

Building blocks - Bolton's VCSE Sector Early Years Strategy 2021 - 2023



November 2021

A co-designed strategy led by Bolton Together and funded by Bolton Council's Start Well Service.

A foreword from the Chair of Bolton Together – Karen Edwards OBE

I am delighted that we are leading the way in Bolton by developing a VSCE Early Years Strategy to drive forward delivery over the next three years. Early Years voluntary sector providers are well placed to deliver support and services embedded in local communities. We know that by working together we can address the challenges and barriers that children and families face in Bolton from an early age to improve school readiness, health outcomes and life opportunities. This strategy will support the delivery and investment into Early Years provision alongside supporting providers to capture and evidence the difference they make to our young children and families in Bolton.

A message from Executive Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Bolton Council – Cllr Anne Galloway

Bolton Council are proud to see that there is a dedicated early years strategy for the Voluntary and Community sector in Bolton. We are committed through the 2030 Vision and the Children's Service plan, to all children having the best start in life. Services and partners are working together to achieve this as well as other priorities to improve outcomes for all children and families in Bolton.

This Strategy recognises the vital role the Voluntary and community sector has in supporting children to get the best possible start in life, so that they have every chance to succeed and be happy. It outlines the key priorities that will enable diverse groups and services improve the health, wellbeing and life experiences of babies, children, and their families.

A message from Bolton Council's Director of Children's Services – Bernie Browne

I welcome that there is an Early Years strategy for the VCSE sector in Bolton. This strategy aligns with the principles of Belonging in Bolton, both established on co-production, partnerships, and connections. The more that agencies join up to deliver services to meet the needs of families with young children, the more these needs can be met in a seamless way.

There are some areas of the borough where families and communities need more support with aspects of their lives including supporting their children's early education. We know that the VCS are well placed to help meet the needs of local communities based on their active engagement, knowledge, and relationships.

This Bolton VCSE Early Years Strategy recognises the strength that a quality Early Years VCS offer can help achieve the aspiration to improve school readiness, ensure every child has a sense of belonging irrespective of background, needs or culture to enable them to achieve positive outcomes.

A view from an early years provider in Bolton

At the heart of the community is the VCSE sector. Made up of those working side by side with families requiring support and often utilising the knowledge and experience of volunteers who have experienced these struggles on a first hand basis. Provided with the right support, funding and through joint working, these organisations and groups are based placed to make the most impact.

Liz Morley – Centre Manager – Baby Basics

Introduction.

Bolton Together, Bolton Council's Start Well Service and Bolton CVS have led the design and development of this voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector early years strategy for Bolton. This strategy has been co-designed with groups and organisations working with babies and children aged 0-5 years, incorporating their knowledge and experience of working directly with families and carers. This strategy aims to create the strong foundations on which to develop Bolton's VCSE sector early years offer and increase the connectivity between existing provision, inspire new innovation into the early years offer and create stronger VCSE sector-led services.

The aim of this VCSE sector-led strategic approach is to improve the health, wellbeing and experiences of babies, children and their families, ensuring that parents and carers are supported in helping children get the best start in life in Bolton.

Co-designing the strategy.

Co-design has been a critical element in the development of this strategy. Through working collaboratively with VCSE sector groups and organisations, we've undertaken surveys, workshops and one to one conversations with staff, volunteers and trustees from individual organisations. The findings of those activities have then been used to inform this strategy and the supporting action plan. We see this strategy as essential to continue the conversation between VCSE providers and commissioners and forms the basis for on-going conversations and working in collaboration to deliver the local offer for Bolton.

Measuring impact.

Through the development of this strategy, it was clear that there are different perspectives on how best to support babies, children, their families and carers by the groups and organisations providing support, public sector service providers and commissioners. Importantly, the common thread amongst all stakeholders is the wellbeing and opportunities for babies and children and in particular, the development and 'school readiness' of children. The commonly shared most important element of impact measurement for this strategy by all was that it is child-centred and also enables the development of early years VCSE sector provision in Bolton.

Embedding the strategy.

The implementation of this strategy will be regularly reviewed through Bolton's Children's Board and form part of the work plan for Bolton's Active, Connected and Prosperous Board (Health and Wellbeing Board).

Progress against implementation will be reviewed by Bolton Council's Public Health Team, Bolton Council Commissioners, NHS Bolton Clinical Commissioning Group, Bolton Council's Start Well Service, VCSE Sector groups and organisations, Bolton Together and Bolton CVS; and most importantly, children, families, and carers.

Bolton's voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector.

Bolton has a strong, established and well connected VCSE sector. The State of the Sector research (2021) highlights that there's 1,672 VCSE sector groups and organisations active in the borough collectively donating 232,608 volunteer hours each week. Around 24% of those groups and organisations work directly with children and young people. The VCSE workforce working with children and young people is estimated at 1,704.72 FTE with a further 14,047 people actively volunteering. Funding for Bolton's VCSE sector comes from a variety of sources, with Bolton Council being a principal funder with some investment made by NHS Bolton Clinical Commissioning Group and Bolton at Home. The Bolton's Fund is Bolton's open-access grants programme which launched in 2019 and will provide further opportunities for future investment aligned to Bolton's Vision 2030.

VCSE Sector early years provision in Bolton.

There are over **60** dedicated VCSE sector groups and organisations focused on early years provision, with many other organisations providing universal services that also include support for babies and children aged 0 - 5 years old, their families and carers. Early years provision is spread across the borough, with a number of groups and organisations also specifically supporting babies and children with additional development and social needs. There's been no specific plan for supporting VCSE sector early years provision over the past 5-years, however some of those organisations providing services have come together through the Bolton Together Early Years Sub-group.

Measuring impact.

Through co-design with Bolton Together members, VCSE sector groups and organisations, analysing Bolton CVS's development support and eliciting the views partners, the development areas are:

- Providing opportunities for the VCSE sector early years providers to collaborate and share learning together.
- Ensuring that activity aligns to the Bolton and Greater Manchester school readiness agenda.
- Providing business and strategic planning support for individual organisations and also strategic partnerships.
- Supporting groups and organisations with income generation, bid writing and financial planning.

Opportunities for the early years VCSE sector in Bolton.

There are lots of opportunities that can be explored by VCSE sector early years providers in Bolton, including:

- Securing new investment and new service delivery models through Bolton Together.
- Developing an at-scale offer that could support the Public Sector in reaching diverse communities.
- Tackling inequalities through targeted provision, devising a specific offer for diverse communities and SEND.
- Collaboration with other children and young people's provision to develop a 'life course pathway' for Bolton.

The Vision - VCSE Sector Early Years Strategy 2020 - 2022

One of the key components of Bolton's Vision 2030 is **Start Well**: *'Our children get the best possible start in life, so that they have every chance to succeed and be happy'*, which is also the Vision for this strategy.

This strategy also aligns to the 3 aspirations of Bolton's Start Well Service.:

- **Improve the quality and impact of early education and childcare.**
- **Improve children's health and wellbeing in the early years.**
- **Address inequalities, raise aspirations and improve life chances.**

Priority 1 - Ensure that school readiness is a priority for early years VCSE sector providers in Bolton.

This will be achieved by:

- Connecting Bolton's VCSE sector to Bolton Council's Start Well early years priorities.
- Distributing targeted investment via **Bolton's Fund** for targeted early years support and activities.
- Providing targeted, sector specific training for VCSE sector groups and organisations of all sizes.
- Strengthening the relationship between the Start Well Service, Bolton Together, Bolton CVS and the wider VCSE sector in Bolton.

Priority 2 - Build a collaborative alliance and create the space for providers to design and shape their offer together.

This will be achieved by:

- Delivering a leadership programme for VCSE sector early years providers (Chairs and employees).
- Encouraging and enabling early years providers to participate in regular facilitated meetings.
- Identify 'at scale' opportunities utilising Bolton Together and other alliance vehicles to secure new investment.
- Design and develop a VCSE sector 'hub' and 'No Wrong Door' principles to encourage seamless internal referral systems across VCSE, Independent and Public Sector providers.

Priority 3 - Develop a funding model through commissioners, grants makers and the VCSE sector working together.

This will be achieved by:

- Ensuring that all grants programmes for VCSE sector early years provision are designed in line with Bolton's Fund design principles and aligned to ensure that Social Value and child-centred approaches are embedded.
- Agreeing outcome measures that ensure the focus of investment is in improvements for babies, children, their families and carers.
- Delivering a 3-year programme of investment that is independently evaluated.

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- Strengthening the relationship between the Start Well Service, Bolton Together, Bolton CVS and the wider VCSE sector in Bolton.

Why...

Every year, young people in Bolton start school without basic skills and this can be addressed through effective support for families and carers from pre-conception through to early years provision, delivered by the VCSE sector. In order to effectively and strategically position Bolton's VCSE sector, it's essential that school readiness is a priority for early years groups and organisations in order to align to key strategies and ensure the VCSE sector is embedded within pathways as a referral partner across Start Well priorities including physical, social and emotional development. Furthermore, it is critical that decision makers and commissioners are clear that VCSE provision contributes to school readiness in a meaningful and effective way so that they invest and fully support the local offer.

How...

There will be a comprehensive bespoke training programme designed by Bolton Council's Start Well team and delivered directly to and for VCSE providers through Bolton CVS's Stronger Together Training Programme, supported by Bolton Together. Performance and outcome measures will be introduced through grants and investment programmes that early years providers use that demonstrate improved outcomes against school readiness. Bolton CVS and Bolton Together will develop an annual impact summary of the collective early years VCSE sector offer in Bolton.

When...

The training module will be designed and implemented by Quarter 1, 2021-22 and will be delivered quarterly.

The child-centred performance measures will be co-designed with providers, commissioners, decision makers and those accessing Bolton's early years VCSE sector offer from Qtr 1, 2021.

An interim impact report will be produced for the year ended 31st March 2022 and a full collaborative impact report will be produced for the year ended 31st March 2023.

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Why...

Bolton has a strong early years VCSE sector offer that is connected and has been supported through Bolton Together, Bolton CVS and Bolton Council. It is essential to build on those strong foundations in order to maximise the offer and get the best for babies, children, their families and carers.

Through connecting providers, the diversity of offer and potential to provide targeted support will be better co-ordinated in order to improve outcomes for babies, children, their families and Bolton as a place

How...

The leadership programme is a bespoke commissioned activity that will be delivered through Bolton Together via Bolton CVS for early years VCSE sector providers. A programme of workshops will also be supported through Bolton Together to ensure that providers regularly connect to share learning and create new opportunities together. Through targeted horizon scanning, large-scale opportunities can be explored and the collaborative bid writing capacity across organisations can be maximised. Through all of this joined up working and collaboration, more effective connectivity and pathways will emerge across the VCSE providers.

When...

The leadership programme will begin delivery in Quarter 1 2021-22 and will be commissioned through a local provider.

Collaborative workshops to look at pathways and funding opportunities for VCSE sector early years providers will be co-ordinated through Bolton Together and these will begin from April 2021.

Priority 3 - Develop a funding model through commissioners, grants makers and the VCSE sector working together.

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- Ensuring that all grants programmes for VCSE sector early years provision are designed in line with Bolton's Fund design principles and aligned to ensure that Social Value and child-centred approaches are embedded.
- Agreeing outcome measures that ensure the focus of investment is in improvements for babies, children, their families and carers.
- Delivering a 3-year programme of investment that is independently evaluated.

Why...

The Bolton's Fund is the place-based open access grants programme for the VCSE sector in Bolton that ensures fair distribution of investment aligned to JSNA priorities. Through future grant and contracting arrangements, there is a need to shift from an output measurement framework to outcomes for babies and children and this requires joined-up co-design work with commissioners, VCSE sector providers, families and children. Furthermore, currently, grant and contracting arrangements for early years provision are usually short term, often 12-months and rolling agreements which impacts organisational development and sustainability.

How...

There are 4 components to making this work:

- Effective co-design.
- Providing a strong evidence base and regularly sharing data and information.
- A shift from output measurement to a strong outcomes and child-centred measurement framework.
- Standardised reporting so that data can be collated to better understand performance.

When...

The co-design is an on-going process with and there should be frequent opportunities for VCSE providers to share their collective progress with commissioners and decision makers through the Children and Young People's governance in Bolton.