TITLE PAGE
Oxfordshire County Council Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy
2022 - 2027

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Page 1: Introduction – from Leader and Portfolio Holder

Oxfordshire is a vibrant, diverse and innovative rural and urban county, with a voluntary and community sector (VCS) that reflects this. Over the past few years, local government and the voluntary and community sector have worked closer together tackling some of the county's biggest issues. This was notably most visible through the Covid-19 pandemic, and the sector's ability to organise and find solutions for our residents at pace.

The Council is keen to build on the momentum of our closer working relationship and ensure that our voluntary and community sector is empowered and sustained to work alongside us in supporting residents and communities.

Our vision is to enable a strong, diverse and vibrant voluntary and community sector across Oxfordshire, to help deliver positive change for our communities.

We recognise that alone we cannot create a county that is greener, healthier and fairer. We appreciate and value the critical work the local VCS does across Oxfordshire, and see first-hand the positive impact this has on residents and communities. As a Council, we see our role as supporting and empowering our voluntary and community sector to do what they do best, working in partnership together along the way.

Crucially, this strategy has been driven by co-production and we want to take the opportunity to thank all of you who have contributed, and shared your valuable knowledge and insight with us. You have been essential to the creation of this strategy, and we look forward to working collaboratively with you over the next five years in bringing it to life.

Page 2: Purpose and Approach

This strategy sets out our intentions and ways of working with the sector over the next five years. The priorities and commitments within it will be developed into an action plan and provide a framework to guide the approach in how we will achieve our commitments over the coming years.

It will shape our work with the voluntary and community sector (VCS) across all Council services, to provide consistency in how we collaborate and work together. This strategy looks at Oxfordshire as a whole, balancing out the needs of our rural and urban communities and the VCS organisations within them.

In recent years across the Council, we have seen strengthened relationships with our VCS colleagues. Although this was in part due to the need to respond to Covid-19, we have a strong desire to maintain and build upon these relationships. In doing so, we recognise that we need a whole Council approach, and a renewed commitment to collaborating with the sector.

A key to this strategy, was co-producing it with the sector. In December 2021, we ran two virtual workshops to gather evidence on the sector's key challenges and priorities for a strategy, as well as understanding the best approach for co-production. This provided us with invaluable feedback that has been the backbone of the development of this strategy.

From this, we formulated a VCS Strategy Co-production Steering Group, comprised of voluntary sector organisations and colleagues from each District and City Council. After analysing the evidence from the workshops, the priorities and commitments of the strategy were formulated and agreed by this group. In May 2022 we ran a consultation exercise available to the whole sector on these co-produced priorities and commitments, with the feedback we received being incorporated into this document.

This strategy is a living document with high level commitments, it will be underpinned by an action plan that allows us to be flexible and respond to the sectors' changing needs. Co-production will be an essential throughout, ensuring that we collaboratively tackle challenges and find solutions.

Page 3: Vision

<u>Our vision is to enable a strong, diverse and vibrant voluntary and community sector across Oxfordshire, to help deliver positive change for our communities.</u>

We cannot create a greener, healthier and fairer Oxfordshire alone. The voluntary and community sector are often more deeply rooted and uniquely placed in understanding and responding to local communities' needs. Therefore, we want to use our community leadership and enabling role to build community resilience through empowering our voluntary and community sector.

Page 3: What do we mean by the Voluntary and Community Sector?

The voluntary and community sector, sometimes known as the Third Sector, constitutes a diverse range of organisations that all have one thing in common - they are not-for-profit and have wider societal benefits as their primary aim.

Traditionally most people associate registered charities as being VCS organisations, but the picture is a lot broader than this. Not-for-profit groups can take many forms as well as being charities, such as social enterprises, community interest companies, community benefit societies, or faith groups. There are also many small community groups that won't have formalised structures yet are a crucial and active part of the sector.

Throughout this strategy, when we refer to the voluntary and community sector, we refer to any organisation that is not-for-profit and works for the benefit of society, regardless of their size.

Page 4: Communities in Oxfordshire (presented information in bubbles/boxes)

Oxfordshire is a vibrant, diverse and innovative rural and urban county.

As of mid-2019, Oxfordshire was the most rural county in the South East. Just under a quarter (22%) of Oxfordshire's population are resident in Oxford City and 38% in the county's main towns. The remaining 40% live in smaller towns and villages.

Oxfordshire was ranked the 10th least deprived of 151 upper-tier local authorities in England in 2019. However, we also have 1 out of 407 Lower Super Output Area ranked within the 10% most deprived areas nationally, and a further 16 areas were ranked in the 20% most deprived areas nationally.

Whilst Oxfordshire's population is relatively healthy, doing better or similar to national averages on most public health indicators, our population is ageing with a substantial recent and predicted growth in the number of older people. This understandably brings challenges for service provision in regard to health and social care.

Despite Oxfordshire's relative affluence there are wide inequalities in health and wellbeing. Males living in the more affluent areas of the county are expected to live around 11 years longer than those in poorer areas. For females the gap in life expectancy is around 12 years.

1 in 5 children in Oxfordshire are estimated to be living in poverty – within Oxford City this figure rises to a quarter of children.

As of the 2011 Census 16.4% of Oxfordshire's residents were from non-white British backgrounds. These groups are more likely than the total population to be resident in the most deprived areas in Oxfordshire.

Page 5: Investment in the Voluntary and Community Sector

The voluntary and community sector provides vital services to the residents of Oxfordshire, supporting vulnerable people and helping to create the sustainable and vibrant communities. Whether these services are commissioned by the Council, are fundraised for by the community or delivered as part of wider objectives, the VCS are a valued and a key partner, especially in helping us achieve our preventative agenda.

Through commissioning a wide range of services with voluntary and community organisations, Oxfordshire County Council invests over £80million a year in the sector. Around £79.5m of this is made up of contracts, and £500,000 from grants.

Contracts make up the vast proportion of our VCS spend (99%). The Council holds contracts with the sector that covers everything from household name charities in Adult Social Care and Public Health, to less obvious elements such as our Fix My Street software being developed by a not-for-profit social enterprise.

In total around 17% of all of the contracts the Council holds are with VCS organisations.

Looking at the spread of our service areas across our voluntary and community sector spend the vast proportion (78%) is spent by Adult Social Care

% OF OVERALL VCS CONTRACT SPEND PER SERVICE

Environment and Place
1%

Public Health
9%

Children's
12%

Adults
78%
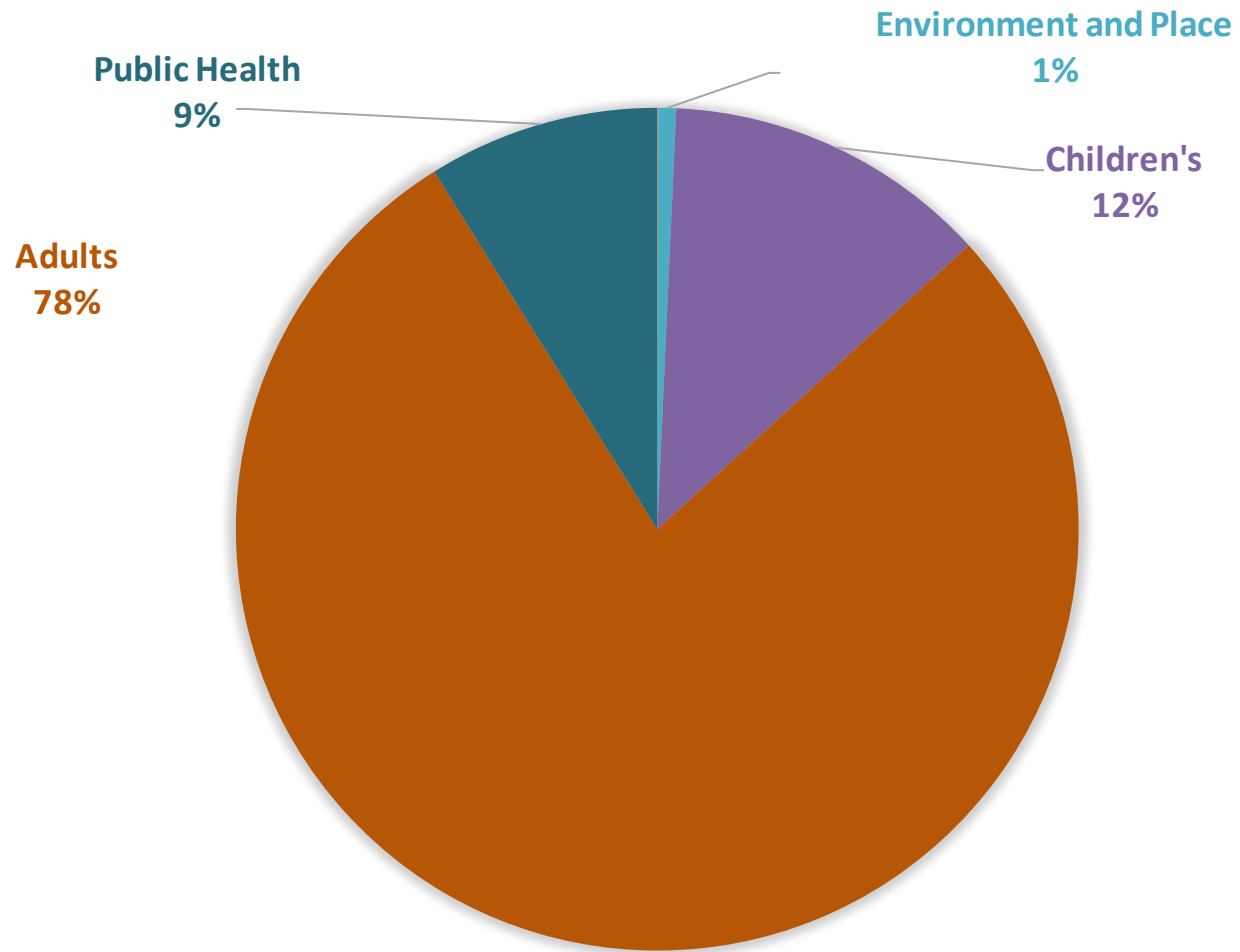
*data from analysing all grants and contracts in the 2020/21 financial year. Covid-19 support spend was excluded as this would not be usual year on year spend.

Page 6: Social Value Policy

Social value is any additional economic, social or environmental benefit that is achieved in addition to the core deliverables of a contract. Voluntary and community sector groups often already operate in a way of bringing additional value to their core services, which makes them very well placed to demonstrate social value in commissioning processes. For instance, many voluntary and community sector organisations will already focus on offering jobs to care leavers or military leavers or focus on reducing their carbon footprint.

In February 2022, Oxfordshire County Council [adopted a new social value policy](). The aim of our policy is to enable our spending on services to go further, by ensuring that our suppliers and providers commit to providing additional benefits for our communities. As such, this social value policy acts as the 'golden thread' between the Council's strategic plan and procurement, to unlock additional economic, environmental and social benefits to deliver our strategic priorities.

This means, that bids for contracts over £100,000 will be weighted based on their added social value, as well as on their price and quality. Due to the importance for the Council to tackle climate change, all climate-related measures will receive maximum prioritisation, with additional selected social, economic and environmental measures receiving other levels of prioritisation.

Page 7: Our Priorities and Commitments

We have worked with the local VCS to co-produce these five priorities, that will underpin our collaborative working with the sector over the next five years. All priorities and commitments have equal weighting with each other, and we be worked on at the same time over the coming years.
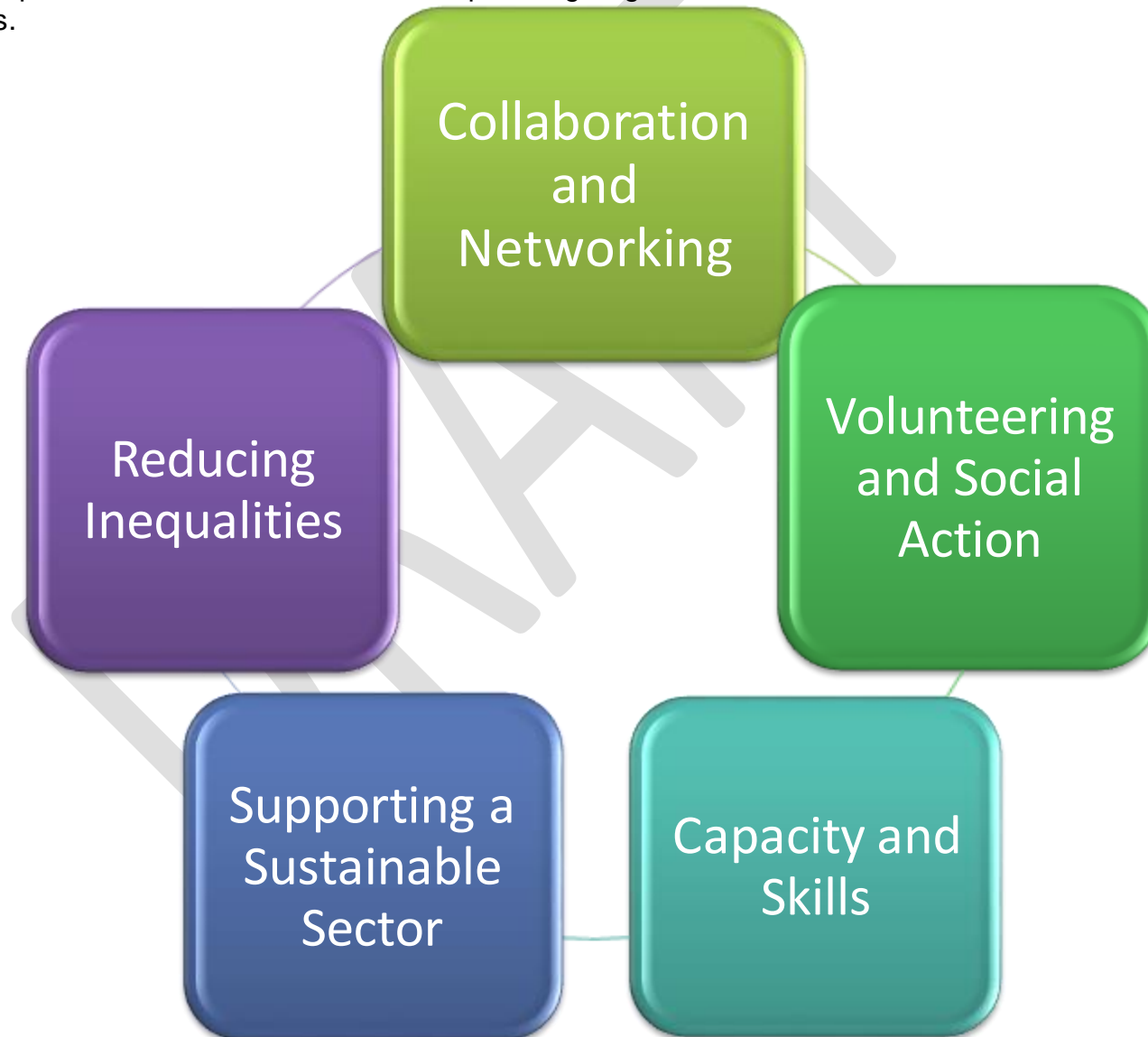
Page 8: Priorities and Commitments
Collaboration and Networking:

As the past few years working together through the Covid-19 pandemic has proven, collaboration and networking are vital in supporting our communities. This is true for both relationships between local government and the sector and supporting and enabling partnership working within the sector. The Council is committed to fostering new ways of collaborating and working together and increasing co-production.

We also recognise the importance of the closeness the voluntary and community sector has with our residents. This leads to a unique and deep knowledge and understanding of our communities, especially in terms of harder to reach communities, or those whose voices are often less heard. It is therefore essential that we work collaboratively to address long-term challenges.

Commitments:
- Promote and champion the work of the VCS
- Conduct an exercise to understand and review the existing internal and external VCS and public partnership networks
- Continue to strengthen partnership working through existing networks or by identifying new networks
- Explore the use of the Compact and review our commitment to ways of working with each other
- Gain a deeper understanding of community needs through the expertise, knowledge and support of the VCS
- Listen to and work closely with the VCS, recognising their strengths and local knowledge
- Support greater partnership working and co-production, working collaboratively with the VCS to address long-term challenges, for instance through the Oxfordshire Way
- Seek opportunities for co-location to enhance collaboration and networking

The Oxfordshire Compact

The Oxfordshire Compact is an agreement which aims to provide a mutual framework for improving and sustaining better working relationships between statutory bodies and the voluntary and community sector. It was developed by the VCS and although it is not a legal document, becoming a signatory is a commitment to uphold the principles of the Compact.

Page 9: Priorities and Commitments

Volunteering and Social Action

Volunteering and social action play a huge part in supporting communities in Oxfordshire to flourish. From residents who take part in informal and small volunteering acts, such as helping neighbours with their shopping, to those who regularly donate their time in more formalised roles – every volunteer in Oxfordshire makes a difference.

We want to do more to celebrate and recognise our volunteers, as well as raise awareness about the benefits volunteering has for communities and the impact on individuals.

In addition, the Council uses volunteers within a range of service areas, from our libraries, to our highways and fire service. These volunteers are crucial in supporting communities, and we want to ensure they are better supported and equipped to fulfil their roles.

Commitments:
- Actively promote volunteering and social action, and the value it brings to communities and individuals
- Celebrate and recognise the work of volunteers across the county
- Internally promote a culture of volunteering, encouraging Council staff to use their volunteering leave and identifying opportunities for them to do so
- Explore how to better recruit, retain and support volunteers that support Council services
- Work with the VCS to identify, understand and tackle barriers to volunteering that can be addressed at a local level

Page 10: Commitments and Priorities
Capacity and Skills

A strong sector is one that has the capacity, skills and capabilities to carry out its work effectively. In order to facilitate this, the local VCS needs access to a range of training opportunities, support services, resources and tools.

In recognition that a strong sector is required to help us deliver our aims, the Council provides general capacity support to the sector through a VCS infrastructure contract. The contract covers three main outcomes, that VCS organisations have access to information, advice and tools to build capacity, that volunteering is promoted and developed, and that communities are supported and empowered to find their own solutions.

The council is committed to exploring a range of additional ways we can offer support to the sector in building capacity and skills, in order to help them flourish and to help us deliver our shared aims.

Commitments:
- Support the VCS to build capacity and work together to identify sector needs
- Support the sector understand the Council's strategic priorities, to enable us to work together on our common goals
- Continue to invest in VCS Infrastructure to support the sector
- Help foster and support strong leadership within the sector
- Enable the sector to support each other, promoting best practice, sharing of skills and a space for strategic conversations
- Explore the potential of hub models in supporting VCS organisations, for instance with centralised training

Page 11: Commitments and Priorities

Supporting a Sustainable Sector

Voluntary and community sector organisations have a unique understanding of local communities, and they are therefore often well placed to deliver innovative solutions. This is especially true for helping us explore models for prevention, from our work with Community Catalysts in adult social care, to increasing our early intervention support for families in our children's services.

However, local government procurement can be confusing, especially to smaller groups, or those who have previously not engaged in commissioning processes. We are committed to exploring how we can better communicate and increase transparency around commissioning, and align our processes to make procurement opportunities more accessible.

Commitments

- Work in co-production to explore and expand our data on the local VCS
- Continue to embed the principles of the Council's new Social Value Policy in commissioning processes
- Explore how the Council could simplify and align the commissioning and grants process
- Increase transparency and communication behind commissioning, empowering VCS organisations to understand and be better equipped to take part in commissioning processes, including through consortia bids
- Uphold and respect the independence of the VCS
- Support community-based models of prevention and early intervention, to help build resilience within our communities
- Explore with the VCS how best to use our property assets to form long-term partnerships to create stronger, more cohesive and more sustainable communities.

In 2022, the Council offered tenants in our community assets, a one-year rent holiday to take account of financial pressures many community and voluntary organisations have faced during the pandemic. We also committed to reviewing the management of these properties and put their arrangements on a more stable, predictable footing from 2023-4.

Page 12: Priorities and Commitments

Reducing Inequalities

Although work on reducing inequalities will be pivotal across all priorities and strands of this strategy, the Council is committed to proactively tackling inequalities across Oxfordshire and believe inclusion is everyone's responsibility. We recognise the need to listen and learn and work collaboratively as we tackle inequalities, but most importantly we know this will only be achieved through concrete actions.

The voluntary and community sector will be essential in helping us to achieve meaningful change, and we therefore want to work collaboratively across the board to ensure we fully understand Oxfordshire's inequalities in order to tackle them together. Furthermore, we want to provide support to the sector in tackling equality, diversity, inclusion and equity issues within the sector, recognising that a lot of important work in this area is already underway.

Commitments:

- Work collaboratively with the local VCS to develop better ways to use data about our communities to understand diverse needs and create inclusive communities
- Work collaboratively with the local VCS to address inequalities focusing on those in greatest need, to effect sustainable meaningful change, with a focus on healthy place shaping, preventative actions and early intervention projects
- Empower and support the VCS to tackle equality, diversity, inclusion and equity issues within the sector, for instance through the Oxfordshire Equality Framework
- Explore how we can reciprocally increase diversity at senior levels within the VCS and public sectors, such as at leadership and trustee levels.
- Continue to work with the VCS to tackle digital exclusion across Oxfordshire, through the implementation of the digital inclusion strategy and charter
- Continue to work with the VCS to address the effects of climate change and promote the circular economy, in order to reduce negative impacts on people living in areas of higher deprivation

> The circular economy is an approach which aims to keep materials in use for much longer, ensuring they can be reused, recovered and recycled

Page 13: How we will implement the strategy

This strategy demonstrates the desire across the county to work in collaboration with each other to make a greener, fairer and heathier Oxfordshire. This document is designed to be living and flexible enough to adjust to our communities changing needs over the next five years.

However, we will only be able to meet our commitments by taking real action. In doing so, we will continue working in partnership with the sector to develop an action plan around the strategy, that will ensure a collaboration and system-wide approach.

The Council will oversee and monitor the action plan, updating and reporting yearly to the Oxfordshire Stronger Community Alliance on progress.

Oxfordshire Stronger Community Alliance (OSCA)

OSCA is a partnership group that represents the interests of the voluntary and community sector in Oxfordshire. The main objectives are to build a sustainable voluntary, community and faith sector, and a stronger and empowered community.