STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SERVICES AND LICENSING COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, 14 MARCH 2024

Report Title	Stroud District Council VCSE Principles
Purpose of Report	The Voluntary, Community Social Enterprise Sector (VCSE) Principles seek to provide the council and its partners in the VCSE with a set of commonly understood good practice guidelines for communication and support. It is designed to strengthen working relationships with a transparent and consistent approach.
Decision(s)	**The Committee RESOLVES to adopt the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector Principles.**
Consultation and Feedback	- SLT and CS&L Chair - FFF Community Engagement Workstream Lead - VCSE leaders/ partners - Integrated Care System partners - VCSE and statutory org members of Know Your Patch Network
Report Author	Emma Keating Clark, Community Health & Wellbeing Manager Email: emma.keatingclark@stroud.gov.uk
Options	If the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector (VCSE) Principles are not adopted, working practices will remain as they are. VCSE Partners will continue to experience different approaches to partnership working from different parts of the Council.
Background Papers	None
Appendices	Appendix A: GL11 Community Hub Annual Report 2023/24 Appendix B: Stroud District Community Husb Theory of Change Appendix C: Gloucestershire ICS/VCSE MOU Appendix D: Overview of VCSE input to Council Plan Action. Appendix E: Equality Impact Assessment.

Implications (further details at the end of the report)	Financial	Legal	Equality	Environmental
	No	No	No	No

1. Introduction

1.1 The Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) principles were developed in response to the increasing importance of the VCSE to the work of the statutory sector. The current Stroud District Council Plan relies on partnerships with the VCSE for many of our objectives (Appendix D). In acknowledgement of the growing importance of good partnership working with the VCSE post-COVID, Stroud District Council worked with the rest of Integrated Care System (ICS) and the VCS Alliance in Gloucestershire to develop a Memorandum of Understanding between the ICS and VCSE (Appendix C, p3). Learning from VCSE leaders in our District and the ICS MOU has formed the basis for these SDC principles.

1.2 This report outlines why and how Stroud District Council should partner with the VCSE. The VCSE is critical in supporting community wellbeing. Its value as a partner to statutory agencies cannot be underestimated (Appendix A, p4 and Appendix B, p3).

1.3 Appendix A, p4 and Appendix B p.3 highlights some key learning from Stroud and Gloucestershire about how much the VCSE does for wellbeing.

1.4 Section 3 in Appendix D outlines how this learning could be applied to the way we work in partnership with VCSE organisations to achieve our joint aims. This includes illustrating how much of our current Council Plans relies on the involvement of the VCSE.

2. Why does SDC needs a set of VCSE Principles?

2.1 The model where all community needs are met by the Local Authority is long gone. It is unsustainable, it disempowers communities and does not recognise the wisdom and strength of local people.

2.2 Building connections between local people and growing neighbourhood organisations who know and care about their people creates safer, stronger places to live with better long term health outcomes.

2.3 There are services and activities that should sit with the statutory sector and there are services and activities that are more successfully held within the VCSE. The most effective approach is for both sectors to work in partnership with good dialogue and sharing of skills and knowledge. As the Local Authority is traditionally perceived as the partner holding most of the 'power', these VCSE Principles are our transparent commitment to being a good partner.

3. What is the VCSE?

3.1 The VCSE includes organisations whose main object is not financial profit to investors or shareholders. They are organisations who exist to support community members, either in a particular place like a local Community Hub, a target group of people like Home Start who work with families under the age of 5 or a specific field of interest like The Long Table who focus on food for community.

3.2 In the Stroud District, some of our VCSE organisations are run purely by volunteers but most have a small number of paid staff who then recruit and manage a team of volunteers. Only a few of our VCSE partners have large teams of paid staff.

3.3 Most of Stroud's VCSE organisations are funded by short to mid-term project funding with a small amount of commissioned work by statutory partners like the National Health Service (NHS) or the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).

3.4 Stroud District Council currently supports the VCSE through the Community Wellbeing grant scheme or though Government funding schemes like the Household Support Fund. Some Parish and Town Councils support their local VCSE organisations through grant funding or by supporting them with practical help and resources from their Council officers and elected members.

3.5 Our Social Enterprise partners operate a business model that receives payment for services or goods like food but re-invests their profit back into their community objectives. The Social Enterprise model is a slightly newer approach and some of our VCSE partners are trialing aspects of the model in their work.

3.6 Constitutionally, some community organisations will start very informally, as groups of people with a shared interest in making some kind of change. As their work develops, they will look to adopt a more formal structure that will require Trustees or Directors. More experienced statutory and VCSE partners are essential as trusted advisors in this process, something that SDC already supports. Our VCSE Principles aim to build on that work.

4. Consultation

4.1 Since 2017, Stroud District Council has been co-hosting the Know Your Patch (KYP) Networking forum to enable better joint working between the VCSE and Statutory sectors in the district. There are over 300 organisations on the mailing list and the monthly forum has attendees of between 30 and 80 people. KYP members have discussed what they find

challenging when working with the statutory sector and what would help them to function more easily as equal partners. The insight from KYP members has informed the VCSE principles in this report.

4.2   The Community Hubs Development Project is a partnership of leading Stroud VCSE organisations working together to improve support for developing Community Hubs and to increase partnership working between the Hubs and the statutory sector.

4.3   Members include Creative Sustainability CIC, GL11 Community Hub, The Keepers Community Hub, Feeding Gloucestershire, Hot Spots, Stroud Town Council and Stroud District Council.

4.4   This partnership has developed the Community Hubs Theory of Change which focuses on how experienced and well-resourced partners can help to improve VCSE strength and capacity for better partnership working. As a result, the learning from the Hubs Theory of Change has been essential to the development of the SDC VCSE Principles.

5.   What is the difference between the SDC VCSE Principles and the SDC Community Engagement Principles?

5.1   This VCSE Principles are being considered in parallel to SDC's Community Engagement Principles. See 5.4 These two pieces of work are complementary but have key differences and targets.

5.2   The VCSE Principles seek to provide the council and its partners in the VCSE with a set of commonly understood good practice guidelines for communication and support. It is designed to strengthen working relationship with a transparent and consistent approach.

5.3   The Community Engagement Principles are a toolkit for the council's officers and members across all their work with communities and individuals, supporting an asset based approach underpinned by consistency, respect, and reliability applicable in the many and varied interactions which the council has with is communities of place and interest.

5.4   Comparison of VCSE and Community Engagement Principles

	What is it?	What does it involve?	Who is it for?
VCSE Principles	How SDC commits to work in partnership with VCSE organisations and people who represent those organisations.	Frequent and open dialogue with our VCSE partners. Review of policies and processes that impact on our VCSE partners. Review of SDC service areas that interact with VCSE partners. Clarify how different SDC officers work with the VCSE.	Organisations working in Voluntary and Community and Social Enterprise sectors who deliver services or activities in the Stroud District.
Community Engagement Principles	Principles to support individuals in the planning and delivery of different types of engagement, including the methods and techniques that can be used to effectively involve local people in decisions that affect their lives	Identifying engagement opportunities and challenges across council services, building a toolkit of resources, good practice, and learning. Review of SDC strategies, policies and procedures that relate to community engagement. Collaborating with SDC service areas to implement and embed the framework, and to evaluate the impact it is having.	People who live in, work in, or visit Stroud District.

6.   Local Learning informing the VCSE Principles

6.1   These VCSE Principles are based on key pieces of local learning which are outlined in (Appendix A, p4, Appendix B, p3 and Appendix C, p3)

6.2   In summary the outcomes include:

6.3   How the VCSE influences long term wellbeing. GL11's Annual Report 2023/2024 references NHS statistics, stating that 16% of health depends on clinical care while 84% depends on other factors. GL11's Report illustrates how they impact on the 84% as a VCSE organisation. (Appendix A, p4).

6.4   The VCSE sector cannot work in isolation to support long term wellbeing. It can only do this in partnership with the statutory sector. However, the VCSE needs capacity to build working relationships with statutory partners. For example, SDC Housing Officers offering drop in advice at a community café, Citizens Advice working at outreach Foodbank sessions in rural VCSE venues, Social Prescribers taking referrals from VCSE organisations to help clients access support.

6.5   The Stroud District Community Hubs Theory of Change has explored how a partnership approach can support the VCSE to build capacity. (Appendix B, p3**.)** The Community Hubs Theory of Change is a partnership action plan for how to bring about long term system change between the VCSE and statutory sectors. Although the Stroud District Community Hubs are only one element of our VCSE sector, the principles from the Theory of Change research can be applied to our more general VCSE Principles.

7.   What the VCSE wants from the Statutory sector

7.1   As part of formation of the new Integrated Care System (ICS), the Gloucestershire ICS and Gloucestershire VCS Alliance carried out an extensive piece of research with the VCSE in Gloucestershire, including many Stroud organisations.

7.2   Stroud District Council were part of this consultation and as part of the ICS have committed to following their Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with our VCSE partners. For full MOU see Appendix C.

7.3   The MOU agreed shared values and principles for how all partners should work together and with individuals and communities.

7.3.1 *Working togther*

When the statutory sector works with the VCSE sector, we all agree to:

- Collaboration
- Equity
- Integrity

7.3.2 *Working with Individuals and Communities.*

When the statutory sector works or the VCSE sector, works with individuals and communities, we all agree to be:

- Impactful
- Community Focused
- Person -centred
- Creative

7.3.3 The MOU also made specific joint commitments in response to concerns that came out of the research. These include:

- Sharing opportunities and risks
- Listening to each other as 'critical friends'
- Hold spaces for debate and challenge through formal and informal channels
- Being as transparent as possible about how decisions are made
- Developing engagement stuctures so the VCSE has a voice on the issues that matter to them and their communities. These should be impactful, proportionate and fair.

7.4 The principles of the ICS MOU have directly informed the 11 Stroud District principles recoomended in Section 8.

8. Recommendation

8.1 Out of 83 actions in Stroud District council plan 2021 -2026, 53 rely on some sort of VCSE support. In order to support future partnership working between Stroud District Council and the VCSE, this report recommends that the Council adopts the 11 proposed SDC VCSE Principles below. For the full list of which Council Plan actions have input from the VCSE, see Appendix D.

8.2 The proposed Stroud District Council VCSE Principles:

1   We identify which SDC service areas work with VCSE partners and ensure that the 11 VCSE principles applied across the Council.

2   We use our time and resources to hold spaces for open and informative dialogue with VCSE partners through regular forums.

3   We seek VCSE partners and their representatives to form working groups with us on priority issues including Community Safety and Cost of Living.

4   When a new priority is identified, we seek to bring relevant VCSE partners together to share data, insight and develop joint working with us.

5   We will actively listen to our partners without judgement and prejudice valuing community knowledge and local insight.

6   We champion the work of our VCSE partners in the networks that we have access to, including ICS commissioning groups and SDC decision making bodies.

7   We invest in our VCSE partners with the project funding we receive from Government, commissioners and our SDC grant schemes.

8   We research potential investment in funding tools that will support VCSE organisations like a Crowd Funding platform.

9   We review our contracting processes to ensure they are accessible for less experienced organisations and the documentation and monitoring is proportionate for the level of funding being given.

10 We invite open dialogue and respectfully hear what out VCSE partners have to say as 'critical friends' to us.

11 We use constructive feedback from our VCSE partners to inform future policy and practice.

9.   Implications

9.1   Financial Implications

There are no significant financial implications within this report as it recommends to adopt the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector Principles. Any future funding identified from these principles will have to be brought back to this Committee.

Adele Rudkin, Accountant
Tel: 01453 754109   Email: adele.rudkin@stroud.gov.uk

9.2   Legal Implications

Whilst there are no direct legal implications from this report, there may be when exercising the principles. The Council must always consider the requirements of the Subsidy Control

Act 2022 when giving grants or financial assistance. One Legal can assist with the subsidy assessment and produce appropriate grant agreements.

Any procurements for the award of contracts for supplies, services and works must comply with the Council's Contract and Procurement Procedure Rules. Also, the council will need to ensure that the passing on of any funding received by central government or other third parties is permitted by the funding body. The use of that funding is governed by an appropriate grant agreement between the Council and the ultimate recipient because the Council will remain responsible for the delivery of the funding objectives.

One Legal   Email: legalservices@onelegal.org.uk

9.3   Equality Implications

There are not any specific changes to service delivery proposed within this decision.

9.4   Environmental Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.