



BLMK VCSE Annual Review

APRIL 2023 - MARCH 2024

FOREWORD

Sonal Mehta **VCSE Partnership Lead**

When I started this role two and a half years ago, the VCSE sector was recognised for the vital support they provide to the residents of BLMK. This support is wide ranging and can include enabling people to stay connected in their local communities, providing much needed mental health support, or caring for people towards the end of life. The role they can play as a strategic partner to help shape our thinking, and contribute to the planning and design of an integrated health and care system was less well understood. A system that keeps people well, as well as treats them when they fall ill, and is committed to reducing health inequalities.

We should not underestimate the hard work that goes in to developing an effective partnership, especially when spanning different sectors with very different cultures. I am grateful for the opportunity to be hosted in a VCSE organisation in the early days of this role, which combined with my background as a pharmacist, led me to have an appreciation of challenge that lay ahead. However, thanks to the commitment of members and attendees of BLMK VCSE Strategy Group, and wider colleagues, we have made strides in developing this understanding. Our partnership has a strong foundation to build on due the dedication, time and energy of VCSE and ICB colleagues, and the trusted relationships we are creating.

We have have seen positive examples of the VCSE's strategic role in shaping and delivering priorities in the Denny Review on healthcare inequalities, and developing mental health alliances. They are bringing new perspectives and different approaches to supporting residents through neighbourhood working and supporting system flow. We look ahead to identifying more areas where the sector can make a valued contribution, as we transform pathways and services to include more focus on prevention and tackling health inequalities.

Both the VCSE sector and the public sector are under considerable strain and there have been difficult but honest conversations along the way. We know we have to develop new ways to work together in order to tackle the complex challenges we face in BLMK. There is more to improve but also much to celebrate, as we see increasing involvement of VCSE colleagues in key workstreams across BLMK and at a more local level. We look forward to strengthening our partnership over the coming year to ensure we can deliver better health for our residents.

Supported by VCSE Strategy Group Co-chairs:

Caroline Cook, CEO, Luton All Women's Centre

Caroline Faulkner, Business and Commissioning Manager, Keech Hospice Care

Manjeet Gill, Non-executive Member, BLMK Integrated Care Board

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

Since 2019, a group of senior VCSE leaders have come together to support embedding the VCSE sector as equal partners in the local health and care system. This group is called the BLMK VCSE Strategy Group and has members from across all four places within BLMK.

The purpose of this annual review is to reflect on the progress the BLMK VCSE Strategy Group has made in supporting the VCSE sector to become embedded as equal partners. It is intended to highlight current and future challenges, and support with engaging partners in the development of strategies to overcome these in the next financial year.



BLMK VCSE STRATEGY GROUP

The BLMK VCSE Strategy Group was established to 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 group acts as a conduit to engage the sector more widely and ensure the VCSE sector partners are embedded at all levels of governance and decision-making across BLMK.



Above: Sonal Mehta, Manjeet Gill, Peta Wilkinson, Rima Makarem, Caroline Cook, Felicity Cox and Maria Wogan at the Memorandum of Understanding ceremony. Venue - Luton All Women’s Centre.

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

The Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector has signed a formal agreement with the Integrated Care Board (ICB), who is responsible for planning and delivering health care for one million residents in the local area. The MoU, approved in November 2022, sets out how both will work in partnership to improve the health of people living in Bedfordshire. Luton and Milton Keynes. The MoU will establish an adaptable and flexible framework to support the development of mutual understanding between partners and a culture of learning.

The MoU was signed in May 2023 by the co-chairs of the BLMK VCSE Strategy Group on behalf of the wider VCSE sector.

SHARED PRINCIPLES AND VALUES



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.

WHAT HAVE WE ACHIEVED?

BLMK ICB has a dedicated role to support the VCSE Partnership

7 spaces allocated to VCSE partners to complete Quality Improvement Training

“In regards to tendering, the VCSE has been able to speak to one another rather than just competing against each other”

BLMK ICS is a champion site for the NHS England VCSE Quality Development Tool

VCSE supported The Denny Review on health Inequalities

The Strategy Group is a force for good - it's allowed lots of trust-building

A VCSE representative on the Working with People and Communities Committee

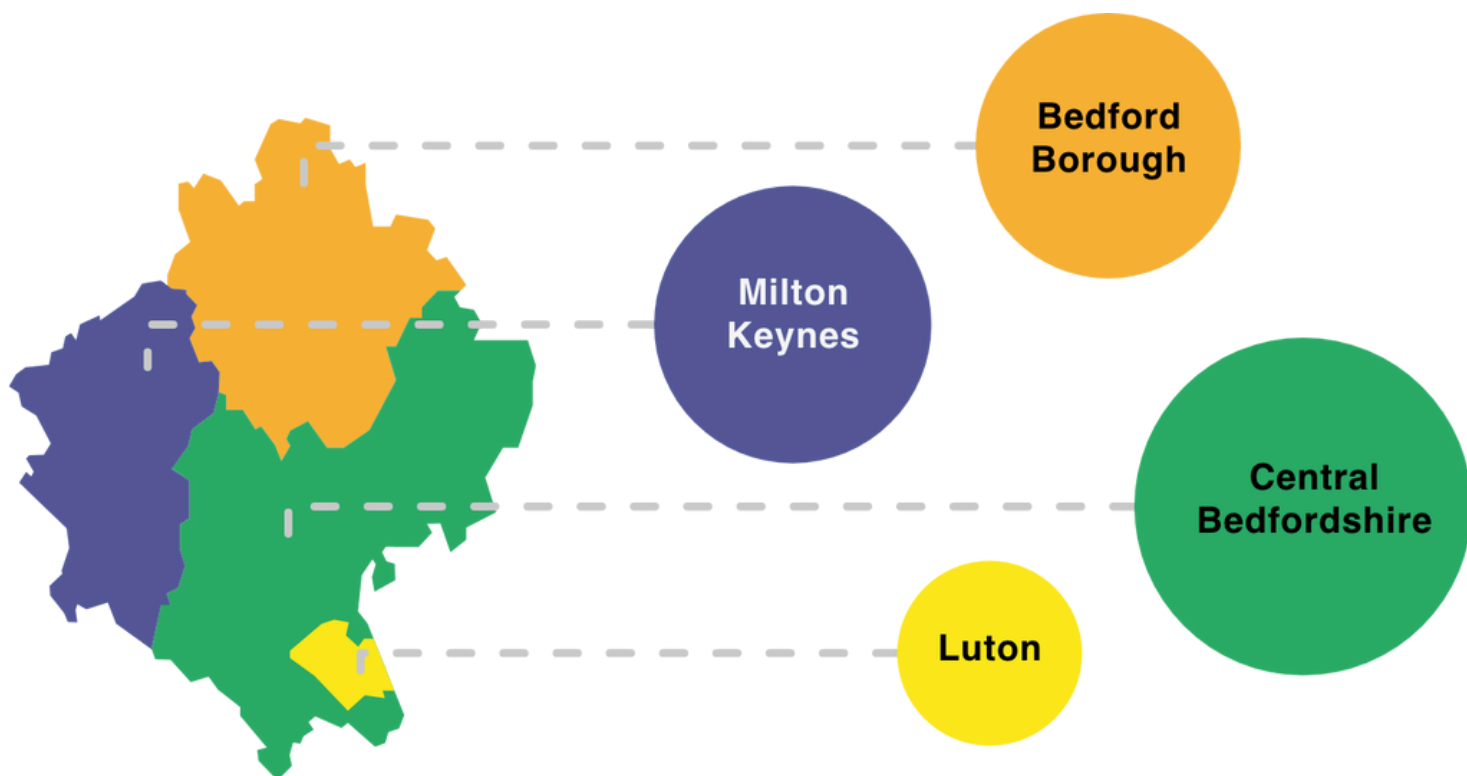
VCSE has supported joint ICB and Health & Care Partnership Seminars

FUNDING

The VCSE has received funding to support **Early Involvement in NHS Planning, Health Inequalities and Environmental Sustainability**. These funds will support learning and improvement to develop pathways that have more focus on prevention, early intervention and reducing health inequalities. The BLMK VCSE Strategy Group has been working to develop appropriate governance and ensure early VCSE involvement in ICB workstreams delivers improvements for residents. The Strategy Group intends to use this opportunity to generate evidence for further investment to work differently with system partners.

BLMK IN FOCUS

How the VCSE is supporting integrated care at a local level



Bedford Borough

- Bedford Mental Health Alliance
- Collaborative Networking Events with Bedford Borough Council
- VCSE Representative on Place Board

Milton Keynes

- Milton Keynes Mental Health Alliance
- Voluntary Sector Alliance Steering Group
- VCSE Representatives on 3 MK
- Deal Priority Working Groups
- VCSE Representative on Place Board


Central Bedfordshire

- Bedford Mental Health Alliance
- Winter Planning Meeting held with Place Board
- VCSE Representative on Health and Wellbeing Board

Luton


- Emerging Luton VCSE Mental Health Alliance
- Family Hubs
- 2 VCSE Representatives on Place Board

TESTIMONIALS



“Joining the VCSE Strategy Group has been incredibly beneficial for my role within Be Active, it is has enabled me to develop key relationships and contribute to work where there is alignment with both of our strategies and aims. I have started to feel a culture shift in terms of how the VCSE sector is perceived and although there is more work to be done it feels as though our involvement is not just valued but seen as essential when tackling inequalities. I am grateful to Sonal for her ongoing commitment to joining up the dots between health and the VCSE sector and have very much appreciated her ongoing support”.

Jade Welding
Senior Relationships Manager for Health and Inequalities
Be Active



“We have such a wealth of VCSE organisations within BLMK ICB, and they already support a wide range of activities, but in developing a better understanding of the kind of services they are able to provide, and how best to engage with them to access these, we have some real opportunities to do things differently for the citizens and patients of BLMK. One of the pieces of work we have started is looking at how the VCSE can support patient transport requirements, working alongside our existing providers to get the right transport, to the right patient, at the right time. Through this project, we are looking at how we can make it a more positive experience for patients and transport providers, and ensure we have the right capacity in place when needed. There is a long way to go yet, but our VCSE partners are already bringing a knowledge and experience which will be invaluable in designing a service for the future”.

Kathryn Moody
Director of Contracting
Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board

CHALLENGES

Developing meaningful and lasting cross-sector partnerships is complex and requires a considerable amount of patience, compassion, and determination. In our efforts to embed the VCSE sector as a strategic and equitable partner, within an intricate system of different cultures and established practices, we recognise the significant pressures and increased demands that all partners are contending with.

Looking forward to the 2024/2025 timeline, we are eager to further develop the VCSE Partnership program. Our collective efforts will focus on enhancing the programme's scope and depth, ensuring it continues to foster strong, productive partnerships that benefit the residents of Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes.

FUTURE PLANS

As we look to the year ahead, our strategic emphasis will be on tackling key challenges that are critical to the vitality and efficacy of the VCSE sector:

- 1. Developing a Stronger Evidence Base:** Our goal is to strengthen the VCSE sector's foundation by building a comprehensive evidence base that demonstrates the value and impact of our work. This will not only justify but also encourage long-term investment, ensuring sustainability and growth.
- 2. Cross-Sector Communication:** At the heart of thriving partnerships lies the art of communication—clear, open, and dynamic. We're committed to developing a culture of open and effective dialogue across sectors, ensuring that information flows smoothly and efficiently. It is through this commitment to improved communication that we pave the way for better collaboration and mutual understanding.
- 3. Utilisation of the MOU:** The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is a key instrument in our partnership toolkit. We plan to leverage it more effectively to cement our collaborative intentions and actions.
- 4. VCSE Representation on BLMK Boards:** We are committed to advocating for stronger representation of the VCSE sector on boards throughout the integrated care system (ICS). By doing so, we aim to ensure that the unique perspectives and insights of the VCSE actively contribute to the shaping of policies and decisions that affect our communities.

We would like to encourage all partners to take an active role in realising our shared goals and appreciate the hard work and commitment those already supporting our programme have demonstrated.

For updates on the BLMK VCSE Partnership program, please refer to the [BLMK ICS website](#), which will be updated throughout the year.