

Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy 2025-2029

‘Work in partnership with the VCS and other stakeholders to foster a thriving, inclusive, and sustainable sector that continues to improve residents’ lives’

September 2025



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Foreword



We are delighted to introduce our new Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Strategy. Our vision is for the Council to ‘work with the VCS and other partners to support a thriving and diverse VCS that improves the lives of residents.’

Tower Hamlets is the fastest-growing borough in London because it is such a wonderful place to live, work or study. Whilst we have considerable strengths, our residents face significant challenges, largely caused by the scourge of inequality.

We are fortunate to have one of the largest and most diverse VCS in London which plays a key role in the lives of residents. The VCS is often the first point of contact for residents seeking support and delivers many vital services, activities, and events that improve residents' lives.

This VCS Strategy has been developed alongside our ‘Compact’ which sets out our shared commitment to work together to achieve better outcome for residents. Both of these commitments have been co-designed, with the extensive involvement of the sector. They set out our and senior officers’ commitment to build strong relationships with the VCS organisations from all sections of the community based on trust and respect, so we can work together to identify shared priorities and work in partnership to meet the community's needs.

The VCS is facing challenges with increased demand for services at a time when the sector is being affected by financial pressures. We will thus continue to support the sector to be independent and sustainable by providing funding, access to affordable premises, and working with the sector to provide capacity-building support.

We look forward to working together with our valued partners in the VCS over the next four years to build an even brighter future for our borough. This Strategy sets a clear vision and objectives for that important work.

Lutfur Rahman, Executive Mayor Tower Hamlets

Cllr Saied Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Resources and the Cost of Living

Our Vision

The Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) in Tower Hamlets plays a vital and valued role in delivering services, activities, and events that enhance the lives of our residents.

This VCS Strategy, developed in tandem with our refreshed Compact and co-produced with the sector, reflects our shared commitment to partnership. It outlines how the Council and the VCS will work together strategically to improve outcomes for local people.

To shape this strategy, we engaged with 239 individuals—including representatives from the VCS, partner organisations, and elected members—ensuring a broad range of voices and experiences helped inform our collective direction.

The Strategy sets out a shared vision for the next four years and a practical framework for how we will collaborate to strengthen the sector and deliver positive change in our communities.

Our vision is to work in partnership with the VCS and other stakeholders to foster a thriving, inclusive, and sustainable sector that continues to improve residents' lives. Together, we will focus on:

1. Building strong, trust-based relationships between the VCS and the Council
2. Collaborating across the VCS, Council, and partners to effectively meet community needs
3. Strengthening the capacity, resilience, and voice of the VCS
4. Supporting the VCS to grow its independence and long-term sustainability

This Strategy marks a renewed commitment to working hand in hand with the sector, recognising that lasting change for our residents is best achieved through shared ambition, mutual trust, and strategic partnership.

Tower Hamlets Council is developing the Borough's strategic vision for 2035 called 'Our Tower Hamlets Vision 2035'. The VCS Strategy will support the delivery of outcomes set out in 'Our Tower Hamlets Vision 2035'.

This Strategy is aligned with key borough plans, including the [Strategic Plan 2022-26](#), [Community Engagement Strategy 2024-2028](#), [Strategic Asset Management Plan 2024-2029](#), and [Grants Policy and Outcomes Framework](#).

It describes a relationship where the VCS is seen as an equal partner as we work together to change Tower Hamlets for the better.

Profile of the voluntary and community sector

Tower Hamlets population

Tower Hamlets is a fast-growing, diverse, and young borough in East London. The borough's population grew by 22.1% between 2011 and 2021, making it England and Wales's fastest-growing local authority area. The borough is also the most densely populated in England, with 15,695 residents per square kilometre, over 37 times higher than the national average. The average age of residents in Tower Hamlets is 30, making it the youngest borough in the country. The borough also has the smallest proportion of people aged 65 and over.

Tower Hamlets has the UK's largest Bangladeshi population of 34.5%. At least 2% of the Borough's population is Somali. Other common countries of birth for residents are Italy, India, China, and France. 14% of residents were born in a current European Union country. Population turnover is high, with more than a fifth (20.8%) of residents having lived somewhere else a year before the 2021 Census.

There is a high level of inequality in the borough, with 55,381 (40%) households having an income of less than £30,000 per year, and an unemployment rate of 7% for people aged 16-64 that exceeds the rates for the UK and London. 12.9% of residents were disabled, and 15.7% of households had no person with English as their primary language. Tower Hamlets has high numbers of residents living in poor health. The life expectancy gap between those who are wealthy and those who are poor in the borough has widened in recent years. Women in Tower Hamlets have the lowest healthy life expectancy in London. We know the main conditions that contribute to these inequalities are heart disease, diabetes, respiratory disease, and cancer.

In Tower Hamlets, our diversity is our biggest strength. However, as this profile demonstrates residents face numerous challenges, which illustrates why it is so vital that we have a thriving and diverse VCS that can improve the lives of residents.

Overview of the VCS

Tower Hamlets is home to a large and diverse VCS, with an estimated 1,300 plus organisations supporting residents. They include:

- Registered charities
- Faith groups
- Unregistered and informal community groups, including mutual aid group
- Social enterprises
- Tenant and residents' associations
- Cooperatives
- Community interest companies

North East London Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise Sector (NEL VCFSE) Collaborative - which is hosted by Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Service (THCVS) and acts as a strategic link between the region's VCFSE sector and NHS North East London - produced a recent report on the VCS in this sub-

region.¹ The sub-region covers seven boroughs, including Tower Hamlets. The report found that 61% of VCFSE organisations in NEL have annual incomes under £100,000, including 30% with an annual income under £10,000, indicating a predominantly small-scale, grassroots sector in the sub-region.

Organisations covered in the survey primarily delivered frontline services to everyone in their local community (61%) and were led by people with lived experience of issues that they address (67%). The top five themes of work delivered were:

- Social and community activities: 106 organisations (67%)
- Health and general wellbeing: 85 organisations (54%)
- Advice and information: 75 organisations (47%)
- Mental health challenges: 48 organisations (30%)
- Befriending or mentoring: 36 organisations (23%).

The VCS is supported by a range of organisations that strengthen its capacity and increase its impact. These include:

- **Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Services** – Supports the VCS to run their organisations effectively and collaborate with each other. It is also a strategic partner in the borough, on behalf of the wider VCS.
- **Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets** – Promotes volunteering and support volunteer management.
- **East London Business Alliance** – Building connections between businesses and local communities.
- **East End Community Foundation** – Providing grants and philanthropic support across East London.

This Strategy recognises the importance of partnership working between organisations to ensure the VCS can be supported to deliver better outcomes for residents.

Why is the VCS important?

The VCS has strong relationships with residents and often reaches communities that the Council and other public services cannot. It is often the first port of call for support and is often more trusted. The VCS delivers a wide range of services, activities, and events that improve the quality of life and provides residents with the opportunity to get involved in community life.

The sector often delivers specialist services tailored to their users' needs and supports residents, preventing more serious issues from escalating. It plays a vital role in providing services to those who are more likely to be disadvantaged or vulnerable, such as groups with protected characteristics, carers, and people on low incomes.

The sector also acts as a voice for the communities they work with, raising awareness of the issues impacting residents and challenging the discrimination they

¹ NEL VCFSE Collaborative: *State of the Sector Report 2025*, August 2025.

face. The sector also plays an important role in bringing different communities together, promoting community cohesion, and reducing social isolation.

It is important the Council and the VCS, work together to deliver services and co-design policies and services that meet local needs. The VCS also makes a significant contribution to the local economy, employing approximately 4,300 people and bringing approximately £200 million into the local economy.

The impact of VCS activities for local resident and communities include:

- Better health and social care outcomes by delivery of culturally responsive services and improved mental health and wellbeing through widening of social networks
- Being better informed on, and enabled to access, statutory sector services, such as social welfare benefits and NHS provision, to reduce poverty and enhance their well-being
- Enhanced education, through supporting children to develop their potential and delivering responsive services to groups who have not fully benefitted from education in the past – e.g. young people not in education, employment and training, adult learners, people whose first language is not English
- Enabling socially excluded residents to progress towards employment and training through supported employment projects and responsive training
- Enhancing quality of life and opportunities for specific protected characteristic groups - such as children and young people, older people, and women – by provision of culturally sensitive service and supporting access to wider services and activities, such as information and communication technology
- Enabling access to arts and culture activities for the first time
- Providing local housing residents with a voice on how their area is managed by partnership work through tenants and residents' associations with local housing services
- Participating in sports, physical activities and play opportunities to enhance physical and mental health, including enabling women and young girls from Black, Asian & Multi-Ethnic communities to take part for the first time
- Benefitting from safer communities through crime prevention, support for victims of crime and peer support for vulnerable groups, including women
- Access to green spaces, including city farms, plus education on environmental sustainability issues.

How the Council works with the VCS

The Council recognises the vital role the VCS plays in the borough and considers it a key partner. We work with the VCS in various ways

- **Funding and commissioning** – The Council currently provides £4.4 million of grant funding annually through the [Mayor's Community Grant Programme](#), the [Mayor's Small Grants Programme](#), and the [Emergency Fund](#). In 2023, we also commissioned the VCS through approximately £42.1 million worth of contracts to deliver services to support residents.
- **Partnership working** - The VCS has a strong track record of collaborating with the Council and other partners. It is represented on strategic

partnerships, such as the [Tower Hamlets Partnership](#) and Cooperate, the key VCS and public sector strategic partnership in Tower Hamlets.

- **Premises** – The Council has [70 buildings](#) available to VCS organisations to lease, with some offering community benefit rent reductions. There are also 40 halls and venues available for hire.
- **Equalities** – The Council commissions and works with the [Tower Hamlets Equalities Hub and Networks](#), which are managed by local VCS organisations. The networks provide coordinated support to VCS organisations supporting and representing local protected characteristic groups.
- **Information sharing** – The Council sends a monthly VCS Newsletter to over 2,300 organisations, sharing updates on funding, training, and events. The Council's website includes VCS-focused webpages on funding, training, and premises opportunities for the sector. We also hold an annual VCS summit to celebrate the sector.

The Best Value Inspection of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets (November 2024) highlighted the Council's work with that sector which included perceived deterioration of relationship with the sector. The Tower Hamlets Continuous Improvement Plan proposes several responses, including co-designed principles for community engagement – such as ensuring that there are adequate time and resources for engagement with partners – and rebuilding and strengthening key partnership relationships. This Strategy supports delivery against the Continuous Improvement Plan priorities.

What challenges is the VCS facing?

Despite Tower Hamlets having a large and diverse VCS, we know the sector faces several challenges. The cost-of-living crisis, the long-term impact of the pandemic, and other issues, have caused a sharp increase in the demand for services from the VCS. This also comes at a time when many VCS organisations are struggling with funding. Rising costs for staff and buildings, reduced charitable giving, budget cuts from funders, and competition for limited resources have created a funding crisis. According to the State of the Sector Report 2023 by Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Service, funding is the biggest challenge for VCS organisations. Of those surveyed, 10.71% said they were close to closing, 46.43% felt secure for one year, and 29.76% felt secure for two years. NEL VCFSE Collaborative: *State of the Sector Report 2025* was supported by a survey of VCS organisations across seven boroughs, including Tower Hamlets, which received responses from 158 organisations. Only 20% of organisations responding reported secure funding, with 37% having no secured funding for the next 12 months. Global Majority-led organisation respondents faced disproportionate financial challenges, with 61% reporting deteriorating financial situations.

VCS organisations depend heavily on volunteers. During the pandemic, the nation saw huge levels of volunteering. However, since then, national data shows a sharp decline in the number of people volunteering, as volunteers have returned to work, have increased childcare duties and are grappling with the cost-of-living crisis.² The VCS in Tower Hamlets has reported problems in recruiting volunteers locally.

² The Guardian: [Volunteering in sharp decline in England since Covid pandemic](#) 2nd May 2023

In our engagement with the sector, it was stated that it can be challenging to find spaces to deliver services, because they are often unaffordable or have complicated booking systems. Recruiting and retaining staff can also be challenging as VCS finds it difficult to compete with private and public sector employers, who can offer more favourable salaries and conditions. Additionally, while many services have moved online since the pandemic, this has created barriers for those who lack access to digital technology or skills, leading to digital exclusion. These challenges highlight the need for continued support to ensure the VCS can meet the growing needs of the community.

How we developed this Strategy

A Council wide steering group was established involving those who regularly collaborate with the VCS to develop this Strategy. The Council's grant and commissioning teams undertake extensive engagement with voluntary and community sector and intelligence from this work has also fed into the development of the Strategy. We evaluated our work with the VCS against standards of good practice, identifying what we currently deliver, what is working well, and areas of improvement.

We engaged with 99 stakeholders from the VCS, Council staff, and the public sector to understand the sector's strengths, challenges, and priorities for the strategy. This engagement included:

- 11 in-depth interviews with the VCS
- 2 Workshops with 70 members of VCS organisations
- 2 workshops with 18 Council staff
- 1 workshop at Cooperate, the key strategic voluntary and community sector partnership.

The insights gathered were used to develop a draft vision and objectives for the Strategy. We also researched best practices from other local authorities and councils for voluntary services, including reviewing their strategies and conducting interviews.

Building on this, we carried out a more detailed engagement with 140 stakeholders from the VCS, Council staff, public sector partners and elected members. This explored:

- Feedback on the draft vision and objectives
- Stakeholders' ideas on how to achieve the objectives.

This phase included:

- 5 workshops with 80 people from the VCS and public sector
- 2 workshops with 30 Council staff
- 30 responses to an online survey by local VCS organisations and residents.
- 2 workshops with elected members
- 6 workshops with Council services who work with the VCS.

The findings were analysed to finalise the vision, objectives and actions for the Strategy. The draft strategy has been shared with those who participated in the engagement and to other relevant stakeholders including the Overview and Scrutiny Committee members, giving them the opportunity to provide feedback. This feedback was used to refine the final version of the Strategy.

Our objectives and how we will achieve them

Objective one
Building strong, trust-based relationships between the VCS and the Council
What priorities do we want to achieve
<p>We have worked closely with the VCS to co-produce a refreshed Compact that sets out our shared values and principles for partnership working. This Compact guides how we will collaborate, align our goals, and set clear, mutual expectations. We are committed to ongoing dialogue and will regularly seek feedback from the VCS to learn, adapt, and improve how we work together.</p> <p>The VCS is deeply rooted in our communities, bringing vital insights, trusted relationships, and essential services—often delivered in partnership with the Council. We will ensure that the VCS is meaningfully represented in strategic partnerships and fully supported to participate as equal partners in shaping borough-wide decisions.</p> <p>We recognise that not all organisations have the same capacity to engage, particularly smaller or grassroots groups. That’s why we will work with the VCS to identify and remove barriers to participation and co-design practical solutions—such as agreeing on a fair approach to recognising and valuing VCS contributions to Council decision-making.</p> <p>We know that decisions developed in partnership with the VCS and our residents are more effective and more likely to reflect the real needs of our communities. That’s why we will strengthen how we engage and co-create strategies, policies, and services—ensuring that diverse voices are heard and included from the outset.</p> <p>The VCS plays a vital role in improving wellbeing and strengthening community life across the borough. It’s important that this impact is recognised and celebrated. We will use our communication channels and work with partners to showcase the sector’s achievements and organise events that celebrate its contributions.</p>
What will we do to achieve this objective
<p>In delivering the strategy we will focus on the following three priorities. The detailed action plan at the end of the strategy sets out actions we will deliver against these priorities.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Strengthen trust and collaboration by building meaningful, long-term partnerships between the Council, the VCS, and local communities.2. Work with the VCS from the earliest stage possible to co-design policies, programmes and services3. Actively promote and advocate for the wide range of strengths of the VCS in Tower Hamlets by working in partnership to raise its profile, influence, and impact across the borough

Objective two

Collaborating across the VCS, Council, and partners to effectively meet community needs

What priorities do we want to achieve

To meet the needs of our community, it's essential that we work in close, equal partnership with the VCS, including with VCS infrastructure organisations. By coming together, we can strengthen collaboration between the Council, public sector partners, and the VCS to agree on shared priorities and co-develop a clear, collective plan for achieving them.

A strong mutual understanding of the VCS—its composition, strengths, and the challenges it faces— is key. We will work alongside the VCS to gather these insights on a regular basis. This shared knowledge will help us identify emerging issues and opportunities, inform priority-setting, and support effective, long-term partnership working.

Both the Council and the VCS hold valuable data and insight about the borough and its residents. By improving how we share and bring this information together, we can build a fuller picture of local needs and empower the VCS to deliver services that truly reflect the priorities of our communities.

We recognise that the complex social challenges our borough faces cannot be tackled by the Council alone. That's why we're committed to deepening our partnership with the VCS—so we can better understand the needs of our communities, design solutions together, and take coordinated action to support residents in a meaningful and sustainable way.

What will we do to achieve this objective

In delivering the strategy we will focus on the following two priorities. The detailed action plan at the end of the strategy sets out actions we will deliver against these priorities.

1. Collaborate with the VCS and other partners to build a shared, evidence-based understanding of sector strengths, challenges, and community needs to inform joint priorities and action
2. Strengthen the VCS's voice and influence by working together to embed its role within key partnership structures and decision-making forums.

Objective three

Strengthening the capacity, resilience, and voice of the VCS

What priorities do we want to achieve

We are committed to working in partnership with the VCS to provide capacity-building support that helps organisations meet the needs of the communities they serve. Together, we will help to empower VCS staff and volunteers, supporting the development of their confidence, knowledge, and skills to deliver high-quality, responsive services.

Each year, we will engage with VCS organisations and other partners to identify the most valuable forms of capacity-building support. Using this insight, we will co-design a tailored support offer for the following year, with a focus on meeting the needs of smaller and grassroots organisations that may face greater challenges accessing support.

We recognise that we are not the only ones offering capacity-building support. To increase our collective impact, we will collaborate with other key providers to develop a shared understanding of the sector's needs and work together on a coordinated, joined-up capacity-building plan.

Peer-to-peer learning and support within the VCS is a powerful way to share knowledge, build relationships, and strengthen the sector. We will work with VCS partners to enable and champion peer support, creating space for staff and volunteers to connect, collaborate, and learn from each other.

What will we do to achieve this objective

In delivering the strategy we will focus on the following two priorities. The detailed action plan at the end of the strategy sets out actions we will deliver against these priorities.

1. Partner with the VCS to design and deliver targeted capacity-building support that strengthens organisations' ability to deliver high-quality, inclusive services for local residents
2. Create inclusive opportunities and support mechanisms that empower residents to actively participate in local decision-making, community initiatives, and civic life.

Objective four

Supporting the VCS to grow its independence and long-term sustainability

What priorities do we want to achieve?

For the VCS to thrive and remain vibrant and diverse, long-term sustainability is essential. This is especially critical given the high number of small VCS organisations in Tower Hamlets, many of which face heightened vulnerability in challenging times. These organisations include many that are led by women and focused on representing and supporting local women, including women from Black, Asian & Multi-Ethnic communities. This means supporting strong leadership, enabling access to reliable and diverse funding sources—including for core costs—and ensuring the availability of affordable, accessible premises across the borough.

We recognise the serious funding challenges facing the sector due to rising costs, increased demand, and cuts in funding. In response, we will continue to work in partnership with the VCS to support the delivery of vital services, events, and activities through grants and commissioned services.

To help reduce reliance on a single funding source, we will collaborate with the VCS to identify and apply for external funding — from central government,

charitable trusts, and the private sector—so that organisations are better able to secure the resources they need to flourish.

We also recognise that access to physical space remains a key barrier in some areas. To address this, we will work with VCS organisations to improve access to affordable premises by changing planning and community premises policies to increase community space in new developments, making Council buildings available to lease or rent in a fair and transparent way, and ensuring our rental fees remain accessible for community groups.

Digital exclusion continues to affect both some residents and VCS organisations. Through our Social Value programme, we will partner with the VCS to improve access to digital tools and provide training opportunities, helping staff and volunteers build the confidence and skills to make full use of digital technology.

Recruitment and retention in the sector are also growing concerns, as VCS salaries and conditions can be perceived as uncompetitive with those offered by other sectors. We will support the VCS in recruiting and retaining talent by helping promote job opportunities, connecting potential candidates with VCS employers, and supporting access to funding for apprenticeships, training, and development.

Volunteering remains at the heart of the VCS, yet volunteer numbers have declined both locally and nationally. We will work closely with the sector to promote inclusive and rewarding volunteering opportunities and encourage more residents—of all ages and backgrounds — to get involved in strengthening their communities.

What will we do to achieve this objective

In delivering the strategy we will focus on the following four priorities. The detailed action plan at the end of the strategy sets out actions we will deliver against these priorities.

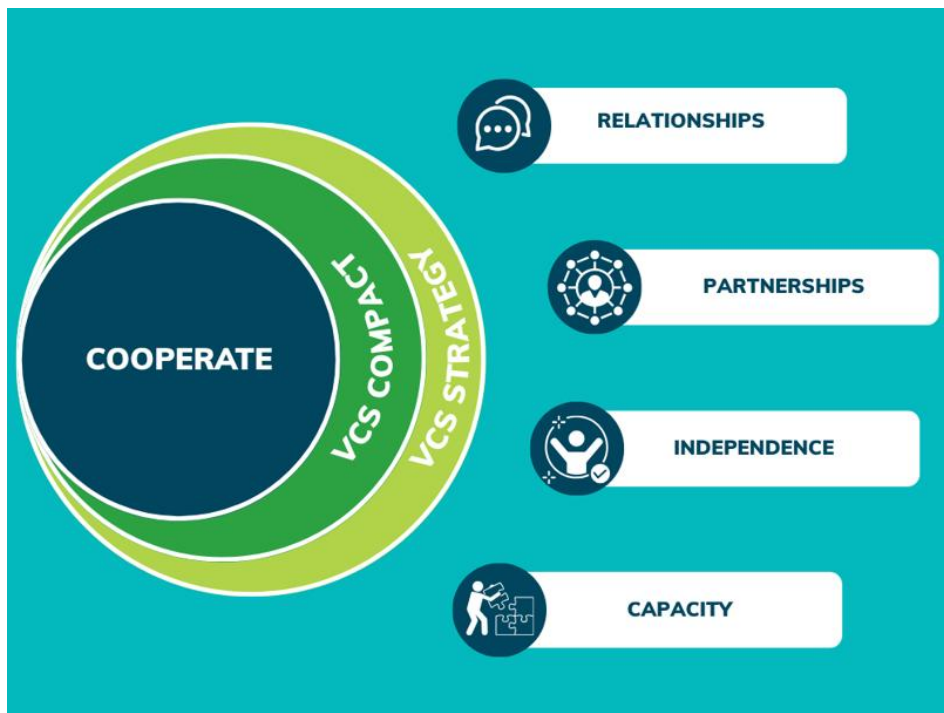
1. Work with the VCS to identify, promote, and secure access to diverse grant funding opportunities, with targeted support for smaller organisations and those organisations representing socially excluded communities
2. Collaborate with the VCS to explore and secure alternative funding sources, including social investment, corporate partnerships, and national funding opportunities, to strengthen the sector's financial sustainability
3. Partner with the VCS to identify premises needs and improve access to affordable, fit-for-purpose premises that enable effective service delivery across the borough
4. Promote the VCS as a valued employer and volunteering destination by showcasing career pathways, highlighting the impact of working and volunteering in the sector, and increasing visibility of opportunities across the borough

Strategy Delivery and Monitoring

A strategy delivery group will be set up with key stakeholders to monitor, review, and update the Strategy. To ensure the Strategy is delivered effectively, we have created a delivery plan that outlines who is responsible for each action and when it will be completed. Each year, the Strategy Delivery Group will create an annual delivery plan with clear performance indicators for each objective. These indicators will define what success looks like and help us track progress.

In the first year, we will work with the VCS to co-design ways to measure the state of the sector and the impact of our joint work. We will gather data in relation to these measures each year to track changes and improvements for the VCS. We will also publish an annual progress report to share our achievements, challenges, and lessons learned. This report will be publicly available to ensure transparency and show how the Strategy is benefitting the VCS and residents.

The VCS Strategy will provide updates to Cooperate and is a key delivery mechanism of the Compact. The diagram below shows relationships between Cooperate, VCS Compact and VCS Strategy:



How to get involved

The VCS Strategy aims to work with the VCS and partners to support a thriving and diverse VCS that improves the lives of residents. If you would like more information about the Strategy or want to get involved, please contact:

vcs@towerhamlets.gov.uk

VCS Strategy Delivery Plan

Actions
Objective one: Building strong, trust-based relationships between the VCS and the Council
Priority 1: Strengthen trust and collaboration by building meaningful, long-term partnerships between the Council, the VCS, and local communities.
<p>Action Co-produce a new VCS Compact with the VCS and other partners that sets out the values, principles, and practices for effective partnership working.</p> <p>Service Responsible Corporate Strategy & Communities</p> <p>Deadline October 2025</p>
<p>Action Deliver a range of engagement and celebration events that champions the VCS and supports it to work with the Council effectively.</p> <p>Service Responsible Corporate Strategy & Communities</p> <p>Deadline Events throughout out the year</p>
<p>Action Bring together a diverse working group of VCS organisations, Council officers, and other key partners to lead the implementation of the VCS Strategy and strengthen coordination across our shared work</p> <p>Service Responsible Corporate Strategy & Communities</p>

Actions
<p>Deadline January 2026</p>
<p>Priority 2: Work with the VCS from the earliest stage possible to co-design policies, programmes and services</p>
<p>Action Produce a toolkit that outlines good practices for involving a diverse range of VCS organisations in policy decisions.</p> <p>Service Responsible Corporate Strategy & Communities</p> <p>Deadline October 2026</p>
<p>Action Develop a Council policy for recognising and rewarding residents and VCS participation in Council and partnership decision making.</p> <p>Service Responsible Corporate Strategy & Communities</p> <p>Deadline December 2025</p>
<p>Priority 3: Actively promote and advocate for the diverse strengths of the VCS in Tower Hamlets by working in partnership to raise its profile, influence, and impact across the borough</p>
<p>Action Ensure that celebrating the impact of VCS is a core part of the Council's 'We Love Tower Hamlets' campaign.</p>

Actions
<p>Service Responsible Communications</p> <p>Deadline Ongoing</p>
<p>Action Produce an annual report highlighting the impact VCS organisations have made through the Mayor's Community Grants Programme and Small Grants Programme.</p> <p>Service Responsible Corporate Strategy & Communities</p> <p>Deadline April each year</p>
<p>Objective two: Collaborating across the VCS, Council, and partners to effectively meet community needs</p>
<p>Priority 1: Collaborate with the VCS and other partners to build a shared, evidence-based understanding of sector strengths, challenges, and community needs to inform joint priorities and action</p>
<p>Action Conduct an annual needs assessment to gain an overview of the VCS in the borough and its strengths, challenges, and priorities.</p> <p>Service Responsible Corporate Strategy & Communities</p> <p>Deadline April each year</p>

Actions
<p>Action Share data and statistics on the borough and residents through website, newsletter, events and meetings to enable the VCS to deliver services based on resident's needs.</p> <p>Service Responsible Corporate Strategy & Communities</p> <p>Deadline Ongoing</p>
<p>Action Strengthen the work of the Equalities Hubs and Networks to enable residents with protected characteristics to influence Council decisions and identify the needs of VCS organisations supporting groups with protected characteristics.</p> <p>Service Responsible Corporate Strategy & Communities</p> <p>Deadline May 2025</p>
<p>Priority 2: Strengthen the VCS's voice and influence by working together to embed its role within key partnership structures and decision-making forums.</p>
<p>Action Review VCS membership of Tower Hamlets Partnership to ensure membership of thematic partnerships fully reflects the local VCS and communities, including faith communities.</p> <p>Service Responsible Chairs of thematic Tower Hamlets Partnership Boards</p> <p>Deadline December 2025</p>

Actions

Action

Joint work to strengthen referral pathways between the Council and VCS so residents can access the support they need.

Service Responsible

Commissioning
Public Health

Deadline

November 2026

Action

Work with the VCS to make the park hire application process for delivering events in Council green spaces more accessible to community event organisers, including VCS organisations.

Service Responsible

Culture

Deadline

April 2026

Objective three: Strengthening the capacity, resilience, and voice of the VCS

Priority 1: Partner with the VCS to design and deliver targeted capacity-building support that strengthens organisations' ability to deliver high-quality, inclusive services for local residents

Action

Develop a borough-wide Capacity Building Plan with the VCS - including small groups and women led organisations - and wider partners to support the sector and review it annually.

Service Responsible

Corporate Strategy & Communities

Actions
<p>Deadline January 2026</p>
<p>Action Deliver training sessions to address priority areas for the VCS identified through engagement.</p> <p>Service Responsible Corporate Strategy & Communities</p> <p>Deadline Ongoing</p>
<p>Action Develop information sheets on key topics relevant to the VCS, such as governance, best practices, policy development, and funding, to be hosted on the Council's VCS web pages.</p> <p>Service Responsible Corporate Strategy & Communities.</p> <p>Deadline August 2025</p>
<p>Action Provide grant funding through the Small Grants Programme for VCS organisations to access capacity-building support.</p> <p>Service Responsible Corporate Strategy & Communities</p> <p>Deadline Ongoing</p>

Actions

Action

Communicate information on training and development opportunities for VCS staff and volunteers on our website and the VCS newsletter.

Service Responsible

Corporate Strategy & Communities

Deadline

Ongoing

Priority 2: Create inclusive opportunities and support mechanisms that empower residents to actively participate in local decision-making, community initiatives, and civic life

Action

Provide support to social housing tenants to set up and run new Tenant Resident Associations and community food gardens.

Service Responsible

Housing Community Partnership Service

Deadline

Ongoing

Action

Deliver an annual capacity-building programme to empower tenants in social housing to actively participate in Tenants' Residents Associations and other VCS organisations.

Service Responsible

Housing Community Partnership Service

Deadline

Ongoing

Actions
Objective four: Supporting the VCS to grow its independence and long-term sustainability
Priority 1: Work with the VCS to identify, promote, and secure access to diverse grant funding opportunities, with targeted support for smaller organisations and those representing socially excluded communities
<p>Action Work in partnership with the sector to deliver the Mayor's Community Grants Programme, Small Grants Programme, and Emergency Fund, which provides £4.4 million of funding a year to the VCS until March 2027.</p> <p>Service Responsible Corporate Strategy & Communities</p> <p>Deadline March 2027</p>
<p>Action Co-design the replacement programme for the Mayor's Community Grants Programme and Small Grants Programme in partnership with the VCS.</p> <p>Service Responsible Corporate Strategy & Communities</p> <p>Deadline March 2027</p>
<p>Action Promote and raise awareness of funding opportunities available to the VCS on the Council's web pages and our monthly newsletter.</p> <p>Service Responsible Corporate Strategy & Communities</p>

Actions
<p>Deadline Ongoing</p>
<p>Action Support access to funding by providing funding searches, developing consortium bids, and organising funders fairs .</p> <p>Service Responsible Corporate Strategy & Communities</p> <p>Deadline Ongoing</p>
<p>Action Introduce a Council corporate grants framework to ensure greater consistency of grant management processes across the organisation.</p> <p>Service Responsible Corporate Strategy & Communities</p> <p>Deadline May 2025</p>
<p>Priority 2: Collaborate with the VCS to explore and secure alternative funding sources, including social investment, corporate partnerships, and national funding opportunities, to strengthen the sector’s financial sustainability</p>
<p>Action Develop partnership working with VCS and local private sector organisations to explore and co-develop new funding opportunities that support the sector across the borough.</p> <p>Service Responsible Corporate Strategy & Communities</p>

Actions
<p>Deadline October 2026</p>
<p>Action Work with the VCS to review Council procurement procedures and co-develop improvements to the support available for applicants, making tendering processes more accessible —especially for smaller, local organisations.</p> <p>Service Responsible Procurement</p> <p>Deadline March 2026</p>
<p>Action Refresh our approach to Social Value to ensure that the benefits secured by the programme meet the needs of smaller VCS organisations.</p> <p>Service Responsible Procurement</p> <p>Deadline July 2026</p>
<p>Priority 3: Partner with the VCS to identify needs and improve access to affordable, fit-for-purpose premises that enable effective service delivery across the borough</p>
<p>Action Ensure Council’s portfolio of community buildings is well used and managed, and support VCS groups to maximise the use of assets.</p> <p>Service Responsible Asset Management</p>

Actions
<p>Facilities Management</p> <p>Deadline Ongoing</p>
<p>Action Undertake a full review of council-owned Community Premises, including a review of the Community Premises Policy in conjunction with the VCS, ensuring those currently leasing and hiring premises, and those who would like to, are able to fully participate.</p> <p>Service Responsible Asset Management Facilities Management Public Realm</p> <p>Deadline Ongoing</p>
<p>Action Continue to offer the Community Benefit Rent Reduction scheme, providing reduced lease costs for Council-owned community buildings, and work with the VCS to ensure the scheme is accessible, transparent, and supports a diverse range of community organisations.</p> <p>Service Responsible Strategy, Performance & Improvement in Housing and Regeneration</p> <p>Deadline Ongoing</p>
<p>Action Support the VCS in accessing council buildings to lease and hire by delivering premises roadshows each year. This should include understanding their specific premises needs and identify the barriers and solutions.</p>

Actions
<p>Service Responsible Strategy, Performance & Improvement in Housing and Regeneration</p> <p>Deadline Ongoing</p>
<p>Action Ensure that all VCS organisations managing a Council building have an appropriate agreement in place for the use of the building, which confirms the appropriate rent and other charges that the VCS organisation should be paying.</p> <p>Service Responsible Asset Management Facilities Management</p> <p>Deadline Ongoing</p>
<p>Action Include a requirement in the borough's new Local Plan that all new strategic development proposals for residential development deliver a community facility on-site where evidence demonstrates a need for the local area.</p> <p>Service Responsible Planning</p> <p>Deadline April 2026</p>
<p>Action Produce clear, practical design guidance for developers to support the effective delivery of high-quality Community Facilities as part of new developments.</p>

Actions
<p>Service Responsible Planning</p> <p>Deadline December 2025</p>
<p>Action Develop an approach for the management of new Community Facilities, which are delivered by developers through the planning system or directly by the Council, including setting appropriate rental or sessional hire rates to the VCS for use of rooms or space at these facilities.</p> <p>Service Responsible Asset Management Strategy, Policy and Improvement</p> <p>Deadline September 2026</p>
<p>Priority 4: Promote the VCS as a valued employer and volunteering destination by showcasing career pathways, highlighting impact, and increasing visibility of opportunities across the borough</p>
<p>Action Run a campaign with partners to promote employment in the VCS, advertise employment vacancies, and participate in recruitment fairs.</p> <p>Service Responsible Employment & Skills Corporate Strategy & Communities</p> <p>Deadline December 2026</p>

Actions
<p>Action Work with the VCS and partners to develop a plan to increase volunteering in the borough.</p> <p>Service Responsible Corporate Strategy & Communities</p> <p>Deadline September 2026</p>