



Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy

2020-25



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Foreword

One of the key strengths of Wokingham Borough is its rich and vibrant Voluntary and Community Sector. For many years it has provided outstanding service to our residents and in particular improved the lives of many vulnerable residents. It is therefore really important that the Council outlines how it intends to work with, nurture and grow the sector in the forthcoming years.

Investing in the right community support is a key part of the Council's plan to improve the quality of life enjoyed by different members of our communities. The sector plays a significant economic role in the borough, accessing external funding and providing paid employment, but also harnessing a wealth of time, skills and resources from local people and organisations to benefit the community. The sector contributes to the wellbeing of the borough; connecting communities, stimulating innovation and flexibility to make a positive difference to people's lives.

This is a time of great change in the delivery of health and care, both locally and nationally. The health and care system can work in innovative ways with the sector to enhance the day-to-day lives of our residents and respond to the challenges of a growing population with an increased demand for support.

The ability to produce this strategy was only possible due to the commitment of the sector. We have conducted a consultation during which many stakeholders have contributed to a truly meaningful engagement and have helped in setting a strategic direction for our work.

We would like to thank all in the sector who have taken part, for their time, honesty and input.

Charles Margetts

Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services

Matt Pope

Director of Adult Services

Words from Involve

There are hundreds of charities and community groups operating across the Wokingham Borough offering a vast array of services, activities, projects and opportunities for local people and communities. The Voluntary and Community Sector is a vital partner to all public sector organisations and Involve Community Services was delighted to support Wokingham Borough Council with the building of this strategy.

In a time of great change there is a big opportunity for more partnership working, collaboration and new approaches to create positive changes. Charities and groups contribute to tackling disadvantage and improving life chances for people therefore should be seen as greater critical partners moving forwards.

There is an opportunity now for real joined up working. There are areas that the Voluntary and Community Sector need support with themselves and in return could then deliver differently, maximise value for money, enhance their offer and contribute more to improving the health & wellbeing of all people and communities across the borough.

Creating resilient communities, seizing prevention opportunities, empowering people – all this can be achieved through a clear strategy and plan that is supported and delivered through working together. This strategy outlines a clear vision, key priorities and actions to achieve the above and Involve Community Services is excited by this opportunity for the local authority and the local Voluntary and Community Sector to come together and achieve the above.

Philip Cook

General Manager

Executive Summary

Our ambition is for Wokingham Borough to be one of the best boroughs for adults and carers in need of support to live, where they feel safe, included and a key part of our community.

Our Corporate Plan commits to safeguard the most vulnerable residents and ensure that everyone has an equal chance of benefitting from the opportunities that living and working in Wokingham Borough have to offer. This strategy sets out the Council's strategic vision for the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) that will help promote health and well-being and enable people with care needs to live independently and reduce the need for long term care.

The VCS is a fundamental part of Wokingham Borough. It is a key partner in delivering services and support to our residents, made up of a diverse range of socially driven, not-for profit, voluntary and community groups that have a unique role in supporting the borough at a neighbourhood or community level. The diversity of the borough includes small grassroots organisations to well established larger ones that provides a wealth of services.

WBC spend a significant amount (almost 37% in 2018/19) of our budget on Adult Social Care (ASC) each year. 46% of our ASC expenditure is on older people and 40% on learning disability support, which is in line with the make-up of the high prevalence levels within the population of the borough. WBC highly values the contribution the VCS makes in providing a wide variety of services. In 2018/19 ASC invested over £1.25 million in the VCS through a combination of grants and commissioned projects to improve the health and wellbeing of residents.

The VCS is well placed to assist in dealing with the challenges faced by the Council through their extensive experience, expertise and local networks. The Council can only achieve its ambitious priorities by working with our partners including the VCS and the community itself. This strategy articulates the Council's priorities and sets clear expectations as to the outcomes the Council wishes to achieve through its relationship and funding to VCS organisations.

This strategy has been coproduced with involve, this ensured that the VCS had a clear voice and also provided local context to the Council. This has been a genuinely co-produced strategy and this spirit of collaborative working is one that will continue for years to come.

Our vision is to have an independent, sustainable and diverse voluntary and community sector, working with the community, Council, and partners to meet the needs of local people. We hope to achieve this vision through our priorities that are summarised below and detailed within this strategy.

Our strategy is focussed on the following priorities:

Prevent, reduce and delay the need for formal care and support

- Providing information and advice as a universal service to everyone, taking into account their specific needs.
- Providing the right support at the right time in a place where people need it
- Enabling residents to maintain independence for longer to minimise their need for ongoing support
- Applying a Council wide approach to addressing loneliness and isolation and we look at the role of wider partners
- Addressing the emotional Well Being of residents
- Ensuring community assets and transport services are local, accessible, flexible, responsive and appropriate to the needs of the community.

Work in partnership and build the capacity of the VCS

- Having a set of principles to govern the relationship between WBC and the VCS
- Applying a collaborative approach that will enable the Council to develop and build on the existing strengths and resources of the community and the VCS
- Sharing Council resources with the VCS to assess trends and anticipate future demand
- Monitoring service provision, and where there are any gaps, work with the VCS to deliver and develop such provision.
- Building the capacity and connectivity of the sector, for it to be responsive and effective to meet the diverse needs of the borough
- Engaging hard-to-reach communities so that they have an equal opportunity to influence decisions and help shape and design services
- Business planning to aid income generation and build the expertise of the sector to monitor and evaluate their impact
- Reviewing assets (buildings) to support the VCS including scoping the use of community hubs.

Commission services in line with our strategic priorities that deliver quality and value for money

- Ensuring future opportunities are clearly linked to identified community need, aligned to Council priorities and services
- Developing a new bidding framework for future allocation of funding to achieve ASC outcomes
- Providing clarity on how provision is contributing to outcomes
- Commissioning services rather than grant funded
- Working closely with and recognise the experience and expertise of the VCS
- Improve governance and scrutiny of funding by developing arrangements for grant decision making and scrutiny that are open and transparent
- Supporting innovation, allowing flexibility and enabling risks to be taken.

Purpose of strategy

Our ambition is for Wokingham Borough to be one of the best boroughs for adults and carers in need of support to live, where they feel safe, included and a key part of our community.

Wokingham is a thriving and diverse borough. The population and economy continues to grow and the needs of residents are changing which impacts on the services we provide.

Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) has a strong commitment to promoting equality, tackling disadvantage and improving the life chances of our residents, especially those who are the most vulnerable. This strategy sets out how we want to deliver services, and the role of the Voluntary Community Sector (VCS) to improve the quality of life of the borough's communities. It is the start of defining how we will work alongside the VCS to deliver effective early intervention services that reduce the need for long term care and enable people to live more independent fulfilling lives.

The Council has taken a traditional approach to supporting the VCS in the way it has grant funded services to date. This strategy looks at ways to strengthen our relationship with the VCS and support communities in a way that is flexible, responsive and meets local needs whilst delivering high quality and demonstrating value for money. As budgetary pressures increase, the need to target investment in key priority areas is essential. We need to find new, innovative and efficient ways to make best use of the resources we and our partners have available. This includes providing support to the VCS in a range of practical ways, as well as through a commissioning approach that has a clear funding framework and specified outcomes. There will no doubt be considerable changes in the way we work in the future and we will support the VCS throughout this process.

This strategy articulates the Council's priorities and sets clear expectations as to the outcomes the Council wishes to achieve through its relationship and funding to VCS organisations.

Background

The Council recognises its duties under the Care Act (2014) to ensure that local people have a good range of wellbeing services to choose from. WBC has a long tradition of working with its local VCS to improve the quality of life for everyone who lives, works, studies or does business in the borough.

Our aspiration is to continue to have a vibrant VCS, which

is resilient to funding challenges, working in partnership with all organisations for the benefit of the residents in our borough. We acknowledge that we must work together to share resources and prioritise our support to manage the challenges we face. We want to work closely with our residents and the VCS to make sure that the services we support and commission through the sector are efficient, effective and delivered to meet the needs of residents. It is essential that the services continue to change as the demands placed upon them change.

The VCS is an essential partner in shaping and delivering services and building stronger, resilient communities. In particular there is a distinct role where they can help to deliver preventative and wellbeing services to achieve partnership priorities. The sector has developed in areas that statutory organisations have not reached and is highly regarded and centrally placed to continue to play an active role in contributing to and responding to the challenges faced by statutory organisations.

Through collaborative working and placing the needs of people needing support and their carers at the heart of everything it does, the sector has helped to make choice and independence a reality for many individuals. The VCS has also contributed in bringing additional resources into the borough and in building greater resilience within communities. This VCS Strategy shows how we can all 'work better together' for the benefit of local people and communities.

This strategy has been coproduced with [Involve](#), this ensured that the sector had a clear voice and also provided local context to the Council. The consultation took place over five weeks and 250 local charities and organisations (who have adults as their service users) were contacted and informed. All were offered various methods to contribute and a survey was posted on the WBC website for both providers and users of their services. In addition workshops were held with various key stakeholders and funded organisations. We met with all internal stakeholders and representatives of partner statutory organisations including the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and NHS providers. In total over 60 hours of consultation meetings were held with 18 organisations seen in person. We received input from a further 14 organisations and 50 surveys were completed on our website. This has therefore been a genuinely co-produced strategy and this spirit of collaborative working is one that we will continue.

The consultation evidenced that the VCS have a number of strengths including their closeness to communities, their flexibility and creativity in identifying and dealing with issues before a more complex and costly solution is needed. In addition their responsiveness to local need

and advocates for their users are qualities that we hope to benefit from and build upon by working more closely with the sector in future to deliver resilient and empowered, supportive communities. However the consultation has also highlighted opportunities which need to be considered to enable the VCS to carry out its valued role more effectively.

Our vision is to have

An independent, sustainable and diverse voluntary and community sector, working with the community, Council, and partners to meet the needs of local people

We hope to achieve this vision through our priorities that are summarised below and detailed within this strategy.

Our Priorities

Prevent, reduce and delay the need for formal care and support

Work in partnership and build the capacity of the VCS

Commission services in line with our strategic priorities that deliver quality and value for money

Strategic Alignment

Our Corporate Plan commits to safeguard the most vulnerable residents and ensure that everyone has an equal chance of benefitting from the opportunities that living and working in Wokingham Borough have to offer. This strategy sets out the Council's strategic vision for the VCS that will help promote health and well-being and enable people with care needs to live independently and reduce the need for long term care.

The Corporate Plan sets out the Council's promises to residents, business and partners across a number of priority themes. Those that impact on the VCS are summarised below:

Safe and strong communities

- Promote a strong and vibrant voluntary sector that enable children, young people and vulnerable adults to be supported as early as possible
- To prevent, reduce and delay the need for formal care and support

Acknowledges challenges - getting the fundamentals right, tackling isolation and emotional health, addressing and managing the demand for long term care, increase in long term health conditions such as dementia, high proportion of learning disabled population, poor recruitment and retention to relevant workforces.

Enriching lives

- Create resilient communities by empowering all of our people through education, art, culture, leisure and wellbeing opportunities.

Acknowledges challenges - tackling health issues and social isolation in the population particularly older people, those with mental health issues and carers, pockets of deprivation, inactivity or unemployment, high risk of poverty within working families. Increase in children and young people seeking support for mental health issues. Over 10,000 older people in the borough estimated to be living alone.

This strategy also fits in with the Wokingham Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2018 – 2021. The VCS is a key partner in helping to deliver its three strategic priorities:

- Creating physically active communities
- Reducing social isolation and loneliness
- Narrowing the health inequalities gap

Adult Social Care Strategy and Priorities

Our ASC Strategy's ambition is for Wokingham Borough to be one of the best boroughs for adults and carers in need of support to live, where they feel safe, included and a key part of our community. The ASC Strategy sets out our approach to successfully achieve this whilst making sure people to achieve the desired outcomes that are important and personal to them.

The Care Act (2014) places clear duties on local authorities to promote 'wellbeing' and to focus on 'prevention' to help people live the most fulfilling life they can. Meeting these duties underpins our approach to service delivery. Budgetary and demographic pressures require a radical shift in the way the Council delivers ASC services and an opportunity for the Council to refocus its resources. We need to make sure that we work in a way that fits with how people choose to live their lives, whether that is in education, training, employment or in retirement.

To help achieve our aspiration to support people to live as independently as possible and to reduce the need for long term care, we are taking forward an approach to support our residents that seeks to enable people to self-help through developing the assets and skills they already have, including friends and family that support them and the communities and resources in which they live. It also seeks to reable people with the aim where appropriate to help them build and develop skills through targeted support focused on achieving personal outcomes to become self-reliant whilst continuing to provide support in the areas they most need it. The role of the VCS is pivotal to this approach as we have evidenced in the ASC Strategy and will see throughout this strategy.

Our ASC Strategy is focused on the following priorities:

1. Keep people safe
2. Prevent, reduce and delay the need for formal care and support
3. Involve people in their care and support
4. Work in partnership and commission services that deliver quality and value for money

Our Wokingham Borough

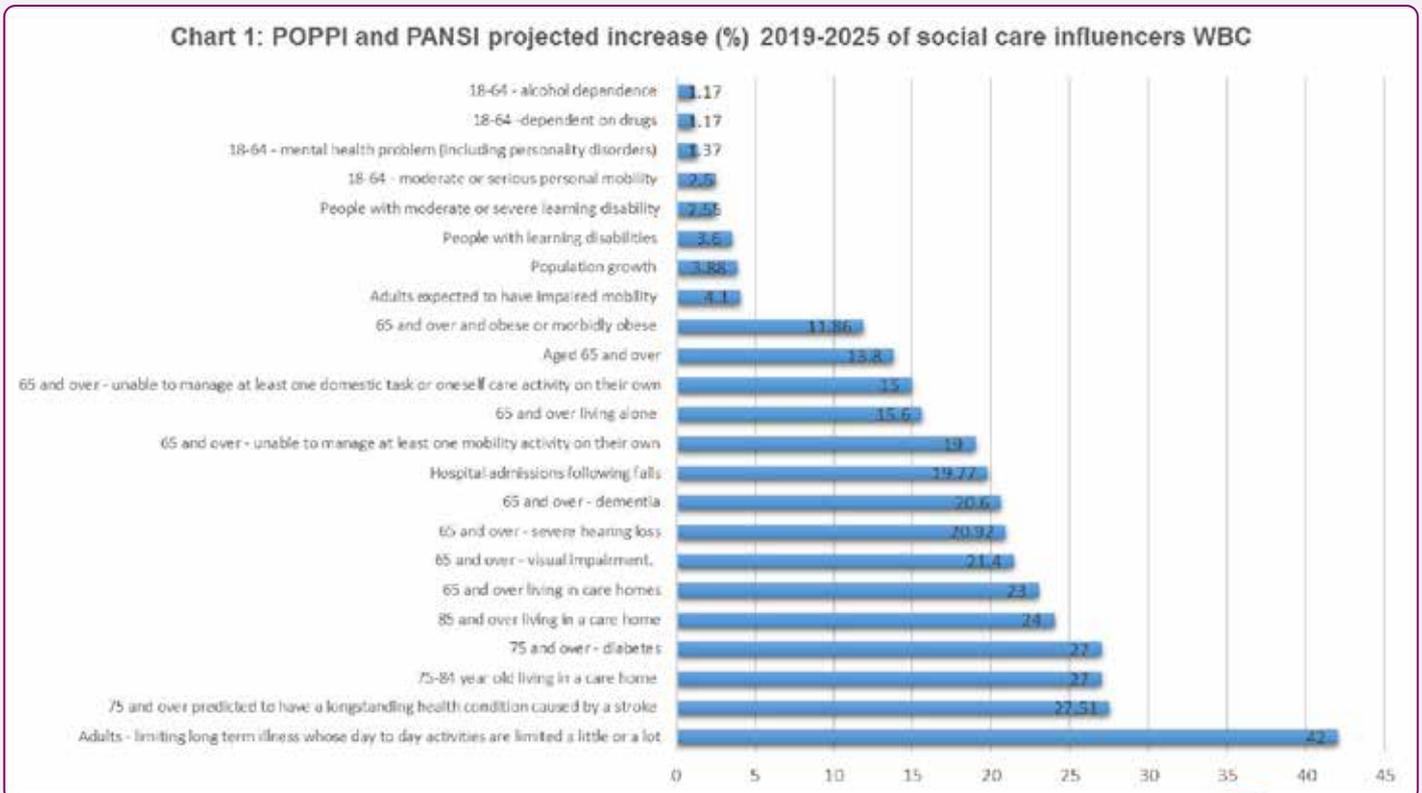
Wokingham Borough enjoys high affluence and is a popular place to live. Residents enjoy amongst the highest healthy life expectancies in England and a full two year highest life expectancy. There are 164,890 residents living in Wokingham Borough and by 2025 the population is expected to reach 173,700 people. However given that there are 10,000 new homes in [new or extended communities](#) over the next 10 years this growth is expected to accelerate.

The proportion of the population in their twenties and thirties in Wokingham Borough is much lower than the England distribution, however the older population is growing rapidly. In 2017, 18% of the population was aged 65 and over and this is expected to increase to 22.3% by 2025.

The future design of social care services must take into account not only the growing number of residents who may need care and support but more importantly the likely needs of the population. The Wokingham [Joint Strategic Needs Assessment](#) (JSNA) highlights the main indicators of health needs amongst Wokingham’s

population. Our ASC Strategy also sets out the key health and social care issues likely to be experienced in Wokingham Borough between 2020-25, these are summarised in Chart 1 below.

The VCS is key to helping address these challenges, and it is essential that services reflect the makeup of the local population both now and what is expected to happen over the next five years. While it is a great achievement that more people are living longer- particularly those who have complex needs- this adds to the challenges facing the Council. WBC must, through its response ensure that there are different innovative models of health and social care service delivery that meet people’s individual outcomes and provide safe, high quality services. For example within the next five years the number of people aged 65 and over living in the borough will increase by approximately 3,800, particularly those who are aged 90 and above. The evidence suggests that social isolation and loneliness will be an issue amongst these groups and therefore we must look at different ways of addressing this including the use of technology. We are likely to see an increase in people with conditions that include support with learning disability, dementia, stroke and obesity. It is crucial that carers are supported to be able to provide appropriate care and support, whilst at the same time ensuring that their health does not suffer. The number of people who are prone to fall are also expected to increase and it is essential that we have the support, both to prevent falls but also to ensure that when people are discharged from hospital they have the right level of support to enable them to get back to independence as quickly and safely as possible.



The VCS is well placed to assist in dealing with these and other challenges through their extensive experience, expertise and local networks. The Council can only achieve its ambitious priorities by working with our partners including the VCS and the community itself.

A detailed analysis of the social and health care needs of our residents can be found in [Appendix 1](#) and through the Wokingham JSNA.

Adult Social Care Service use

In 2018/19 approximately 2,025 new clients made 4,345 requests to WBC. 69% (2970) of these led to signposting to universal services or no service provided and 11% (460) led to long term care. 1,860 people (existing and new) received care and support provided by WBC throughout the year (detailed analysis in [Appendix 2](#)).

Chart 2 below shows what happens following a request to WBC ASC services: Over recent years we have signposted the majority of queries to universal services, either through our own services or via a referral to other organisations particularly in the VCS. The role of the VCS is therefore very clear, to provide information and advice people need to make decisions about care and support and specific support to vulnerable people and their carers such as support groups. These services prevent people's care needs from becoming more serious, and delay the need for long term care. In line with our focus on prevention we expect the referrals to universal services to increase.

No services provided refers to where a client may have low-level needs which cannot be supported by the Council and there is no universal service or third party support which could help them. This has been reducing which suggests that people are receiving the support that they need, and delaying the need for long term care and support. We expect the referrals that lead to no services provided to continue to reduce. This will

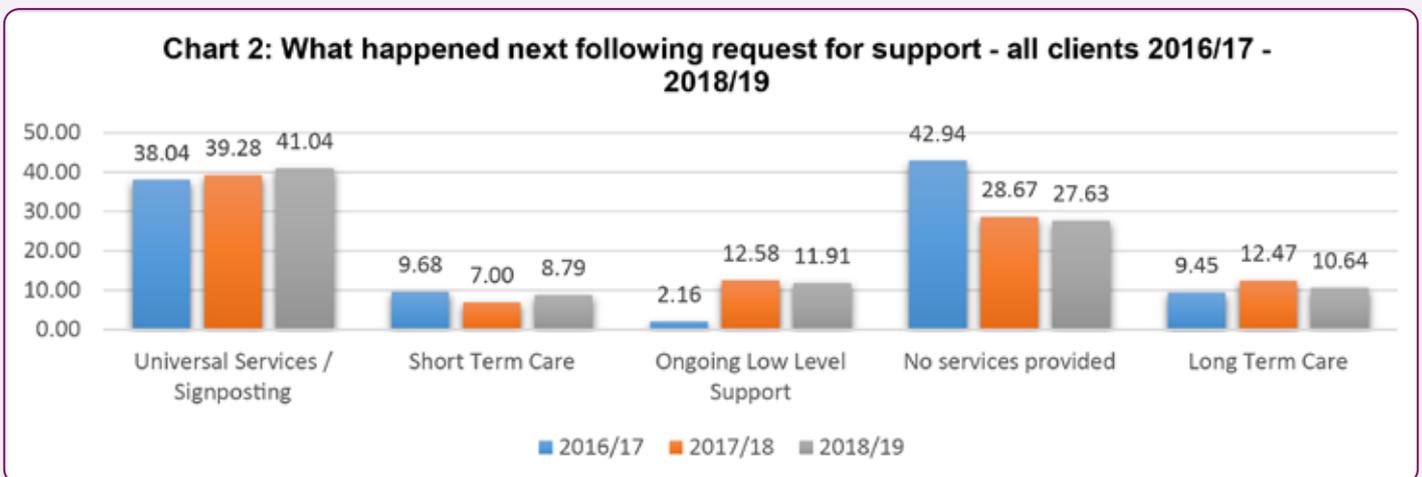
mean understanding what these services are that may be required but are not currently available, investing, and working closely with the VCS to ensure that they are available. The consultation with the VCS to inform this strategy has highlighted a number of areas where there is opportunity to improve, and could support the Council in its preventative approach including carers, social isolation and transport- these are detailed in the sections that follow.

Our ASC Strategy details the people who are receiving services. It is important to note:

- In 2018/19 1,860 people received care and support provided by WBC throughout the year
- most people (1,320) received care and support in their own home with around 540 people receiving care via residential and nursing facilities
- 57% of all people were aged 65 and over, and this has been lower than in recent years (58% in 2017/18 and 59% in 2016/17)
- There has been a significant increase in 18-64 year olds supported in the community
- Aged 18-64 the majority of people have a learning disability support need and aged 65 and over they require physical support

Long term care is only provided where appropriate but this can be supplemented and enhanced by support from the VCS to stop people's needs from progressing.

For all residents care and support services must follow the priorities and principles set out in the ASC strategy. This includes ensuring that people are protected and kept safe from abuse, neglect and exploitation. In addition personalisation must be at the heart of service provision including, giving people choice and control and putting them at the centre of the process will support built around them.



Our local VCS

The VCS is a fundamental part of Wokingham Borough. It is a key partner in delivering services and support to our residents, made up of a diverse range of socially driven, not-for profit, voluntary and community groups that have a unique role in supporting the borough at a neighbourhood or community level. The diversity of the borough includes small grassroots organisations to well established larger ones that provides a wealth of services. It includes faith groups, as well as those involved in the arts, leisure, sports, the environment and other activities.

The VCS in Wokingham Borough focuses on those in particular need, whether they are older people, carers, disabled people, the homeless, refugees and asylum seekers, people with learning disabilities, people who need housing related support, victims of crime or those living on low incomes. Data from The Charities Commission suggests that there are 765 registered charities operating in Wokingham Borough. We recognise that this is only a partial picture considering many VCS organisations are not registered charities. Groups differ greatly in their size, area of operation and the people their services reach.

Funding

WBC spend a significant amount (almost 37% in 2018/19) of our budget on ASC each year. 46% of our ASC expenditure is on older people and 40% on learning disability support, which is in line with the make-up of the high prevalence levels within the population of the

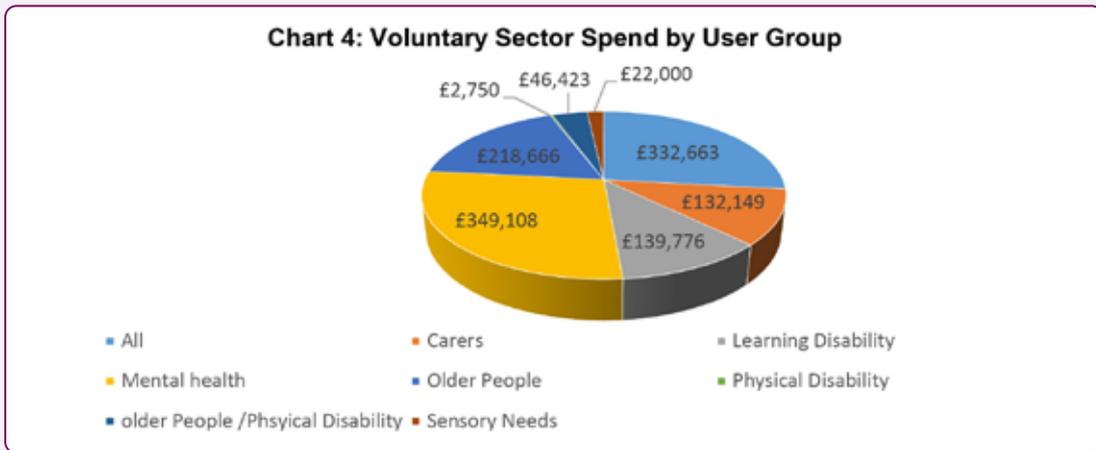
borough. WBC highly values the contribution the VCS makes in providing a wide variety of services. In 2018/19 ASC invested over £1.25 million to 22 organisations in the VCS through a combination of grants and commissioned projects to improve the health and wellbeing of residents. Through our Integration Programme, including the Wokingham Better Care Fund (BCF) plan, local health and social care services are working together to enable people to achieve the best outcomes for their particular health condition. Part of the sector receives funding from Berkshire West CCG (mainly through the BCF) to support the Council in its statutory duties.

The VCS help to bring money into the borough to tackle poverty and disadvantage, promote education, address inequality and develop the borough's art, culture and heritage, as well as improving and protecting the environment. This is achieved through grants, fundraising, sale of goods and services, corporate sponsorship and donations. As well as utilising many volunteers, the VCS is a major local employer. VCS organisations provide a broad range of services and activities addressing a variety of needs in the borough. As evidenced by an analysis of our data (Chart 3), the majority of the practical support is on carer services, however many organisations provide multiple services.

Chart 3 : VCS Spend by Category

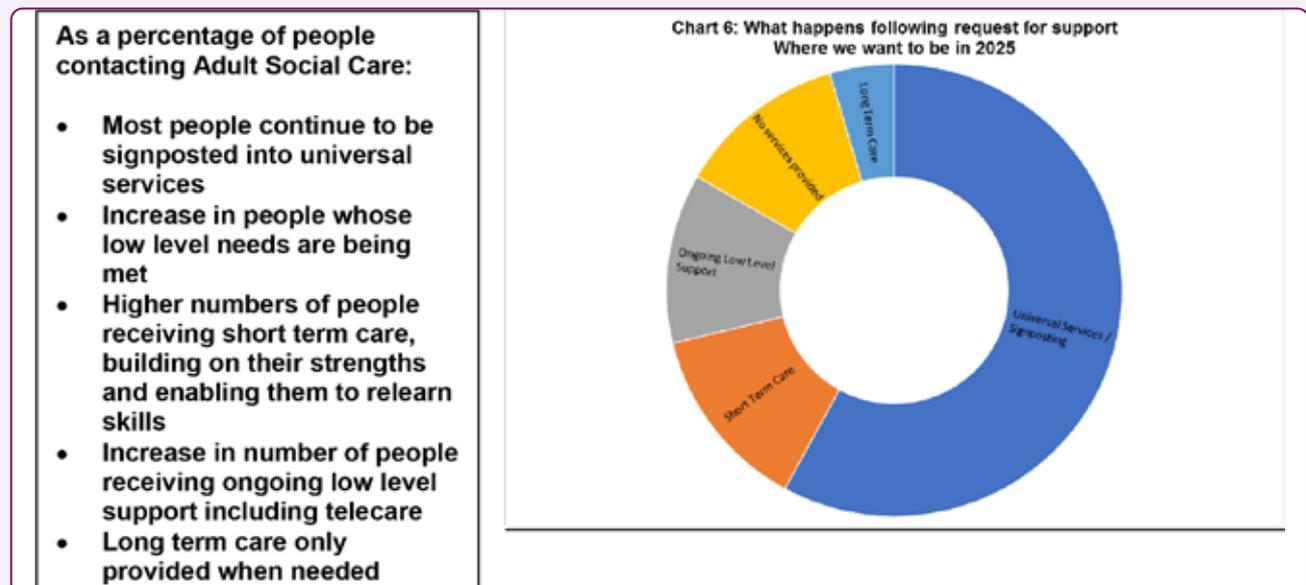
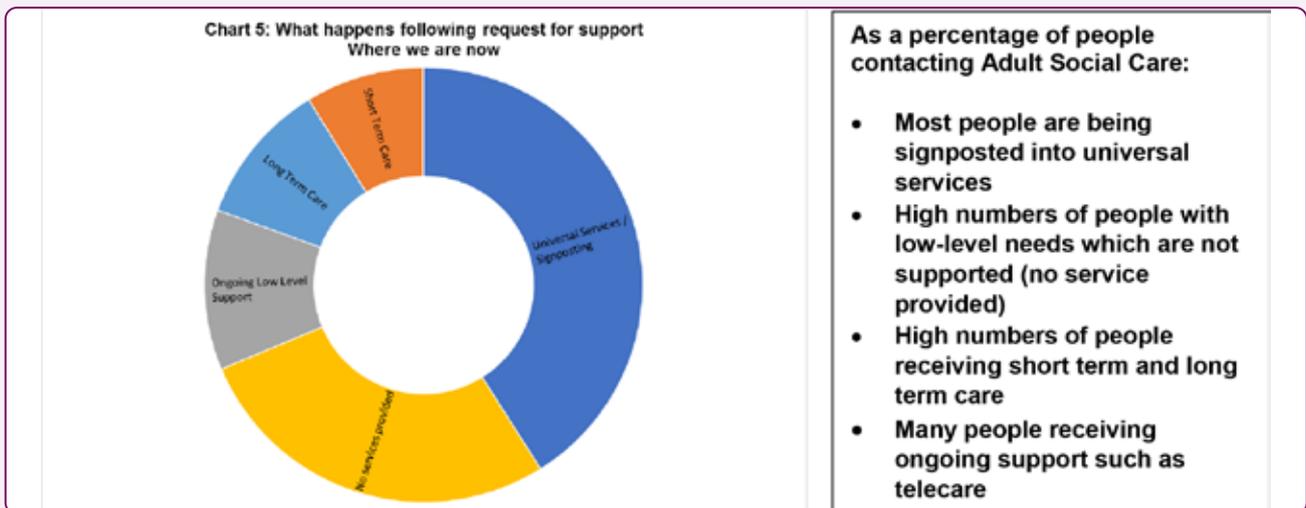


By user group it is fairly evenly split as seen in Chart 4, most organisations work across different client groups. Given the prevalence and expected rise in Learning Disability in the borough this may be an area that needs further consideration.



Our Journey

Charts 5 below shows what happened following a request for support during 2018/19. The Council hopes that by 2025 this will be more in line with Chart 6. The VCS has a pivotal role in helping us in this journey and to shift the balance. There is a need to understand what the level of unmet need is, and the consultation was the starting point for this. The strategy details how the Council plan to address these in partnership to ensure that we are meeting the needs of our residents as set out in the priorities in the following section.



Priority 1: Prevent, reduce and delay the need for formal care and support

Information and advice

Information and advice is key to a successful health and care system. Information and advice must be available as a universal service to everyone, taking into account their specific needs. Individuals and their families and carers need easy access to high quality information, advice and guidance to enable them to make informed choices. This includes the use of advocates to enable people to have a voice and express their views. Information and advice services provided when needed can make a significant difference to peoples lives and can help to prevent their needs from escalating. Ultimately this can reduce the demand for care and support and promote independent living.

It is essential that residents can “self-serve” and ‘self-help’, where it is appropriate to access support that is available from the Council and other organisations in the community. The Councils Wokingham Community Directory (WCD) details hundreds of services, support, clubs and activities enabling people to remain independent and stay connected with the community. We need to maximise the referral of people to the WCD. Services commissioned by the Council, must use this as a resource to advertise and promote the services they offer as well as signposting to other more appropriate organisations.

Evidence from best practice suggests better outcomes for residents where the VCS work directly alongside local authority employees at the front door of Council services. This means that should a VCS service become appropriate direct links can be made at source. The Council will explore opportunities of working in this way.

Right support at the right time

Wokingham is a borough of town’s and parishes, different locales and demographics. The feedback from the consultation is that people may identify with their local area more than with the borough as a whole and that local areas are different in demographic and geographical features, and will change radically with future development in the borough.

Smaller VCS organisations exist in Wokingham Borough without formal statutory support. The majority of these organisations operate at a parish or town level. Some of these organisations have funding from local towns and parish Councils, however there is no comprehensive list

of this funding. There is a need for a more comprehensive review of this including discussion about future use of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).

WBC does not fund services on a neighbourhoods basis but a small amount of money in a neighbourhood can make significant difference, particularly when sustaining local services (a popular lunch club or gardening group for example). To ensure that this local support continues and flourishes there is a need to identify and map organisations that provide such services and to support them to continue (see capacity building section).

Maximising independence

The focus where possible is to ensure that everyone that needs support gets it and for them to relearn the skills they need for daily living, enabling residents to maintain independence for longer to minimise their need for ongoing support. The emphasis is on (strength based commissioning) utilising peoples networks of family, friends and community resources to promote independence and wellbeing. Sports and leisure activities can play a fundamental role in supporting the wellbeing of the boroughs people and communities. It is important that they are also utilised as part of any solution.

Our social prescribing service “Community Navigators” supports and empowers people to engage in self-care, independence and wellbeing across the borough. The service funded via the Better Care Fund aims to promote and improve access to local VCS resources by providing targeted, up to date information to people who receive services and their families; and supports local people to self-care and maximise their wellbeing. It is aimed at people (particularly low to moderate risk service users, their carers, families and the general public) who might benefit from local information and are supported to self-care and enhance their health & wellbeing.

Social prescribing can make a huge contribution to an individual’s health and wellbeing. The scheme is for anyone of any age in the borough, from a young parent looking for peer support and different activities in the area, to an elderly person looking to find support with managing a health condition or looking for new social networks to join. In 2018/19 the service received 242 referrals with 87% of users reporting that they felt more self-reliant.

Our Carers Strategy 2020-25 highlights areas where we want to develop and establishes the focus of our work over the next three years to enable all carers in Wokingham Borough to be able to access the support they need and to be recognised and valued in their community.

Reducing Social Isolation

Reducing isolation is a corporate priority as outlined in the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2018-21. It is important that this Council wide approach to addressing loneliness and isolation continues and we look at the role of wider partners, including independent care providers. In addition we recognise the importance of having local solutions, particularly when transport can be a problem given the rural nature of the borough. Technology must also be utilised as appropriate due to its proven success in reducing isolation.

Social isolation was mentioned as the main area where the VCS expected a growth in demand in the next five years. This included an aging population as well as in the disabled, those with challenged mental health, carers, young mothers and even children. It was felt also that the Council must consider housing developments planned in future years. These could exacerbate the problem, not only bringing in demand through new residents but also effecting current residents as their communities change.

For ASC, the main services that prevent social isolation are befriending, mentoring and the Community Navigation Service. A number of services (including day centre-type services, lunch clubs), and social group schemes aim to help people widen their social circles. There is an opportunity as services are recommissioned across the council to ensure that the issue of isolation and loneliness is tackled.

Addressing Emotional Well Being

Wokingham Borough is set to see an increase in residents with mental health issues of 1.37% (440 people) over the next 5 years. It has a low rate of people requesting support for mental health issues when compared to similar local authorities. However this generally refers to formal and diagnosable mental health conditions and does not include anxiety, milder depressions, stress, and substance misuse issues. There is increasing evidence that these areas are seeing faster growth and it is well known that a failure to provide early support for people suffering early effects of mental ill health can lead not only to more severe mental health issues but also to many physical health problems.

In general the borough has a good tradition of self-help in this area which may account for the low prevalence of formal requests. There are a large number of therapists, life coaches and support groups in the area. These are not generally in the traditional VCS as some are for profit or are not formally registered as charities. Nonetheless they play an important part in the wellbeing of the borough and are well represented by the umbrella organisation Wellbeing in Wokingham Action Group (WiWAG).

In addition Wokingham is developing a treatment model through a Recovery College. This is a secondary prevention system that delivers comprehensive, peer-led education and training programmes within mental health services.

Transport and Accessibility

Community assets must be local and accessible, flexible, responsive and appropriate to the needs of the community. Being able to access these resources enables people to engage with others in activities they enjoy and to enjoy good quality lives while maximising their independence. Neighbourhoods which encourage and facilitate people to participate in their communities are essential.

The lack of transport provision for users of VCS services was another key issue raised during the consultation. This is not a VCS specific issue and the rural nature of large parts of Wokingham Borough means that it shares this issue with many other Council areas. Currently the existing options for transport either on an individual basis or from an organisational point of view are expensive and in certain cases unreliable. Having local provision where there is a demand will alleviate some of these pressures and the Council will review this as set out above.

Several local organisations run volunteer transport schemes. These work independently of each other and have traditionally been self-supporting. More recently they have been dominated by the demand to provide transport for hospital appointments but they have aspirations to do more community work. The consultation evidenced that a major obstacle in their development is not in attracting volunteer drivers but in the administration side. With some structural organisation and possible seed funding there is an opportunity for these groups to be arranged into an effective borough wide transport network, either administered by the Council or the VCS.

Actions

- a) Maximise referrals to the WCD and ensure organisations list and update information
- b) Improve information and awareness of all VCS and statutory organisations including working together better
- c) Asset map local community groups
- d) Continue and broaden the corporate approach to social isolation including technology, contracts infrastructure and new housing developments
- e) Support the implementation of the Wokingham Carers Action plan
- f) Align commissioning of carers service to the wider VCS plan

- g) Ensure that a commitment to carers is in all relevant VCS contracts
- h) Ensure a commitment to emotional and mental wellbeing as part of future commissioning
- i) Develop mental health awareness and prevention training in the VCS
- j) Involve the VCS in the development of the Recovery College
- k) Map all current transport services and review any opportunity to be used better
- l) Develop a pilot project looking at borough wide transport provision

Priority 2: Work in partnership and build the capacity of the VCS

Principles

The consultation evidenced the sectors view that an overarching vision was required that set a direction for the medium term. It is hoped this would guide the VCS on funding and contracting decisions and define the outcomes to be achieved to guarantee a robust and sustainable sector for years to come. [The Government Compact for the VCS](#) sets out key principles and establishes a way of working. Having a set of principles to govern the relationship between WBC and the VCS was suggested and it was hoped this would also address the complexities in working with a variety of different commissioners and contract managers.

Collaboration and coproduction

A collaborative approach between VCS organisations will enable the Council to develop and build on the existing strengths and resources of the community. It also avoids duplication and maximises shared benefit. The Council will use its resources and commissioning arrangements to promote and incentivise joint working between VCS organisations.

There is the potential to build on the skills and experience of VCS organisations to be able to meet the requirements of commissioners and compete with the private sector. There is also opportunity to embed a more collaborative approach to the development of policy and commissioning and design of services. But this requires a culture change towards greater co-production with the VCS. There is opportunity for the Council and VCS to share information, including consultation and experiences; community needs assessments; existing good practice and service and gap analysis.

There is also scope to share Council resources such

as research and information about the community to provide in-kind support to the VCS, particularly to attract external funding. As detailed in our ASC strategy there is a wealth of information collated by WBC that can be utilised to assess trends and anticipate future demand. As mentioned earlier there is a high number of people who when contacting services are not provided with a service. It is important that we monitor this, and where there are any gaps, work with the VCS to deliver and develop such provision.

Participatory approaches will need to be adopted to ensure that data on residents experience is part of any commissioning exercise. The VCS will play an active role in reviewing evidence and working with people who use their services to ensure that their experience is reflected.

A number of groups are supported by the Council to shape decision making and will continue to be informed and involved in service development. In addition the NHS is developing locality based Primary Care Networks (PCNs). For future integration purposes it may be beneficial to organise the local VCS along PCN boundaries.

Capacity building

Stakeholders who took part in the consultation felt that there was a need to build the capacity and connectivity of the sector, for it to be responsive and effective to meet the diverse needs of the borough. The Council and the sector need to review the capacity of the VCS overall in the borough, in size and composition, to address the needs of the local area. The overall balance within the VCS needs to be considered, taking into account, for example, that Wokingham is a borough with high levels of learning disabilities and social isolation and also has low levels of unemployment. Where there is opportunity to invest, and develop services to enhance the preventative offer this will be explored.

The Council will ensure that organisations can demonstrate that they involve and engage with all communities including those that are hard to reach so that they have an equal opportunity to access provision, influence decisions and help shape and design services. There was a recognition that more sustainable funding sources that provide the VCS with the stability to plan and deliver innovative services was needed. The sector also felt that there were more opportunities to attract non-Council funding and that often obtaining one type of funding made it easier to secure another. Whilst direct payments was mentioned, those who had experience in this respect claimed that it was difficult to plan services when the revenue was not assured. Business planning to aid income generation and build the expertise of the sector to monitor and evaluate their impact was a recurring theme.

There is a need for infrastructure support to the VCS, including:

- “skilling up” organisations in bidding for and taking on commissioned services
- embedding business planning to ensure that services are resilient and less reliant on funding from the Council
- encouraging VCS organisations to innovate in how they generate income
- supporting the sector to retain premises and resources in a difficult financial climate (see below)
- providing training in a range of areas
- ensuring VCS organisations are digitally engaged

Assets

The difficulty in finding buildings and spaces for the VCS to operate from was another theme raised in the consultation. Current market conditions mean that rents and leases are very expensive in certain areas of the borough, and as a result many VCS organisations were spending a significant amount of money on rents some of which could have been better invested in service delivery. In addition, finding affordable office space resulted in many organisations working away from other organisations. It was suggested that a review of assets (buildings) to support the VCS should be undertaken with consideration in the following areas

- Not just the Council: Asset sharing should include the VCS itself sharing with each other
- Full cost recovery: Access to assets needs to be costed and shown as part of funding allocations to all organisations
- Transparency: The VCS need to be confident that there is a fair approach to the allocation of Council assets
- Borough coverage: The nature of Wokingham Borough requires that the assets not be based in one area but an equitable approach is taken across the towns and parishes and that be flexible to allow smaller organisations to use.

The community hub approach

This is a partnership approach where services and assets are shared across the borough. These largely consist of office space for mobile working, interview rooms, meeting rooms and space for intensive one-to-one work. The local VCS collaborative body can decide qualification criteria for building access (i.e. strategic importance to the borough, level of service provision, even performance).

This then means that any qualified organisation can give access to its staff. Also relevant statutory agencies such as Council and NHS staff should also have access.

Either the Council or VCS partners being responsible for managing allocation arrangements and ongoing facilities management. Can share access to computers, Wi-Fi and digital skills amongst other organisations and the community. In addition, sharing professional expertise in areas such as digital engagement, HR, finance and procurement.

The Council will consider options for maximising the most effective use of any community hub. This includes exploring opportunities for the private sector to work alongside these services, for example many care agencies are not registered in the borough, also citing high office costs as a reason for basing themselves in neighbouring authorities. Allowing use to these agencies will provide further synergies, particularly given their day to day work with vulnerable residents and the opportunity and benefits to signpost them to the VCS.

Actions

- a) Draw up a partnership agreement between WBC and the VCS based on shared principles
- b) Promote collaboration where possible, in the design, commissioning and monitoring of services
- c) Better information sharing between partners including input of people in receipt of services
- d) Review of the capacity of the VCS in Wokingham in relation to the borough profile
- e) Invest, and develop services to enhance the preventative offer
- f) Develop a programme of infrastructure support for VCS organisations
- g) Review of Council buildings that it owns or that are currently under wider community use and VCS buildings
- h) Development of community hubs that are sustainable and provide better outcomes for residents

Priority 3: Commission services in line with our strategic priorities that deliver quality and value for money

A new strategic approach to funding

A strategic approach is important to help ensure that the VCS can operate effectively and sustainably. The Council will ensure future opportunities are clearly linked to identified community need, aligned to Council priorities and services (as articulated in our strategies and Corporate Plan) are competitive and demonstrate value for money.

A new bidding framework for future allocation of funding will be developed to achieve ASC outcomes. This may include various funding from different directorates including public health and leisure and culture and the framework will ensure that there is strong quality assurance around safeguarding and health and safety practices.

Decision making on funding allocations will be based on well-defined criteria that support clear outcomes. Contracts will be more robust at defining outputs and outcomes and measuring and evaluating impact, and providers will be expected to report back on Key Performance Indicators regularly. This will ensure that clarity is provided on how provision is contributing to outcomes, and give flexibility to amending specifications if required.

Promote transparency and accountability of the VCS

The Council will improve governance and scrutiny of its funding of the VCS by developing arrangements for grant decision making and scrutiny that are open and transparent. Generally it was acknowledged that with reduced budgets across local government it is particularly important that the VCS is able to demonstrate impact on how it adds value to public service delivery.

Commissioning Arrangements

Services currently funded by grants will be commissioned rather than grant funded. In moving to this approach, the Council will work closely with the sector to ensure that their particular experience and expertise is recognised.

Grant funding will only remain in a very narrow set of circumstances, where there is a clear necessity for funding to be provided by way of a grant rather than commissioning and a clear benefit of the service being funded.

Council commissioning processes and funding arrangements, will ensure that:

- where appropriate, the Council will look to commission VCS organisations to provide services.
- the advantages of commissioning the VCS are valued and understood
- the ability of the VCS to participate in the commissioning process is maximised
- small organisations are able to benefit from commissioning opportunities
- requirements of tenderers and contractors are more proportionate to the levels of funding and complexity of the service
- greater collaboration with the VCS within the relevant legal frameworks;
- commissioning is underpinned by the needs of people who use the services
- there is effective evaluation of impact;
- longer funding terms are used where appropriate and take into account external income generation
- we encourage and support the development of innovative ways to deliver services;
- processes minimise bureaucracy and are pragmatic
- increase efficiency, value for money and reduce duplication in the VCS

Respondents to the consultation were keen to highlight that barriers do exist to involving the sector in the delivery of strategic priorities. It was noted that multi-year funding assists business planning within the sector and should be encouraged.

Innovation and technology

The design and delivery of the preventative offer and care and support services will no doubt need to change as mentioned throughout this strategy. There have been evidence of other Local Authorities doing this successfully in order to meet the challenges they face. We will learn from best practice where possible but will be mindful of the uniqueness of our borough, encouraging a culture of innovation and creativity and supporting the development of new models to deliver social care and support.

Smart technology can also be used to reduce isolation and loneliness, particularly with the development of virtual assistant devices like Alexa. Through the Smart Cities programme we will pioneer an innovative digital service which enables improvements in connecting isolated older people to services / support on their own terms.

To support innovation we will allow flexibility, enabling risks to be taken and accepting that inevitably some things may not work.

Actions

- a) Explore a single streamlined process for all WBC funding to the VCS based on corporate priorities
- b) Identify outcomes to be used in a future 'bidding programme' for the procurement and contracting of future services
- c) Provide multiyear funding to assist business planning for VCS

Measuring Success

Our borough has a vibrant and diverse VCS that provides a wide range of services, activities and support to residents. The Council is committed to ensuring support to the sector and working together to ensure a continuing thriving VCS, with improved community cohesion and the foundations of wellbeing and resilient, empowered, supportive communities.

The VCS Strategy has been coproduced with the VCS and presents a way forward to sustain, develop and broaden a thriving community offer. This strategy is not about telling the VCS how to operate. It sets out our vision for working together – for an independent, sustainable and diverse VCS, working with the community, Council, and partners to meet the needs of local people.

It anticipates future need and provides a new way of governing services with all stakeholders involved. The priorities set out here are intended to provide an open and honest framework for prioritising our support and resources for working with the sector to deliver better outcomes for all residents in Wokingham Borough.

The Strategy focuses on our priorities, to:

- Prevent, reduce and delay the need for formal care and support
- Work in partnership and build the capacity of the VCS
- Commission services in line with our strategic priorities that deliver quality and value for money

An action plan is now being developed to turn the vision into reality that will include new ways of working between statutory organisations and the VCS.



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