

# Working together to ensure that Doncaster and its people thrive

Insights into the experience of the  
Health and Social Care landscape  
for VCF sector organisations

This document outlines the findings of 10 in depth interviews with Voluntary Community Faith (VCF) sector organisations in Doncaster who responded to an open invitation to participate.

The purpose of the interviews was to explore how Team Doncaster could work more closely with the VCF sector to help transform health and social care outcomes for the people of Doncaster. This involved asking organisations to talk about the strengths of and challenges within the current system. These insights were used as input to a full day workshop with VCF organisations on the 24th of May, designed to support the Council, the health sector and the VCF sector to work together more closely. The insights will also be used to inform and support the ongoing engagement between the Council, health sector and VCF sector in the future.

**The 10 organisations interviewed were:**

Dunscroft YOUth

B:Friend

The Children's Sleep Charity

Friends of The Mac Gallery

Edlington Hilltop Centre

Live Inclusive

Keyring

Active Independence

Doncaster Minster

Agape Life Chapel

“

Sometimes we need to remind ourselves that we are all here together, dedicating our lives to helping those who need us.

”

# Summary

The organisations interviewed were passionate, dedicated and tenacious in providing support to those that they worked with. They were also committed to working closely with the Council and the health sector to deliver outcomes. They had a strong desire to work in close partnership. Many people told positive stories of working with individuals across Team Doncaster to achieve better outcomes for local people.

Organisations recognised the difficult climate they and Team Doncaster were working in. Austerity and the closure of the CVS has made them more vulnerable. The Council is extremely important to the voluntary sector and the reduction of Council support and funding has left some organisations feeling disheartened, unsupported and without a voice. They felt that the inevitable focus on financial transactions had the potential to destroy some of the core value in the voluntary services that they deliver. Many are worried about their future sustainability, *“at some point they will be going back out to the voluntary sector and saying where is it all gone?”*

There is a real desire for genuine co-production and a new kind of partnership working that allows organisations to flourish and to continue to deliver the excellent work that they do. There was a desire to influence decisions about what is commissioned, when and how, underpinned by a belief that the VCF community has huge insight into what’s needed, what works and how it should be delivered. The VCF sector recognises the difficulty of coordinating so many organisations and there are efforts to self organise. There is a desire in the sector to create new platforms for coordination and engagement but a lack of capacity to achieve this easily. This research has

created energy and an expectation that the system could be improved. This creates a real opportunity for change.

The report breaks down the findings of the research into four themes:

- Life as a VCF organisation in Doncaster
- Funding and commissioning
- Engagement with Team Doncaster
- A vision for the future

On the 24th of May a wide range of VCF organisations were invited to join colleagues from a wide range of statutory agencies to consider the findings of the research and to make concrete plans that might address some of the issues identified. The report highlights the key themes that emerged through this conversation, and describes a set of practical commitments that all participants have signed up to.

Alongside the event, this report provides a platform upon which VCF organisations and Team Doncaster can continue to build. But the real work starts now. In partnership, the VCF sector and statutory agencies can make a much greater contribution to improved health and wellbeing in Doncaster than they can individually. The ambition must be for all organisations to feel like they are part of one Team Doncaster, working together to ensure that Doncaster and its people thrive. Realising this ambition will require practical change on both sides. This report sets out what these changes might look like in practice, and suggests some tangible next steps that will ensure all parties are actively engaged in making change happen. Over to you!



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“  
Everyday is a magic moment for me.”



## Life as a CVF organisation in Doncaster

This section outlines what it is like to be a VCF organisation in Doncaster. It provides an overview of the work VCF organisations do and the impact that they have. It also describes how the VCF sector sees itself and its core values, as well as how these relate to the values of Team Doncaster. It explores how sometimes, positive action by Team Doncaster is misinterpreted. Finally, it describes how the VCF organisations have struggled to connect with each other following the loss of the CVS.

### Changing people's lives, one at a time

What was most touching about speaking to VCF sector organisations was their passion, drive and dedication. Either people had dedicated their lives to a cause they believed in wholeheartedly, or they had set up their own organisations mid career, sacrificing salary, and career in order to pursue an innovation they believed in. VCF organisations start, grow and flourish - in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges - on the back of individual tenacity.

Organisations were clear about the value they delivered in Doncaster; there were numerous stories

of people who had been helped to overcome difficult circumstances, supported to try new things, meet new people, find work and improve their physical and mental wellbeing.

*“The same person who was giving up school is now doing a masters. He wrote something personally about the impact we have made on his life.” “One girl who had been coming here went and became a professional youth worker after attending our sessions.”*

The organisations were also very user-centered and collaborative, *“we are 100% user led and have created everything from a user perspective.”* They use each other's services to support users, meeting to understand what others did and seeking out opportunities to bid together and work together.

The VCF organisations interviewed were inspiring. They had a passion for social justice and they really cared about the people they supported. Seeing the change first hand in their users was their core motivation.



## Describing the VCF sector

Those interviewed were asked to describe the VCF sector in 3 words. Above are the words that people used, the bigger the word, the more it came up.

In general people felt proud of the work that they and others were doing in such difficult circumstances. They described moments when work had been celebrated, but only by other local authorities or nationally - some highlighted that their work hadn't been celebrated locally: *"We won an award, it was an honour to have our work celebrated and appreciated, it is just a shame it doesn't happen here.."*

Faith organisations experienced additional barriers when engaging with the Council and community as they felt those who were non religious might be put off when receiving support from faith based services.

## How support efforts can be misinterpreted

Interviews highlighted a number of examples of initiatives designed to support the VCF sector that have been misinterpreted. For example the VCF sector strongly believes in being asset based and user-centric.

This should have resulted in them being positive about the new community led support initiative. But whilst people believe in the concept of the community leading support, they feel this is already a core part of what they currently do, *"when you look at all the community led things that Doncaster wants to do, well that is what we do, that is what we have always done."* They understood that the Council was trying to support the community, through the new initiative, but they felt that it portrayed a lack of understanding and appreciation of the work the sector already does.

For some the biggest concern was that they connected the community led support initiative with a separate initiative aimed at supporting the sustainability of the VCF sector by helping them to be more commercial and sell services. People were so put off by this idea that it coloured their view of the community led support initiative. Organisations were concerned that it would change the dynamic of their relationships with users and didn't align with their core principles, *"all I hear is you need to start charging people to have a visitor. Morally I won't do it. And it changes the dynamic, all of a sudden you are paying for someone to go. We will never do that."*

Some felt monetizing their service would destroy the value inherent in volunteering. For example, a house bound person with mental health difficulties being visited by a volunteer knows that the support is provided because the person wants to do it, not because they are paid to do it, and this is an important part of helping them to believe in themselves. Additionally, they were worried that many users who needed the service would no longer be able to afford it.

*“It makes sense ‘community supporting the community’. But it means do it yourself, pay for it yourself. We have had a number of talks and it sounds like if you want support, pay for it. There is no consideration for people who are poor... that just isn't something that people can do.”*

Team Doncaster clearly values the voluntary sector and wants it to survive and thrive. Part of this has to be about supporting VCF organisations to become more commercially astute. But some organisations have misinterpreted this as forcing them to monetize their service and they feel that this will destroy the value they deliver.

*“How can we help the voluntary sector to commercialise’ - actually that isn't our agenda, we are identifying needs in the most deprived communities.”*

## A need for coordination

People noticed a big change after the Doncaster CVS closed down. Most valued it and although they acknowledged it could have been better, all missed its absence: *“There was a lot of sadness when the CVS closed, there was a fondness for it.”* They commented on the difference between Doncaster Council and Rotherham Council which still had Voluntary Action Rotherham and it felt like there was a thriving voluntary sector there: *“It is a contrast - we work in Rotherham and there is such trust and networking and understanding between organisations. It has been a different atmosphere all together.”* People wanted forums, events with speakers, chances to meet members of the Council and CCG, events to meet other people, advice on winning and delivering services etc:

**“There’s nothing pulling people together any more. There's no celebration of the sector’s work. People are confused - where do I go for support?”**

Some organisations have tried to find other ways to get by without it by creating their own innovations such as setting up co-operatives, running forums, helping each other with fundings bids and meeting and sustaining relationships. For example one group has started to set up a Voluntary Action Doncaster, an attempt to create a successor to the CVS. One hypothesis is that the loss of infrastructure for communication with such a large number of small organisations has contributed to misunderstanding and misinterpretation of policy proposals.



# Funding and commissioning

This section outlines how VCF organisations experienced council and health sector commissioning processes, alongside applying for funding locally. It also outlines how organisations wanted the commissioning process to work in an ideal world.

The biggest cause of stress for charities was finding and maintaining funding. People accepted that a focus on sustainability was something they would never escape from, but at times felt their need to focus on survival detracted from delivering the work. Organisations that had experience of the commissioning process rated it an average of 4 out of 10. The lowest score was 0 and the highest was 10. Those who had good experiences were those who talked about good communication and a straightforward process:

**“It is straightforward. It was clear what they're asking for it was easy to submit and they made a decision quickly. We understand what's expected of us, we have monthly reports so we know what data they want to see. They get back to us quickly and they're flexible.”**

## Funding frustrations

However, many organisations expressed frustrations with the commissioning process. Some organisations felt the process could be unjust. Some people felt that the same organisations were chosen again and again and were re-commissioned even though they weren't running the service effectively and meeting the outcomes required. Some feel they have formed good

relationships with the Council and health sector, but others feel they are out of the tent because they don't have the contacts.

There was a feeling that many councils see commissioning as an important way of reducing costs which has resulted in more contracts being awarded to bigger organisations who are able to deliver services more efficiently. Organisations felt that commissioning was increasingly suited to bigger organisations, with teams that were good at writing bids. Smaller organisations who were part of, and passionate about the community they were supporting, were losing out:

*“Before you had a lot of small groups in Doncaster who have grown here and really care about Doncaster. You now have organisations that are national, private or whoever have been coming in, to deliver that contract. The people who are winning contracts are those that are the best at writing bids.”*

People felt that engagement with commissioners often delivered false hope and unrealistic expectations, either about the prospect of new tenders or about an individuals organisations chances of winning. At the same time commissioning processes sometimes took so long that providers ended up spending more than they could afford waiting for the contract, and had to withdraw:

*“We had to fold the company. The tender we always expected to come out, took 8 years. it is not out now! It took that long for a tender to come out. There were a couple of times they said it was ready to come out tomorrow. We had everything ready, we had all of our team trained up and then it all just folded.”*



At the same time VCF providers felt they were subject to excessive scrutiny, for what were relatively small amounts of money; far in excess of what might be given to other big organisations that contracted with the Council:

*“I spend my life monitoring for £6400. You wouldn’t make it up what we have been asked to do. And there is no money in that contract to do that. Then to be told ‘you should have done this, you should have written this better’.”*

Providers also felt anxious about their encounters with the commissioning team, feeling every contact might be judged in a way that could affect future contracts: *“Ringing the contracts team, I always feel the potential for criticism. I don’t know if what I say is going to be used against me and as evidence if I haven’t done something.”* Organisations felt public sector commissioners saw them as inefficient and without commercial acumen. Their view was that the problems were inherent in the commissioning system and the assumptions made about what was and wasn’t affordable.

*“I am not bidding for tenders, not because I don’t know how to price up a service – actually I do and when I have done that I have realised it would be foolhardy to bid for the service. I feel that there is a kind of misdirection and waste of resource by labelling the voluntary sector as the problem in the situation and saying ‘you got to fix something, you have to learn how to do this’. When actually the thing you are trying to engage with just isn’t right.”*

There were several other issues that stopped people bidding for services. Where there were opportunities to bid as a consortium, it was hard for interested providers to find potential partners. Secondly, the proliferation of small contracts makes it hard for organisations to make long term plans: *“We can happily keep tendering for these small projects but ultimately that isn’t going to be sustainable for the charity in the long term because there is nothing that will feed into the core that will make it sustainable.”*

Organisations also felt services could be decommissioned better. The lack of clarity about whether there will be funding for contracts to be

retendered puts organisations in an impossible situation where they don’t want to close down the service but can’t afford to keep it going: *“A week before the money runs out I am having to email them and ask what is happening? My staff are saying ‘what am I doing? Am I going to carry on?’”* There were also a couple of instances in which people had expressed their distress but there was no empathy for the Catch 22 situation they were in.

*“I actually said to the commissioner: ‘I just want you to understand that if you do this there is a bigger impact to our organisation, this is a core part of our funding and it will destabilise everything’ and the answer was: ‘I don’t care about that, we just need to do x’.”*

It is natural for councils to be constantly reviewing and evaluating the cost-effectiveness of services and considering more innovative ways of delivering these. However, organisations felt they were often given little notice about whether contracts would be continued or not. This left staff feeling anxious their service users would be left with nothing, which sometimes happened, and stopped successful handovers. When contracts did end, organisations often had to go to drastic lengths to survive such as changing the work they did and downsizing.

## Collaborative commissioning

When asked how commissioning would work in an ideal world organisations suggested that they wanted a clear, well-structured, flexible, accessible and transparent process. People also asked for networking opportunities, provider events and opportunities to meet with commissioners to understand how they use their processes to allocate funding.

They also wanted more respect and understanding. They wanted to be trusted to cost and deliver the work effectively as well as opportunities to support those who were less confident. People felt it should be easier for smaller organisations to win work.

VCF organisations also wanted a more collaborative and co-designed process. This meant starting the conversation much earlier and talking to

organisations about what users in Doncaster need, before working together to think about what tenders are required, and how these could be delivered, rather than the Council just commissioning against their own priorities. Organisations wanted to be involved in the conversation earlier on.

**“Increased engagement with the sector to really get to know who is out there and who delivers what and have that understanding for a starter. Then great communication. Then co-design of what is needed and how can this be developed.”**

### A new vision

At the event on the 24th of May, participants were asked to consider what a more collaborative commissioning process might look like. They felt that a collaborative commissioning process would start by engaging service users and VCF organisations to identify what should be commissioned and what this would look like. Together, people would agree the needs and outcomes, making sure they were realistic. Organisations would then be invited to come together and submit joint tenders, supporting each other along the way. Training would be provided before the contracting phase and there would be opportunities to prototype and test ideas.

Secondly, participants had new ideas for removing barriers for smaller providers. They suggested bigger organisations could support smaller ones in writing bids. People felt the way funding was awarded would also make a big difference. They wanted longer contracts, for example over 5 years, and for payment to be provided up front wherever possible.

Participants also felt that there was very little flexibility in how contracts are set up. Specifically, if a contract delivers a surplus (intended outcomes or outputs are delivered with money to spare), VCF organisations aren't generally allowed to use this surplus to cover core operating costs. They felt that

greater flexibility would be an investment in the future of the sector and the community. They also felt that less monitoring would allow them to spend more time doing the work and that this would help to sustain the sector.

Finally, participants felt that when contracts were re-commissioned they should focus on reviewing the outcomes rather than the process that was used. They wanted this to be a fair process that involved observing the lived experience of service users.

“

The more we work together the more  
we develop trust. ”



## Engagement with Team Doncaster

This section outlines the relationships and engagement between VCF organisations the Council and the health sector. Interestingly people had much more to say about the relationship with the Council than they did about the health sector. When people heard ‘Team Doncaster’ they focused on the Council, rather than the other organisations that were a part of it. There was also less expectation of the health sector to provide support to the VCF sector.

People have high expectations of the council to provide a sense of security and safety. Although sometimes critical of the Council, it has huge symbolic significance for VCF organisations. They see it is a positive and resilient force in precarious and turbulent times. But they have also felt the withdrawing of support in recent years. They recognise that the Council has had to inevitably withdraw from universal provision in a number of areas, and that this means they are now the backstop for many people with very high needs, who rely on them for survival. But they don’t feel they have the capacity or the energy to go on doing this into the future.

### The good bits

Many organisations had positive moments of engagement with the Council and the CCG. In general this involved open communication; keeping people informed; feeling they could call up and ask for advice, guidance or signposting; quick response times; being shown respect and recognition.

Positive stories were about great relationships with individuals who had gone out of their way to help people:

*“I think individuals within the Council are really good. In my experience, they don’t tend to be senior people. One person was really helpful, she knew everyone and put me in touch with other people and gave me their contact numbers.”*

Organisations that were funded to deliver services for the health sector tended to be positive about the relationship and had good experiences:

*“We’ve got a strong relationship with the CCG. They are very supportive of the work we do. They’ve commissioned a smaller service. That’s all really positive. I’ve got nothing but praise for the CCG. The support they give us is fantastic. They are proud of the service. They’re so supportive.”*

### The not so good bits

Positives tended to be about interaction with individuals who had been warm and helpful. However, the Council as a brand was less well regarded. People separated the individuals they came across from the organisation as a whole. People recognised the difficult situation Doncaster Council has been in over the last few years. They felt the culture had become disheartened as a result of all the change, with real inconsistencies in energy, attitude and motivation across and between different levels of the organisation. Their experience depended on the person that they spoke to.

Regular staffing changes mean that many organisations have lost their connections in to the Council and the CCG: *“I don’t know any of them any more and that speaks volumes”*. They also feel they

are being squeezed out by larger providers, “We have had huge organisations come in and offer what we are offering and they have got senior backing and there has been a board pop up, which we haven’t been invited to”. Many organisations had experience of being passed from person to person and waiting for long periods of time to hear back:

*“The meeting was really positive, we made arrangements of what to do next and then we just never hear back... I don’t know how people can be so inconsistent. What can you do? You ring them, email them, email multiple people in the meeting... Do I have to actually walk in the office?”*

People also found it hard to identify who in the Council and the CCG they should contact for different reasons and struggled to navigate the relevant systems. Some developed their own strategies for bypass systems altogether. Those organisations who didn’t have an existing relationship with the CCG felt it was hidden away and therefore didn’t make any attempt to make contact.

## A desire for co-production

One area that came up more than any other was a desire for genuine co-production. People wanted to work much more collaboratively with the Council and the health sector - in an equal partnership. This meant having more say on long term plans, being represented on boards and working together to solve problems. Often organisations felt underrepresented. They didn’t feel part of Team Doncaster or that they had been given a strong voice when contributing to strategic plans:

*“They talk about Team Doncaster, but Team Doncaster is Doncaster Council, the CCG, the chamber of commerce, where is the voluntary sector in Team Doncaster? Where are we in it meaningfully?”*

People had little knowledge of future transformation plans. The general feeling was that the Council was in control of the agenda and the VCF sector were expected to deliver it. Many people described feeling “dumped on” by the Council and the Health Sector.

When the Council has tried to work collaboratively with the sector, this has at times come across as tokenistic, rather than genuine. Organisations felt that the Council was doing to them, rather than with them. When the Council did engage with the voluntary sector in activities and workshops, nothing seemed to happen afterwards:

*“There have been many discussions with the VCF, taking up much time, without any subsequent changes/improvements.”*

They also felt that while the Council talked about co-production, they didn’t seem to understand it:

*“Read a book and go on a course about co-production to understand what it means to respect the voluntary sector, who have heaps of experience or working in the community. Without that it is just ‘we are the mighty Council’, you are ‘ungrateful’.”*

People also wanted more moments to celebrate the work that happens across different organisations and were pleased that was being done in the conference on the 24 May.

“ Co-production means delivering public services in an equal and reciprocal relationship between professionals, people using services, their families and their neighbours. Where activities are co-produced in this way, both services and neighbourhoods become far more effective agents of change. ”

- David Boyle



# CELEBRATE DONCASTER



**KeyRing**  
DONCASTER

Doncaster is a vibrant city with a rich history and a bright future. We are proud to be part of the community and to support the local economy. KeyRing is a leading provider of business support services, helping businesses to grow and succeed. We offer a range of services, including business advice, training, and marketing support. We are committed to providing a high-quality service to our clients and to making a positive impact on the community.

## WHO WE ARE

KeyRing is a leading provider of business support services, helping businesses to grow and succeed. We offer a range of services, including business advice, training, and marketing support. We are committed to providing a high-quality service to our clients and to making a positive impact on the community.



## WHAT WE DO

KeyRing offers a range of business support services, including business advice, training, and marketing support. We are committed to providing a high-quality service to our clients and to making a positive impact on the community.



## AN EXAMPLE OF WHERE WE HAVE MADE A DIFFERENCE

KeyRing has helped many businesses to grow and succeed. We have provided business advice, training, and marketing support to a wide range of businesses, from small start-ups to established companies. We are proud to have made a positive impact on the community and to support the local economy.



## OUR IMPACT

KeyRing has made a positive impact on the community and supported the local economy. We have provided business advice, training, and marketing support to a wide range of businesses, from small start-ups to established companies. We are proud to have made a positive impact on the community and to support the local economy.

# CELEBRATE DONCASTER



## A vision for the future

Interviewees were asked to consider where they would like to be in three years time, and how this would look and feel different to now, as well as the concrete commitments they would like from senior Team Doncaster leaders in order to make this change happen. At the event on the 24th of May, participants worked together to build on this insight, developing the beginnings of a vision that all partners could sign up to.

### In 3 years time....

We asked people how they would imagine the sector in 3 years time if a platform for future engagement had been successful and the sector was thriving: *“Well I am smiling for a start!”*

People wanted to feel they were working together with the Council and the health sector, feeling listened to and valued. This involved Team Doncaster acknowledging the sector’s skills and capabilities and coming to them for their help, because of their expert knowledge. *“We would be valued and respected for what we bring. We would be working away from that horrible atmosphere of mistrust and fear - that would be gone.”*

This also meant the VCF sector having a strong voice in strategic plans and being involved in decision making, early on - making sure that each part of the sector was represented equally. Organisations also wanted opportunities for good communication and good relationships with the Council, the health sector and with each other. They also wanted new methods of showing people who they could contact, a simple referral system between different services and effective ways of signposting users to services. People

felt that mapping the different organisations in the sector could also add huge value in understanding what was out there and knowing who they could connect with. They liked the idea of a platform, but felt this shouldn’t just be digital. They also wanted some kind of hub/centre running purposeful events and opportunities for organisations to meet each other.

They felt that this vision needed to be led from the top to show the CCG’s and Council’s commitment to working in a new way: *“Ideally this would be led by the chief executive, Jo Miller. She is a well known figure. She is a good face for Doncaster. She should be up there talking about the value that the sector brings.”*

What was clear, was that everyone had a strong desire to make this happen: *“I firmly believe collaboration and partnership working is the way forward.”*

### Moving forwards

People wanted a commitment from senior leaders to see action soon after the event:

*“I think this will succeed if there is a plan of how this develops and there is a structure and a focus to that and there is buy in from senior levels - but I don’t think it will work if that doesn’t happen. From the event, we need a plan of how we will go from there and what will happen.”*

Organisations felt that this was a make or break moment and that if nothing happened, things would be worse rather than better. They wanted the event to be followed by a clear plan and action which would create change.

“

We need to work together and care together.

”



# Collaboratively developing the vision

At the event on the 24 May the Council, Health Sector and VCF sector started to develop this vision. This section outlines a set of draft vision statements that were created on the day, a draft set of principles for working together and what participants felt the Council, the health sector and the VCF sector need to do going forwards.

## The vision

People wanted a vision that was short, simple and clear. They wanted a statement that united organisations across the VCF and statutory sectors under the banner of Team Doncaster, and demonstrated a new approach to working together as equal partner. It is important to note that Team Doncaster - as both a practical description of a group of organisations working together, and a symbolic narrative that cuts across organisations - carries significant weight and credibility in Doncaster. Team Doncaster's vision is to ensure that Doncaster and it's people thrive.

In this context, the job for statutory agencies is to ensure that the VCF organisations feel like they can sign up to this vision, and that they are an active part of Team Doncaster.

The vision statements across, should be seen as a build on Team Doncaster's current position, that draws specific attention to the inclusive nature of the partnership.

- 1 "Working as a team to give people a better life. We are Team Doncaster."
- 2 "Working together to make sure people in Doncaster have choice and control in how they live their lives."
- 3 "We work together and care together to improve the lives of the people of Doncaster."

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## The principles

Realising the vision for a more inclusive Team Doncaster, will require a new set of attitudes, behaviours and approaches on both sides.

Participants were asked to describe these changes in the form of a set of principles that might underpin a more inclusive Team Doncaster moving forward. Participants suggestions have been collated and turned into the first draft below. They are written as “we” statements, which include both statutory agencies and VCF organisations:

### 1. We are passionate about helping the people of Doncaster

We all care deeply about helping the people of Doncaster to lead healthy, happy lives. We are united by our shared passion for social purpose and people centered approaches. We listen, empathise with and care about those we work with and are happy to go the extra mile.

### 2. We build and maintain genuine and trusting relationships

Our relationships are at the heart of everything we do. We foster a culture of trust, openness and honesty. We build strong relationships with each other, with those we work with, and with the people of Doncaster. We have open, transparent channels of communication. Our interactions are human rather than transactional, involving active listening, empathy, warmth, honesty and laughter.

### 3. We put the people of Doncaster at the centre

We listen to our service users and residents. And, more importantly, we act on what they say. We ensure that their voices are at the heart of what we do and are included in design and decision making processes from start to finish. Our engagement is never

tokenistic; people’s views and feedback will result in real change.

### 4. We work with people’s strengths and build on these.

We know that everyone has strengths, has something to offer and wants to contribute. We recognise, build and promote our service users talents and wider strengths at every opportunity. This doesn’t mean ignoring the difficult circumstances people might face but helping them to develop what they are great at so that they can confident in tackling these head on. We also recognise and develop strengths in each other and help people to value and celebrate their identities.

### 5. We collaborate and co-produce wherever possible

We promote collaboration with each other, our partners and the people of Doncaster. We work together as equal partners and co-produce approaches, plans and services wherever possible. We seek to form effective alliances and joint working. We are open with each other about our practice and collaborative in pursuing improvement. We build on each other’s strengths, and trust and support each other.

### 6. We work together to support each other

We share skills and resources wherever possible. We understand that we all have different strengths and a role to play. We share information, ideas, knowledge, training and space. We are always there to offer support and advice and offer a helping hand.

### 7. We recognise and respect the contribution of everyone

We know that we all play an essential role in the



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community and we value each other's contribution. We have deep respect and trust for each other and the validity of each other's perspectives. We always find moments to appreciate and recognise our respective contributions.

## 8. We all share a common vision

We have a shared vision, goals and aspirations. We collaborate to create clear plans and frameworks for achieving the vision, making sure we all work together to shape it, understand it and achieve it.

## 9. We create smooth joined up services for those around us

We work together to create a seamless experience for our service users. We know it's not about what we do

individually but what we do together. We create clear pathways that are easy to navigate. We take time to understand what goes on in the community around us and bridge gaps between organisations. We make sure handovers are never cold and work hard to create a joined up experience.

## 10. We learn, develop and evaluate practice

We strive to continually learn and develop our practice so that we can achieve better outcomes for the people of Doncaster. We collectively troubleshoot problems and work together to share learning and find new solutions. We learn from evidence based research. We use what works but are not afraid to try new things.

## Next steps

Finally, at the event we asked people to identify what the Council, The Health Sector and the CCG would need to do going forwards to achieve the desired change. These points have been illustrated in the diagram below. The key points from this exercise have been incorporated into the challenge questions at the end of this document.

Over the next month, the council the CCG and key VCF partners will be working together to turn these high level commitments into a set of very practical next steps that will ensure vision and ambition becomes real and tangible change. Specifically, a small design group (including key representatives of the VCF sector and statutory agencies) will be asked to build on the findings of the research and the event by developing a set of specific proposals in relation to the following design challenge:

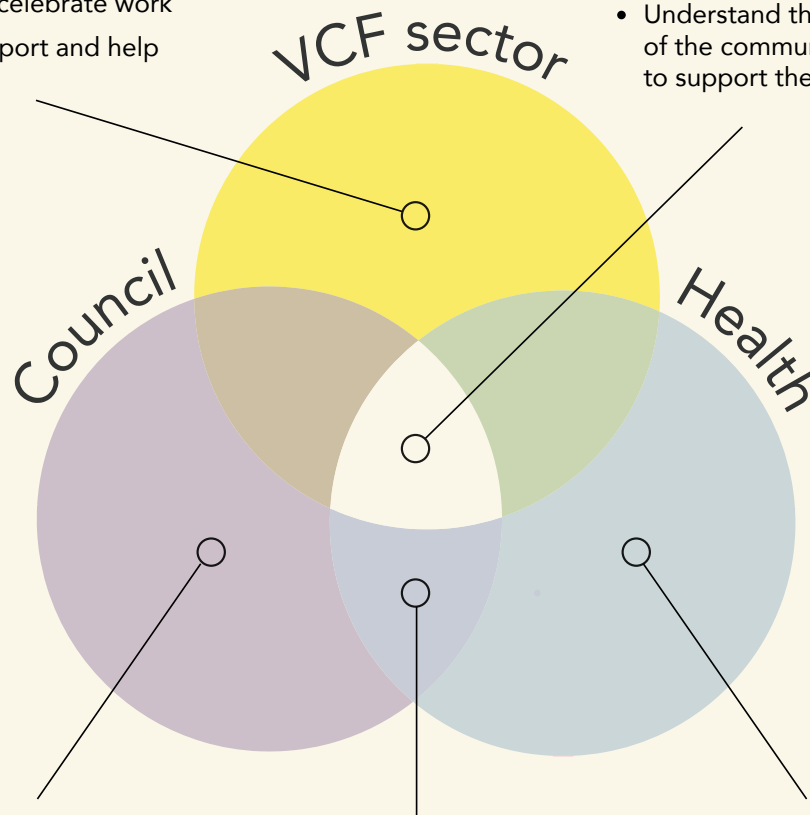
**“How can VCF organisations be supported to communicate, collaborate and integrate in order to make best use of their collective skills and resources, to increase the stability and resilience of the sector, and to improve the quality of collaboration with statutory agencies?”**

The design group will be tasked with coming up with a series of tangible options that the broader VCF community will be asked to consider. If you would like to be part of this design group then please get in touch with [katy.turner@Doncaster.gov.uk](mailto:katy.turner@Doncaster.gov.uk).

# Steps needed to achieve change

- Find new opportunities for working together at a systems level
- Showcase and celebrate work  
Build trust, support and help each other

- Create a cooperative governance structure
- Develop a common vision and purpose
- Create clear and consistent channels for communication and speak a common language
- Ensure all voices are represented and have ownership of future plans
- Walk in each other's services and celebrate each other's work
- Create a new commissioning model
- Understand the strengths and needs of the community and work together to support them



- Recognise and celebrate the work of the VCF sector
- Provide clear method of communication with VCF
- Provide support
- Spend time in the community
- Promote employee volunteering

- Support the VCF to co-ordinate and work together and clarify this support
- Add VCF representatives to boards and groups as equal partners
- Create consistent processes  
Work more collaboratively together

- Think more holistically about the whole system, not just the cost perspective
- Ensure stronger links between the statutory and voluntary sector



## Key questions for Team Doncaster and the VCF sector to work on together

This final section identifies areas of opportunity arising from the key insights in this research. It is important to note that these are based on interviews with 10 VCF organisations and should not be taken as blanket statements but rather prompts for co-design and co-production. This is in the form of a series of ‘how might we?’ questions that could be worked on collaboratively.

- How might we create a cooperative governance structure for Team Doncaster in which the VCF sector feel an equal partner?
- How might we get a collaborative vision for Team Doncaster which is owned by all partners?
- How might we co-produce strategic plans as equal partners which fully reflect VCF expertise and experience?
- How might we work together to ensure that users have access to the services that they need from all of us at the right time?
- How might we co-design a more effective commissioning process that is clear, well-structured, flexible, accessible and transparent ?
- How might we help all VCF organisations to feel connected with each other and Team Doncaster?
- How might we celebrate the work of the VCF sector, the Council and health sector on a continuous basis so that more people understand the wide range of contributions that are being made?
- How can we all get a deep and collective understanding of the real impact of our services on the residents of Doncaster?
- How might we prevent future misunderstandings about initiatives that involve the VCF sector and ensure our core purposes and values are more aligned?

“

If we all work together, I believe we can  
do this... ”

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## Conclusion

The research and the workshop highlighted a number of powerful insights and messages that should drive Doncaster's collaborative efforts, not least the overwhelming desire on both sides for VCF organisations and statutory agencies to see themselves as part of one Team Doncaster.

Commissioners and statutory agencies are committed to supporting the VCF sector. VCF sector organisations are determined to continue doing the work they do, and more. However, the sector needs help given how fragmented, complex and changeable the funding landscape. The lack of opportunities for organisations to come together in a meaningful way, or to have a voice representing them within Team Doncaster forums, has meant the VCF sector doesn't feel included in strategic plans or involved in key decisions. This has meant that the VCF sector doesn't always feel that commissioners - or statutory agencies more broadly - understand their core values. It also means that there can be a mismatch between the positive intentions of commissioner or provider led initiatives and their reception by the sector.

The local authority and the CCG are faced with a VCF sector that is looking to them to provide security, support and reassurance in the face of an increasingly precarious environment, at a time when their capacity to provide this support has never been more constrained. There is real desire on all sides to find a way through, to create more solidarity, resilience and interdependence in the VCF sector and in communities within Doncaster. There are also some powerful ideas for how this can be achieved as well as some real bright spots of new practice among VCF organisations who have taken it upon themselves to organise differently, and commissioners that have adopted a more collaborative approach. The challenge now is to turn these bright spots into change at scale.

We hope this research and the event on the 24th of May will help to turbocharge this process.



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