Cheshire and Merseyside VCFSE Health and Care Transformation Programme

Progress report 2025–2026



VS6

Cheshire & Merseyside VCFSE Health & Care Leaders Group

Cheshire & Warrington Infrastructure Partnership

Voluntary Sector North West

NHS Cheshire and Merseyside

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Our work is delivered through a relatively modest annual investment of around £438,000 from NHS Cheshire and Merseyside. This investment represents both recognition of the vital role the VCFSE sector plays in shaping and delivering health and care, and a clear commitment to building a stronger NHS-VCFSE partnership.



Foreword

Welcome to our review of the Cheshire and Merseyside VCFSE Health and Care Transformation Programme for 2025–2026. This report sets out the progress we have made across our three overarching priorities and the difference this is making to communities across Cheshire and Merseyside (C&M).

During 2025–2026, our programme continued to build on the strong foundations established in its first years. From securing additional funding and meaningful data access for the sector, to championing VCFSE involvement in neighbourhood health, hospital discharge, children and young people's services and devolution planning - this has been a year of real and tangible impact.

It has also been a year of great change and challenge for all partners across our health and care system, not least for our local NHS as it reorganises and restructures in response to national reforms. Despite this we have maintained good progress against our collective priorities, whilst at the same time embracing new opportunities signalled in the national NHS 10 Year Plan, such as neighbourhood health.

Our work is delivered through a relatively modest annual investment of around £438,000 from NHS Cheshire and Merseyside. This investment represents both recognition of the vital role the VCFSE sector plays in shaping and delivering health and care, and a clear commitment to building a stronger NHS-VCFSE partnership. The reach and leverage of that investment is substantial. The updates captured in this report demonstrate the breadth of work being undertaken and the partnerships that are forming and deepening across the system.

We remain committed to the principle that VCFSE organisations are not add-ons to the health and care system - they are essential partners, uniquely placed to reach communities with the greatest health and social needs. This report is evidence of what is possible when that partnership is properly resourced and supported, and work started in year to develop a memorandum of understanding between the sector and our local NHS will help us achieve even more together.



Warren Escadale
Chair, C&M VCFSE Health and Care Leaders Group
Chief Executive, Voluntary Sector North West (VSNW)

About our programme

VCFSE organisations across Cheshire and Merseyside (C&M) play a vital role in improving health and wellbeing. They support people facing the greatest inequalities, provide trusted services rooted in local places, and help people stay well and independent for longer.

They also bring something distinctive to the health and care system - **reach, trust, insight and strong connections into communities whose voices are not always heard through formal services alone.**

At a time of rising demand, tighter funding and increasing cost pressures, strong infrastructure and clear routes into decision making are more important than ever.

Our C&M VCFSE Health and Care Transformation Programme strengthens those foundations. It supports the infrastructure that helps VCFSE organisations work together, build resilience, influence system priorities and play a fuller role in improving health and reducing inequalities across our integrated care system (ICS).

We aim to	To do this we need to	This will deliver
Maximise the benefits of a vibrant and sustainable VCFSE ecosystem, embedded as an active and equal partner in our CMHCP towards: • Gaining a better understanding of the needs, challenges, and aspirations of our diverse communities • Maximising impact and value from coproducing services and projects • Creating better health and wellbeing for our residents	Our VCFSEs to have an 'infrastructure' so they can collaborate with each other and CMHCP effectively.	VCFSEs supported to overcome system barriers and operating challenges so they are fully involved in priority system / place work like neighbourhood health.
	Our VCFSE expertise and insights are routinely used in shaping system priorities, planning and delivery.	Greater understanding of how the system defines and measures outcomes, especially in relation to prevention.
	Our sector's value and unique, integral contribution to be understood, respected and trusted by system partners.	Generation of evidence to demonstrate the significant contribution our VCFSEs make in our communities.

Learning and collaboration | Influence and engagement

How we work

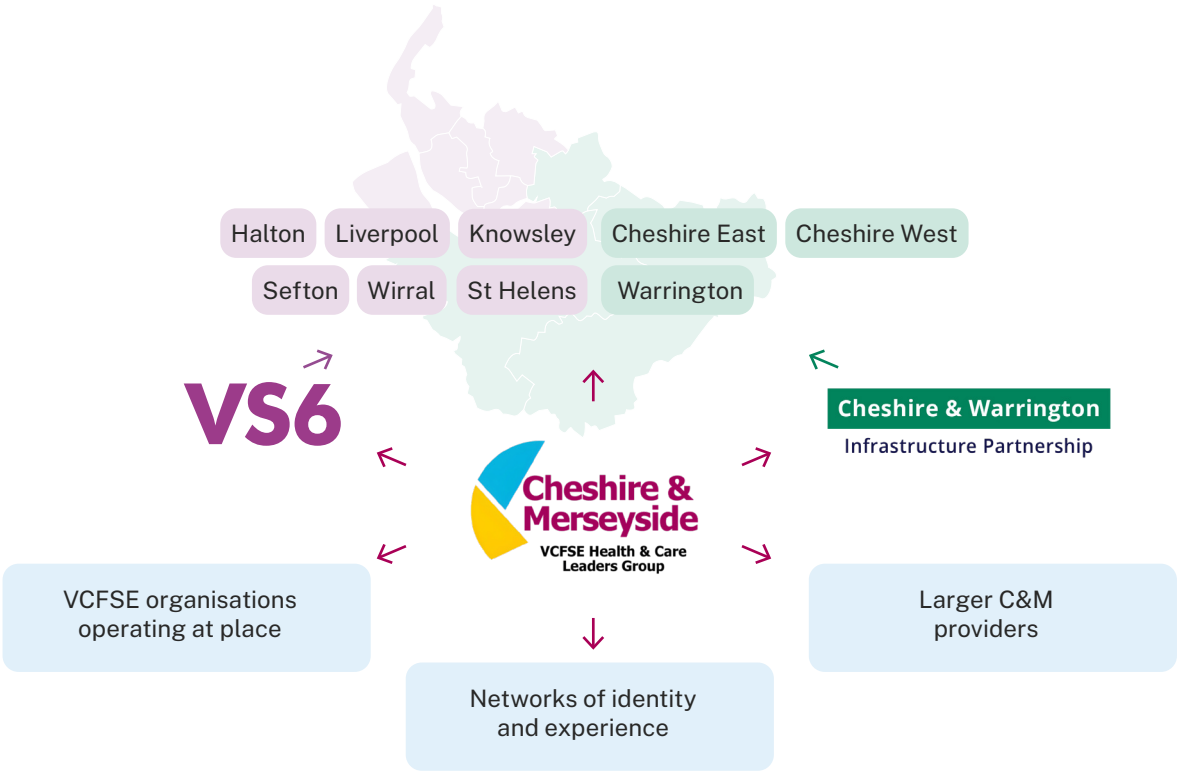
Our programme is delivered through the **C&M VCFSE Alliance**, which brings together:

C&M VCFSE Health and Care Leaders Group Providing strategic leadership, system insight and coordination.

CWIP (Cheshire & Warrington Infrastructure Partnership) Connecting VCFSE organisations across Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Warrington.

VS6 (Liverpool City Region VCFSE Partnership) Coordinating sector engagement across Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton, St Helens and Wirral.

Together, these structures form the connective tissue between thousands of VCFSE organisations in the nine places and the system level governance of NHS Cheshire and Merseyside (NHS C&M).



Our team

We have a small core team, leading and coordinating our work and involving other health and care leaders from our C&M VCFSE Alliance on behalf of the wider sector whenever possible.



Jan Campbell
Primary care and social prescribing lead



Ellen Loudon
Vice chair of the ICS partnership board and chair of VS6



Warren Escadale
VCFSE member of NHS C&M board, chair CMHCL



Racheal Jones
VS6 lead for the ICS – workstreams including mental health and cancer prevention



Alison Cullen
CWIP lead for the ICS – workstreams including urgent care and workforce



Dave Packwood
Children and Young People Network lead



Lyn Cooke
Programme manager

Our funding

NHS C&M has funded our programme since 2022 through an annual budget of around **£438k**. This investment enables:

- Strategic representation across the ICS
- Coordination of VCFSE involvement in major workstreams
- Development of shared tools, frameworks and resources
- Support for place level infrastructure
- Assurance that NHS C&M meets national guidance on working with VCFSE partners

Despite its modest size, this investment has significant reach and leverage - enabling the sector to influence system priorities, secure additional funding and deliver high impact community-based services.

Our collective priorities

We have shaped our programme around three main areas of focus:



1 Supporting VCFSE voice, representation and engagement

Ensuring the sector is present, heard and influential in system governance, strategy and planning



2 Embedding VCFSE organisations as delivery partners

Designing the sector into major programmes across neighbourhood health, urgent emergency care, CYP services, mental health, prevention and digital



3 Championing the sector in C&M's nine places

Strengthening local infrastructure, networks and alliances so the sector can shape place level priorities and demonstrate its impact.

These priorities also align with shared system goals across C&M, including work to improve population health and reduce inequalities through the Joint Forward Plan 2026-2031 and All Together Fairer programme, as well as the direction set by national policy, including the NHS 10 Year Plan.

PRIORITY 1:

Supporting VCFSE voice, representation and engagement

Ensuring that VCFSE organisations have a meaningful and sustained voice in the governance, strategy and planning of Cheshire and Merseyside's health and care system has been a consistent focus throughout 2025–2026.

Working Better Together

Strengthening how the sector and NHS C&M work together has been a major focus this year, with a commitment to coproduce a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between our C&M VCFSE Alliance and NHS C&M.

We carried out an extensive place-led engagement exercise informed by discussions with our C&M VCFSE Alliance over recent years, which ran from February 2026 until the end of May 2026.

Around 170 organisations attended eight place-based workshops and over 80 people responded to an online survey, with six clear messages coming out of the exercise to shape a draft MoU.

The full engagement report and a resulting draft MoU were formerly submitted to NHS C&M for consideration in July 2026. Once agreed, it will provide principles and commitment to formalise and underpin all aspects of our partnership.

1. **Equal partnership**
   Genuine parity of esteem, not a commissioner-provider dynamic
2. **Trust & respect**
   Civil Society Covenant values, strengthened for health & care
3. **Sustainable funding**
   Multi-year, inflation linked contracts - the most cited ask
4. **Representation**
   VCFSE at every level of governance and renumerated for it
5. **Wider scope**
   Beyond ICB - wider NHS, councils etc, complementing existing agreements
6. **"Not just words"**
   Accountability with teeth - keeping the MoU live

You can follow how this work is progressing from the VSNW website.

System level representation

Our programme leads have maintained active representation across a wide range of C&M system level boards, committees, partnerships and forums, ensuring the VCFSE perspective is present wherever strategic decisions affecting the sector and the communities it serves are being made:

During the year this has included:

- NHS Cheshire and Merseyside (NHS C&M) board
- Cheshire and Merseyside Health and Care Partnership (CMHCP)
- Neighbourhood Health Programme Board
- Population Health Partnership
- All Together Fairer Board and Leads meetings
- All Together Active
- All Together Smokefree Partnership Board
- Housing and Health Partnership Board
- Health and Social Care Leaders Group
- Mental Health Oversight Group
- Mental Health, Learning Disability and Autism (MHLDA) Inpatient Quality Group
- Frailty Board and NW Frailty Collaborative
- Urgent Emergency Care (UEC) Workstream
- Data into Action (DiA) Board and Professional Group
- DiA Public and Patient Involvement and Engagement Group
- Children and Young People (CYP) Committee, prior to being disbanded, and associated 'engine room' meetings
- Beyond Programme Board
- CYP Neurodevelopmental Programme Board
- CYP Neighbourhood Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT Focus Group
- C&M Corporate Parenting Group

In addition to our core team, we thank C&M VCFSE Health and Care Leaders (CMHCL) group members - Ellie McNeil and Justin Hill from You Matter, Theresa Pass from Visyon and Mike Watson from Active Cheshire - for their contributions through representation roles during the year. We would also like to give a special thanks to Dave Sweeney, long term supporter and champion of the programme and the wider sector.

Sector voice in strategic planning

The forums constituting our C&M VCFSE Alliance – VS6, CWIP and CMHCL – have influenced and inputted into some of the most important strategies and plans that steer our health and care system during the year, such as All Together in Health and Work strategy.

Most notably, our forums have been involved in extensive dialogue with NHS C&M to help shape its nationally required Joint Forward Plan 2026 – 2031, which commits the ICB to embedding the sector as an equal strategic and delivery partner.

State of the Sector

We began work to update our 2023 flagship report on the scale and contribution of our VCFSE organisations in Cheshire and Merseyside. Initial scoping and analysis will be followed up with in-depth surveying of VCFSE leaders, with a refreshed report published in 2026-2027.

Devolution in Cheshire and Warrington

During the year our system lead for Cheshire and Warrington (C&W) on behalf of CWIP has been actively involved in groundwork to ensure the sector is well positioned to work with the new combined authority (CWCA).

Established in February 2026, CWCA brings together leaders, businesses, partners and communities, aiming to make the region a better place to live, work and invest. Ahead of CWCA's emergence, our lead was involved in the councils' C&W Leaders Board and, from October 2025 onwards, its successor CWCA Shadow Board - building professional relationships with key leaders and influencing the VCFSEs role in devolution.

Key activities include:

- Active involvement in the development of CWIP's manifesto to influence the combined authority
- Development work towards recruitment of a VCFSE secondment within the new CWCA during 2026-2027
- Involvement in the appointment process for CWCA's interim CEO
- Presentation on behalf of CWIP at NAVCA Spring Policy Session on devolution in Cheshire and Warrington and CWIP's manifesto



VCFSE organisations are not add-ons to the health and care system - they are essential partners.

PRIORITY 2:

Embedding VCFSE organisations as delivery partners

Our programme works towards ensuring VCFSE organisations are not simply consulted - but are actively 'designed in' as delivery partners across the major workstreams shaping health and care in C&M. This year we've seen progress across emerging models of neighbourhood health, urgent and emergency care (UEC), children and young people's services, data and digital and a range of other system priorities.

Neighbourhood health

The NHS 10 Year Plan describes neighbourhood health as essential to achieving its ambition to shift activity from hospital to community. We have been involved in NHS C&M's programme at every level to ensure the essential role of VCFSEs in neighbourhoods is recognised and the sector is embedded in the services being designed and delivered at place level.

We were a core member of NHS C&M's Neighbourhood Health Programme Board, where we're championing VCFSE involvement and influencing decision making, whilst our C&M VCFSE Transformation Grant Fund, which you can read about on page 17, is supporting the sector at place level.

With VCFSE partners in C&M and nationally – we've been developing resources and sharing learning across the region and beyond.

Key activities include:

- Providing extensive case studies evidencing the value and impact of VCFSE involvement in neighbourhoods, feeding into NHS C&M's early strategic work to shape its approach to developing place-based models
- Staging a webinar based on early learning from VCFSE and system partners in Sefton and St Helens, named amongst 43 initial pioneers in the National Neighbourhood Health Implementation Programme (NNHIP)
- Developing a best practice briefing on how to embed the sector in neighbourhoods
- Producing an assurance framework and assessment tool, which was agreed and adopted by the C&M Neighbourhood Health Board and shared with other ICB areas.

Urgent emergency care

Our VCFSEs play a vital, yet often under recognised role in supporting people to leave hospital safely, recover well at home and avoid them needing to be admitted in the first place.

We have continued to work with system partners during the year, towards them fully recognising the sector's significant contribution across the urgent emergency care (UEC) pathway – from VCFSE led hospital discharge services, to proactive support to help people stay well for longer in the community and in their own homes – and how this links to neighbourhood health.



This has included involvement in system level UEC working groups and boards – championing greater VCFSE voice and integration in services like hospital discharge and lobbying for greater investment in the sector as essential delivery partners.

- Producing a best practice VCFSE Hospital Discharge Framework, providing commissioners in C&M and beyond with a service specification template and investment guide, also useful for sector colleagues to benchmark how well they are involved in this work
- Promoting and connecting learning through participation in sessions such as the NW Frailty Collaborative learning sessions and ongoing links with VCFSE organisations delivering discharge and UEC services, facilitating information sharing and peer learning
- Carrying out ongoing research and data analysis on VCFSE activity across C&M to inform the ongoing case for greater investment in the sector across UEC

Children and young people

Our VCFSE Children and Young People (CYP) Network has further established itself as the key point of contact for C&M system health and local authority partners to involve the sector in designing and delivering solutions for CYP services. Our workstream lead for the network has overseen strong advancement across its programme of work.

Change Champions

We established 'Change Champion' roles this year to drive progress around the CYP Network's priority areas of work:

Mental Health
Kevin Bradburne
Youth Fed (subgroup members including Monique Collier and Val O'Donnell, YPAS)

Appropriate Places of Care (APOC)
Dave McNicholl
Warrington Youth Zone

Corporate parenting
Sarah Sturmey
Pure Insight

Safeguarding
Sally Carr
MBE & Jane Nolan BEM, StreetGames

SEND and neurodiversity
Sarah Elliott
Koala NW

Edging Towards Care
Gill Bainbridge
MYA

Examples of their work during the year include:

- Contributing to the review and revision of the C&M CYP Mental Health Strategy 2026–2027, providing VCFSE case studies to inform the refresh
- Supporting a VCFSE secondment from St Helens YMCA to the C&M Integration and Transformation Programme to carry out a system wide review of emotional wellbeing and early intervention mental health services – engaging with 500 VCFSE services and over 1,000 CYP to produce the 'Seen, Heard, Supported? Young Voices, Local Services' report
- Representing the sector on the system level working group to develop APOC homes, which is expected to progress in early 2026-2027
- Ensuring VCFSE representation on the system wide Corporate Parenting Board and championing the co-design of a care experienced young people (CEYP) engagement strategy in the year ahead
- Attending a range of C&M and North West Safeguarding forums to provide VCFSE voice and champion greater sector involvement in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, including producing a report and recommendations on how to achieve this
- Initial discussions contributing to the bid for C&M to become a Regional Care Cooperative, led by the local authorities

A neighbourhood approach for CYP

We are part of the Beyond Programme's steering group looking to develop a model of neighbourhood health specifically for care for children and young people. We supported the competitive process to identify six areas commissioned to pilot neighbourhood multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs) - Sefton, Wirral, Liverpool, Cheshire West, St Helens and Cheshire East. VCFSE organisations have been funded within four of these pilot areas and we're working with them to share their initial learning more widely.

Neurodiversity pathway

Last year we supported the delivery of a significant engagement exercise to capture the voice of neurodiverse CYP and their families to help shape a new C&M wide pathway of care, which aims to improve services and people's experience of them. Working with Cheshire West Voluntary Action, we produced communications materials in non-clinical, easy read language, along with a supporting video for the new pathway.

Building on this groundwork, we were involved in NHS C&M's commissioning process to identify a training provider to roll out the new pathway's CYP neurodiversity profiling tool. We led on developing the specification, the call-out for applications and the assessment process. Koala NW was commissioned to codesign and deliver the training toolkit to over 1,000 professionals during the year.

Child poverty

A particular focus on bed poverty has emerged during the year, driven by presentations to the network from StreetGames, Children North East, CHAMPs and the C&M Integration and Transformation Programme (CMITP). Together with CMITP, our network lead is speaking with Children in Need to progress a potential funding bid, with additional discussions ongoing with Cheshire Community Foundation.

Young Warrington CIC

Our CYP Network lead has provided ongoing support to this relatively new venture, since it was established in July 2025. Young Warrington CIC empowers local youth through skill development workshops, mentorship programs, and recreational activities. By focusing on building confidence and resilience, the organisation supports young people in fostering a strong sense of community.

New CYP engagement role

We have worked with NHS C&M to develop a new engagement post to ensure the voices of children and young people better inform the review, design and delivery of services. The role is jointly funded by the ICB and Youth Focus North West, with recruitment and focus of the role in line with our shared system priorities to be progressed in 2026-2027.

What this means for VCFSE investment and delivery

Our CYP Network has helped to lever the following funding into VCFSE organisations during 2025 - 2026:

£20,000
+£40,000
(agreed 2026–2027)

SEND/Neuro' awareness raising

Koala NW – codesigning and leading 'This is Me' professional training - 1,032 professionals trained over the year

£20,000
+ £10,000
(to continue secondment in 2026-2027)

VCFSE mental health services research

St Helens YMCA – secondment role to engage with 500 VCFSE MH services and over 1,000 CYP around early intervention emotional wellbeing MH services

£20,000

New CYP engagement role

Youth Focus North West - recruitment of CYP Engagement Lead (match funding confirmed by ICB)

£210,000
£35,000 × 6 areas

Neighbourhood pilots

Beyond Programme - seed investment across Sefton, Wirral, Liverpool, Cheshire West, St Helens, Cheshire East

Mental health services and support

Our programme has continued to support stronger, more effective working partnerships between NHS mental health services and the sector during the year, towards greater wellbeing for all our residents.

Our system lead for Liverpool City Region chairs the Strategic Planning Forum between CVSs and Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust, which has led to the development of an MOU and 'one workforce' approach. To spread this good practice to joint working, we've been encouraging the adoption of this model with partners in Cheshire and Warrington.

We've continued to collaborate with VCFSE providers, place-based mental health alliances and local infrastructure organisations to strengthen sector visibility and collaborative approaches to data, prevention and early intervention.

Suicide prevention

Continued involvement with CHAMPs Suicide Prevention programme has provided a channel for VCFSE insight into local government and national network discussions, including connecting the sector to a Network Rail initiative.

We carried out a research exercise during the year, focusing on VCFSE workforce resilience in relation to suicide prevention. Results of a survey, together with key findings from qualitative focus groups in each of the nine place-based mental health alliances formed recommendations submitted to the C&M Suicide Prevention Board for consideration.

As a result, the recommendation for VCFSE resource and capacity has been considered an agenda priority for 2026-2027 to devise and deliver tailored support and training for the sector.

Cancer prevention

C&M Cancer Alliance's Community Partnerships programme, originally developed together with our transformation programme, has continued to demonstrate the value of VCFSE involvement in prevention and early diagnosis of the disease. The programme has won several national and regional awards for its approach and outcomes, carried out through more than 48,000 interactions with communities across our ICS.

We've also supported the development and dissemination of the Cancer Alliance VCFSE Targeted Interventions for Early Diagnosis (TIED) grant programme, which builds on the Community Partnerships programme.



Source: Taken from Cheshire and Merseyside Cancer Alliance Community Partnerships Impact Report 2023-2025

Data and impact measurement

Improving VCFSE access to health system data - and the sector's ability to use that data to demonstrate its impact - has been a major focus of our programme in 2025–2026.

Data into Action

We've continued to be actively involved in the NHS C&M led Data into Action (DiA) programme including:

- Membership of the Public and Patient Involvement and Engagement (PPIE) Group, providing a conduit to wider VCFSE
- Active representation on the DiA Professional Group, providing data on VCFSE contributions
- Presenting to DiA Board
- Involvement in a Complex Households masterclass, presenting on VCFSE engagement and impact
- Supporting design of further DiA masterclass sessions focused on data sharing with VCFSE to ensure sector access to anonymised data, and supporting the sector in its practical application in planning, delivery and commissioning

Better access to data

Greater access to health and care data has been a consistent ask from our VCFSEs and we've secured some good progress this year to enable this:

- All infrastructure partners now have access to anonymised ICB data through the Business Intelligence Portal — a major step in enabling the sector to use tools previously out of reach
- A new process has been agreed for the ICB to share anonymised health data with VCFSE infrastructure organisations, with a clear route established for applying for Patient Identifiable Data (PID) access
- Data Access Facilitators have been identified in all nine local infrastructure organisations (LIOs), enabling VCFSE organisations to access wider health system data through supported pathways
- ICB Data Buddies have come forward, offering VCFSE organisations with practical support in navigating business intelligence tools, so the sector can make best use of these resources.

Social prescribing

We carried out a snapshot survey to gain a place-based picture of current social prescribing provision, data gaps and opportunities for improvement. Survey results are being used to shape a social prescribing delivery model for C&M's WorkWell programme, which will launch in November 2026.

Women's health and maternity

A partnership has been established with the Women's Health and Maternity Programme, working towards a more consistent approach to services across all nine C&M places. This work will focus on improving engagement and insight and a good practice model and support structure for volunteers, with progress expected in 2026-2027.

Supporting volunteering

Work has continued to develop a joined-up volunteer platform across C&M to link the VS6 and CWIP volunteer portals. We've actively engaged with Cheshire and Warrington Enterprise Partnership to align volunteering opportunities and insight across the region.



Image: Walking for Wellness, Warrington

PRIORITY 3:

Championing VCFSE role in C&M's nine places

Our programme recognises that health and wellbeing improvements are ultimately made at place level - in communities and neighbourhoods. Throughout 2025–2026, we have worked to ensure that VCFSE organisations in each of the nine places are well connected to system planning, well supported to demonstrate their impact, and well positioned to shape investment decisions.

C&M VCFSE Transformation Grant Fund

Our programme administers the Transformation Grant Fund on behalf of NHS C&M. It is open to the lead local infrastructure organisation in each of our nine places to apply for up to £20,000. Now in its second year, the fund is helping to strengthen place-based VCFSE leadership, deepen partnership working and embed the sector more firmly in health and care planning, design and delivery.

Across 2025-2026, the fund has supported a consistent set of outcomes across very different local contexts. In every place, it has helped infrastructure organisations sustain strategic representation, strengthen local VCFSE networks and generate stronger evidence of the sector's impact and value.

Stronger position for the sector at place level

A core use of Transformation Fund investment has been enabling local infrastructure organisations to maintain a consistent VCFSE presence in the boards, forums and partnerships where decisions are made. Just as importantly, it has helped them engage their wider local sector so that representation is informed by collective insight rather than individual organisational views. This has taken different forms across C&M.

In Halton, the investment supported development of a shared strategic framework for partnership working between statutory organisations and the sector.

In Cheshire East, the funding helped secure VCFSE representation on the Place Leadership Group - a significant step in a place without centrally commissioned infrastructure support.

It also enabled the CVS Cheshire East (CVSCE) to provide support to local organisations to engage with the council's Enabling Communities grant programme, which attracted 197 applications worth nearly £1.7m. One of the strongest collaborative bids came through CVSCE's Food Alliance, showing how sustained investment in networks and relationships can translate into stronger joint proposals.



Image: Cheshire West forums

In Cheshire West, more than 20 VCFSE representatives contributed to system leadership through around 55 meetings, boards and forums, while sector alliances focused on children and young people, mental health, food access and poverty contributed more than 3,000 hours of engagement and support across the year.

SPOTLIGHT

Halton Forum

Halton Forum now regularly brings together 70 or more VCFSE organisations each month, providing a strong collective voice into local system planning. This level of participation means Halton and St Helens VCA can represent the sector with clear mandate and current community intelligence, strengthening the quality and legitimacy of VCFSE input into strategic discussions.

Embedding the sector in neighbourhood health and delivery

Neighbourhood health has been a major system priority during 2025-2026, and the Transformation Fund has helped ensure the VCFSE sector is involved as an active partner in its development. In Sefton, the CVS secured representation across the new Neighbourhood Health Programme Board, Core Group and People and Communities Group, including chairing responsibilities. In St Helens, sustained VCFSE involvement in partnership structures helped embed the sector in neighbourhood health planning from the outset. In Liverpool, Well Placed Forum representatives helped shape a stronger social model of health, making the case for VCFSE assets as part of the foundation for neighbourhood health centres.



Image: Sefton NNIP programme session

This depth of involvement contributed to Sefton and St Helens being selected as national pioneers in the National Neighbourhood Health Implementation Programme (NNHIP).

SPOTLIGHT

Community Partnerships, Cheshire West

Cheshire West Voluntary Action's (CWVA's) Community Partnerships model shows what embedded neighbourhood working can look like at scale. In 2025-2026, 409 people from 76 organisations took part in steering group meetings and events, contributing nearly 1,700 hours of engagement. Partnerships have begun using enhanced case finding tools alongside primary care networks to identify people most at risk of cardiovascular disease and design targeted community-led support. The model's impact has been recognised through a new two year contract running to March 2028.

Strengthening VCFSE involvement in mental health

The fund has also strengthened the sector's contribution to mental health, from early intervention with young people to support for people moving on from acute services. In Cheshire East, a new Adult Mental Health and Wellbeing Alliance helped lead to a co-produced commissioning process with Cheshire and Wirral Partnership Trust that is now being championed within the trust as best practice. In Liverpool, the CVS brokered a new Mental Health Navigator Project funded by Mersey Care NHS Trust, making £150,000 a year available in community grants to support people stepping down from acute mental health care.



Image: Cheshire and Wirral Partnership Trust

SPOTLIGHT

Young Hearts, Strong Minds, Cheshire West

Through the Cheshire West Mental Health Alliance, Cheshire Young Carers and Youth Fed secured funding for *Young Hearts, Strong Minds* - an early intervention therapy and youth led support project delivered in local schools. CWVA worked with delivery partners to evidence the project's social value, estimating a return of £8.73 for every £1 invested through therapy sessions delivered, improved confidence and self-esteem, and the prevention of permanent school exclusion. It is a strong example of how infrastructure investment can translate into measurable outcomes for young people and wider system savings.

Building the evidence base - data, impact and social value

Across all places, the Transformation Fund has accelerated work to strengthen how the VCFSE sector captures and demonstrates its impact. This has included new digital platforms, social return on investment approaches, procurement support, better referral and reporting systems, and new ways of bringing community intelligence into strategic decision-making.

In Cheshire West, for example, more than 30 organisations were supported to use the Plinth outcomes platform and Social Value Engine, with data from four active users alone showing support for more than 2,000 people through 18,000 attendances over the year. In Liverpool, social value procurement workshops helped VCFSE organisations engage more effectively with commissioning processes, whilst in St Helens a new CRM system strengthened data capture for the Social Prescribing Network.

SPOTLIGHT

Community intelligence, Warrington



Warrington Voluntary Action (WVA) focused on a different but equally important dimension of evidence: the insight held by small grassroots organisations working closely with marginalised communities. Over the year, WVA held more than 40 meetings and listening events, involving nearly 300 voices and over 250 hours of collaborative work. The recurring themes that emerged - trust, being believed, being taken seriously and being seen as a whole person - informed a shared framework developed by six community groups for reporting qualitative insight alongside quantitative system data. Supported by the Warrington Neighbourhood Oversight Board, this work is helping reframe the sector's contribution not only as delivery, but also as intelligence, insight and prevention.

SPOTLIGHT

Waiting Well, Sefton

Community intelligence gathered through Sefton CVS's Community Insight Tool helped evidence unmet need among adults awaiting social care assessment, supporting a successful case for £80,000 investment in the Waiting Well model. The project has now been running for almost 12 months, with further Adult Social Care investment confirmed for two additional posts. It is a clear example of the VCFSE sector bringing evidence into the room and that evidence leading directly to investment.

Summary

The Transformation Grant Fund continues to demonstrate high value for relatively modest investment. It strengthens representation, embeds the sector in neighbourhood health, enhances mental health partnerships and builds a richer evidence base across C&M. Most importantly, it enables local infrastructure organisations to make collaboration real — turning networks, alliances and community insight into practical improvements for residents.



> **"The Transformation Grant Fund enables local infrastructure organisations to make collaboration real.**

Acknowledgements

Our progress report has been compiled from updates provided by workstream leads across the whole C&M VCFSE Health and Care Transformation Programme during April 2025 to March 2026.

We'd like to thank all those involved in our programme for their contributions.

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