

	Cabinet 12 October 2026
	Report from the Corporate Director of Service Reform & Strategy
	Lead Member – Cabinet Member for Communities, Culture & Cost of Living Support (Councillor Tina Amadi)
Brent Collaboration Charter	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Key
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
No. of Appendices:	Two Appendix 1: Draft Brent Collaboration Charter Appendix 2: The Civil Society Covenant NCVO
Background Papers:	None
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Tessa Awe, Project Lead Officer 020 8937 2714 Tessa.Awe@brent.gov.uk Rhodri Rowlands, Director Strategic Commissioning, Capacity Building and Engagement 020 8937 1738 Rhodri.Rowlands@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1. Brent has a dynamic and diverse Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector that plays a vital role in supporting residents and strengthening communities across the borough. The sector provides a wide range of valued services, helping to address local needs, reduce inequalities and improve the wellbeing of Brent's residents.
- 1.2 This report seeks Cabinet endorsement of the Draft Brent Collaboration Charter 2026– 2029. The Charter is intended to be a shared agreement between Brent Council, the VCFSE sector and other local partners, including the NHS, establishing a shared vision, principles and commitments that guide how we work together towards shared goals and better outcomes for residents.

- 1.3 The Charter has been co-produced through an extensive programme of engagement. Its development was overseen by a cross-sector Steering Group and informed by a borough-wide World Café event in September 2025, which brought together representatives from the Council, NHS, VCFSE organisations and other stakeholders to identify priorities, barriers and opportunities for future collaboration. The Charter was subsequently further developed and refined through three themed workshops focusing on shared outcomes, partnership principles and commitments.
- 1.4 The Charter sets out a stronger and more consistent framework for partnership working. It seeks to strengthen trust, transparency and collaboration, support a thriving and sustainable VCFSE sector, improve resident participation and ensure that the Council works alongside communities as equal partners.
- 1.5 In particular, the Charter will strengthen how we work together by:
- **Strengthening accountability:** establishing clearer expectations, responsibilities and commitments for delivery partners and organisations we work with across the sector, with appropriate mechanisms to monitor delivery and address both delivery and non-delivery.
 - **Providing clearer measures of success:** developing stronger performance indicators and measurable outcomes so that partners can define what success looks like, monitor progress and demonstrate the impact of collaborative work for residents. This will also help identify where additional support or action is required.
 - **Enabling responsive priority-setting:** providing a framework for agreeing and reviewing partnership priorities annually, while retaining the flexibility to respond sooner to emerging needs, opportunities and key themes across the Council and the borough. This will ensure that partnership activity remains relevant and responsive to changing local circumstances.
 - **Increasing capacity-building support:** committing Brent Council and partners to supporting smaller grassroots organisations that have strong community connections and the potential to deliver meaningful work, but may need support to build their organisational capacity. This will include practical support with governance, funding applications, organisational development and demonstrating impact, enabling these organisations to participate more fully in partnership working and access delivery opportunities.
- 1.6 Following Cabinet endorsement, implementation will focus on embedding the Charter across Council services, commissioning, neighbourhood working and partnership governance. The intention is that the Charter becomes a practical framework for how the Council and its partners work together, rather than simply a statement of shared ambition.

- 1.7 This is the draft version of the Charter and represents the beginning of a longer-term approach to collaboration. The initial sign-up will be by Brent Council and VCFSE organisations, recognising that immediate action and impact can be achieved together and reflecting the strength of engagement and co-production undertaken to date.
- 1.8 We aspire for all partners who commit to the Charter to play an active role in its delivery and impact. Engagement with partners, including the NHS, will continue, with the aim of strengthening wider partner participation and ensuring that the Charter develops as a genuinely shared commitment across the borough.
- 1.9 The draft Charter has been reviewed by Council officers, the wider VCFSE sector, the Corporate Management Team and Lead Members. Cabinet is asked to endorse the Draft Brent Collaboration Charter 2026–2029 and support the continued development and implementation of the Charter with partners across the borough.

2.0 Recommendations

That Cabinet:

- 2.1 Agree and endorse the draft Brent Collaboration Charter and ensure a one council approach to supporting its implementation
- 2.2 Note and endorse the establishment of a VCFSE Strategic Advisory Forum linked to emergent Brent Strategic Partnership structures that will provide overall oversight and ownership of the Charter, its implementation and delivery.

3.0 Cabinet Member Forward

- 3.1. The VCFSE in Brent plays a vital role in delivering services, activities and events that enrich resident's lives and strengthen our communities. Partnership with the VCSE sector is embedded within Brent's current 2023–2027 Borough Plan *Moving Brent Forward Together*. The Plan emphasises collaboration with residents, partner organisations and voluntary groups to deliver better outcomes and ensure no one is left behind. As the Council develops its next Council Plan, partnership working with the VSCFE will continue to be a key commitment.
- 3.2 The VCFSE contributes directly to key borough priorities such as tackling poverty, improving health and wellbeing, and fostering safer and stronger communities. Community organisations provide essential services — from welfare advice to health outreach and youth development — that complement statutory provision and strengthen neighbourhood resilience.
- 3.3 The VCFSE sector also serve an important function in providing constructive feedback and critique for council policy, service design and commissioning ensuring there is accountability in our decision making and in our approach.

Fundamentally, this accountability goes both ways and part of the push towards building better partnerships is to improve fairness and equity.

- 3.4 The common feature across the VCFSE is its passion to work alongside residents to meet their needs, supporting activities and local action which bring people together and drive improvements for the residents they work with.
- 3.5 Brent Council fully recognises the value of the sector to deliver positive outcomes for residents. By endorsing the Collaboration Charter, we recognise that the challenges facing our communities cannot be tackled alone. By working in partnership, we can identify shared solutions and deliver better outcomes for residents.
- 3.6 The Charter supports the Council's ambitions to reduce inequalities, strengthen neighbourhoods, improve health and wellbeing, increase resident participation and deliver services through collaboration. It reinforces prevention and early intervention by recognising the role of community organisations in supporting residents before needs escalate. The Charter also supports collaborative commissioning, stronger community leadership and more effective partnership working across the public sector.
- 3.7 The charter must be an active document, a catalyst for real and lasting change that improves the quality of life for Brent's residents and communities. We are committed to building on our strong foundations to ensure improvements in how we engage with and resource the VCFSE in our day-to-day work.

4.0 Background and why we are developing the charter

- 4.1 Brent has one of London's largest and most diverse VCFSE sectors, making a significant contribution to tackling poverty, reducing isolation, improving health and wellbeing, supporting young people, strengthening community cohesion and creating opportunities for volunteering and civic participation.
- 4.2 The Council's last formal Voluntary Sector Strategy covered the period 2010–2015. Since then, there has been no formal Compact, overarching strategy or structured approach to setting out the shared commitments, principles and expectations that underpin the relationship and partnership working between the Council and the VCFSE sector.
- 4.3 Alongside this, there has been no recognised shared forum or partnership vehicle that enables structured strategic engagement and partnership working around areas such as policy development, service design and commissioning.
- 4.4 The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge in 2025 recommended that Brent refresh its relationships (such as the development of a Compact) with the VCFSE and strengthen engagement with grassroots organisations.
- 4.5 The Charter addresses these gaps through an approach that formalises shared commitments and priorities, which recognise the value and role of the VCFSE sector and provide a basis for ways of working and governance that better

manage the strategic and day to day relationships between the Council, other public sector bodies and the VCFSE sector.

- 4.6 The Council recognises the need to strengthen and refresh this partnership, acknowledging that an effective relationship with the VCFSE sector is not one-directional. It requires mutual commitment, shared responsibility and a collaborative approach, with both the Council and sector organisations contributing their expertise, resources and local knowledge to achieve better outcomes for Brent's communities.
- 4.7 Increasing demand on public services and continuing financial pressures have also highlighted the importance of working differently with communities. The Charter provides a shared framework that moves beyond transactional relationships towards genuine partnership, recognising the strengths, knowledge and assets of both statutory organisations and the VCFSE sector.
- 4.8 Nationally, this work is symbiotic with the Government's approach to developing a Civil Society Compact and the implementation of local neighbourhood plans and development of local partnerships between the VCFSE and local government.
- 4.9 There is growing recognition from across the country that VCFSE organisations are facing increasingly challenging circumstances, with continued reductions in available public funding, changes to commissioning methods, alongside the increased complexity of the issues that people face, coupled with a growing demand for services, placing considerable strain on the sector.

5.0 Overview of the Brent Collaboration Charter

5.1 What the Charter aims to achieve

- 5.1.1 The Brent Collaboration Charter is a shared partnership agreement between Brent Council, NHS partners and the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector. It establishes a common framework for how partners will work together over the period 2026–2029 to improve outcomes for residents through stronger collaboration, greater trust and a shared commitment to community empowerment.
- 5.1.2 The Charter has been developed through a process of co-production and reflects the collective ambition of partners to move beyond traditional consultation towards a model of equal partnership.
- 5.1.3 Rather than creating new statutory responsibilities, the Charter establishes a shared set of principles, outcomes and commitments that will shape future partnership working across the borough. It is intended to support long-term cultural change, embedding collaboration across policy development, commissioning, service delivery and neighbourhood working.

5.2 Shared vision and outcomes

5.2.1 The Charter is underpinned by a shared vision of **a Brent where the VCFSE and public sectors are aligned and work together in equal partnership to support and empower all residents**. It seeks to build stronger and more trusting relationships between organisations, increase transparency and openness, strengthen the sustainability of the VCFSE sector, promote prevention and early intervention, and improve equity and fairness for residents.

5.2.2 The Charter is built around three shared outcomes:

- **A thriving, diverse and sustainable VCFSE sector in Brent**, recognising the vital contribution that voluntary and community organisations make to residents and committing partners to strengthen capacity, improve commissioning, make better use of community assets and support the long-term sustainability of the sector.
- **A strong and clear role for the VCFSE sector in shaping local decision-making**, ensuring community organisations have meaningful opportunities to influence policy, commissioning and service design through transparent and consistent engagement and partnership structures.
- **A leading and active role for residents in shaping the places where they live**, supporting greater resident participation, neighbourhood empowerment and co-production, while recognising the importance of community leadership and local decision-making in improving outcomes.

5.2.3 These outcomes are supported by a set of shared co-developed partnership principles which emphasise generosity, transparency, proportionality, resident focus and mutual support.

5.2.4 Collectively, they provide a foundation for strengthening relationships between the Council, NHS and VCFSE sector and embedding collaborative ways of working across Brent. They also signal that improving community outcomes is not the responsibility of one department or one sector alone. It embeds collective ownership across the system.

5.2.5 The Charter is intended to be a living document, supported by shared governance, regular review and continuous learning. Progress will be monitored through agreed governance arrangements and performance measures to ensure that the commitments made within the Charter translate into tangible improvements for residents and communities.

6.0 How the Charter was developed

6.1 A cross-sector Steering Group guided the development of the Charter throughout 2025 and 2026. The initial World Café consultation in September 2025 identified priorities for future collaboration and highlighted a strong appetite for a shared partnership agreement. Rocket Science then facilitated three workshops covering sustainability of the VCFSE sector, strategic influence in decision-making and resident empowerment.



7.0 Making it work in practice

7.1 It is the intention of all parties, to continue to work together to develop a practical and achievable action plan, that will underpin each of the outcomes. This work has started, however remains work in progress.

7.2 Enabling a One Council approach to engagement with the sector is vital to ensure consistency across all areas of work. This will ensure we foster a positive and strategic relationship with the sector which will be guided through the establishment of a new VCFSE Advisory Forum.

7.3 Following Cabinet approval, officers will continue to progress activities to widely communicate, raise awareness and promote the Charter across the Council and with key partners. programme of engagement and education. Engagement activities will include:

- Sessions with cross-council networks and teams where responsibilities for delivering on key commitments will sit including: Commissioning and Contract Management Communities of Practice.
- Sessions with the Council's Community Engagement and Grants Networks.
- Directorate Leadership Team meetings.
- Further development of actions associated with the commitments through the Embrace Change Capacity and Capability Board.
- Initial exploration of incorporation into organisational development and induction programmes.
- Planning for a session with the Council's Senior Management Group

7.4 Externally, post Cabinet agreement, we anticipate implementation will include a Charter launch event, communications campaign, identification of VCFSE outcome champions, development of an online presence and engagement through health partnership boards and strategic partnership groups.

- 7.5 We aspire to all partners committing to the Charter to ensure its effective delivery and impact and are continuing our engagement ahead of Cabinet in October with partners.

8.0 Governance and Monitoring

- 8.1 It is proposed to expand and transition the current VCFSE Steering Group to a VCFSE Strategic Advisory Forum, jointly chaired by VCFSE Leaders and Council. This will link with Brent's emergent strategic partnership structures. The Forum will oversee implementation, monitor progress against agreed actions and provide strategic leadership. Quarterly meetings, annual impact reporting, performance indicators and Charter Champions across Council directorates and the VCFSE sector will support delivery.
- 8.2 The remit and terms of reference for this forum will need to be developed, however, it is envisaged that alongside a role championing the Charter, the forum will enable more strategic, structured and joined up VCFSE input into areas including:
- policy development
 - service redesign
 - commissioning intentions
 - budget planning
 - equality impact assessments
- 8.3 In the VCFSE sector, our engagement has recommended identifying named outcome champions that represent the Charter overall and a particular shared outcome theme.
- 8.4 In an interim step, three local community leaders have stepped into these champion roles: Maxine Willets (CEO Young Brent Foundation), Raj Kapoor (CEO Citizen Advice Brent) and Sandra White (Chair Harlesden Neighbourhood Forum).
- 8.5 The Charter will be subject to at least annual review and all partners will be expected to contribute to identifying positive examples of impact, change and better outcomes for community and residents.

9.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

- 9.1 Extensive stakeholder engagement has been undertaken through the Shaping the Future of Brent's VCSE event (September 2025), ongoing VCFSE Steering Group meetings and the Charter development approach outlined above. The Lead Cabinet Member has been engaged and informed throughout and on a regular basis. Internally, the Charter's development has been considered through the Embrace Change Capacity and Capability Building Programme.

10.0 Financial Considerations

- 10.1 There are no immediate financial implications arising from endorsement of the Charter. Future resource implications will be considered through existing governance arrangements.

11.0 Legal Considerations

- 11.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. Any subsequent commissioning, grant agreements, or property-related arrangements will be subject to compliance with the Council's Constitution, Contract Standing Orders, and relevant legislation. A foundation for this work is the Governments 'Civil Society Covenant' linking the strands of a fair, just and equitable society with improvements to people's lives and protection of human rights, to construct a strong, sustainable and independent civil society which collaborates with local and national Government to benefit the public.

12.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

- 12.1 The charter supports the Council's commitment to equality, inclusion and co-production by improving participation and ensuring diverse communities influence local decision-making.

13.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

- 13.1 This charter's development included engagement with groups that support climate and environmental projects. The VCFSE sector plays a key role in community engagement on issues relating to fuel poverty, energy efficiency advice and general sustainability initiatives so better partnerships with the sector will be key to helping us achieve our stated aims. The Charter support's Brent's Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy through initiatives such as the *Together Towards Net Zero* grant fund and community greening projects. VCFSE organisations are key partners in promoting sustainable behaviours and local environmental action.

14.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

- 14.1 There are no HR implications arising directly from this report.

15.0 Communication Considerations

- 15.1 This document will be communicated internally via various existing networks and forums. Formal editing will be done before the document is launched and a formal partnership launch event will be planned for early winter.

Report sign off:

Rachel Crossley

Corporate Director of Service Reform & Strategy

Financial implications:

Rav Jassar

Deputy Director Corporate and Financial Planning

Legal implications:

Elizabeth Benjamin

Senior Lawyer Contracts and Governance