



VSNW Strategic Plan

2025 - 2030



VSNW 

Who is Voluntary Sector North West?

As the first regional voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) infrastructure organisation in England, VSNW has a unique role as both a voice for, and a supporter of, the full breadth of VCFSE activity across the North West.

Since our establishment in 1997, we have grown into a thriving membership organisation that connects with the sector through VCFSE infrastructure, equalities networks and providers. Our reach spans large regional and national providers, as well as local infrastructure and equalities networks that stand alongside the grassroots organisations making up the majority of the 50,000 plus groups across the North West.

Our members and partners are at the heart of everything we do. As of September 2025, VSNW is proud to have 243 members including full members and associates. Associates may not meet the full membership criteria, but they share our mission and actively contribute to the strength of our network.

We work to facilitate strong partnerships across the North West wherever possible, from the VS6 Partnership in the Liverpool City Region, the Greater Manchester VCFSE Leadership Group to the Cheshire and Merseyside Health and Care Leaders Group. Together, these partnerships help us amplify the collective voice of the sector and champion the vital role it plays in communities.

Our members



Our mission

To work together to enable the VCFSE sector to positively shape the future of the North West.

Our vision

Through the strengths of the VCFSE sector, put communities in charge of driving change.

What does VSNW do?

Our mandate and role are rooted in our close relationship with VCFSE organisations and leaders across the North West – in Cheshire, Merseyside, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, and Lancashire.

To best support the 50,000 plus VCFSE groups operating in the region, our focus is twofold. First, we work to ensure that every subregion has the support it needs. This means helping to build effective subregional partnerships with a shared vision for the sector, partnerships that can attract investment, influence decision making and deliver positive change.

Second, we strengthen our collective voice by amplifying the voices of the sector itself. We ensure that the priorities, experiences and impact of VCFSE organisations are evidenced and articulated, so that the sector's interests are championed across the North West and beyond.

Our values

- **Making connections** by bringing together organisations from the full range of the sector and facilitating partnerships.
- **Being ingenious** through the use of innovative solutions and making use of knowledge taken from all sectors.
- **Creating change** and driving positive improvements within the VCFSE sector and across the North West region as a whole.
- **Adding value** to existing work through the facilitation of partnerships and providing specialist knowledge of the sector.
- **Challenging inequality** in all forms where it exists, by providing a voice and ensuring the inclusion of equalities organisations in key partnerships.

Manchester City Centre



North West Operating Context

A region of strength and challenge

The North West is a region full of energy, innovation and community spirit. From Liverpool City Region to Cumbria, its local councils, NHS partners, combined authorities and VCFSE organisations are working together to build fairer, healthier communities.

While the region faces real challenges — including deep-rooted deprivation and health inequalities — it also benefits from strong partnerships, a vibrant voluntary sector, and a shared commitment to improving life chances and opportunities for our communities.

The VCFSE sector plays a crucial role in this landscape.

It's often the first to respond to local needs, the last to leave, and the bridge between communities and public services.

Whether it's tackling isolation, supporting people with long-term conditions, or helping families in poverty, VCFSE organisations are central to making the North West a more inclusive and resilient place to live.

Regional snapshot¹

Population: ~7.5 million (13% of England); projected to grow 3–4% by 2031

Median age: 39 with an ageing population

Spatial context:

- 89% urban
- 11% rural/semi-rural

Ethnic diversity: 86% White, 7% Asian, 3% Black, 4% Mixed/Other.

Language:

- English as main language: 94%.
- Limited English proficiency: ~2%

North West Economy

£270.8 billion GDP²

- Third-largest regional economy in England
- Fastest growing economy in the UK in 2024³

Greater Manchester:

- £110 billion GDP (41% of NW)
- Largest city region economy outside London



¹ Office for National Statistics, [Population estimates for England and Wales: mid-2022](#)

² Office for National Statistics, [Regional economic activity by GDP, UK: 1998 to 2023](#)

³ Ey, [UK Regional Economic Forecast 2025](#)

Deprivation and inequality

The North West has the **second highest level of deprivation in England**, following the North East, with the most deprived areas concentrated in coastal and former industrial areas. Many of our local authority areas have large proportions of neighbourhoods classed amongst the 10% most deprived in the country.

- 20% of North West neighbourhoods are highly deprived⁴
- Most deprived local authorities:
 - **Manchester**: 41%
 - **Blackpool**: 40%
 - **Burnley**: 40%
 - **Knowsley**: 40%
 - **Liverpool**: 37%
- **Blackpool** – 7 of the top 10 most deprived neighbourhoods nationally.
- **Manchester** ranks in the top five for local authority deprivation.
- **Persistent deprivation**: 82% of neighbourhoods that were deprived in 2019 remain so in 2025.
- **Child poverty**⁵:
 - 35–37% of children live in poverty (vs 30% nationally)
 - 90% of constituencies have child poverty rates of 25% or higher.
- **In work poverty**: 72% of children in poverty live in households with at least one working adult.⁶

⁴ Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, [English indices of deprivation 2025: statistical release](#)

⁵ End Child Poverty, [Local Child Poverty Statistics](#)

⁶ Department for Work and Pensions, [Households below average income: for financial years ending 1995 to 2024](#)

⁷ Office for National Statistics, [Employment in the UK: October 2025](#)

⁸ The Health Foundation, [How employment status affects our health](#)

⁹ UK Health Security Agency, [Health inequalities in health protection report 2025](#)

¹⁰ [Health Equity North](#)

¹¹ Department for Education, [NEET age 16 to 24](#)

¹² Youth Futures Foundation, [NEET Dashboard](#)

Labour market and employment

Diverse economy: advanced manufacturing, digital, health innovation, education, tourism.

Economic inactivity: 22% – higher than UK average (21%)⁷

Key drivers: long-term health issues, caring responsibilities, early retirement.

Poor health is a major barrier to employment:

- Unemployed people are 6x more likely to report poor health.⁸
- Areas with high deprivation also show higher emergency hospital admissions, limiting workforce participation⁹

Economic inactivity due to ill health: 5.3% (North West) vs. national average of 4.1%.

- **NW hotspots**: Blackpool (8.2%), Knowsley (8.1%), Liverpool (7.6%) have the highest levels of economic inactivity due to long-term sickness compared to the national average of 4.1%.¹⁰

Young people not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET):

The North West has seen one of the largest increases in numbers post-pandemic.

- **Total NEET population**: 121,434 (11.2%)
- **Up 16% from 2023**¹¹
- Drivers include:
 - Mental and physical health issues
 - Caring responsibilities
 - Poverty and housing instability
 - Disengagement from mainstream education
- **NW Hotspots**:
 - Blackpool and Knowsley rank among the highest-risk areas for NEET nationally¹²

Health and social care

- Higher rates of chronic illness, mental health issues, and emergency hospital admissions than national average.¹³
- **In deprived areas:**
 - **Men:** spend 70.4% of life in good health vs. 84.5% in least deprived areas
 - **Women:** spend 65.1% of life in good health vs. 81.5% in least deprived areas¹⁴
- **Life Expectancy Gap:**
 - Men: 10.5 year gap between most and least deprived
 - Women: 8.3 year gap between most and least deprived.
- Highest proportion of working-age adults receiving long-term care (0.9%).¹⁵

ICSs in Greater Manchester, Cheshire & Merseyside, and Lancashire & South Cumbria are, alongside partners including the VCFSE sector:

- Embedding **Core20PLUS5** priorities.
- Targeting a 10% reduction in life expectancy gap by 2030.
- Addressing inclusion health for marginalised groups.

VCFSE organisations are:

- Leading hospital discharge models (e.g., Healthy & Home).
- Supporting early cancer detection and mental health transformation.
- Driving community-centred prevention and neighbourhood health models.

The sector at a glance¹⁶

51,700+ **112,500+**
Organisations Employees (FTE)

£3.529 billion

GVA

796,000 **1.1 million** 
Unpaid carers¹⁷ Volunteers

Strategic priorities

- **Strengthen collaboration** across the region and with system partners.
- **Focus efforts** on communities facing the greatest inequalities.
- **Build capacity and resilience** through training, volunteering and leadership.
- **Embed prevention and wellbeing** to reduce pressure on acute services.
- **Champion co-production and lived experience** in decision-making.

¹³ Office for National Statistics, [Health inequalities](#)

¹⁴ Office for National Statistics, [Health inequalities](#)

¹⁵ Institute for Government, [Adult social care across England](#)

¹⁶ Collated from various sector reports:

- VSNW, VS6 & CWIP, [Cheshire & Merseyside State of the Sector Report](#)

- 10GM, [Greater Manchester State of the VCSE Sector Report](#)

- LOCAL, [Lancashire VCFSE Manifesto](#)

- Durham University, [The contribution of the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector in Cumbria](#)

¹⁷ Office for National Statistics, [Unpaid care by age, sex and deprivation, England and Wales: Census 2021](#)

What will we do by 2030?

The trustee board of VSNW reviews the aims, objectives and activities of the charity each year in order to ensure activities remain focused on our stated purposes.

The VSNW team and trustees have established a strategic plan for 2025-2030. You can see an outline of the goals below.



Measuring progress

We are monitoring progress against each of our five strategic goals with clear metrics to support better decision-making, to identify roadblocks, and to foster innovation to achieve our desired goals.

Our coordination and delivery of events, workshops, meetings and conferences enables the sector across the North West to stay connected, to network, share and collaborate, so we measure the number and range of VCFSE leaders who attend and engage with our work.

We support the growth of city-region level VCFSE partnerships and equalities networks, closely tracking progress, risks and opportunities in each North West sub-region so we have clear insight into the level of VCFSE influence based on involvement and investment.

Liverpool



We aim to increase our membership by 100 by 2030 so we can be an effective voice for the sector and provide higher profile advocacy on key issues, such as commissioning and investment, and equalities. By enabling more effective campaigns and influencing, we can more successfully highlight and celebrate the role of the sector and its workforce. We also hope to grow income into VSNW to support our work and grow our capacity.

We aim to secure investment into the North West VCFSE sector by £55 million by 2030 to enable a resilient and sustainable sector, through our work engaging with the health system across the North West, developing clear implementation plans, delivering campaigns, and providing a clear and coherent voice on key areas, such as social prescribing, local economic development and health inequality.

Blackpool





1. A connected and influential VCFSE sector

By 2030, VSNW wants to help the North West build strong and visible partnerships in the VCFSE sector that can influence local priorities and systems and drive collective action.

How we will do this

Better use of data

VSNW will help the sector develop its evidence base and data insights to how impact. This will help them influence decisions made by local councils and other authorities.

Equal representation

VSNW will support local partnerships to include underrepresented groups, particularly disability groups, so their voices are heard and amplified.

More influence

The sector will have more credibility by using strong evidence, building partnerships, and clearly stating what it wants, especially in areas like health, prevention, the economy, and local communities.

Stronger Northern voice

VSNW will develop our working relationship with similar organisations across the North (like VONNE) to make sure the sector’s voice is heard.

Support in devolution

In areas where devolution (local control over decisions) is new, like Lancashire, Cheshire & Warrington, and Cumbria, VSNW will support the sector to have a say in how things are run, advocating for a community-led approach.

Challenging inequalities

Making connections

Adding value



2. A stronger voice for the sector

By 2030, VSNW will build stronger, clearer, and more effective relationships with key, voluntary, political and public sector leaders, both in the North West and across the country. We will take a more strategic approach to make sure the voice of the our sector is heard, respected, and valued.

Challenging inequalities

Making connections

How we will do this

Stakeholder mapping

We will map out key stakeholders in the North West, working with local organisations to identify who needs to be influenced and why.

Strengthening sector influence

It's important that the VCFSE sector has a voice across all major UK political parties. VSNW will ensure our work and influence reaches beyond the current government can adapt to changes in leadership and political systems.

Access to research

We will help the sector get involved in research, supporting the building of relationships with universities and researchers, and highlighting how the importance of putting communities at the centre of health and care research.

Centring equalities and lived experience

We will make sure that North West equalities networks and lived experience models are central in our policy work and influence efforts with politicians, public authorities, health and care systems, and cross-sector partnerships.



3. A championed and celebrated sector

We want the North West's 50,000 plus VCFSE organisations to be recognised, valued, and celebrated by political leaders and public sector partners.

How we will do this

Strategic communications offer

We will develop a strategic communications offer for VCFSE sector across the North West to support the sector in championing its work and role. This will include sharing positive stories, case studies, and campaigns.

'State of the Sector' report

Each sub-region in the North West will have an up to date 'State of the Sector' report showing the size, scope, and impact of the sector.

Data for influence

VSNW will develop a clear and effective way to use sector data to influence politicians and public sector partners. The aim is to make the data easy to understand, relevant and impactful so that funding and resources are directed to the sector.

Equalities

Equality networks within the VCFSE sector will be recognised and celebrated.

Challenging inequalities

Creating change



4. A thriving and supported workforce

We want the North West’s VCFSE workforce and volunteers to be recognised, valued and supported as a skilled, talented and vital part of our region’s economy and communities.

How we will do this

Championing good employment

We’ll promote the sector as a leading employer, highlighting the rewarding careers and volunteering opportunities it offers, the contribution our workforce makes to public life, and our commitment to fair pay, staff wellbeing and supportive workplaces.

Changing perceptions

VSNW will work to showcase the immense skills, talent and leadership within VCFSE organisations, including our volunteers, and the sector’s role in developing future public sector leaders. We’ll promote a better understanding of the sector’s scale, impact and expertise, ensuring it is recognised as an equal partner in shaping places and services.

Promote training and leadership opportunities

We will bring together infrastructure and equalities networks to map existing home-grown training and inclusive leadership programmes, helping to share best practice and fill skill gaps across the North West.



5. A resilient and sustainable sector

Community organisations will have the support they need to sustain their work through fairer funding, smarter commissioning, diverse income models and stronger social networks.

How we will do this

Better investment

We will push for better funding for the sector, not just more investment, but funding that’s fair, flexible and based on trust. We’ll roll out a North West Fair Funding Protocol to help public sector bodies adopt better, more consistent funding practices.

Use data to drive change

We will use data to show the vital role of the sector in public service delivery and push for a stronger, more defined place in commissioning. We’ll also advocate for continued support for grassroots delivery.

Build operations skills

Enable the sector to connect, share learning, and work together on the operational issues that underpin resilient and sustainable organisations.



To find out more about how we are going to deliver the strategic plan, please visit www.vsnw.org.uk

If you are interested in joining our board, please contact Yen Siang Tan, VSNW's Operations Director.

The regional voluntary sector network for the North West. Ensuring the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector, in all its diversity, takes its full part in shaping the future of the North West.

Voluntary Sector North West

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