



Cheshire and Merseyside VCFSE News

February 2026

Welcome to our February update for voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) colleagues across Cheshire and Merseyside (C&M).

Some of you will already receive updates directly from us, or through your local infrastructure organisation. This newsletter complements those channels and provides another way to share key news, opportunities and learning from across C&M.

We hope you find this edition useful and relevant, and we encourage you to share the full newsletter, or individual items, with your networks.

You can also find past and future editions online [here](#).

Updates

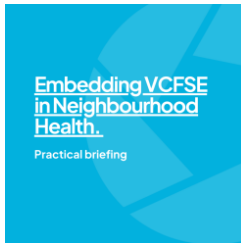
VCFSE recognised as key partner in Cheshire and Warrington's future

The shadow board of the Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority recently received an update on the contribution of the VCFSE sector across the region. Gary Cliffe, Chief Executive of CWVA, spoke on behalf of the Cheshire and Warrington Infrastructure Partnership, highlighting how the sector is actively shaping the area's devolution journey and supporting priorities that benefit local communities.

Gary said: "It's encouraging to see the sector recognised as a genuine partner. Our organisations bring community insight, trusted relationships and practical delivery expertise. Working alongside the combined authority from the outset ensures devolution delivers real and lasting benefits for our communities."

The meeting was also the first shadow board attended by Nick Walkley in his role as Interim Chief Executive designate, providing leadership as the region prepares for new powers and investment through devolution.

Find out more



New briefing: Embedding the VCFSE Sector in Neighbourhood Health

A new briefing from VSNW sets out why the VCFSE sector should be treated as a core partner in neighbourhood health and offers practical guidance for those designing or delivering local models.

It highlights how strong place-level governance and local infrastructure support consistent, scalable neighbourhood delivery and meaningful community engagement.

Drawing on regional learning, including examples from Sefton and St Helens, it outlines actions to strengthen co-production, embed VCFSE organisations in neighbourhood teams and better use local insight and data.

[Read the briefing](#)

Great North VCFSE Exchange

The Great North VCFSE Exchange brought together over 65 leaders from the VCFSE sector across the North to explore how partnerships with combined authorities are working in practice.



Discussions highlighted a mixed picture, with some areas having established clear structures for VCFSE involvement, while others are still shaping their approach.

You can now view the slides and webinar recording on the VSNW website.

[Find out more](#)

NHS assessment highlights progress and pressures for Cheshire and Merseyside health system

NHS England's latest annual assessment of integrated care boards highlights both progress and ongoing pressures across systems, including NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board.

The review confirms strong governance and leadership locally, alongside improvements in cancer targets, elective recovery and access to mental health and primary care. Positive work to tackle inequalities and increase social value through anchor commitments was also recognised.

However, challenges remain around urgent care capacity and system finances. Nationally, assessments reflect the evolving strategic role of ICBs, with a growing focus on prevention, community care, digital transformation and stronger system wide partnership working.

[View here](#)



Why local infrastructure matters

In VS6's latest blog Sally Yeoman MBE, Chief Executive of Halton and St Helens VCA and VS6 Partnership partner, explains why local infrastructure organisations are so important for the VCFSE sector and our communities.

She highlights how they connect grassroots groups with strategic partners, amplify local voices and help organisations access funding and influence decision-making.

By acting as convenors, facilitators and bridges across sectors, infrastructure bodies strengthen community resilience and ensure services reflect local needs.

Sally reminds us that investing in sustainable, high-quality infrastructure is key to unlocking the full potential of community action across the Liverpool City Region.

[Read the full blog](#)

Cheshire and Merseyside interim needs assessment now published

The first draft of the Cheshire and Merseyside ICB Integrated Needs Assessment (ISNA) is now available on the ICB website.

This assessment informs the development of the Five Year Strategic Commissioning Plan and the Population Health Improvement Plan, both of which our VCFSE alliance has helped shape through forums such as CMHCL, VS6, and CWIP.

The ISNA provides valuable insight for VCFSE organisations, supporting planning, business cases, and funding bids.

[Find out more](#)

YMCA publishes latest State of Play report

The YMCA has published its latest State of Play report, offering up-to-date insights into youth services, community needs and local trends across the country. The report includes detailed figures for local areas, making it a valuable resource for planning, funding bids and understanding where support is needed most.

Check it out to explore the latest data and see what it reveals about your local community.



[Read the full report](#)

Events and Opportunities

International Women's Day event

Organisations across Cheshire and Merseyside are invited to a networking and insight event hosted by The Phoenix Way, a national racial justice movement focused on tackling structural barriers for Black and Racially Minoritised communities and community-led organisations.



The event will feature a special International Women's Day tribute, national and subregional updates from The Phoenix Way, and the launch of the research engagement toolkit. There will also be opportunities for discussion and networking.

Speakers include Naz Ghodrati, Chief Executive Officer at Warrington Voluntary Action and CWIP member, alongside leaders from across the region.

Date: Friday 27 February

Time: 9.45am to 1pm, including lunch

Venue: Court Hey Park, The Courtyard, L16 3NA

Register now



Merseyside CSA Week

From 2 to 6 March 2026, the Pan Merseyside Safeguarding Alliance, supported by the NW Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and Centre of Expertise for CSA, is hosting Merseyside CSA Week. The week brings together multi-agency practitioners and leaders to co-produce a Merseyside Child Sexual Abuse Strategy.

The aim is to understand system strengths, identify areas for improvement, improve system-wide confidence and create a draft strategy informed by practitioner, children's and family voices.

A series of sessions will support the workforce in understanding services and recognising and responding to child sexual abuse.

To take part, contact your Local Safeguarding Partnership for more information or view the leaflet below for a full list of what's on.

View the leaflet

Healthier You Programme partnership opportunities

In our last edition, we shared details of [Reed and their Healthier You Programme opportunities](#). We now have two further national providers, [ICE Creates](#) and [Xyla](#), seeking local VCFSE partners.

ICE delivers personalised support to improve physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing. Their planned services include support for obesity prescribing, NHS diabetes and long-term conditions programmes, and the Type 2 diabetes path to remission. They are inviting organisations to complete an Expression of Interest (EOI) to join their framework for local delivery or research and insight panels.

- **ICE EOI:** <https://forms.cloud.microsoft/e/BiTYNbXmBg>

Xyla runs a range of NHS-commissioned programmes nationally and is keen to partner with organisations supporting underserved ethnic communities, inclusion health groups, people experiencing deprivation, migrants, digitally excluded individuals, socially isolated people, carers, and lone parents. Xyla aims to co-design equitable, community-aligned engagement approaches.

- **For more information contact:** sarah.mair@xylaservices.com

VCFSE organisations with experience in community health delivery are encouraged to get in touch to explore these partnership opportunities and help reduce health inequalities across Cheshire and Merseyside.



Nominate for NHS Excellence Awards

NHS England has opened entries for the NHS Excellence Awards 2026, which celebrate innovative projects improving health and care for patients and communities.

The awards are free to enter and open to organisations including ICBs, trusts, primary care, local authorities and VCFSE partners delivering local services.

There are 10 categories recognising achievements such as digital innovation, partnership working and improving outcomes. Entries close at **5pm on Friday 6 March 2026**.

Find out more

Help shape the Build Move Thrive programme



Partners across Cheshire and Warrington are invited to a Community Insight Day to help shape the next phase of the Build Move Thrive programme and inform a regional funding submission to Sport England.

The session will bring together organisations with strong grassroots connections to share local insight, identify cross-county themes, and influence strategy so future plans reflect real community needs and experiences.

The event aims to ensure residents' voices drive system change and that physical activity and health initiatives are designed around lived reality, not assumptions.

Date: Tuesday 10 March

Time: 11am to 3pm, lunch provided

Venue: Crewe Alexandra FC, Railwaymen Bar and Lounge

Register now

Subscribe and feedback

If you didn't receive this newsletter directly from VSNW, you can [subscribe here](#) to ensure you don't miss future updates.

We'd love to hear your thoughts on this new update—what's useful, what could be improved, and how we can make it more relevant to you and your work. **Share your feedback with us at cmhcl@vsnw.org.uk**

Thank you for your continued support and engagement. If you have any updates or opportunities you'd like us to share in future newsletters, please contact cmhcl@vsnw.org.uk



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