new demands on community organisations as well as councils</b>	Keep it Local isn't just about asking councils to "let go" – it also requires community organisations to show they are ready to "step up" and play a bigger role in local services
<b>There is a particular role for community anchor organisations</b>	Community anchors hit a Keep it Local sweet spot of having sufficient scale to manage contracts, while being neighbourhood-based and having good reach into communities
<b>Personalisation: a Keep it Local opportunity that is yet to be seized?</b>	To realise "the community opportunity" of adult social care, work needs to be done to make regulation more tailored to community providers, but also to enable community organisations' business to adapt to what might be a significant new income source

## How to Keep it Local

The Keep it Local philosophy is underpinned by six guiding principles. When councils join the network, they endorse and commit to these principles.

They provide a high-level framework to allow councils to assess current areas of strength and weakness. They highlight where approaches can be shifted, achievements can be celebrated, and progress can be made.



1 Think about the whole system not individual service silos



2 Co-ordinate services at a neighbourhood level



3 Increase local spend to invest in the local economy



4 Focus on early intervention now to save costs tomorrow



5 Commit to your community and proactively support local organisations



6 Commission services simply and collaboratively so they are "local by default"

We have seen how the network of Keep it Local councils has embraced these principles and developed innovative ways to bring them to life. As such, we've also built understanding of the positive impacts they produce, including:

- **Better services for local people** – the distinct approach to service provision by local organisations can have a transformative impact of people's lives.
- **Reduced pressure on public services** – decreased long-term demand on the public sector by addressing people's problems early.
- **Investment in the local economy** – harnessing community organisations' potential as local economic multipliers.

## The principles in action:

Below are just some of the ways Keep it Local councils have embedded the principles locally. You'll find even more as you read through the report.



### 1 **Think about the whole system not individual service silos** –

recognising that social problems are complex and require a joined-up approach from all local actors to address them. For example:

- **The Oldham Plan** (see page 25) – a partnership of cross-sector leaders from across the borough, including the council, health, housing, education, VCSE, and the private sector. Producing a more inclusive economy, more co-operative services, and thriving communities.
- **Place-based working with the local health system in South Gloucestershire** (see page 29) – a health-based partnership of the council, NHS commissioners and providers to pool resources and tackle shared priorities around health inequalities.

- **York's Local Area Coordination** (see page 30) – using an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach to deploy 'Coordinators' to walk alongside local people. Building their communities' capacity and capability to create positive change. This has inspired change across adult social care, volunteering and social action, and housing.



### 2 **Co-ordinate services at a neighbourhood level** – supporting local community organisations to

join up services around people's distinct needs and harness their strengths. For example:

- **Make it Local in Bristol** (see page 33) – working with community anchor organisations in different parts of the city to develop asset-based models of care.
- **Leeds Community Anchor Network** (see page 36) – plugging into existing community infrastructure in different neighbourhoods and working with local organisations and volunteers to support residents through the pandemic and beyond.



### 3 **Increase local spend to invest in the local economy** – commissioning local community organisations to

provide services is a key way to keep money within a place. They spend their money on local projects, employ local people, and use local suppliers. For example:

- **Progressive procurement and commissioning strategies** (see page 38) – informed by the approach of councils like Bradford, we have developed a guide for procurement and commissioning to keep spend local.





**Focus on early intervention now to save costs tomorrow** – supporting preventative community-based interventions to reduce the need for costly treatment services later down the line. For example:

- **Calculating the value of the local VCSE sector in South Gloucestershire** (see page 41) – building political understanding of the need to invest in the local sector by calculating the amount of money it has saved the council through preventative action in the community.
- **Live Well Wakefield** (see page 42) – preventing longer-term physical and mental health needs through social prescribing by GPs to local community organisations – funded by public health.



**Commit to your community and proactively support local organisations** – maximising the value of the local VCSE sector by helping to grow their capacity, capabilities, assets, and resources. For example:

- **Supporting the local sector in Kirklees** (see page 44) – through, for example, holistic and supportive Community Asset Transfer policies and processes, and connecting pandemic-inspired mutual aid groups.

- **Calderdale's Community Anchor Policy** (see page 45) – formally recognising and supporting the important role of local community anchor organisations to the borough's ambitions.

- **Pre-market engagement in Bradford** (see page 46) – committing to year-on-year increases in local VCSE spend, and helping the sector become more engaged in pre-procurement market consultations.



**Commission services simply and collaboratively so they are "local by default"** – recognising that current commissioning processes favour big providers and supporting local providers to demonstrate their unique value to service delivery. For example:

- **Bristol's Domestic Abuse Services** (see page 50) – actively connecting local organisations to work together to develop consortium bids for more well-rounded services.
- **South Gloucestershire's Welfare, Benefit, and Debt Advice service** (see page 51) – using an 'honest broker' to facilitate a collaborative culture in the delivery of the service by multiple local VCSE providers. ■



# Introduction

**Keep it Local is Locality's campaign to build long-term partnerships between councils and communities.**

Over the past decade, local authorities have faced unprecedented challenges. With budgets shrinking and demand rising, many councils have sought savings through outsourcing services at scale. Services get bundled up into big contracts, which go to large providers at the lowest price possible.

We believe there is a better way: to Keep it Local. Our campaign has its roots in a ground-breaking piece of research conducted in 2014, which showed there are "diseconomies of scale".<sup>1</sup> Big outsourcing contracts inevitably lead to tick box, one-size-fits-all services, that don't deal with people's problems at source. Ultimately it is this which is putting such pressure on our local services. Rising demand is the price of failure. This in turn becomes amplified by growing pressures, such as the pandemic and now the cost-of-living crisis.

Local community organisations are experts at prevention, harnessing their local relationships to provide tailored support for local people. This stops rising demand in its tracks – and also keeps

vital public sector investment circulating round the local economy. But for too long, complex commissioning and mega outsourcing contracts have crowded out smaller local providers and left them unable to do what they do best.

In 2017, we developed our Keep it Local campaign with action research with six councils and 20 community organisations. We sought to understand the barriers and opportunities for local commissioning – in particular, how commissioning community organisations could strengthen the local economy. We found that community organisations act as local economic multipliers. By employing local people and using local supply chains, every pound spent with a community organisation creates £2.50 for the local economy.<sup>2</sup> We also found a clear desire from local authorities to unlock this potential and work in closer partnership with their community organisations. However, bureaucratic processes, and in particular the challenge of joining up commissioning and procurement, were often seen to stand in the way. ■

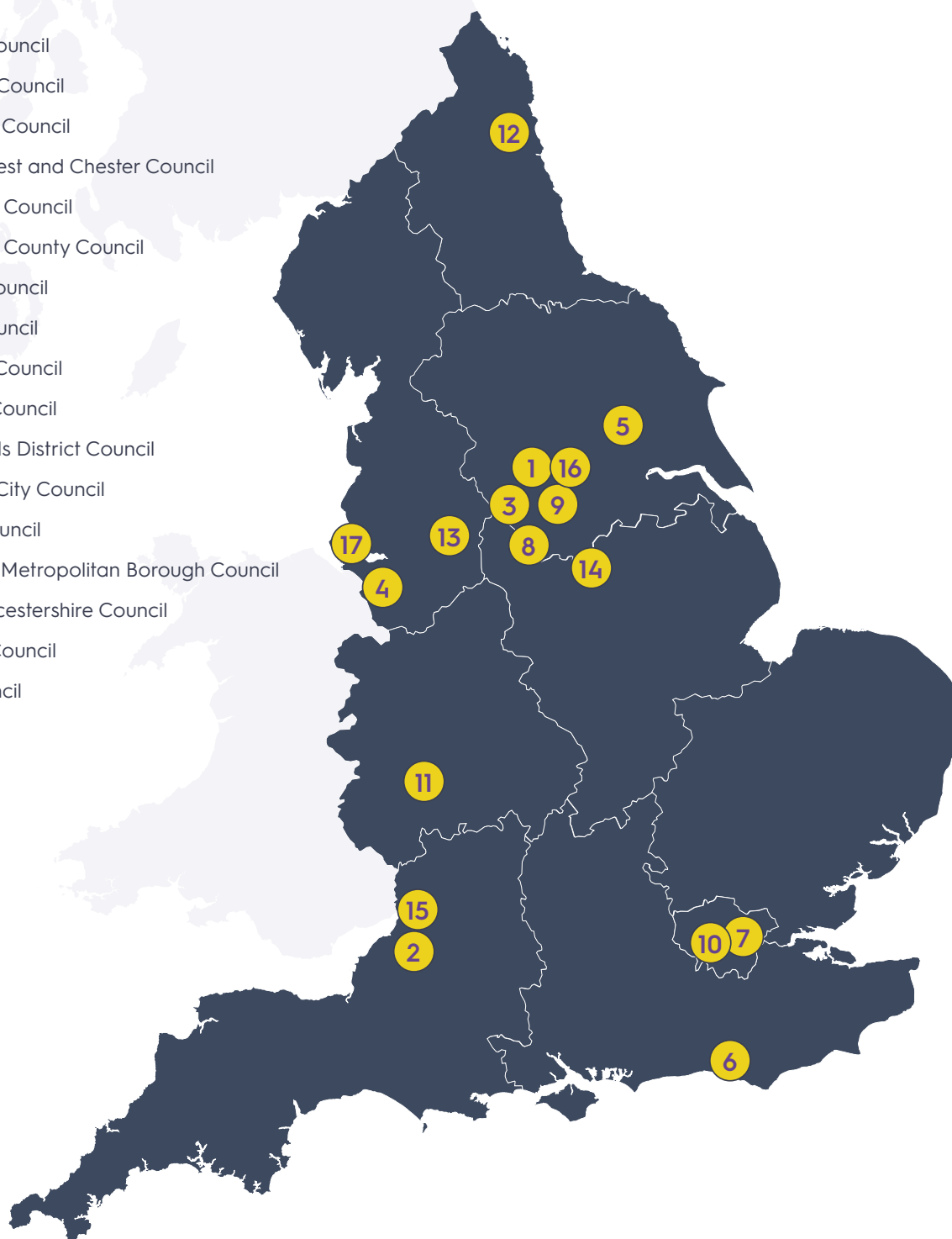




# Keep it Local network map

Over the last few years, we have been seeking to build a coalition to create momentum for a different approach. In partnership with Lloyds Bank Foundation for England and Wales, we have established an active network of Keep it Local councils who are committed to unlocking the power of community. In March 2020 we announced our first trailblazer councils, who had signed up to our seven Keep it Local principles and agreed to work together to put them into practice. Our growing movement has now reached 17 councils.

- 1 Bradford Council
- 2 Bristol City Council
- 3 Calderdale Council
- 4 Cheshire West and Chester Council
- 5 City of York Council
- 6 East Sussex County Council
- 7 Hackney Council
- 8 Kirklees Council
- 9 Leeds City Council
- 10 Lewisham Council
- 11 Malvern Hills District Council
- 12 Newcastle City Council
- 13 Oldham Council
- 14 Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
- 15 South Gloucestershire Council
- 16 Wakefield Council
- 17 Wirral Council



## About this report

The aim of the Keep it Local Network is to provide a forum where councils committed to unlocking the power of community can share and learn, supporting each other to go further on the Keep it Local journey. Within the Network we have also been providing practical support to two Keep it Local pilot areas – Bradford and Bristol – where we have been incubating new ideas and approaches, learning lessons that we can share with the wider Network.

This report brings together learning since we started working proactively to build our network of Keep it Local councils with Lloyds Bank Foundation for England and Wales in 2018. It comes in two key sections. The first draws out some overarching lessons about how to embed and sustain Keep it Local in local authorities. It is aimed at campaigners and practitioners working with, and within, local authorities. The second part is a more detailed practical guide. It uses our six Keep it Local principles as a framework for tips and advice on how to deliver on each principle, along with case study examples from the network of good practice.

Our aim is to build momentum behind the approach and demonstrate the art of the possible. We know change isn't easy, and even for committed Keep it Local councils, progress is often gradual. But these experiences and examples show that this not a theoretical exercise; written about in policy reports but with no real grip on the road. It's a living breathing movement taking hold in local government, with trailblazer councils leading the way. ■





# Part 1:

# What we've learned about Keep it Local

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Here we present our key lessons for Keep it Local. Throughout, you will find links to case studies that exemplify some of these learnings later in the report.

# Building the foundations

## Be realistic: it takes time

We began our active work to build a Keep it Local Network and develop our Keep it Local pilots in 2018. Over this time, we have found growing impetus behind the Keep it Local approach. In part, this stems from a principled desire to shift away from a more top down, service delivery model of local government towards an “enabling” approach. This means, rather than the public sector thinking it has all the answers, recognising there is huge power that resides in our local communities that, with the right support, can be unlocked to help tackle the big challenges we face. It also stems from the practicalities of limited budgets and the need to achieve more with less. However, despite this energy, establishing new ways of working takes time. Many of the lessons we share here detail the reasons for this – the barriers that can make progress incremental rather than straightforwardly linear; the mitigations that can keep the train on the tracks. But it is important to recognise there are no shortcuts and that long-term commitment is a key requirement of Keeping it Local.

## Don't forget this is about people

The heart of the case for Keep it Local is better services for local people. Research from Locality and Lloyds Bank Foundation for England and Wales has shown how local community organisations take a distinct approach to local service provision that can have a transformative impact on people's lives.<sup>3</sup> This is especially the case for “person-centred” services: those services like social care, domestic abuse support or employment support where

trusting relationships, local knowledge and long-term commitment are key. Community organisations act as “cogs of connection”: connecting people up to a place, to a community, to a range of different services and activities. They are able to draw on people's strengths and co-design approaches that address their particular challenges. Alongside these benefits to individuals, we believe there is clear evidence of wider impacts of Keeping it Local. It reduces long-term demand on the public sector by addressing people's problems early rather than allowing them to mount up over time.<sup>4</sup> It invests in the local economy, ensuring that precious public sector spending doesn't leak out but instead harnesses community organisations' potential as local economic multipliers.<sup>5</sup> It strengthens local community capacity by creating a level playing field for smaller local providers to compete for public sector contracts. However, despite the multifaceted benefits, it is critical to keep sight of the people for whom services exist in the first place. This can sometimes be forgotten once you get into the weeds of local service systems or the detail of commissioning processes. But it's why we are all here and needs to remain in the forefront of everyone's minds when seeking to design new approaches.

## Start small

Once a council is committed to the Keep it Local approach, it is important to work quickly to turn high-level endorsement into something meaningful and visible. There are examples across the Keep it Local Network and elsewhere of big picture systems change projects that are having huge impact – the Oldham Plan for example (see page 25 for case study), or the Wigan Deal. However, these big bang approaches aren't the only way of realising transformation, and can sometimes feel long-term and overwhelming for people in the trenches of change. Starting small can



often therefore be the most effective approach. That way, it is something that officers in whichever part of the council is driving Keep it Local can find achievable within their remit and start to build momentum. Otherwise, the risk is that Keep it Local remains a strategic ambition but without the practical home necessary to prove the case and persuade a wider internal cohort that it can deliver the results in reasonable timeframes. See case studies on pages x and x for examples of how specific programmes has inspired wider system change.

**“The council is taking practical steps to look at different ways of procuring. Looking at local employment, social value, and local knowledge... this all helps to keep things local.”**

- Nasim Qureshi, CEO, Inspired Neighbourhoods, Bradford

## Procurement can be the blockers – but also the champions

Back in 2017, we conducted Keep it Local action research with six councils. One of our key conclusions was that “commissioning and procurement functions within local authorities are often disconnected and seen as two different disciplines: the former about innovation, solutions and outcomes; the latter about rules, processes and finance.” In very broad terms, our work over the last four years has found this dichotomy to still be in place. A “system says no” culture in procurement often puts a handbrake on innovative commissioning practice, more likely to put barriers in place than offer creative solutions. However, this is beginning to change. And for some councils, it is procurement teams who are leading Keep it Local. In Bradford, for example, we have worked closely with the Head of Procurement to support their new Procurement Strategy, which has

embedded Keep it Local approaches and is driving change across the council (see case studies on page 47 and 50).

**“The future of local commissioning looks better than it did eight or nine years ago”**

- Nasim Qureshi, CEO, Inspired Neighbourhoods, Bradford

Other councils have sought to join up commissioning and procurement, recognising the importance of designing the right process from the outset to achieve desired outcomes, rather than seeing procurement as a “black box” over which commissioners have no control. It is increasingly recognised as suboptimal to put huge amounts of effort and care into designing services, only to close your eyes and hope for the best when it comes to the process through which you procure the provider. Councils are thinking hard about where their procurement departments sit, the range of skills they need, and how to ensure they are an embedded part of their social mission – rather than a legal and financial safety net at the end of a commissioning process. Newcastle City Council, for example, brought together two teams into a single function to oversee all commissioning and procurement over £25,000 and embed social value as its central focus. Calderdale Council have moved their procurement function out of the finance directorate to sit in Regeneration and Strategy alongside other teams such as business and skills, the voluntary sector, housing, and tourism. ■

# Putting principles into practice

## Strategic leadership is the crucial first step

Our action research in 2017 concluded that “a local authority needs to be committed at a very senior level to Keep it Local, and for this to be a key part of a council’s political and corporate identity”. Our work with the Keep it Local Network since then has confirmed this to be the case. Each of our Keep it Local councils has formally endorsed the Keep it Local principles, to set a clear direction of travel and provide a framework to shape Keep it Local practice. The key thing we have learnt is the importance of this to create space to do things differently. Officers need permission to deviate from “business as usual” and to know that there is senior commitment when things don’t turn out as planned. Without this organisational ballast, risk aversion will continue to hold back the potential of new ways of working. A key part of what strategic leadership can do is find space for conversations – create the right structures for staff to discuss new ways of working with each other, build a shared sense of endeavour and co-create solutions.

## You need “passionate persuaders” at all levels to win the argument

While strategic commitment is the critical first step, it isn’t enough on its own to change practice. It is relatively straightforward to commit to a set of well-intentioned, high-level principles. It is harder to actually turn the tanker around. To translate Keep it Local principles into practice, our pilot areas have formed

working groups, bringing together a range of staff – including commissioners, procurement officers, community development teams and key service leads. These working groups have sought to identify particular areas of work or upcoming commissioning exercises that might be particularly relevant to Keep it Local and provide early opportunities to test and learn. Over time, more people would get involved in the working group, or come forward with ideas for where Keep it Local principles might be applied as the work progressed. This has helped to build a critical mass, where it has felt momentum behind the Keep it Local approach has become self-sustaining within the council. To reach this point you need to have a number of “passionate persuaders” at different levels of the council. The Chief Executive is a vital champion, setting that overarching strategic direction and creating a permission structure. But you also need officers at multiple levels who ‘get’ Keep it Local and see it as an important part of their roles. This might include commercial category managers, risk professionals, commissioning managers, and those involved in delivery. Our experience suggests a team of 8-10 core champions can have a huge impact in embedding the approach across the council. Different departments might also need different approaches. It may be because the service type is different and there is less of a clear line through to Keep it Local. Or it may be that individuals in a particular team are less instinctively onboard with the Keep it Local approach. So it is important to always build from the ground up. Just because the council is committed to Keep it Local and may have made progress in other departments, carefully building relationships and understanding in each area of work remains important.

**“Whatever happens in the future on local commissioning, we can go into every meeting on the assumption that we all agree Keep it Local is the right way to go, and that this is a consistent argument for why commissioning needs to be done in a certain way”**

- Joanna Holmes, CEO, Wellspring Settlement, Bristol

## Build an asset map to understand local capacity

Throughout our Keep it Local work we have consistently heard councils express doubts about the capacity of their local voluntary, community, and social enterprise (VCSE) sector to play a bigger role in local services. Officers will often say they agree with the idea of Keeping it Local and indeed are already doing it as much as they can, but are prevented from going further because the local VCSE sector just isn't capable of doing more. We have been keen to understand if this perception is an accurate assessment of the local sector's capacity, or a myth based on lack of knowledge or cultural bias. Knowing this is crucial for formulating the right solution. If the capacity of the local sector is underestimated by councils, then the answer is to provide better information and narratives about its strength. However, if the perception is broadly true, the solutions need to focus on building capacity locally. One of the things two Keep it Local councils have done is to build an asset map. We worked with [MyCake](#) - who specialise in developing business information tools and services for third sector organisations and SMEs in the creative industries - to analyse the available data to produce a map of the overall size, scope, distribution, and characteristics of the local VCSE sector. Broadly, this showed that despite



austerity, there was steady growth in local VCSE sectors and they were often based in the most disadvantaged areas where need is higher. We also identified clusters of organisations in the £200,000 - £500,000 turnover group, which we believe is a key size for growing the Keep it Local approach. At this scale, community organisations might perhaps not be delivering contracts already, but they are organisations of a reasonable size who could be further supported and become more involved in commissioning. This process was helpful for working with councils to understand the exact strengths and weaknesses of their local sectors based on the best information available. On the other side of the coin, it can also be the starting point for honest conversations with local community organisations about their ambitions for getting more involved in service delivery - what is and isn't in line with their missions, and what organisational development they might need to get there. ■



# Going further to embed transformation

## Support large and small organisations to work together

Once you have a good understanding of the strength of your local sector, finding ways to get the best out of them is the next step. Different types of organisations have different strengths. A small, hyper-local community organisation might have excellent reach into communities and real expertise at building relationships with people who tend not to engage in mainstream services. But they might not have the capacity or skills to bid for and manage large contracts. A larger organisation might have a good track record of contract management and a good relationship with the council but lack local reach. In the Keep it Local Network, we have seen creative commissioning approaches which harness the strengths of both. For example, Leeds' community-based mental health service, 'Live Well Leeds', merged four contracts into one to create a large, £1.3m per annum contract. This is in some ways the opposite of the Keep it Local approach we tend to advocate, where we encourage big contracts to be broken up into smaller lots. However, fundamental to the council's approach was ensuring small, local providers were part of the mix. So, the final model was a partnership of lead three providers, with one responsible for contract compliance and sub-contracting with 16 smaller neighbourhood-based providers. This enabled the council to commission a richness of providers, which built on everyone's strengths and improved the reach into communities including communities of interest. It didn't burden small organisations with the complexities of managing a large contract but supported them to be part of it and freed them up to focus on

service provision. See more examples of councils fostering VCSE collaboration in commissioning from page 48 onwards.

## Make Keep it Local an explicit part of recruitment to key positions

Bradford Council identified procurement as a key area for Keep it Local, to ensure their processes were fully joined up with their ambitions. They were recruiting for a new Head of Procurement and understood it to be the key position in realising this. Locality was invited to be part of the recruitment process, sitting on a stakeholder panel along with representatives from the local VCSE sector. This meant the skills and experience to successfully drive the Keep it Local approach in the council were an important factor in the process and candidates had to engage directly with the concept. The successful candidate went on to be the key Keep it Local champion in the council and develop Keep it Local practice via the council's new procurement strategy ([see page 47 for more details](#)). Given what we have learned about the importance of individuals with the right skills and cultural mindset to driving system transformation, it will help other councils with similar ambitions to take the same approach. Keep it Local alignment should be an important part of recruitment to key positions and local VCSE organisations should be brought in to participate in relevant recruitment processes.

## Broker conversations between VCSE sector and procurement

Keep it Local working groups create regular communication channels between council procurement teams and the local VCSE sector. This is based on shared commitment – the Keep it Local principles – which creates a

strong foundation for the relationship. But crucially it means the realities and practical challenges of implementing this agenda can be aired and shared. VCSE organisations know councils face constraints around processes and finances. Being part of the conversation means the precise nature of these can be understood and creative solutions can be found. This might involve identifying 'quick wins' when unnecessary process is standing in the way, or building a shared commitment to work through more structural barriers in the long term.

## Put social value at the centre of service contracts

Ever since we started working with local authorities on Keep it Local, social value has been a key topic of conversation. In 2017, we concluded that social value was the most useful current framework for driving change in commissioning practice but had yet to prove transformative. Five years on, many ambitious councils created new social value policies, and now the question is how best to measure it. Increasingly, councils are using highly quantified and standardised social measurement approaches. This is understandable and has clear benefits to councils. It provides a straightforward solution to a potentially complex issue, bringing a sense of rigour and consistency. It allows for benchmarking and comparison with other local authorities. It falls neatly into procurement officers' mindset – into whose roles responsibility for social value has increasingly fallen. However, it clearly butts up against the critical problem with social value we have heard from Keep it Local councils: it struggles to capture intrinsic social value. For services which are inherently about achieving social outcomes – from homelessness to employment support, children's services to adult social care – the social value runs right through the service. It is at the very core of the procurement and should be at the core of the provider's ethos. It is far from straightforward to turn

this into a spreadsheet formula. What's more, for contracts of this type, asking providers to demonstrate additional social value on top the social service they are already seeking to provide, risks diverting resources away from core social purpose. So, Keep it Local councils are now seeking to develop twin track approaches to social value: using quantitative measurement where appropriate to measure additional social value, while seeking to make social value inherent to the quality element of tenders for person-centred services. For example, see Bradford's Specialist Services for Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence on [page 50](#).

## Take a Keep it Local approach to Integrated Care System commissioning

In the move to Integrated Care Systems (ICSs), councils can work with the NHS and local partners to take a truly whole-system approach to commissioning. By introducing the Keep it Local principles to these partners, they can help produce a broader local shift towards transformational services in health, wellbeing, and care. Services which are sustainable, impactful and which reduce pressures on the health system. A key element of the ICS model is the principle of subsidiarity – that services should be designed and delivered as close to local communities as possible. The Keep it Local approach is an ideal way of achieving this. Services provided by local community organisations carry considerable added value for the system. As well as producing intrinsic social value, as described above, they are also often delivered in a way that positively impacts the wider determinants of health and reduces health inequalities.<sup>6</sup> This will be vital for ICSs to achieve meaningful improvements in population health locally. [See page 29](#) for an example of how South Gloucestershire is working more closely with its local health system in this way. ■

# Overcoming external challenges

## Broad internal support can help mitigate barriers in the wider policy environment

It is well understood that local government has endured the brunt of post-2010 austerity. For many councils, this has been a big driver of Keep it Local. There is keen interest in maximising the value of each pound spent for the local economy and understanding how to drive down long-term costs by harnessing the local VCSE sector's ability to intervene early and effectively. However, it is the overarching fiscal context that is also providing the biggest barrier to embedding Keep it Local in practice. Pressure on staff capacity means finding time and space to do things differently is a real challenge. Staff churn is probably the biggest practical barrier. Keep it Local tends to be driven by a relatively small group of committed champions. In the current climate, people often stay in specific roles for relatively short periods of time. The plus side of this is that we have seen the development of a Keep it Local diaspora, where people move into different councils, in some cases with a specific remit to translate Keep it Local working into a new environment. But it makes building momentum and sustaining progress very hard, as new relationships need to be forged. If key people leave when Keep it Local work is still at the planning rather than implementing phase, it might mean starting again. This highlights the need to build a broad base of support for Keep it Local across the council, which can be done by establishing working groups. This means it is not just being driven by one advocate or trialled in one service areas but can withstand the ebb and flow of external tides.

## Keep It Local can help embed pandemic partnership progress

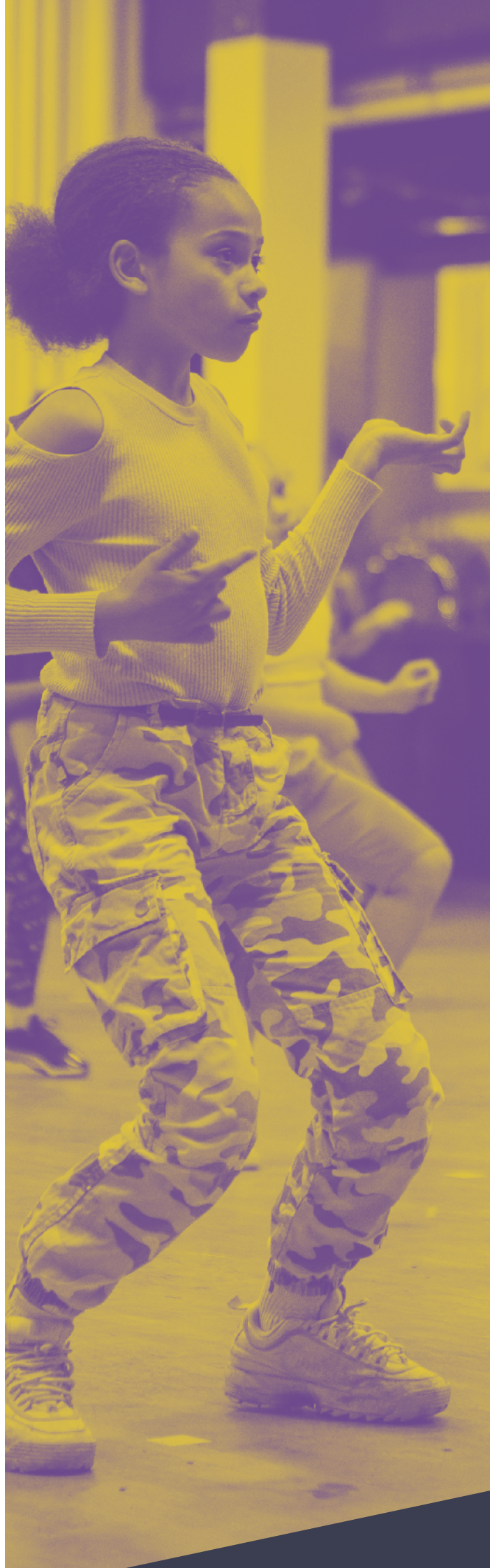
Our report [We Were Built For This](#) showcased the community response to Covid-19 and found a growing appetite for Keep it Local among councils. The crisis inspired new partnerships and built greater respect for, and understanding of, the work of the local VCSE sector among councils. Since the immediate emergency response, our work with the Keep it Local Network has shown a clear appetite to build on the "community moment" we have experienced over the past two years. This includes mainstreaming closer partnership working into recovery strategies. However, it is also clear that the pressures of the pandemic are creating big challenges in turning this interest and commitment into practice. Ongoing lockdowns meant councils have been stuck in crisis management mode, which has been a drain on both staff capacity and strategic planning headspace. However, councils are now finding themselves able to think on a longer-term time horizon. We are therefore at a critical moment to build out from the experiences of the pandemic – the new ways of working and the stronger relationships. Keep it Local can provide the framework for doing this – to embed partnership working as a permanent direction of travel, rather than a purely a crisis success story.

## Show how Keep it Local can be a key means of achieving government's levelling up ambitions

In May 2021, we published a [Keep it Local Manifesto](#). This set out the opportunities within the government's own policy agenda to provide greater support for the burgeoning Keep it Local movement. The manifesto looked,



in particular, within the emerging levelling up agenda. It showed how the inspiring local partnerships that had got us through the pandemic could be supported as a vehicle for long-term transformation. The Levelling Up White Paper has provided an encouraging framework to take this forward. There are opportunities for both local government and the VCSE sector. These include: the development of a Strategy for Community Spaces and Relationships; plans to pilot community partnership models like Community Covenants, and; the focus on devolution to local leaders with an accompanying recognition of the need for “onward” devolution to neighbourhoods. However, we have yet to see a wholesale commitment from central government to community power. The forthcoming Procurement Bill is a particular example of this. In reimagining procurement for a post-Brexit world, it could have put the power of community front and centre. However, it has instead doubled down on a market mindset and focused on streamlining processes, missing the opportunity to develop a much more flexible approach to support the commissioning of person-centred services. Despite this, the government has listened to feedback from local government and the VCSE sector since it published its initial green paper. It is now committed to retaining the Light Touch Regime, which as our accompanying practical commissioning guide shows, is a key means of promoting Keep it Local within the existing procurement regulations. And now, as the Levelling Up White Paper shifts from its design to implementation phase, councils and communities stand ready to work with the government to ensure the practical details are as supportive as possible to the local innovation that is spreading across the country. ■



# Lessons for community organisations

## Keep it Local places new demands on community organisations as well as councils

We have always been clear that Keep it Local isn't just about asking councils to "let go" and do things differently. It also requires local community organisations to show they are ready to "step up" and play a bigger role in local services. We find that community organisations generally understand this and are committed to it – but that it often raises questions which aren't straightforward to answer. They need to be wary of "mission creep", so that chasing contracting opportunities doesn't see them move away from their core purpose or lose focus on their local communities. It also requires them to ask honest questions about their capacity and capability. Adult social care has provided a particular focus for these conversations. As our report [The Community Opportunity](#) set out, adult social care has been at the forefront of our Keep it Local work. It is where councils face the greatest urgency for reform and where there is a growing understanding of the role community organisations can play.<sup>7</sup> But it is also a heavily regulated area of services, and a key discussion we have had with local community organisations is whether becoming a Care Quality Commission (CQC) registered care provider is a suitable way forward for them as organisations. Some have taken this step, but for many it is not thought appropriate. Partly this is about the high barrier of entry placed by the CQC. But it is also about mission creep and wanting to maintain flexibility and independence, with many community organisations

viewing it as a step too far away from their charitable missions and into formal, statutory service delivery.

## There is a particular role for community anchor organisations

At Locality, our strategic framework and theory of change places a particular emphasis on community "anchor" organisations. These "tend to be the strongest and most successful community organisations, employing staff, delivering services, and owning or managing community spaces."<sup>8</sup> From a Keep it Local perspective they often hit the sweet spot of having sufficient scale to manage public sector contracts, while being neighbourhood-based and having good reach into communities. They are the key "cogs of connection" our research has identified – connecting people to a range of local services and joining up the local public sector.<sup>9</sup> We saw this role come to the fore during the Covid-19 crisis, where community anchor organisations connected up the different "layers of local", from the street level response of mutual aid groups, to city or county wide networks and provision.<sup>10</sup> So we believe the role of community anchor organisations is crucial in the Keep it Local ecosystem. As our Make it Local adult social care pilot in Bristol shows ([see page 33](#)), they can be a key neighbourhood-level partner for local authorities: supporting smaller community groups and micro-enterprises and enabling local areas to harness the broad strengths of their neighbourhoods. For example, a community group might have deep reach into a particular community but be unable at the current stage of its development to participate in formal contracting. However, by working in partnership with a local community anchor organisation, their skills and experience can be brought into play.



## Personalisation: a Keep it Local opportunity that is yet to be seized?

Within the adult social care focus of our Keep it Local work, personalisation has been a particular area of interest. Community organisations, with their proximity to and relationships with service users, have the potential to play a key role as control over care budgets is devolved to individuals. This could be as an organisation which holds a personal budget on behalf of an individual – so called Individual Service Funds – and works with them to plan out how they want to use it. Or it could be as part of a pool of providers whose services might be funded by people’s personal budgets. However, we have identified big challenges for community organisations to play this role to the full. Partly this is down to the questions discussed above around entering regulated care markets. However, it is also about business models. Personal budgets see funds come into organisations in a different way and provides less secure income. It also creates cashflow challenges, particularly for smaller organisations who may not have large reserves to smooth over income gaps or work in arrears. So if we are to realise “the community opportunity” of adult social care, work needs to be done both around regulation to make it more tailored to community providers, but also around community organisations’ business models to enable them to adapt to what might be a significant new income source. ■





# Part 2:

# How to Keep it Local

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Here we showcase how our Network of councils have brought the Keep it Local principles to life.

The Keep it Local campaign is guided by six principles. These were co-designed with councillors, commissioners, community leaders and policy experts across a six-month engagement process. We ask councils to commit to and endorse them to join the Keep it Local Network. The principles are:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
|  <p><b>1</b> Think about the whole system not individual service silos</p> |  <p><b>4</b> Focus on early intervention now to save costs tomorrow</p>                        |
|  <p><b>2</b> Co-ordinate services at a neighbourhood level</p>             |  <p><b>5</b> Commit to your community and proactively support local organisations</p>          |
|  <p><b>3</b> Increase local spend to invest in the local economy</p>       |  <p><b>6</b> Commission services simply and collaboratively so they are “local by default”</p> |

They are high-level principles that provide a framework for putting Keep it Local into practice. They can be used by councils to assess areas of strength and weakness, to understand the different components for shifting their approaches, celebrate successes, and to identify key areas where progress needs to be made.

When put into practice, these principles can bring tangible benefits for an entire place:

- Better services for local people** - Research from Locality and Lloyds Bank Foundation for England and Wales has shown how local community organisations take a distinct approach to local service provision that can have a transformative impact on people's lives.<sup>11</sup> This is especially the case for “person-centred” services: those services like social care, domestic abuse support or employment support where trusting relationships, local knowledge and long-term commitment are key. Community organisations act as “cogs of connection”: connecting people up to a place, to a community, to a range of different services and activities. They can draw on people's strengths and co-design approaches

that address their particular challenges.

- Reduced pressure on public services** - Community organisations can help to reduce long-term demand on the public sector by addressing people's problems early rather than allowing them to mount up over time.<sup>12</sup> They are more likely to solve underlying issues upfront because of the way they work: services are person-centred and joined-up with other local service providers.
- Investment in the local economy** - Keep it Local also ensures that precious public sector spending doesn't leak out of the area. Instead, they harness community organisations' potential as local economic multipliers by employing local people and using local suppliers. Indeed, Locality research has found that every £1 generated by a community organisation creates around £2.50 for the local economy.<sup>13</sup>

Here we share some of the key practical lessons for turning each principle into practice; what the big challenges are; and exemplar case studies from the Keep it Local Network. ■

# 1. Think about the whole system not individual silos

Too often, our services exist in silos. This means they are narrowly targeted on one aspect of a person's needs and work to their own internal logic and organisational priorities. This creates a disjointed service landscape that can be hard to navigate and can't respond to the range of factors that impact people's lives. Keep it Local recognises the complex nature of social problems and the need to work as a whole system to address them.

Within our Keep it Local Network, we have seen councils approach this principle in three different ways:

**1. Whole system strategies** – new principles for social change and public service reform being developed at scale across whole places and systems.<sup>14</sup>

**2. Place-based working with local health systems** – the introduction of Integrated Care Systems has provided an opportunity for councils to work more closely with their local NHS and VCSE sectors. Through this collaboration, they can decide how resources can be best used to improve public health.

**3. Working with communities to inspire wider system innovations** – collaborative working in one discrete part of the system (eg, service area or pilot initiative) to show tangible progress and opportunities which inspire wider system change. ■





# Principle in action

## Whole system strategies – The Oldham Plan 2017-22

### The ambition

In 2017, the Oldham Partnership introduced a five-year plan for the borough with an ambition to “be a productive and cooperative place with healthy, aspirational and sustainable communities”. The partnership has included cross-sector leaders from across the borough, including the council, health, housing, education, VCSE and the private sector. The plan set out the Oldham Model – based around shifts in three fundamental areas:

- 1. Inclusive Economy** – a vision for Oldham to become Greater Manchester’s Inclusive Economy capital by making significant progress in living standards, wages, and skills for everyone
- 2. Co-operative Services** – a vision to collaborate, integrate and innovate to improve outcomes for residents and create the most effective and seamless services in Greater Manchester.
- 3. Thriving Communities** – a vision for people and communities to have the power to be healthy, happy, and able to make positive choices. As well as both offering and accessing insightful and responsive support when required.

### The action

To achieve these shifts, Oldham has focussed on two key enablers – public service reform and empowering people and communities. This is based on an understanding of Keep it Local that better public services and reduced

demand can only be achieved by investment in communities. By taking this approach across multiple elements of the system, as in the three areas above, the council is embracing the Keep it Local approach – thinking wider than just individual service silos. The Oldham Plan is currently being refreshed, building on these principles, and looking ahead to a vision for the borough by 2030.

The Thriving Communities strand warrants particularly close inspection. It was established with the intention of: creating the conditions for sustainable prevention; linking people into community capacity, and; generating change through social action. There are three workstreams to the programme:

- a. Social Prescribing Innovation Partnership** – A Social Prescribing network led by infrastructure organisation Action Together and comprised of Tameside, Oldham and Glossop Mind, Positive Steps, Age UK and Altogether Better.
- b. Social Action Fund** – £850,000 to fund five projects over three years which: tackle social isolation; innovate in the delivery approach or system involvement of the VCSE; improve people’s physical and mental health and wellbeing; support a reduction in pressure on health services, or; take a strengths-based approach to working with people.
- c. Fast Grants** – A three-year rolling programme of small grants up to £500. These were focussed on funding small scale community innovation quickly and accessibly. Funded projects focussed on: supporting the community to be fit and healthy; developing skills of local people; changing the area for the better, and; encouraging community participation.

## The result

Recently, evaluation of the strand has highlighted its impact in building a stronger, more trusted, and more empowered VCSE sector in the borough.<sup>15</sup> From their role in strategic decision-making boards to delivery of frontline services, the VCSE sector is now seen as an integral part of Oldham's system.

Another overarching success of the programme has been the impact on wellbeing of beneficiaries. Using the Office for National Statistics' ONS4 methodology, the evaluation has demonstrated increased health and wellbeing across all three workstreams. This has occurred through, among other things, increased social connectedness and participation and improved resilience and ability to take control of health and wellbeing.

In addition to this, further return on investment created by the programme includes:

- Inward investment into the borough from grant funding awarded to VCSE groups who are part of the programme
- Local jobs created in the sector providing work for local people
- Increase in trained volunteers across the sector, improving its resilience and sustainability

- Jobs and volunteer numbers contributing to overall increase in community capacity
- Demand reduction and cost avoidance for the wider public service system in Oldham, such as housing and welfare support

## The learning

Next steps for Thriving Communities as recommended by the evaluation include:

- Creating a cross-system working group to co-design and co-produce prevention model for the borough
- Considering a single grant funding pot to pool resources for community-led initiatives and community capacity building. This will ease funding applications for organisations and create a sustained funding stream.
- Considering funding options and models for the future of Social Prescribing and VCSE grants
- Designing a refreshed set of objectives, outcomes, and measures for Social Prescribing that align to the funding model chosen and monitor through contract management as service becomes business-as-usual. ■

## Whole system strategies – Connected Communities in Malvern Hills

### The ambition

The Malvern Hills Connected Communities Strategy 2021-2041 provides a shared vision for Malvern Hills district to support the building of strong, resilient, and sustainable communities. This will be achieved by focusing on 'what's strong, not what's wrong'.

So, rather than just list all the problems or weaknesses in a particular area, Malvern Hills wants to take all the great things that already exist in its communities and build on them to make them even better.

The strategy identifies seven strands for connected communities:

- Helping people in communities to become more connected to others.
- Delivering services differently, with more services taking place in communities.
- Strengthening networks and partnerships across neighbourhoods, towns, and villages.
- Developing the VCSE sector and links to communities.
- Local people influencing decision making, policy and the way services are delivered.
- Supporting responsible businesses to be open and communicate what they do for society and the environment – to genuinely invest in and become part of the communities in which they operate.
- Strengthening networks with schools and other education establishments to help build genuine partnerships with their communities.

### The action

To do this, Malvern Hills will use Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) to help them work with communities and partner organisations to achieve the set goals and targets. ABCD is a method of community development based on identifying, maximising, and benefitting from the existing resources, skills, and experience within a community. It focusses on growing sustainable communities, building connections between people that live in the area, and empowering people to act on things that are important to them. These will often be different to what the public sector thinks is important.

The work will be resident-led, relationship-oriented, asset-based, place-based, and diversity-and-inclusion-focused.



### The result

The council's stated commitment is to 'develop and implement a community development strategy which supports the building of strong, resilient, and sustainable communities'. To achieve this, it has anchored the strategy around three central themes – communities that are: healthier, safer & more inclusive, and stronger & more sustainable. One example of the approach already in action is the Lower Broadheath Community Shop – saved by local residents to continue providing vital



services to a village of 2,000 people. You can watch a short video about it [here](#).

By applying the ABCD approach to all seven strands of the strategy, the council is demonstrating how to Keep it Local by investing in its community to strengthen multiple places, communities, networks, and sectors.

### The learning

ABCD is not something that councils do alone. Instead, the council sees itself as part of a wider system. This involves

working with partners with similar principles, who are trying to achieve the same thing. That's why Malvern Hills have put significant time into identifying like-minded people with a similar energy for the changes it is trying to encourage through this strategy.

The ambition contained within this strategy is only as strong as the networks across our district. The council has made a big ask of its communities – to stay connected to each other and share knowledge, insight, and learning into that system. The network created together across the district is essential in achieving that ultimate vision. ■





## Place-based working with local health systems – South Gloucestershire

### The ambition

Initially, South Gloucestershire Council used Keep it Local as a framework to work better with the VCSE to improve outcomes and reduce costs. The scope and influence of their approach has now grown to involve other local system partners. This has included the local Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and Sirona Care & Health, a social enterprise health provider funded by the NHS and local authorities in Bristol, South Gloucestershire, and North Somerset. The partnership aims to reduce potential duplication of work and help all parties achieve their priorities.

### The action

By dedicating funds to the partnership, all members have committed to working together to agree a strategy for tackling local health inequalities.

Key areas of collaboration for the partnership include financial security, support for mutual aid groups, and delivery of funding schemes such as the Household Support Fund and local Community Resilience Fund.

The group is also now issuing contracts for several key place-based services, including:

- **Hospital discharge pathways** – supporting those leaving hospital to access appropriate care for recovery in the community
- **Village agents** – voluntary groups providing a health awareness presence in local villages

Through the partnership, the council have funded VCSE leaders to take part in strategic conversations. This recognises the fact that the sector can only input into work that it is remunerated for. The council is also funding fundraising and development capacity within the sector.

### The learning

This approach takes a broad view of what constitutes the 'system' in a place. By focussing not only on council responsibilities, but also incorporating those of local health providers, the Keep it Local approach can be used to inspire community leadership within an even wide gamut of services.

To read more about how the partnership has co-designed a collaborative welfare, benefit, and debt advice service, see the case study on page 51. ■



## Working with communities to inspire wider system innovations – York’s Local Area Coordination

### The ambition

In recent years, York Council also has embraced Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) to build wellbeing in the city ([see page 27 for more information on ABCD](#)).<sup>16</sup> This focuses on shifting power to people to define what they want from their neighbourhoods and build more connected, caring, and compassionate communities.

### The action

A key element of this approach is the city’s Local Area Coordination (LAC) programme. Through a team of Coordinators ‘walking alongside’ local people, citizens are encouraged and supported to build on their own agency and capabilities. Often people have forgotten about their experiences, hidden talents, and skills – conversations with Coordinators tap into this and unearth passions, contribution, and action.

Coordinators focus on the assets that exist in communities, building knowledge of hyperlocal, neighbourly, non-service options and potential connections. Where there are gaps, they can support communities to mobilise and establish their own groups and responses too.

### The result

The city has deliberately aligned multiple initiatives and teams to embed the LAC approach, creating system change and a ‘new normal’.

The approach has had tangible impacts on several delivery areas:

- **Adult Social Care** – By building community capacity to support citizens – particularly those experiencing loneliness and isolation – the council now seeks to put prevention and early intervention at the heart of social care provision.
- **Volunteering and social action** – Alongside the city’s VCSE sector, the council has reviewed the city’s volunteering and social action strategy – ‘People Helping People’. This has facilitated the coproduction of solutions to complex public and neighbourhood problems with citizens – based on growing social action and impact volunteering.
- **Housing** – The council has used ‘layered’ stories to demonstrate the impact of social action in the city – the individual’s story, the community connections created, and the ripple effect on the system. One story told using this approach inspired the council’s Housing team to restructure their services to adopt a more ABCD approach.<sup>17</sup>

These knock-on effects of one approach to ABCD is a great example of how wider system change along Keep it Local lines doesn’t have to be set by whole-council strategies. Instead, it shows how community development can be infectious when done well in one programme – inspiring other parts of the council to embrace this model and its benefits for a joined-up approach.

The effect of the approach on individual wellbeing and community resilience is clear. This short [video](#) explains just how great a sense of purpose and belonging it has given Denise, a Community Health Champion supported through the initiative.



## The learning

The council has explored how the 21st century public servant needs to be one informed by values of social justice, equality, and trust. They must see the facilitation of active citizenship – not the design of top-down services – as a first point of action. This reflects the importance of ‘human learning systems’ and a recognition that if it is only the

Coordinators and practitioners that take on ABCD principles, it will not be sufficient for sustained and genuine change. Rather, the council remains committed to the future of public services that are co-produced and ‘people-powered’ with social action as the norm rather than the exception. All informed by the principles and values of ABCD and community building. ■

## Working with communities to inspire wider system innovations – The Big Conversation in Wakefield

### The ambition

In summer 2022, Wakefield will be embarking on a district-wide effort to understand what matters to its residents. ‘The Big Conversation’ is a community engagement initiative designed to involve 1,200 people across the area, and anyone who wants to take part.<sup>18</sup> ‘Conversationalists’ will be recruited to work in communities, listening to the views of local people about the strengths of the area and what they want for the future.

insight. They will include volunteers of all ages from various local organisations. As well as the council, this includes the CCG, Healthwatch Wakefield, housing agencies, and, importantly, VCSE groups. The latter are vital to the success of the project, as they already possess the trust and knowledge of communities to engage them effectively.

### The result

Insights gathered from conversations will be analysed to draw out the big issues that matter to the district. These will then feed into key council strategies, including the Corporate Plan and new Economic Wellbeing Strategy. Using findings to inspire the latter, for example, will produce the best chance of building a strong local economy to provide better paid and secure jobs.

### The learning

This is designed to be a long-term, sustainable approach to achieving people-led priorities and services. It will be the start of an embedded approach, ensuring that community engagement underpins the work of the council and its partner organisations into the future.

It is also another great example of how system change can be inspired from the bottom-up. Here, Keep it Local has been used to build the foundations of wider council strategy by investing the time to understand how it needs to serve local people. ■

### The action

Eighty-five of these listeners will speak to residents in work, social, and community settings to gather a broad range of



## 2. Co-ordinate services at a neighbourhood level

It is at the neighbourhood level where services can be most effectively joined up around people's distinct needs and their full range of assets can be brought into play. As Anna Hartley, Director of Public Health at Wakefield Council, puts it:

**"Working at a neighbourhood level with communities who understand both the challenges they face, and the strengths and assets that can help meet those challenges, can help find creative solutions to seemingly insurmountable problems. It seems an obvious point, but neighbourhoods are where people spend most of their time. So by working in them and with them, we can have greater reach and impact."**<sup>19</sup>

Neighbourhood-level service coordination can happen in many ways but is most successful when it involves the knowledge and connections of the local VCSE sector. Community "anchor" organisations – those larger,

more established organisations usually owning assets and delivering multiple services – can play a significant role in supporting councils with this approach. Locality research has found that these organisations on average deliver 13 different services to 13 different population groups within their areas. In doing so, they address on average 91% of the social determinants of health.<sup>20</sup> This means they can support the public sector to tackle social problems neighbourhood by neighbourhood, with comprehensive reach and holistic impact.

Key to this is their role as local "cogs of connection". As previous Keep it Local research has shown, they connect residents to other local people, the place they live, as well as other services and organisations.<sup>21</sup> Their high level of innovation, creativity and flexibility helps them build trusting relationships, often with people furthest from statutory support. It means they are skilled at dealing with complex cases. And it means they are continually investing in the people and spaces of their neighbourhoods.

There are numerous examples of Keep it Local councils plugging into the power of these organisations to deliver high quality, localised services. ■



# Principle in action

## Bristol – Make it Local in adult social care

### The ambition

From 2019 to 2020, a group of cross-sector stakeholders in Bristol met to establish a shared vision for adult social care in the city, building on their role as one of Locality's Keep it Local pilot areas. This led Bristol City Council (BCC) to develop the Make it Local (MiL) programme. The programme is powered by an alliance of BCC's Adult Social Care and Community Development teams, VCSE organisations across the city, Power to Change and Locality.

### The action

BCC's identification and engagement of community anchor organisations (CAOs) is key to the success of the programme. Through initial grant funding, these organisations have been supported to explore, with a view to developing, asset-based models of care. These are models that can be delivered at neighbourhood level, using the mechanism of the Direct Payments menu, and aimed primarily at adults who may have accessed Home Care services. These partners are exploring how to fill gaps in the care and support market by offering a range of additional services based on their strengths. These could include: community support (for citizens who do not require personal care); the co-ordination of local micro-providers for self-funders and personal budget holders; and, over time, the delivery of regulated care at home using a Wellbeing Teams approach. The CAOs in question are Southmead Development Trust, Wellspring Settlement, and BS3 Community.

City-wide and equalities organisations also offer an opportunity to improve and expand the marketplace. They can use their specialist knowledge and close links with different parts of the community to provide innovative solutions for care that still retains a local link. They include WECIL (West of England Centre for Inclusive Living), Black South West Network (BSWN), and Age UK Bristol.

Through MiL, the city hopes to reimagine current care provision for a person-centred approach. It seeks to support the local VCSE sector into the Bristol care marketplace to:

- Use strengths-based approaches to improve choice and control for local citizens.
- Improve outcomes.
- Address the urgent need to move resources away from crisis resolution and towards prevention and early intervention.
- Ensure that more of the councils' expenditure on care and support for adults is kept within the Bristol economy.

### The result

A central focus of MiL so far has been the development of 'Introductory Agencies' (IA) across the city. These are matching platforms to connect individuals looking to access care services and those who provide them. They are run by qualified professional managers with a high level of understanding and training to effectively make matches. These agencies support local care provision by:



- Improving choice, freedom and independence for people seeking care who may otherwise have a limited range of home care or support options.
- Building the capacity of VCSE organisations and social enterprise start-ups to deliver community-level services that address localised care challenges, such as market failure. This applies to the VCSE organisations themselves, as well as the local micro-providers and sole traders who register as care providers on the IA platform.
- Potentially relieving pressure on regulated health and care services by offering targeted support to people in their own homes, or by helping people to return home from hospital in a timely manner.
- Improving value for money for the council through quality, cost, and efficiency of services. Also, creating significant added value for care seekers, care providers, and each hyper-local community.



- Improving social value through a diversified offer and range of services and providers.
- Offering opportunities to support individuals to receive appropriate care in their homes, connect with other care seekers, and increase their involvement with community activities.

There has also been progress in the

following areas (noting that this may not be relevant to each individual organisation involved):

- Better understanding for CAOs of the CQC registration process to deliver “regulated activities”. This has provided clarity on offering relevant non-regulated home care activities.
- Better understanding for CAOs of the personalisation agenda, how to contribute to the uptake of Individual Service Funds (ISF),<sup>22</sup> and how to gain access to the council’s forthcoming ISF Approved Provider Register.
- Co-production of asset-based approaches to support established homecare and other providers, including VCSE organisations.

Stakeholders from both the council and the local VCSE sector have reported several benefits from the MiL approach, including:

- Enlightened thinking from all parties to “do things differently” and take a truly collaborative approach to service design and commissioning in adult social care. This has included co-development and co-production of grant agreements, delivery models for care and support, and resource and responsibility sharing. This has deepened relationships and grown trust.
- Improved availability, openness, and communication between the council and the VCSE sector.
- A greater understanding of the VCSE sector’s work by the council and wider local health system. This has been facilitated by representation from VCSE organisations on all the emerging Integrated Care Partnerships<sup>23</sup> – now known as Locality Partnerships – across Bristol.
- Improved collaboration between

neighbourhood based CAOs and city-wide VCSE organisations representing communities of interest, including racialised communities and disabled people.

## The learning

### Challenges

As well as the positive impact made by MiL, the approach has also encountered challenges in its development. These can be framed around three 'Ps' – practicalities, pounds, and pandemic:

- Practicalities** – The culture and systems change required to embed a new approach to commissioning like MiL takes time, effort, and persistence. This means that existing day-to-day processes remain in place, acting as blockers, despite a strategic desire to work differently. Consistency of approach across council commissioners is also threatened by the usual churn of key staff members and champions over time.
- Pounds** – BCC faces the perennial issues of funding, resource, and capacity to plan for the longer term. This can jeopardise its aspirations to think creatively about adult social care and do things differently. Finding the security to commit to social value and circular economy outcomes for contracts, rather than purely financial value, is difficult.
- Pandemic** – The Covid-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on priorities and use of resources for all councils. This included making progress with the MiL programme. Despite this, MiL grants were used by VCSE organisations to keep developing their offers whilst delivering crucial community services during the pandemic. It was a condition of the grant that VCSE organisations use the resource to maintain pandemic

response services, while also developing their MiL offer.

However, there is a sense that a fourth 'P' – power – will be crucial to overcoming these challenges. Both BCC and the VCSE sector possess the drive and commitment to keep pushing for change and overcome these obstacles. There is clear optimism among all parties in Bristol, and a shared sense that the MiL approach is the right thing to do. Together, the council and the VCSE



sector can use this collaboration to tackle the adult health and social care crisis locally, as well as enabling other council-based initiatives focused on empowering communities.

### Lessons

There have been many lessons learnt from the MiL approach so far – for the council, for VCSE organisations, and for both working together. Primary among these are:

- A need for clear and consistent senior leadership from named individuals both at BCC and among VCSE organisations. This is vital to creating widespread culture and systems change, particularly within the council.
- A need for an agreed framework for co-production. One that formalises roles, values and aspirations to help tease out concrete opportunities for the VCSE sector to contribute. It must also set the scene for relational commissioning and procurement going forwards.

- A need to properly understand the preventative and early intervention value of VCSE provision in this area and commit to valuing and funding it. This should be done via a sustained investment approach to allow delivery at scale to achieve measurable system-wide impact.
- The importance of CAOs working with city-wide equalities organisations to develop services which consider broader equalities issues to ensure the success of the programme for all care receivers.
- The consideration of the CAOs' charitable missions is key. Not all organisations will want to, or be able to, deliver formal care services for the council based on their Articles of Association.

## Looking forward

As mentioned above, the development of new Locality Partnerships in three geographic areas across Bristol presents an opportunity to identify further areas of need and joint solutions. A joined-up approach between BCC, the local NHS, and the VCSE is key. This will include exploring pooled budgets between

health and social care to fund CAO and other VCSE support for vulnerable adults sustainably and at scale.

BCC also acknowledges the need to better understand the strengths, missions, and, therefore, suitable roles for the VCSE organisations with different geographical and social remits. This will help balance the importance of maintaining mission focus for organisations, delivering services to the highest quality possible, and investing money most effectively in the local economy. This can and must extend beyond just adult social care, into all areas of council work. It must also be recognised by the range of wider partnerships that cross the Bristol, North Somerset & South Gloucestershire Council areas.

There is a shared understanding that this approach must be supported by at least a medium-term funding and delivery strategy. As part of this, the council, along with organisations like Locality, can continue to support the VCSE sector to better engage in commissioning and procurement processes and frameworks. ■

## Leeds Community Anchor Network

### The ambition

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, Leeds City Council and a group of locally trusted organisations have provided emergency support to local people in neighbourhoods across Leeds. This has covered a range of activities, including food parcels, welfare calls, and signposting. Through this work, these

organisations have built partnerships with other local organisations to provide a wider package of support to vulnerable families and individuals in different neighbourhoods. These organisations are called Community Care Hubs and aim to work in a citizen-led way, involving local people in the design and delivery of services. The council are keen to support the continuation of this work and new way of collaborative working.



## The action

Following a pilot project, a number of these organisations have formed a movement which aims to continue to build on citizen-led activities and partnerships. This movement is called the Leeds Community Anchor Network, or LCAN.



The partnerships forged through the Covid-19 response have accelerated connectedness – in the words of one Community Care Hub, “it took us 6 months to make partnerships it would otherwise have taken 6 years to establish”.

Many of the 19 anchor organisations are involved in different initiatives which are established features of the landscape in Leeds. This include ABCD Pathfinder sites (organisations that use Asset Based Community Development practice to connect communities and develop community owned solutions); Local Care Partnership boards, and Neighbourhood Networks specialising in working with older people. The diverse nature of the network will ensure that its activities work well with what is already established in the city.

## The result

The network uses the term ‘locally-trusted’ to refer to the place-based work done by member organisations. Each member brings different strengths and is best placed to know the strengths and the needs of local communities. We know that solutions are not always ‘one size fits all’ and the trust must extend not only from communities but from key decision makers too.

Leeds Community Anchors are a “gateway” not a “gatekeeper” to services and groups in their area. The network is already seeing the benefits of constructive conversation between partners and believes in ‘collaboration not competition’. Joint approaches to securing funding, service delivery and working with other agencies means so much more can be achieved as collectives than would be as individual organisations.

## The learning

The network is developing a mechanism for the experiences and voices of community members to be heard at the ‘top table’. LCAN will not reach these aims in a short space of time and much of the work will be long-term. But it believes it is important to hold as an ‘end game’ a fairer more just society of thriving communities and equal access to services.

Perhaps the most important feature of LCAN is that is a group of community organisations have come together and agreed their long-term vision for change. They are building from that vision to create a lasting partnership with both city-wide third sector infrastructure and the council. ■

A list of community anchor organisations in LCAN can be found [here](#) and is regularly updated

### 3. Increase local spend to invest in the local economy

For over a decade now, councils have faced incredible financial pressures. It is therefore vital to maximise the value of precious public sector resources. We must ensure they invest in the local economy, rather than being allowed to leak out of it.

Commissioning community organisations is a key way of doing this. As well as spending their money on local projects, community organisations tend to employ local people and use local suppliers. Indeed, previous Keep it Local research has shown how they act as local economic multipliers.<sup>24</sup> They ensure the wealth they generate is redistributed in their neighbourhoods, by employing local people in good quality jobs, using local supply chains, and providing training opportunities so local people can become economically active.

As such, investing in them builds wealth in the local economy far more effectively than when contracts go to multinational companies or big national charities. Whether through grant funding or commissioning, increased spend with local organisations can make a significant impact in developing an inclusive and sustainable local economy.

But what does this mean in practice? How can councils define and measure local spend? And how do we ensure it sticks? ■



# Principle in action

Learning from our in-depth pilot area work in Bradford has generated the following guide.

## | A guide to spending locally

**1. Think of local spend in terms of concentric circles** – The first circle will be the boundaries of the council area. The second could be the wider county, combined authority area, or cluster of local authorities as makes most sense. The third may be the region, and the fourth would be national. Recording spend against these geographies can help provide a more nuanced view of where council money is going. Creative judgement may need to be used for suppliers with distant head offices, depending on whether the delivery of a spend occurs through a local office.

**2. Measure multiple relevant indicators** – This can bring further nuance and allow councils to really understand the impact of their spend and set priorities to go further. Councils may already measure local spend and spend with small and medium enterprises (SME), but it's important to also measure both total and local VCSE spend.

**3. Include as much third-party expenditure as possible within your local spend calculation** – Apart from salary expenditure, payment for goods, works, services and grants that go through the council's ledger should be included and measured.

**4. Council-wide targets for local spend are important to ensure accountability** – They should be stretching but achievable and reviewed according to trends in overall council spend. Targets should be included in both council plans and procurement strategies.

**5. Invest time in understanding the granular detail of council spend** – This will have an exponential impact on the ability to maximise local spend. Without a more qualitative understanding of changes in local spend – for example, the effect of different departmental approaches, how services are designed, and how contracts are awarded – it is difficult to understand how to move the dial on local spend in an intentional and sustainable way.

**6. Understand what happens next** – This level of analysis will support a better understanding of the impact of local spend, and whether the money stays locally. Providing training and capacity for contract managers to develop a 'circular economy' approach, including understanding how services are sub-contracted, is valuable here.

Key to the success of a local spend strategy is investment in the procurement monitoring system. The more sophisticated the functionality of the system, the more accurately councils can measure and target local spend. Tagging suppliers by geography, size, and sector, and spend by type (as in point 3, above) will greatly increase a council's ability to for set and reach local spent targets and understand their impact. ■



## 4. Focus on early intervention now to save costs tomorrow

Community-based interventions can act “upstream” and prevent demand escalating elsewhere in the system. We are continuing to see rising demand for both statutory services and the services provided by community organisations, and ever more costly late interventions by health and social care systems. So, acting early is becoming increasingly important.

However, after over a decade of shrinking council budgets, preventative spend has often be the most likely to be cut. Research by New Policy Institute for Lloyds Bank Foundation for England and Wales has shown this. For example, in housing, in 2011/12 English councils were spending over £1.2bn on preventative services such as welfare services, discretionary payment and other support programmes. This was over double the amount spent on crisis services such as temporary accommodation. Comparatively by 2016/17, crisis spending had overtaken preventative spending which was around £700m in that year.<sup>25</sup>

The pressures that have driven this have been further compounded by the pandemic, meaning councils have struggled to prioritise and progress early intervention. A 2021 report from New Local further highlights the challenge and the need for a shift away from the focus on crisis spending. It points to the need for community power to be embedded,

and active community participation to happen, so services are designed in a way which not only responds to rising demand but can get ahead of it.<sup>26</sup>

A key part of the problem is that when preventative spending does happen, it is often not the departments making the investment which see the benefits. For example, a council investment in preventative public health programmes or improved housing conditions may produce a longer-term saving for the NHS if it stops health issues becoming an acute problem further down the line. But the council itself may well not realise a budget improvement.

It is therefore a challenge to articulate to decisionmakers and budget holders the benefits of early intervention. Especially when budgets are already shrinking, and the impact may not be directly felt. In roundtables with officers from our Keep it Local councils, we have heard how difficult it can be to make the case.

This shows how the current system does not incentivise councils to pursue preventative activity. However, there are examples from across our Keep it Local Network of how councils are breaking out of these confines. They are thinking about the whole system, looking beyond silos, and delivering services in a way which recognises the importance of early intervention. As you’ll see in the Wakefield case study, below, this approach can have overwhelmingly positive effects on individual well-being and the management of long-term health conditions. ■

# Principle in action

## South Gloucestershire – recognising the value of the local VCSE sector:

### The ambition

Throughout the pandemic, South Gloucestershire Council saw community organisations and mutual aid groups playing a vital role in the crisis response. Being able to demonstrate the value of VCSE impact is a powerful way of making the case for preventative activity happening now, to save costs further down the line. This is an integral part of the Keep it Local philosophy.



### The action

The council recognises the continued importance of the VCSE and has pursued a programme of culture change to ensure that an understanding of the value of the sector is imbedded in all service areas. The council are the first to admit that they have a long way to go when it comes to ensuring that the value of the sector is understood across the council. But, in implementing this programme of culture change they have found ways of demonstrating the value of the sector.

### The result

The council calculated that during the pandemic, a £165,000 investment in the local VCSE sector meant that £1.095m of direct council spending on their own services was not needed. This created a net saving of at least £935,000 for the council, avoiding £6 in costs for every £1 invested in the VCSE sector.<sup>27</sup> This is a clear example of how investment in the sector can reduced pressures on public services and make public money go further.

### The learning

But understanding the value of the sector is not enough. It also requires an understanding of challenges faced by the sector. This has meant building knowledge among council officers that many VCSE organisations don't have large cash reserves or the ability to leverage debt or equity. They can therefore only provide the services for which they have funding. There is growing recognition that there needs to be support for the capacity of the sector to get involved in new services. For example, in the case of one home care service, VCSE organisations were not able to be integrated into hospital discharge pathways due to a lack of capacity.

We know that VCSE organisations can have a big impact and reduce costs in the long-term in services such as hospital discharge and home care. But it requires capacity and the investment in these services in the first place. South Gloucestershire's calculations are just one step in the culture change journey. This has put an emphasis on working across the public and VCSE sectors, further emphasising the need to break out of traditional service or sector siloes. ■

## Live Well Wakefield

### The ambition

Live Well Wakefield is an exemplar of how different parts of the public sector can work alongside the VCSE partners to improve outcomes for individuals in their community. The service is led by Nova, the local CVS infrastructure organisation. It is funded by the council through public health grants and works in partnership with the local mental health trust. The service is available to any adult aged 18 and over living or registered with a GP in Wakefield District. It aims to support the physical and mental health needs of the population. Much of this work is preventative. It aims to support a wide range of issues which could have a negative effect on residents before they become acute problems. In 2021, the service had over 3700 referrals from multiple sources, including self-referrals.

### The action

Self-management courses and workshops help individuals to live better with long-term health conditions. Volunteering opportunities also harness the assets within the community, with a directory of support groups and social activities available across the district. It is an example of the public sector enabling and linking up their provision with that of the VCSE sector in the area. Tackling isolation and loneliness, building self-confidence, helping people to gain skills or access advice and guidance, the service is holistic in its approach to wellbeing.

The service includes a social prescribing team. They work with people to identify areas of their life where additional support could help,

and then assist with setting wellbeing goals and accessing the support needed. This can take place over the phone, within a GP surgery, at a local community venue or in the home. The service won best larger social prescribing project in 2021.

### The result

The results of this service speak for themselves. In 2021, 93 per cent of the clients supported by the service reported that they achieved their primary wellbeing goal. This may have been starting a new activity to help connect them to their community or attending workshops to learn how to manage a long-term condition. Over 80 per cent of clients also reported improvements in their wellbeing.

### The learning

The Live Well service is an example of how councils can invest money now to save money for other parts of the system, and themselves in the long run. The small grants programme which runs alongside the service enables the VCSE to fully play their part in the system and fund their time and services. The recognition that investment is needed to save money in the long-term is an important principle of Keep it Local. We know that early intervention can be more cost-effective, but the lack of immediate results can be a barrier to making this happen. The Live Well service demonstrates how the council, and partners in the wider public sector, worked in partnership with the VCSE sector to not only fund their activities but provide a whole-system approach to prevention and wellbeing in the area. ■



## 5. Commit to your community and proactively support local organisations

Local community organisations are facing huge financial pressures as they tackle deeply entrenched social challenges in their communities. The pandemic has shown this work to be more important than ever. Councils now have greater understanding of the immense value of their local VCSE sectors.

It is vital that we harness this moment to embed closer partnership working between councils and communities. But this won't happen by chance, which is why we believe a proactive approach to community support is a critical piece of the Keep it Local puzzle. Keeping it Local requires strong networks of local community organisations which can step up and play a bigger role in service delivery. Councils have a clear stake in supporting that to happen, but there is responsibility on both sides to commit to new ways of working and collaborating.

There are many ways in which a council can proactively support the sector in their area. Here are some of the key ones that have emerged through our Keep it Local work:

- **Supporting community ownership** – when community organisations own assets, it gives them independence and the ability to earn their own income. Ensuring the council has a Community Asset Transfer policy is the key step in supporting this.
- **Supportive commissioning** – when big contracts and bureaucratic processes exclude small charities and community organisations from commissioning, they don't just miss out on the opportunity to provide high quality services for local people. They lose out on potential sources of income that can help sustain them for the future.
- **Supporting local organisations representing minoritised groups** – the pandemic further exposed the stark inequalities which exist in our society. It also showed that additional support is required for those organisations which are led by and represent minoritised groups and have seen an unequal distribution of resources and support in the past. Councils can play a role in correcting inequitable distribution of funding and by supporting the capacity of these vital organisations.
- **Capacity and capability building within the local sector** – within the wider VCSE sector there is a need to support the capacity of often overstretched organisations to ensure they can have the greatest possible impact within their communities. This can often involve making sure they have the skills and capabilities to fulfil this role, including making sure they have the skills to take on community assets and take part in commissioning processes.
- **Providing spaces for open and honest communication between the council and VCSE organisations** – several Keep it Local councils, and VCSE organisations in their areas, have expressed the benefits of having a space dedicated to conversation between council and local sector. Whether this is convening partners around a specific project or a general forum, this is a valuable way of building relationships and furthering understanding.

Around the country, community organisations are playing a critical and distinctive role in local service provision. At a time when we are seeing an increasing demand for services in both the VCSE and public sector, community organisations continue to play a vital part in that provision landscape. For example, in the case of adult social care, community organisations are further enhancing personalisation by becoming the only providers of care in areas of market failure. In other service areas, community organisations provide physical spaces for council services to be delivered from and deliver contracted services too. This demonstrates the importance of investment in social

infrastructure and the need for strong local organisations who can respond to the increasing demand and pressures on their own terms, rather than being heavily reliant on one type of public sector grant or contract.

We know the distinctive role which community organisations play in public service delivery and in so many government priorities. Personalisation is one of these, and we have highlighted the distinctive contribution which community organisations are making in the social care system.<sup>28</sup> This is, however, neither achievable nor sustainable for many without support from councils. ■





## Kirklees – Community Asset Transfer and mutual aid support:

### The ambition

Kirklees Council has made a commitment to “work with and alongside” their local sector rather than “doing to”. They want to use the expert knowledge of those living and working in communities to shape council services and the focus of investment. This has been at the forefront of the council and VCSE sector’s new set of shared values and has been used to develop a Draft Kirklees VCSE Investment Strategy. All this builds on the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic, which saw the council recognising the strengths of the sector to a greater extent than it previously had.

### The action

There are several strands to the way in which Kirklees has supported local community organisations – over and above embedding ways of working into the council’s values and strategy.

Community assets are a vital part of a thriving community and Kirklees has recognised this through its Community Asset Transfer (CAT) programme. However, rather than just handing over control of an asset to a community, the transfer programme comes with a holistic programme of support for organisations before, during, and after asset transfer. The council’s Grant Access Point (GAP) provides a one-stop point of registration for community organisations with the council.

Furthermore, during the pandemic Kirklees took an equally supportive approach to the over 140 mutual aid and spontaneous neighbourhood groups which sprung up in early 2020. The council played a role as facilitator to bring together these groups with other local organisations in “connection calls”.

### The result

The GAP process has proved a useful method for the council to collect valuable information about local organisations and carry out an organisational health check if needed to identify where additional support can be provided. So, this is not Kirklees Council acting as a barrier to funding or CAT, but a way of starting conversations with local organisations. It provides a development tool which can help to strengthen and build those relationships in the long run.

For its mutual aid support - beyond the initial pandemic response, these calls have been a way of continued communication with the VCSE sector and a further forum for open, trusting relationships to be built.

### The learning

Developing these programmes and processes required an investment of time, resource, and knowledge by the council. However, it is key to the community capacity building element of the Keep it Local approach. It provides the foundation of a high-functioning local VCSE sector, which is able and ready to support the council to achieve shared aims. ■



## Calderdale Community Anchor Strategy:

### The ambition

Calderdale council has made a public commitment to proactively supporting its local VCSE sector. In the council's 2018 Inclusive Economy Strategy, community anchors were put at the heart of the vision and delivery of a more inclusive economy in Calderdale. The strategy came with some clear commitments to use the council's purchasing and employment power to deliver more social value, opportunities and, benefits – working in partnership with community anchor organisations.



### The action

This Inclusive Economy Strategy has not been considered in isolation. In 2016, the council brought forward a Community Anchor Policy to embed their work in this area. The aim of the policy and the work surrounding it was to enhance the roles of these vital organisations and deliver better outcomes for communities. The council's recognition of community anchors showed that it understood their important role and value. The policy recognises the community leadership these anchors provide, empowering and enabling residents. It recognises the important role of these organisations being local service providers. They maximise community assets, bringing long term resilience and sustainability

to their neighbourhoods and re-investing income locally. The policy further recognises the role of community anchors as working holistically with their communities to find the solutions to big challenges. Demonstrating their understanding of this, and having it written into a cabinet-approved policy, is a fantastic example of how councils can support their communities in the Keep it Local way.

### The result

In producing the Community Anchor Policy, Calderdale set out how they would support community organisations as partners in the local area. This collaborative approach is a far cry from the paternalistic relationships which often exist between councils and their local VCSE sectors. In practice, the policy has meant putting in place a Relationship Management approach with established community anchors and ensuring they have access to council officers and practical and proactive support. It has also meant ensuring they are engaged in regeneration activities and in wider strategic partnerships as well as supporting them to play a key role in Town Boards across the district. Importantly, this is also accompanied by a commitment to support the development of emerging organisations in different communities through both strategic support and capacity building.

### The learning

Overall, in the Community Anchor Policy, the council now has a framework for how it interacts with, understands the role of, and gives future support to the local VCSE sector. In recognising the many different roles organisations in the sector play they have shown an understanding of the different support and development needs they might have. Just as Kirklees Council has done, Calderdale has taken an approach of working alongside communities and community anchors as equal partners. ■

## Bradford – pre-market engagement

### The ambition

Bradford Council's Procurement Strategy 2021-25 demonstrates their commitment to support the local economy and local community organisations. With the strategy, the council has set its aspirations to enable the local VCSE sector in its activities and enable the local market. In deciding to proactively support their local sector, the council has published their key measures for success, which include year-on-year increases in VCSE sector spend.

### The action

As well as this, they have committed to helping the sector become increasingly engaged in pre-procurement market consultations through meeting forums. The council has also produced a guide to pre-market engagement to aid conversations in the local area around commissioning and procurement. The guide shows how local commissioners can "keep it local" in the various stages of a pre-market engagement process. This includes engagement planning, service co-design, incorporating social value, and guidance on community support. The document sets out certain elements of the process which the council can improve, to better involve their local sector.

### The result

Reflecting on a changing relationship, council officers noted that regular forums with local organisations on all matters to do with procurement had changed the nature of the relationship. These meetings began to "de-mystify" the procurement process, eg, by explaining which contracts could be grants and which couldn't. These meetings also gave community organisations a space to ask questions of officers and talk about frustrations with processes.

### The learning

Procurement and commissioning should not be seen as two different disciplines. One about service design and the other about processes and rules. Rather, they need to be seen as two elements of the process working together so that the procurement process is the most appropriate one to achieve the desired outcomes for a particular service. Having this acknowledgement locally can really support the local sector and highlights the connectedness with the need to commission services simply and collaboratively.

Ultimately, this type and level of practical support for local organisations to bid for tenders is vital for achieving the aims of any Keep it Local based procurement and commissioning strategy. Without it, the innovative and valuable ways such groups can deliver services in the community are unnecessarily lost to bureaucracy. ■

## 6. Commission services simply and collaboratively so they are “local by default”

Our Keep it Local campaign began in response to the trend towards scale in commissioning. Community organisations who had created innovative local services and developed huge experience in supporting local people, suddenly found themselves crowded out of the local service landscape. Big contracts and bureaucratic processes were automatically putting services in the hands of mega outsourcing companies and big national charities.

We want to turn this on its head by making services “local by default”. This doesn’t mean giving unfair advantage to local organisations or suggesting local community organisations should win every single contract. It means recognising current commissioning processes favour big providers. Instead, processes should encourage and support smaller local providers, so they are supported to show what they can do and the benefits they can bring. This will mean commissioning looks local first – with larger national providers used only when it’s particularly appropriate.

There is a prevailing myth that local authorities don’t have any choice in this; that the procurement rules mean standard competitive tendering is the only option. Previous Keep it Local commissioning guidance has shown this not to be the case.<sup>29</sup> There are a range of bold approaches available to commissioners to Keep it Local.

Some of these fundamentally rewire the system, like alliance contracts and innovation partnership, building in collaboration at the start. These will often require whole council commitment and senior management support – but examples like Oldham’s Innovation Partnership or Plymouth’s complex needs alliance contract show this investment can lead to gold standard commissioning results.



However, we also understand from our practical work with Keep it Local councils that sometimes these big ticket approaches can feel out of reach to individual commissioners or procurement officers. So we want to emphasise that relatively small changes to commissioning and procurement systems can play a huge role in supporting local organisations, and the rules are more flexible than many think. There are many ways in which councils can change practices in their own systems to take a Keep it Local approach. There are quick wins as well as big bangs.

Keep it Local councils have demonstrated the art of the possible on several contracts, showing the level of flexibility which exists. ■



## Calderdale - VCSE Infrastructure Support Alliance

### The ambition

Calderdale Council has made a commitment to support the local VCSE sector. It has recognised the essential role which the sector plays and proactively supported it, particularly through the Community Anchor Strategy. However, the critical role which the sector plays has been brought into sharp focus by both the backdrop of a decade of austerity-driven financial cuts and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In recent years, the Calderdale VCSE infrastructure support services (services which support capacity building and other forms of support to VCSE organisations) have been fragmented. There have been different support providers offering competing services, leading to overlap and duplication. Alongside this, they have faced gaps in provision and confusion amongst frontline VCSE organisations. Some of this was caused by disjointed commissioning practices, with Calderdale CCG and the council independently commissioning infrastructure support. This was further compounded by a lack of collaborative working between the providers in the area themselves. This has meant a considerable amount of energy has been absorbed into managing relationships.

### The action

The council has changed its commissioning processes to support local providers and to build capacity. By agreeing to pool VCSE infrastructure budgets with the CCG, the council can take a more consistent and coherent approach to supporting the sector and avoiding duplication. The two bodies created an overall investment pot of £720,000 over three years and developed a set of shared outcomes identified by

commissioners in both organisations.

In addition to this joint commissioning, officers from Calderdale council have made greater use of the Light Touch Regime above what was the €750,000 threshold in EU regulation and combined this with alliance contracting. The council wanted to bring all the infrastructure support providers together around an agreement and delivery of whole system outcomes. They did so while ensuring that the council was adhering to the principles of transparency and equal treatment. In doing so, the council was able to use the alliance contract as a way of bringing them closer to providers. This was a concerted effort to move away from the “us and them” mentality which had previously characterised relationships.

### The result

The aim of all of this was to encourage the VCSE infrastructure services to be more demand-led, driven by the needs of the organisations on the frontline. Along Keep it Local lines, this was also a drive to move towards more prevention and early intervention service delivery. Becoming more enabling and empowering of frontline and community anchor organisations so that they were more resilient and self-supporting.

The initial result has seen the council and CCG joining with VCSE infrastructure support providers to form an integrated alliance team. They have a set of shared principles to guide their work. These include: equality of everyone around the table; trust honesty and openness at all times, and; an “all in it together” attitude to working towards shared, whole-system outcomes.

This commitment to local and collaborative commissioning is a great example of the Keep it Local ethos in practice. ■

## Bristol's Domestic Abuse Services:

### The ambition

Bristol City Council has recognised the need to enable greater collaboration between organisations when producing people-centred services. It understands the value in drawing on the combined knowledge, expertise, and financial standing of different parties. Consortium bidding via either a lead or severally liable partnership route allows smaller, local, organisations to be part of bids for contracts. Recognising the amount of capacity which is required of smaller organisations to build these consortiums and partnerships, the council has sought to look at how they can best support that.

### The action

The council's Domestic Abuse Services contract was identified as an opportunity to use this way of working. To support the process, officers produced a document setting out some key information about the understanding, motivation and practicalities of partnership working. It was sent out on the council's Find a Tender procurement portal to local VCSE

infrastructure bodies such as Voscur and Black South West Network. This meant that notice of the upcoming tender and information about partnership working could be cascaded to local organisations.

As part of this process of engaging local organisations, the council gathered the names of organisations looking for partners and put them in touch with each other. A list of interested parties was included in the tender documents when they were released. To further aid the process of forming partnerships, the council extended the tender window from the statutory 30 days to two months. During this time, the council held events for suppliers attended by 32 organisations, over half of which were local.

### The result

The process of commissioning this contract is still ongoing, with results and impact expected to be clearer in time. However, it demonstrates a commitment to facilitating local collaboration that is exactly what is required for an often complex and sensitive person-centred service. It is an approach that speaks directly to creating transformative services. ■

## Bradford - Specialist Services for Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence

### The ambition

In 2021, Bradford council re-commissioned its specialist services for domestic abuse and sexual violence. It aimed to maximise the impact of experienced service delivery backed by local knowledge and connections to local support networks.

### The action

As such, the commissioning process included extensive engagement and co-production with established local providers. It sought to understand the viability of the operating model in the local context and explored flexibility within the procurement process. This allowed providers time to form innovative bidding models such as consortia and consider how best to meet the financial criteria.

This resulted in the award of a multi-million-pound contract to a consortium

of three local providers. This involved a joint commission, with the local CCG, of several services delivered by local organisations to create a 'One Front Door' delivery model. This new model put an emphasis on creating networks within communities to support people following experiences of violence.

In line with the council's policy for social value and inclusive growth, 10 per cent of the evaluation criteria were attributed to the four key areas of Business Dynamism, Good Jobs, Human Development, and Social Cohesion. This allowed local VCSE organisations to demonstrate their intrinsic social value rather than any additional social value they could bring. The strategic aims included a commitment to implement flexible working practices for carers and support Bradford people back to work by providing career mentoring, advice, and guidance. The commission also included criteria on committing resource to working with service users, commissioners, contract managers and the sector to identify proposals for alternative models of service delivery and contract performance. It also provided for the creation of four new

volunteering opportunities alongside the local VCSE sector. The successful consortium exceeded two out of four of these targets, committing to help create 20 new volunteering opportunities. These commitments will build community capacity and skill base over the coming years.

### The result

This contract demonstrates how a focus on local and collaborative commissioning can facilitate impact among other Keep it Local principles. The commissioning model developed for this contract was about creating an integrated, whole-system approach to services for both domestic abuse and sexual violence, to serve all communities in Bradford working across multi-agencies. This represented a change from the previously commissioned individual services and highlights how the council has used this as a way of breaking out of individual service siloes. The commission has also put a focus on early intervention as part of the contract – working to address the levers of violence and abuse. ■

## South Gloucestershire - Welfare, Benefit, and Debt Advice service

### The ambition

As described on page 29, South Gloucestershire Council has taken a whole-system approach to health and wellbeing provision in the district. Working with the VCSE sector, CCG, and local health care provider, Sirona, this has included the co-design of an improved new welfare, benefit, and debt advice service designed to save the council £75,000.

### The action

This began with the existing local VCSE providers being encouraged to work as a consortium. To support the providers to develop a collaborative culture in delivering the contract, the council has offered to fund an external 'honest broker' to facilitate partnership.

Previously, the providers would manage all 'tiers' of support requests, regardless of their severity. Now, the first port of call is the council's internal support function. Here, simpler cases can be dealt with immediately by council staff through its Contact Centre and One Stop Shop. These functions also provide emergency loans and funding, including home energy grants for those in crisis.



## The result

This new co-produced service has made the service more targeted, holistic, and efficient. Individuals can receive practical financial help for the short-term in various ways, while more severe cases are referred to the providers for more specialist support.

This service is also an excellent example of how Keep it Local style collaborative commissioning can not only deliver better services for the community, but can also save money for the council.

## The learning

The council is reviewing this service model as it grows, learning lessons on the need for better data sharing between parties. As the current cost-of-living crisis bites, the council recognises that more resource must be put into the service to ensure it continues to support those most in need. ■



# End notes

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20. Ibid, 6.
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22. An ISF is a form of care delivery where the recipient chooses a provider, rather than the council or themselves, to manage their personal budget. This allows the individual choice and control of their support without having to manage the money themselves. See: <https://www.independentlives.org/individual-service-funds-explained>
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## Locality

Locality supports local community organisations to be strong and successful. Our national network of 1,600 members helps hundreds of thousands of people every week. We offer specialist advice, peer learning and campaign with members for a fairer society. Together we unlock the power of community.

## About Lloyds Bank Foundation for England and Wales

Lloyds Bank Foundation for England and Wales partners with small and local charities who help people overcome complex social issues. Through funding for core costs, developmental support and influencing policy and practice, the Foundation helps charities make life-changing impact. The Foundation is an independent charitable trust funded by the profits of Lloyds Banking Group.

Since 2018 the Foundation has worked with Locality on Keep it Local as part of its work to improve the commissioning environment for small and local charities.

For more information visit [lloydsbankfoundation.org.uk](http://lloydsbankfoundation.org.uk).

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