

## **Bedfordshire Luton and Milton Keynes Health and Care Partnership and Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Memorandum of Understanding**

### **Introduction**

The Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Health and Care Partnership is a group of local authorities, NHS organisations and the voluntary, community & social enterprise (VCSE) sector, working together with our population to support and improve health and wellbeing in our area. Our aim is simple - we want everyone in our city, towns, villages and communities to live a longer, healthier life.

When we talk about the VCSE in BLMK, we mean charities, voluntary organisations, community groups, faith groups, and those social enterprises where profits are reinvested in their social purpose. This breadth and depth is its strength and the sector brings specialist expertise and fresh perspectives to public service delivery. It has a long track record in promoting engagement and finding creative ways to improve outcomes for groups with the poorest health, making it an essential partner in addressing health inequalities.

The VCSE sector is already working across areas such as skills, employment and enterprise; housing and transport; environment and carbon reduction; poverty reduction; inclusive economic growth and inclusive governance. In addition, many of them are already active in community development, social movements, health creation, and social innovation. The sector boasts an impressive overview of how health and social care and other agendas are interconnected.

### **Purpose**

This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is a written understanding between the Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board and the VCSE sector to detail how the two will operate and to ensure integration to realise the potential of working together.

The purpose of this MoU is to establish an adaptable and flexible framework that brings supports the development of mutual understanding between partners and a culture of learning. It will demonstrate shared vision and values, putting people in our communities at the heart of everything we do. The MoU will build on existing partnership working and dynamic relationships, committing resources, energy and passion to integrated working to achieve our collective aims and objectives as equal partners. We recognise that this is the first step in developing an equal partnership.

### **Background**

Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Health and Care [Partnership](#) is committed to formalising a strategic partnership with the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector, building on existing structures and engagement at neighbourhood, place and system. A Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector partnership forum is being developed through the established Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector strategy group.

This group acts as a conduit to engage the sector more widely and ensures Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector partners are embedded at all levels of governance and decision making across the system. The Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector partnership lead is a member of the of the Health and Care Partnership Joint Committee.

### **Shared Principles and Values**

The following are the shared principles and values of the Health and Care Partnership and the VCSE in BLMK:

- Co-production
- Learning and adapting
- Honesty and transparency
- Supportive
- Trusted relationships
- Person and community focused
- Integrity

### **VCSE vision**

A vibrant, sustainable and resilient Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector which is participating across all levels and places within the Bedfordshire, Luton & Milton Keynes Integrated Care System. The VCSE is recognised as an equal partner for the expertise it brings in shaping strategies and in planning and delivering services for the benefit of the population.

### **Governance and Connectivity**

The BLMK VCSE strategy group will influence and facilitate greater collaboration between the BLMK Health and Care Partnership and the VCSE Sector, enhancing the role of the VCSE sector in the delivery of the transformation of health and wellbeing and cementing their role as a key strategic partner. The VCSE sector is a key part of the ICS and therefore it forms part of the overall governance of how the BLMK Health and Care Partnership will operate.

The BLMK VCSE Strategy Group enables connectivity of the wider sector and the VCSE is increasing representation on certain boards. The VCSE Strategy Group has core membership from identified infrastructure organisations across BLMK and places for Health and Wellbeing Board VCSE representatives from all four local authorities. Membership of the group will evolve as partnership arrangements mature. A range of VCSE organisations will have been participating in working groups prior to the development of a strategic partnership.

The Strategy Group recognises that the VCSE sector needs to maintain a flexible architecture to operate with maximum impact across BLMK. Most of the work will happen at a 'place' level, however where relevant, decisions or work may need to happen at a system

level or cross boundaries. The group will support the development of a BLMK VCSE Partnership Forum to ensure there are opportunities to engage at a system level, where it makes sense to do so.

In Milton Keynes, the infrastructure organisation Community Action:MK, along with other VCSE organisations is facilitating a place-based alliance of VCSE organisations that can work with the Milton Keynes Health and Care Partnership to deliver on local priorities, as agreed in the MK Deal. MK membership of the BLMK Strategy group is drawn from the MK VCSE alliance. Members of the group from across the county of Bedfordshire are those that have capacity and purpose to engage at a system level.

There is one dedicated infrastructure organisation, CVS Bedfordshire, covering the county of Bedfordshire, alongside other VCSE organisations and local authority teams that provide an infrastructure function. Each of the local authorities of Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire and Luton will work with the VCSE networks across Bedfordshire to engage with local decision-making structures, and where appropriate, the Bedfordshire Care Alliance.

The VCSE sector will also be a key component to workstreams and themes at place, care alliance and system levels. We will ensure VCSE representation in these areas is strong and utilises the strengths and knowledge of wider VCSE organisations, ensuring the appropriate level of contribution in the right areas.

The VCSE will work alongside the other partnerships within the BLMK system, with responsibility as agreed with the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and local authorities. In addition, the VCSE will work with the other partnerships on their responsibilities and integrate the work of the sector to support and deliver against other outcomes. A non-executive member of the ICB will have VCSE partnerships as part of their portfolio to ensure the appropriate level of profile and visibility at a strategic level.

### **Joint commitments**

- For the next 12 months we commit to the undertakings described in this document. We will hold each other to account, live our values and regularly review our working relationship.
- We will collaborate to maximise on the opportunities and share the risks to achieve the best possible outcomes for individuals, communities and our organisations.
- We see each other as critical friends. We will invest time in learning about each other's sector, developing mutual understanding and assimilating our learning into our behaviours and practice.
- We will hold spaces to have difficult conversations when required, committed to being open to ideas, debate, challenge and discussion, through formal and informal channels. This will include developing a dispute resolution process.
- To ensure we work in a trusting relationship we commit to being as transparent as we can be, whilst recognising that there are times this is constrained. Transparency by the ICS about where and how decisions are made is key for the VCSE sector to have equality, equity and parity of power in influencing decision making. Transparency by VCSE sector organisations about their characteristics, successes and challenges is key to citizens gaining the greatest possible benefit from services.

- We will develop engagement structures that enable VCSE organisations to have a voice on issues that matter to them and the communities they work with. This will be done in a way that is proportionate, impactful, and fair.

### **ICS commitments**

- When a need for representation is identified (by either party), we will recognise, respect, and work with the pathways that will be established for engagement with the VCSE.
- We recognise the difference between VCSE representation and VCSE participation and will recruit to boards and working groups with this difference in mind.
- We will welcome input from the VCSE sector to ensure senior ICS system leaders are informed about what is important to the sector and communities. We are committed to an ongoing dialogue with the VCSE sector and respect them as an equal strategic partner.
- We value the infrastructure for the VCSE sector and support this where we can, including funding it where possible, relevant and appropriate, with agreements that are meaningful to both sectors
- We commit to appropriate and proportionate commissioning processes for the VCSE sector. This includes frameworks and grant funding and consideration for length of contracts and grants. We understand the need for timely payment of invoices. We also recognise the importance of full cost recovery and are committed to commission on this basis.
- We recognise that the VCSE is an equal partner that sometimes has a different perspective. We respect the sector's right to challenge and campaign without this impacting on the funding relationship with the ICS.

### **VCSE Commitments**

- We will prioritise areas of our strategic engagement with the ICS based on VCSE capacity and a mutual agreement concerning where we add most value.
- We will appoint representatives who have a mandate to speak on behalf of the VCSE sector. They will be appointed on the basis of a commitment to maintaining their impartiality, reflecting a diversity of perspectives, clearly articulating our collective messages and openly sharing information and opportunities with the VCSE sector.
- There will be times where people from the VCSE sector attend ICS boards / working groups outside of this structure and represent their own organisations and speak from their own perspectives.
- The VCSE sector will work collectively to take a strategic lead and define its priorities based on local intelligence.
- We will collaborate within the VCSE sector to work strategically with the ICS; this includes building relationships and cohesion within the sector, exploring opportunities for joint working and sharing information and resources.
- We will participate in service design, strategic planning and prioritisation including undertaking commissioned work to support the ICS to involve local communities and communities of interest in the planning and design of services.

- We will create volunteering opportunities, strengthening community cohesion and resilience by enabling staff and residents to contribute their skills and time

### **Resourcing**

BLMK Health and Care Partnership/ICB will provide appropriate resources to support collaborative activity and capacity from members to support the operations of the VCSE Strategy Group and Partnership Forum to deliver on agreed programmes and projects at system, Place and alliance. In addition, the BLMK ICB will directly fund agreed core posts.

Funding and staffing resources will be reviewed on a regular basis in line with emerging needs and priorities. The VCSE Strategy Group will identify and secure additional external investment to deliver on the plans and priorities of the partnership and wider VCSE sector.

BLMK also recognise of value of the VCSE at Place, as key independent partner and ensuring sustainability of the sector's contribution and allocate appropriate resources that enable strategic partnership working.

**November 2022**

**Signed on behalf of the VCSE:**

**Signed on behalf of the ICB:**